

*The Poet-Historian Qian Qianyi.* By Lawrence C. H. Yim. Academia Sinica on East Asia series. London and New York: Routledge, 2009. Pp. ix + 222. £75.00.

This is a work of erudition on erudition, one which uses impressive sinological and hermeneutical skills to lift a veil of intentionally obscure poetic artistry from the face of one of the Ming-Qing era's most important intellectuals. Patient readers will come away from this book with a firmly based view of Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664) that probably will vary significantly from previous impressions of this man, the official condemnation of whom during the middle Qing period—for exhibiting infirm dynasty loyalty—has discouraged objective examination of his life and *œuvre* until recent times.<sup>1</sup> Focusing particularly on certain writings by Qian, a former Ming official, from the two decades after his ignominious return from a brief stint as a collaborator at the Qing court, Yim penetrates Qian's dauntingly refracted meanings to reach the depths of his pathos and passion, and to effectively cast doubt on the ambient view that Qian's regenerate Ming loyalism was merely a hollow attempt to salvage his reputation. While readily conceding that Qian was very intent on shaping his own image for contemporaries and posterity, Yim manages through careful scholarship to present convincing evidence of Qian's sincerity in the loyalist cause.

Although Qian had been a very prominent littérateur for decades prior to the fall of the Ming, Yim chooses to concentrate on his post-1644 poetry not just because of the loyalism issue in Qian's case, and not just because Yim feels that Qian's “greatest works . . . deal with the Ming-Qing transition and his own experiences in it” (p. 10). Overarching these reasons is that Yim takes Qian as the prime representative of a neglected but distinct period in the history of Ming-Qing poetics: the decades from the 1640s through the 1660s which were dominated by an imperative to write *shishi* 詩史 (poetic history) using poetry to bear witness to a time of painful historical change in ways beyond the means of chronicles and other prose narratives. This necessarily Ming-loyalist poetics—“freighted with the burden of . . . nostalgia, indignation, grief, despair, regret, shame, heroism, fantasy” and also marked by a spirit of personal and cultural resistance (p. 3)—distinguishes the period, in Yim's view, from the strangeness and unrestrained, individualistic expressiveness in the poetry of the late Ming, and from the valorization of reticence, detachment, and a rather ethereal concept of “spirit resonance” by the much-lauded Wang Shizhen 王士禎 (1634–1711) and his school from the early Qing onward. This is a valuable point, which Yim reinforces by discussing Qian Qianyi's *shishi* in

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent exposition of Qian's reputation before and after the Qianlong 乾隆 reign (1736–1795) and the slow emergence of more open-minded approaches to him in the twentieth century, see “Qian Qianyi and His Place in History” by Yim's mentor Kang-I Sun Chang, in *Trauma and Transcendence in Early Qing Literature*, ed. Wilt L. Idema, Wai-ye Li, and Ellen Widmer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), pp. 199–218.

relation to the historical poetics of some of his contemporaries, especially Wu Weiye 吳偉業 (1609–1672), Qu Dajun 屈大均 (1630–1696), and Qian Chengzhi 錢澄之 (1612–1693). The reader craves but does not find, however, any discussion of continuity or change between the post-conquest aesthetics of Qian's *shishi*—characterized by subtlety, indirect allusiveness, hidden meanings, allegory, and complex symbolism—and those of the Yushan 虞山 school of poetry of which Qian was the doyen in the last decades of the Ming.

The first chapter of Part I, which explains Qian Qianyi's theory of *shishi*, is constructed as a step-by-step disquisition on a preface that Qian wrote to the collected poems of a friend and member of the Ming-loyalist underground, Hu Zhiguo 胡致果. Hardly adopting the best expositional strategy for enticing readers into the body of the book, Yim begins with a very technical subsection on the probable date of this preface (his preference: 1662). He then proceeds through the preface itself, identifying successive themes that bring the reader from the ancient era up to Qian's own time. Qian first draws on the classical thesis that there was a bond between history and poetry, a continuity of historical intent from the *Book of Odes* through the *Book of Documents* and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. According to this thesis, all these classics were morally and ethically suasive, sometimes using satire to place “praise and blame.” The *Annals*, especially, carried through in prose with the “rhetoric of subtlety” of the *Odes*, purposefully employing ambiguity, vagueness, euphemism, and circumlocution to set forth judgements and testimonies that would inspire people for many ages. In Yim's words, Qian Qianyi “thereby appropriated for poetry the whole panoply of values that goes with history” (p. 25). Qian then identifies antecedent practitioners of poetic history from the Six Dynasties through Tang, naturally according significant mention to Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770), surely the most famous writer ever of *shishi*, and a man whose plights and poems during and after the An Shi Rebellion 安史之亂 are alluded to frequently in Qian's works. According to Yim's exposition, Qian admired Du Fu for expanding personal poems' “social, historical and political horizons,” for taking versification “as a psychological event through which the poet externalizes unrelieved tensions and strivings, and at the same time interweaves the historical, the didactic, and the aesthetic” (p. 27). Moving on to the Song period, Qian then begins to connect the tradition of *shishi* to the loyalism of the Ming-Qing transition by invoking the body of “sorrowful and wounded” yet emotionally reserved and verbally cautious historical poetry by *yimin* 遺民 of the Song-Yuan transition, particularly Wang Yuanliang 王元量 (1241–1317), whose largely lost œuvre Qian placed back in circulation, and the most famous martyr of all to barbarian subjugation, Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236–1283). Arriving finally in his own time, Qian sets forth his preferred aesthetics of Ming-loyalist *shishi* by reflecting on the poems of Hu Zhiguo, continuing to value subtlety but placing “greater emphasis on historical memory, emotion, and creativity” than was characteristic of *shishi* from the Song-Yuan transition (p. 40).

Yim rounds out this key chapter by discussing the importance to Qian of the “mutated

tones” (*bianyin* 變音) that the “Great Preface” to the *Odes* identifies with turbulent ages (*luanshi* 亂世) and fallen states (*wangguo* 亡國), and of the mutated poems among the *Odes* that by tradition were interpreted didactically, historically, and allegorically as social and political criticism. But Yim also observes that Qian’s own *shishi* language was “more restrained, symbolic and suggestive” (p. 46), that is, more akin to that of the *Annals* than of the *Odes*. Yim asserts that through Qian’s “*Hu Zhiguo shi xu*” 詩序 an assurance is issued to Ming loyalists that “posterity will remember them,” especially if they respond to Qian’s call to write *shishi*, and Qian also offers a “reading strategy for posterity” by which the subtle words of those historical poems can be understood (p. 48).

The most original contribution of the second chapter in Yim’s Part I, on “Qian Qianyi’s reception in Qing times,” lies in his examination of the extraordinarily visceral and harsh response of the Qianlong emperor to reading Qian’s works, after Qian had been held in quite high posthumous regard as a scholar and poet for over a century. It is well known, of course, that Qianlong was obsessive about the principle that officials be steadfastly loyal to their state and monarch, and that, because Qian had doubly violated that principle—first by transferring his services from the Ming dynasty to the Qing and then by fomenting against the Qing after abandoning his second allegiance—Qian’s works were ordered destroyed and his name expunged from China’s literary record during the infamous “Qianlong Inquisition” of the 1770s and early 1780s. It may well be, as Yim argues, that the whole inception of the Qianlong emperor’s *wenzi yu* 文字獄 can be laid to his discovery of Qian Qianyi’s offending works, that the successive stages of the inquisition were driven by the emperor’s hatred of Qian’s example, and that countering Qian’s influence was central to the emperor’s ancillary measures to gain ideological control over the history of the Ming resistance to the Qing conquest. More speculative—as acknowledged by Yim’s tentative wording—is the suggestion that Qianlong’s animosity toward Qian Qianyi was heightened by the very awesomeness of Qian’s stature as a scholar, writer, critic, and interpreter of history, that is, by the outrageous idea that a scurrilous two-time turncoat could pose, from the grave, a challenge to the emperor’s self-assumed consummate authority.

Yim concludes this chapter, and Part I, by briefly describing the enthusiasm for Qian’s rediscovered Ming-loyalist poetry among anti-Qing revolutionaries and anti-Japanese intellectuals from 1910 through the 1940s. This discussion does not correspond well, however, with remarks in the subsequent introduction to Part II, that “Chinese scholars in the past century have largely overlooked Qian Qianyi’s works,” and that Qian’s “ambivalent political activities . . . disreputable *erchen* [貳臣] status, the unavailability of his works, and his difficult and highly allusive style have all contributed to his obscurity” (p. 83).

The body of Part II is truly heroic, both in its subject and in Yim’s tremendous effort of explication. The subject is Qian Qianyi’s last collected poems, the *Toubi ji* 投筆集 (Renouncing the pen [for the sword]), subtitled “*Hou ‘Qiuxing’*” 後秋興 (After [Du Fu’s] “Autumn thoughts”), only about 7% of which was published prior to the twentieth

century, and most of which has remained little-explored despite recognition of its importance. In the three chapters of Part II, Yim respectively translates and explains the first three poem cycles of the thirteen-cycle *Toubi ji*, ones that correspond in time and spirit with the seaborne Ming-restorationist campaign of Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功 (1624–1662) to wrest Nanjing and the lower Yangzi region from Qing control in the autumn of 1659. Yim selects this portion of the *Toubi ji* because it best reflects the purpose and qualities of *shishi* that Qian himself advocated. Also, since the broad outline of this event—from Zheng’s approach to and siege of Nanjing, through his strategic ambivalences and combat losses, to his forced withdrawal from the theater—are fairly well known by students of the Ming-Qing transition, the selected poem cycles allow Yim to demonstrate how *shishi* can enhance latter-day understandings of the past. The first cycle reflects Qian’s hopes and excitement upon learning of Zheng’s movement into the Yangzi and stalking of Nanjing; in the second cycle Qian takes the stance of proffering advice and encouragement to Zheng, who, in his youth, had been among Qian’s students; and the third, about which Yim writes with especial eloquence, concerns Qian’s moving separation from his beloved wife-concubine Liu Rushi 柳如是 (1618–1664) in order to embark on a harrowing trip, possibly to help rally flagging restorationist hopes as Zheng was departing from the Jiang-Zhe 江浙 coast and returning in defeat to Fujian 福建.

The political sensitivity of these poems is not hard to imagine, but it takes a translator/interpreter of Yim’s skill and erudition to show us—phrase by phrase, line by line—what phenomenal challenges and rewards lie therein for the scholarly reader. We learn unforgettable through Yim’s insights what Qian meant by the need for subtlety, indirectness, obscurity, and veiled meanings in *shishi*, and how Qian’s rhetorical emphasis on strong underlying emotion was manifested in his own *shishi*. The material is stirring and touching by turns, and it often is breathtaking to be shown the depths of meaning in lines that, even to someone accustomed to reading premodern Chinese poetry, seem quite enigmatic—as they were intended to be.

As a historian, I do have some dissatisfaction with Chapter 4, in which Yim overreaches in his recommendation of Qian’s *Toubi ji* poems as primary sources for historical research. He touts the poems as being “replete with concrete and intimate details” (p. 105) and for “express[ing] the sentiment of the people” (p. 114)—in the latter case seeming to accept Qian’s self-characterization as “one of the ordinary elders of Wu [吳]” (p. 119). It is left to the reader to figure out that Qian did not directly witness any aspect of Zheng’s campaign, that during the whole time he was either at home in Changshu 常熟 or in hiding, relying on hearsay that took several days to reach him. And it is the reader’s charge to know that Qian was hardly a man of the common people and his purported voicing of their sentiments was likely a projection of his own feelings onto society. Moreover, throughout this chapter, Yim’s phrasings suggest that the “strategist and mentor” Qian Qianyi had direct contact or communication with Zheng Chenggong, and that Zheng actually read and was affected by Qian’s poems—for instance: “this poem must have reminded Zheng . . .”; “reading Qian’s poem, Zheng must have regretted . . .”

(both p. 109); “line 4 warms Zheng with the sympathy of the populace” (p. 119–20). Yet the following chapter leads clearly to the conclusion, stated in the book’s introduction, that Qian never made contact with Zheng even remotely, and that Zheng probably never saw the poems. Actually, Chapter 4 consists mostly of Yim’s use of more solid historical sources, such as the log of Zheng’s quartermaster Yang Ying 楊英 (*Xianwang shilu* 先王實錄) and official documents excerpted in the Qing veritable records (*shilu* 實錄),<sup>2</sup> to explicate Qian’s opaque poems, rather than vice versa to add “concrete and intimate details” to history.

In the well-written conclusion to Yim’s book, his thoughts on the value of poetry as history are more carefully considered. There he writes that *shishi* “effectively valorize and dramatize historical figures and events” (p. 148), partaking of the personal, emotional dimensions of *yeshi* 野史 (rustic histories, private accounts) and surpassing in verbal power the capacity of bureau historians to render opinions on sensitive subjects. He concedes, however, that Qian’s *shishi* “fall short of well-reasoned historical arguments” (p. 149) and, contrary to what was suggested in Chapter 4, he grants that the sort of nuanced, ambiguous *shishi* that Qian advocated and produced “cannot furnish [the] particularizing details” that are prized by historians (p. 150).

Since a good deal of this book consists of Yim’s translations of poems by Qian Qianyi and others, a few words on his translation style are in order—though the value of the book does not hinge on this. Thankfully for the purposes of this volume, in making the devil’s choice between conveying the meaning or capturing in English the cadence and atmospherics of the Chinese original, Yim opts largely for the former. In my inexpert view, Yim makes judicious choices about what to render in English, taking into consideration the verbal surface of the original as well as his knowledge of what lies below that surface. Occasionally he succumbs to a tendency that one often sees in Chinese translators of English: to overplay the exclamatory. For instance, the line 雜虜橫戈倒載斜 becomes in Yim’s translation “Look! the spears of those bastard bandits! jumbled! deserted!” (p. 88) And one sometimes feels that in explicating Qian’s poems Yim is drawn into unwarranted speculations, perhaps by his wider knowledge of Qian’s *œuvre* or his expectation that Qian would not write anything straightforwardly in *shishi*. For instance, in discussing the line 金刀復漢事逶迤 (“Restoring the Han with a gold sword

<sup>2</sup> Yim also extensively uses a secondary history of the conquest from the nineteenth century, the *Xiaotian jinian fukao* 小腆紀年附考 by Xu Zi 徐鼒, and only through the filter of that source does he indirectly refer to another Ming-loyalist poet, Zhang Huangyan 張煌言 (1620–1664) who actually did participate in Zheng’s 1659 campaign on Jiangnan. Zhang left both a prose account of that experience, in his *Beizheng deshi jilie* 北征得失紀略, and many poems reflecting his feelings, circumstances, and interactions, particularly in his collection *Jiling cao* 奇零草. Thus, Zhang would make a better subject for discussing the relation between poetic history and narrative history than Qian Qianyi.

takes a winding course”), Yim plausibly explains *jin* 金 and *dao* 刀 as a riddle, the successive characters constituting two of the three radicals in *Liu* 劉, the surname of the imperial family of the Han dynasty. But then Yim draws on the fact that *fu* 復 (restore) can also mean *huan* 還 (return) to make a long argument that the line alludes to the story of the Han general Li Ling 李陵 (d. 74 BCE), because Qian, like Li, needed to return to the dynastic fold and restore his reputation (pp. 100–101). The reader is left wondering why Yim resorts to Li Ling when a less convoluted reference—to restoration of the Han dynasty by the Liu family generally or by Liu Xiu 劉秀 (*Guangwudi* 光武帝, r. 25–57 CE)—seems clear and sufficient. On the whole, however, Yim’s interpretations are persuasive, and when no single explanation is supportable, he employs good reasoning to set forth alternatives.

Some comment on the production qualities of this 222-page book also are due, especially considering its US\$125 price tag. To Yim’s credit, those aspects that primarily are the author’s responsibility—notation, proofreading, and preparation of the bibliography and index—are excellent. I was hard-pressed to find any spelling, romanization, or punctuation errors (the word “privates” in line 28 of p. 9 should be “pirates”) in this typographically complex text. And the notes, bibliography, and index are executed with thoroughness and care. As for some aspects that primarily are the press’s responsibility—copyediting and provision of visual aids—I cannot be so complimentary. For most readers, comprehension of Part II really would be enhanced by the presence of a map. As for the wording, although Yim has a very good command of English, there are enough awkward phrasings and non-idiomatic usages to suggest that professional copyediting was not provided by Routledge. All writers, whether composing in their native language or not, need expert editing, and one expects it from a press of Routledge’s stature.

This carping aside, one has to accord gratitude and admiration to Yim for bringing this daunting project to fruition for the English-reading scholarly world. Since this book probably will stand for a long time as the only monograph on Qian Qianyi in English, readers may wish that Yim had cast his purview more broadly to encompass Qian’s life, learning, and artistry prior to the dynastic change-over. But in his chosen mission to delve deeply and exhaustively into certain of Qian’s key writings, Yim achieves revelation on a level where few can work and where elusive but profound understandings lie. My own view of Qian Qianyi, an unavoidable figure for anyone who studies the seventeenth century in China, has been altered by this book, and my appreciation of poetry as an important kind of source material for historians, also, has been heightened. I recommend it to anyone interested in the political and literary history of the Ming-Qing era.

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