

NOTES ON QIÁN ZHŌNGSHŪ'S FOREWORD TO HIS *GUǎNZHUĪ BIĀN*

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Qián Zhōngshū 錢鍾書 (1910-1998) was "perhaps the best educated literary man conversant with both Western and Chinese learning";¹ just because of this reason, the late Helmut Martin (1940-1999) advised not to study him.² Only a fool might disregard his warning and take Qián's emphasizing the maxim 'complete liberty of interpretation'³ as license for arbitrariness, and yet, this is a fool's world. The following specimen of asinology, therefore, will hopefully find the approval of Christoph Harbsmeier. Since the scholarly interests of the linguist, author of VII.2 and founder of TLS include matters philological, some notes on a foreword to a collection of notes may amuse him.⁴

The Foreword *xù* 序 in the first edition of Qián Zhōngshū's *Guǎnzhūī biān* 管錐編 (Limited Views: Essays on Ideas and Letters)⁵ published in four volumes by Zhōnghuá shūjú 中華書局 in 1979 reads as follows:

警觀疏記，識小積多。學焉未能，老之已至！遂料簡其較易理董者，錐指管窺，先成一輯。假吾歲月，尚欲賡揚。又於西方典籍，褚小有懷，綆短試汲，頗嘗評泊考鏡，原以西文屬草，亦思寫定，聊當外篇。敝帚之享，

¹ Hutters 1977:186-187. It is regrettable that research on *Guǎnzhūī biān* tends to neglect the foundation Hutters has laid, because it was written before the publication of the former.

² Martin 1996:380-381.

³ Qian Zhongshu 1997D:466.

⁴ Disregarding some minor articles in Western languages, there are three monographs in German and English on the *Guǎnzhūī biān*: the pioneering work of Motsch (1994), the selected translations with an introduction of Egan (1997), and the Ph.D. dissertation of Yu (2002). See Yu (2002) for comments on both and discussions of method and structure of the *Guǎnzhūī biān*.

⁵ Qián's own translation, see Egan 1998:1.

野芹之獻，其資於用也，能如豕苓桔梗乎哉？或庶幾比木屑竹頭爾。命筆之時，數請益於周君振甫，小叩輒發大鳴，實歸不負虛往，良朋嘉惠，并志簡端。

一九七二年八月。

The genre *xù* has in spite of its significance in Chinese literary tradition not received much attention,⁶ even less so the art of quotation. Almost with every word in his text Qián alludes to some literary source which is easy to identify at some times, at others remains opaque. Stereotypes and formulae are to be found, but in most cases they are slightly changed, almost as if the author wanted to dissociate himself from unreflected usages as documented in dictionaries, for example. There is more to the Foreword than meets the eye on the surface of the text. Disregarding all subtleties, the following paraphrase is only meant to convey its basic meaning:

Whenever I caught a glimpse (of something noteworthy in a literary text), I recorded it; [note 1] even though I may only have got hold of what is of lesser significance, [note 2] I have accumulated large numbers (of these reading notes). I have studied them, but am still not able (to produce anything of worth), and old age has arrived already! Thereupon, I have revised those (of the notes) which are quite easy to edit, and have compiled a first collection of limited views (on ideas and letters), arrived at by using (inadequate means like) an awl to measure the depth of the earth and a tube to scan the sky. If I am granted some more time, I still wish to carry on the melody.

Furthermore, with regard to literary works of the West, small bags *will* hold big things; short well ropes *will* dip up deep water, and so I have tried to discuss them in order to have a yardstick for comparison. These (comments) were originally drafted in Western languages, and I still think about finalizing them as outer chapters (in contrast to the part presented here as inner chapters).

What I consider to be of great value, even though it is only my shabby broom, [note 3] what I present, even though it is only celery of a rustic [note 4] – could it be as effective as medical plants like chinaroot or balloonflower? [note 5] More probably, it will only be like sawdust and bamboo ends. [note 6]

At the time when commanding the brush, more than once I sought advice from Mr. Zhōu Zhènfǔ who had much to give, even though I only asked little; coming home full, the hopes of the one going empty were not disappointed – this gracious kindness of a worthy companion is plainly and properly recorded here.

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⁶ Mutatis mutandis, the lament of Schamoni 2004:3-6 holds true for the Chinese *xù* (and other 'paratexts'), too. Confer Hutters 1977:166-167 and Egan 1998:9 on two forewords by Qián.

Notes

1. "Whenever I caught a glimpse (of something noteworthy in a literary text), I recorded it"

The words *piéguān shūjì* 警觀疏記 seem to be taken directly from the autobiography *zìxù* 自序 of Wáng Yún 王筠 (481-549) quoted in his biography in *Liángshū* 梁書 33/486:⁷

余少好書，老而彌篤，雖偶見警觀，皆即疏記，後重省覽，歡興彌深，習與性成，不覺筆倦。

Already when I was a boy, I loved to read books, and this has become even more important for me now, since I have grown old. Even when I only accidentally met with or caught a glimpse of something (noteworthy in a literary text), I immediately recorded it, and later on, when scrutinizing it again, my pleasure and interest grew even deeper. Habit completed nature, and so I never experienced fatigue of the brush.

Wáng Yún was a member of the illustrious family from Lángyé 琅琊 in the north and was highly praised by no one less than Shěn Yuē 沈約 (441-513) who – according to the autobiography – had declared that since the beginning of the world there had never been such a wealth of literary talents in one family (*ibid.*:487). In his text, Wáng Yún recalls his readings during the years from 495 until 540 in some detail and mentions that he has made copies of and taken notes from practically every book available which amounted to more than one hundred scrolls. Depending on the status of the texts, he read some of them – the canonical scriptures – more than 70 or 80 times. The notes he took were only meant as a "remedium against forgetting", not for displaying his scholarship (不足傳之好事，蓋以備忘而已).

Qián seems to identify himself here with Wáng: He is scion of a family having produced many talented scholars, he is already famous for his literary talents in early years, and he is just like Wáng not only an avid reader with the ambition of devouring each and every literary work under Heaven, but also untiringly taking notes, a habit Qián had acquired when studying at Oxford, because the Bodleian did not allow to take out books. His wife Yáng Jiàng 楊絳 recalls the following in her foreword to the 2001 facsimile edition of some of his notebooks: While going through a book for the first time, he would concentrate on taking notes and actually 'read' it only during the second time. Qián himself once said that he discovered "the most brilliant phrases and lines" (最精彩的句子) only after reading a text for

⁷ Imperial histories are cited according to the Zhōnghuá shūjú editions.

several times. Besides making excerpts from works in Western languages (English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Latin: 178 notebooks with more than 34,000 pages), he took notes from the corpus of Chinese literature, too, and used to intersperse these among his diary. When in 1952 intellectuals had to undergo 'thought reform' for the first time, he cut out the diary parts. The Chinese excerpts fill about as many pages as those in Western languages, to both he added critical comments and cross-references. After 1952, he used the title 'daily notes' (*rìzhá* 日札) for the fruits of his reading.⁸ – Written down in 23 volumes with more than 2000 pages, these were the raw material for *Guǎnzhūi biān*.

In a self-confident manner, the author introduces himself as someone having digested the literatures of the world condensing them into 781 sections with close to 1200 paragraphs of notes to ten works of traditional Chinese literature.

2. "even though I may only have got hold of what is of lesser significance"

The term *zhìxiǎo* 識小 is (following Wáng Shìzhēn 王世貞 (1526-1590)? Cf. *Míngshǐ* 明史 97/2387) frequently used in titles of collections of notes and commentaries on canonical or other texts during Qīng 清 times. As a dictum of Chéng Rú 成孺 (1816-1883) indicates, these words seem to have been used as a label by and for authors belonging to so-called Hàn 漢 learning:

義理，論語所謂識大是也：考證，識小是也：莫不有聖人之道焉。事父事君，識大也；多識鳥獸草木之名，識小也：皆詩教所不廢，然不可無本末輕重之差。

Moral principles are what in the *Analects* is spoken of as "to get hold of what is of greater significance", while philology is called "to get hold of what is of lesser significance". In both, we find the True Way of the Sage: "serving one's father and serving one's lord" is "to get hold of what is of greater significance"; "acquiring a wide knowledge of the names of birds and beasts, plants and trees" is "to get hold of what is of lesser significance". The "teaching of the *Odes*" will discard neither, but there has to be made a distinction of root and branches, of the important and the unimportant. (*Qīngshǐ gǎo* 清史稿 480/13161)

This collage, of course, consists almost completely of quotations, mainly two from *Lúnyǔ* 論語, first 19.22:

[...] 子貢曰：文武之道，未墜於地，在人。賢者識其大者，不賢者識其小者。莫不有文武之道焉。夫子焉不學？而亦何常師之有？

⁸ Yang Jiang 2003. This publication will it make possible to reconstruct, at least partially, the textual genesis of *Guǎnzhūi biān*.

[...] Tzu-kung said, "The way of King Wen and King Wu has not yet fallen to the ground but is still to be found in men. There is no man who does not have something of the way of Wen and Wu in him. Superior men have got hold of what is of greater significance while inferior men have got hold of what is of lesser significance. From whom, then, does the master not learn? Equally, how could there be such a thing as a constant teacher for him?" (Lau 1992:197)

Then *Lúnyǔ* 17.9:

[...] 詩可以興，可以觀，可以群，可以怨。邇之事父，遠之事君，多識於鳥獸草木之名。

The Master said, "[...] An apt quotation from the *Odes* may stimulate the imagination, endow one with breeding, enable one to live in a community and give expression to grievances. [...]" (Lau 1992:175)

Chéng Rú relates the "hold of what is of greater or lesser significance" to the *Odes*, the oldest works of Chinese poetry collected in the anthology supposedly compiled by Confucius.

By identifying its genre as *zhìxiǎo*, *Guǎnzhuī biān* is linked up with a tradition flourishing during late imperial times and more or less openly criticizing the then prevailing dogma of Neo-Confucian 'moral principles'. Already in 1945, Qián had used this classification for a collection of notes of his, the first of which appeared in the journal *Xīnyǔ* 新語 shortly after the end of the Pacific war: *Xiǎoshuō zhìxiǎo* 小說識小 (Marginal Notes on Novels).⁹ The method he is using here in juxtaposing *trouvailles* from Western and Chinese narrative prose, already anticipates the more complex structures of *Guǎnzhuī biān*. It may be traced even further back, yet, to an article Qián published in the same year he finished his studies at Oxford and received the B.Litt. degree, writing a thesis on "China in the English literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century". In 1937, there appeared his *Zhōngguó gùyǒude wénxuépīpíng de yīgè tèdiǎn* 中國固有的文學批評的一個特點 (A Special Feature of China's Native Literary Criticism). He lists here, in a generalizing manner, four traits specific to Chinese literary criticism exemplified in his article by the 'special feature' he calls 'animism':

(1) It is buried in the minds of critics from past and present, it is dissipated in the works of literary criticism past and present, the critics of each school and each age have more or less applied it, and it is only because of its ubiquity that we are used to seeing it, and yet forget about it. (2) Since we do not find a counterpart in Western literary criticism, it has to be considered a special feature of China's literary criticism. (3) But this in no case is the result of the peculiar structure of the Chinese language or its system of writing, because once in a while, we find

⁹ Qian Zhongshu 1997B.

an echo of it in Western literary criticism proving that a handful of ingenious critics in the West have vaguely and unexpectedly seen this point. (4) From the accidental insights of Western critics, we can understand that albeit the manifestations of this feature are special to China, with regard to applicability it is potentially universal and global, so our point of view can always be extended to Western art. (Qian Zhongshu 1997A:390-391)

Even though this article in more than one respect reflects the youth of its author, his manifesto of overcoming traditional dichotomies such as old vs. new or Chinese vs. Western has to be taken serious, as we now know. He is aiming not only at the tradition of Chinese literary criticism, but actually at literary criticism in general and through its medium at literature *in toto*. The article already unfolds in a somewhat systematical manner some aspects of what later became essential for Qián's literary criticism: (1) unconscious or matter-of-course application (of motives, methods, concepts, etc.) transcending time, place and dogma; (2) empirical uniqueness to one cultural tradition (China) with (3) a few exceptions (in the West), ergo (4) universality (of motives, methods, concepts, etc.). – This universalism in literary criticism is based on empirical details (citations, quotes and allusions in Chinese and Western traditions) as well as cultural types (in this case the 'animistic' or 'anthropomorphic interpretation of literature'), literary genres, or in fact, every mediating concept: "Things Chinese do not necessarily have to be something special or even unique to China". (Qian Zhongshu 1997A:389-390)

The use of *zhìxiǎo* is at least ambiguous, if not ironic. While Qián's predecessors in many instances were true masters of the art to dissect characters and interpret words rather than texts, his work seems to imitate their techniques of composition, at the same time strongly objecting to *their* 'limited views'. In section 1 which is the methodological exposition of *Guǎnzhū biān*, without much need 'students of the canonical books' (*jīngshēng* 經生) are blamed not to understand dialectical tendencies in language and thought (Qian Zhongshu 1979A:1.6). The shortest paragraph in this section consisting of only two lines emphasizes that ambiguity is common not only in jokes (*huīxié* 詼諧) but also in literature as well as in philosophy (Qian Zhongshu 1979A:1.4).¹⁰ As a matter of fact, Qián himself once acknowledged that the difficulties posed by *Guǎnzhū biān* are not only caused by its numerous quotations and classicist expressions, but at least as much by its being soaked with humour.¹¹

¹⁰ Confer Friedrich Schlegel on joke as quoted in Benjamin 1973:43-44.

¹¹ Yu 2002:35 quoting Cai Tianming 1991:92-93.

3. "What I consider to be of great value, even though it is only my shabby broom."

The expression *bìzhǒu zhi xiàng* 敝帚之享 alludes to *Diǎnlùn lùnwén* 典論論文, the first text unanimously accepted as a piece of literary criticism in China and transmitted in *Wénxuǎn* 文選 52:

夫人善於自見，而文非一體，鮮能備善。是以各以所長相輕所短。里語曰。家有敝帚，享之千金。斯不自見之患也。

People are good at [or fond of] making themselves known; but since literature is not of one form alone, few can be good at everything. Thus each person disparages that in which he is weak by the criterion of those things in which he is strong. There is a village saying: "The worn-out broom that belongs to my own household is worth a thousand in gold." Such is the ill consequence of a lack of self-awareness. (Owen 1992:59; transliterations and endnote deleted)

Cáo Pī 曹丕 (187-226), its author, uses the proverb to characterize the "partiality to oneself and to one's own particular skills" in contrast to the "comprehensive excellence, in which all particular excellences are combined (a capacity associated with the Sage/ruler)" (Owen 1992:60). He is probably alluding to *Mèngzǐ* 孟子 2A2 where it is said that some disciples of Master Kǒng 孔子 "had one aspect of the Sage" (有聖人之一體) while others "were replicas of the Sage in miniature" (具體而微).¹² The piece was written two or three years before its author's ascension to the throne of Wèi 魏 in 220, displaying his aspiration to rulership over the realm of literature as well as over the world. – This position is dogmatic: Knowing the laws of world and literature, the Sage as supreme judge presides over both. It corresponds to the traditional category of didacticism (*zàidào* 載道).

By assuming the dogmatic voice of the emperor-to-be, Qián simultaneously transcends and subverts it. He, as one of those authors 'partial to oneself' without 'comprehensive excellence', degrades the 'Sage' to exactly the same position that was awarded by him to the writers of literature. The 'shabby broom' which is none other than the *Guǎnzhuī biān*, should be suspected to sweep away dogmatic views of literary criticism, since it does not even leave set phrases of literary education unchanged.¹³

¹² Lau 1984:I,59.

¹³ See *Hànyǔ dàcídiǎn* 1986-1993:5.468 for examples (sub 敝帚千金，敝帚自珍，敝帚自享) including the quotation of the saying in the *Dōngguān Hànjì* 東觀漢記 for the year 36 A.D. which is clearly not related to literary criticism or literature.

4. "what I present, even though it is only celery of a rustic"

The phrase *yěqín zhī xiàn* 野芹之獻 directly following the one just discussed is construed as an exact parallel and again avoids set phrases,¹⁴ but is obviously alluding to the closing part of the famous letter written by Xī Kāng (嵇康, 223-262) terminating intercourse with Shān Táo 山濤 (205-283) to be found in *Wénxuǎn* 文選 43:

野人有快炙背而美芹子者，欲獻之至尊。雖有區區之意，亦已疏矣，願足下勿似之。其意如此，既以解足下，以為別。嵇康白。

The rustic who took such pleasure in the warm sun on his back, or the one who so esteemed the flavor of celery that they wanted to bring these things to the attention of the Most High: this showed them to be well-meaning, but also showed their complete ignorance. I hope you will not do as they did. This being the way I feel about it, I have written to explain it to you and at the same time to say farewell. (Hightower 2000:467)

Shān Táo had recommended his friend for office, to which suggestion Xī Kāng reacts by enumerating general nuisances of office as well as those concerning himself who by nature was not meant for social intercourse as required by high status. Not recognising his true nature and his desire for freedom is reason enough to discontinue friendship with Shān Táo who is placed on a level with the rustic presenting Xī Kāng, a worthless gift, to his superior.

Xī Kāng himself is alluding to an anecdote about one of the rustics from the state of Sòng 宋 transmitted in the chapter *Yáng Zhū* 楊朱 of the *Lièzǐ* 列子: The poor fellow did only have a coat of tangled hemp and barely survived winter. When spring came, he warmed his body in the sunshine and was so pleased with this invention that he wanted to present it to his ruler in order to be rewarded. Some rich man in his village told him:

昔人有戎菽，甘枲莖芹萍子者，對鄉豪稱之。鄉豪取而嘗之，蜚於口慘於腹，眾哂而怨之，其人慚。子，此類也。

Once there was a man who had a taste for broad beans, nettle-hemp seeds, celery and southernwood shoots, and recommended them to some important people of the district. When they tried the dish, it stung their mouths and pained their stomachs. They all smiled coldly and put the blame on him, and he was very embarrassed. You are just like him. (Graham 1960:155)

¹⁴ See *Hànyǔ dàcídiǎn* 1986-1993:5.139 (sub 獻芹) and 1992:9.307 (sub 芹敬，芹誠，芹意，芹曝，芹獻) for examples.

In this anecdote within an anecdote, the gifts are offered not to the 'Most High', but only to some 'important people of the district', furthermore, they cause pain to the recipients and finally embarrassment to the donator. Because of his outspokenness and his character, Xī Kāng indirectly considers himself as a potential danger to superiors and well-meaning friends. He is self-content when allowed to do as he likes, and assumes the role of the rustic often found in literary Taoism. Just before the anecdote quoted, the chapter *Yáng Zhū* relates the following saying: "When the rustic is satisfied and pleased with anything, he says there is nothing better in the world." (野人之所安，野人之所美，謂天下無過者; Graham 1960: *ibid.*). *Yáng Zhū* is the philosopher of Classical times who undermined contemporary attempts to find the 'right way' to bring order to society by declaring that he would not give a single hair of his body even if it were to save the world. – This position is skeptical: The only law is that of spontaneous nature realizing itself in each individual in a different way, and what is liked by one person, may be disapproved by others. Each individual has to follow his or her natural bent in order to achieve 'excellence' which consequently consists in the originality of individual genius. This corresponds to the traditional category of expressionism (*yánzhì* 言志).

The position of Xī Kāng is not less rigorous than the one of Cáo Pī, but presupposes an ironic reflection on the effects the 'celery of a rustic' may produce in a world ordered according to the court hierarchies of power and value. The formal parallelism reduces the absolute validity of either the dogmatic or the skeptical position to a relationship of mutual dependancy. Not only the dialectics of dogma and genius or didacticism and expressionism, but also the method of quoting quotes, of adding ever-new levels of reflection to transmitted wisdom imply the process-like character of criticism: The rich man advising the rustic in the *Yáng Zhū* chapter episode is telling a story which is, in turn, alluded to by Xī Kāng in his letter which finally is alluded to by Qián. Xī Kāng does not use the image for an invention or a vegetable, but does so ironically for his own person. Qián then transfers the metaphor to the world of criticism by using it for his *Guǎnzhuī biān*. The efforts of the author to supplement his work – the first edition already has additional notes at the end of volumes 1 and 2, and after publication of a volume of supplements, each new edition saw further addenda¹⁵ – illustrates the never-ending project of criticism. Besides serving as an antidote against dogmatism, its use might also protect from naive worship of genius.¹⁶

¹⁵ Confer Yu 2002:26-30 on the editions of *Guǎnzhuī biān*.

¹⁶ Confer Friedrich Schlegel on Greek poetry as quoted in Benjamin 1973:48.

5. "Could it be as effective as medical plants like chinaroot or balloonflower?"

The question directly following the double characterization of *Guǎnzhū biān*: 其資於用也，能如豕苓桔梗乎哉？ links the dubious gift of celery to the medical plants *shǐlíng* 豕苓 (chinaroot; against diabetes) and *jiégěng* 桔梗 (balloonflower; against rheumatism). In this case *Zhuāngzǐ* 莊子 24 is quoted:

藥也其實，堇也，桔梗也，雞龐也，豕零也，是時為帝者也。何可勝言？
Medicines will serve as an example. There are monkshood, balloonflower, cockscomb, and chinaroot; each has a time when it is the sovereign remedy, though the individual cases are too numerous to describe. (Watson 1968:277)

According to the commentary of Guō Xiàng 郭象 (d. 312), this serves to illustrate the principle of inconstancy: these plants usually are cheap, but in times when their healing power is needed, they will be considered most precious. These enigmatic sentences follow a paragraph describing the True Man (*zhēnrén* 真人) as living and dying in accord with (the right time as destined by) Heaven. On the other hand, flaws in literary composition have been termed 'illness' (*bìng* 病) at least from the times of Shěn Yuē onward, and Huáng Shēng 黃昇 begins his 1244 foreword to the highly praised anthology *Shīrén yùxiè* 詩人玉屑 (The Jade Splinters of the Poets) of Wèi Qǐngzhī 魏慶之 with the declaration: "Just as there are prescriptions in medicine, there is criticism in poetry" (詩有評猶醫有方)¹⁷ – This position is optimistic: Literary criticism is usually not held in high esteem, but in times of need, when the world of ideas and letters is struck by illness, its true value will be recognized, and it will be used as medicine. Literary criticism is prescriptive.

6. "More probably, it will only be like sawdust and bamboo ends"

The seemingly sober answer to the above question: 或庶幾比木屑竹頭爾 uses a set phrase (in reverse order *zhútóu mùxiè* 竹頭木屑)¹⁸ originating from the biography of Táo Kǎn 陶侃 (259-334) in *Jìnshū* 晉書 66/1774:

時造船，木屑及竹頭悉令舉掌之，咸不解所以。後正會，積雪始晴，聽事前餘雪猶溼，於是以屑布地。及桓溫伐蜀，又以侃所貯竹頭作丁裝船。

¹⁷ *Sikù quánshū* 四書全書 edition.

¹⁸ See *Hànyǔ dàcídiǎn* 1986-1993:8.1102.

At that time he ordered the shipbuilding officers to keep all the sawdust and bamboo ends; nobody understood the reason for this. Later at a New Year's assembly, it happened that the skies had just cleared after a heavy snowfall. Before commencing audience, it was still wet after the snow had been removed, so they used the sawdust to cover the ground. And when Huán Wēn (312-373) led an expedition against Shǔ (in 347), they used the bamboo ends saved by Kǎn to make nails for outfitting the ships.¹⁹

The practical value of keeping leftovers is demonstrated by the frugality of the stern and just official Táo Kǎn who despised Taoist teachings, and whose farsightedness was not only to prevent broken legs, but also to support an expedition undertaken years after his death. On the other hand, 'sawdust' alludes to a dictum of a celebrity of the same age. Wáng Chéng 王澄 (269-312) had praised his fellow Taoist and 'Free Spirit' Húwú Fǔzhī 胡毋輔之 (ca. 264-ca. 312) saying that by spitting out brilliant sayings like sawdust flurrying without ever coming to a halt, he really was the leader of the next generation: 吐佳言如鋸木屑，霏霏不絕，誠為後進領袖也 (*Jinshū* 49/1379); none of these gems seems to have been transmitted. The rather ambiguous praise reminds one of critics who used to call the 'brilliant phrases and lines' of poets 'jade splinters' (*yùxiè* 玉屑)²⁰ rather than sawdust. But real 'sawdust', finally, may be of some real use, while poetic 'jade splinters' in the end are only words in the world of ideas and letters. – This position is pessimistic: literary criticism is usually considered as leftovers of literature. If this rubbish is of any use at all, it is only to plug some minor gap. Literary criticism is fragmentary. [note 7]

The sequence broom-celery-plant-sawdust is an example for what might be termed the rule of growing complexity according to which Qián often construes his critical notes or parts of them. To show only some superficial aspects of this particular case:

broom	celery	medical plant	sawdust
metaphor	metaphor	simile	simile
artifact	plant	plant	artifact
Confucian	Taoist	Taoist	Confucian
position	position	effectiveness	effectiveness

¹⁹ The parallel in *Shishuō xīnyǔ* 世說新語 3.16 has an abridged version at least partially quoting the same source. The translation is based on Mather 1976:87.

²⁰ This usage originally may have been adopted from authors hostile towards the world of letters, see *Hànyǔ dàcídiǎn* 1986-1993:4.495 (sub 玉屑 3). In alchemy, it was later taken literally as a means to prolong life.

If read with keeping the original context and Qián's principle of irony in mind, one arrives at a circular structure resembling a kaleidoscope with infinite refractions.

Read in parallel, the similes of plants and leftovers – as contrasted to the metaphors of 'broom' and 'celery' signifying the work of literary criticism introduced by Qián's foreword – imply the decisive role played by the 'times', by the intellectual world which stimulates and receives a work. Like medicine cures the body, criticism could give relief to 'the illness of the time', but this the author politely and ironically declines. His irony reaches its apex when he insinuates that *Guǎnzhū biān* would be as helpful as the leftovers used to proclaim punishments and to plan a military attack. On the contrary, fragments from the world of literature may be remembered for centuries to come, and help to keep their authors' names immortal. A look at the features of *Guǎnzhū biān* written in Literary Chinese quoting thousands of works in six European languages and in Chinese – with the exception of a handful of authors all from pre-Republican times – makes one wonder what its 'timeliness' might be.²¹ One should keep in mind, though, that Qián himself called its contents 'smuggled goods' (私貨)²² and lengthily discussed the dialectics of 'hidden and manifest' in the expository section of *Guǎnzhū biān* (Qian Zhongshu 1979A:1.5-6).

7. "fragmentary"

In an introductory chapter added to the 1979 edition of an essay on Lessing's *Laokoon*, *Dú 'Lā'àokǒng' 讀〈拉奧孔〉*, originally having appeared in 1962, Qián discourses on fragments. In Egan's translation of the again slightly expanded version in the second edition of *Qī zhū jí 七綴集* of 1994 (first edition 1985), the relevant paragraphs read:

[...] in poetry, song lyrics, random notes, fiction, and drama, and even in popular sayings and classical commentaries, a few short phrases jotted down carelessly often convey a refined and original insight that truly enhances understanding. The act of culling out and developing such passages may be a real contribution to theories of art.

[...] these unpremeditated isolated insights are, in fact, the seedlings of elaborate self-conscious theories.

Furthermore, the desultory notes on poetry and other remarks on literature that we read so closely do not need to fit into some theoretical system. If we examine the history of theories, what we find is that many of the most tightly constructed and comprehensive systems of thought and philosophy have not withstood the corrosion of time. Their structure as a whole has been demolished.

²¹ Confer Friedrich Schlegel on annihilation as quoted in Benjamin 1973:73-74.

²² In a *xù* for Mutsch 1994:vi.

Yet some of their particular, isolated insights do survive and are used by later ages. These theoretical systems become, in other words, like buildings that were once grand and imposing but have subsequently fallen into ruins. In their present state they cannot be lived in and will impress no passerby. But certain of the materials used to construct them, some timbers, stones, or tiles, may still be valuable and useful to later generations. Just so, frequently the only thing of value that a great theoretical system leaves to posterity is a few unconnected, partial thoughts [*piànduàn sīxiǎng* 片段思想].

It is the nature of both types of isolated thoughts [*piànduàn sīxiǎng* 片段思想] – that is, both those that have been separated from their original structure and handed down to later times and those that are the seedlings of theoretical systems that have yet to be built – that they are inherently fragmentary [*língsui* 零碎] (Egan 1998:11).²³

The striking image of a palace in ruins for the architecture of 'theoretical systems' after their time has run out as opposed to 'some timbers, stones, or tiles' still useful for later ages just as 'unconnected, partial thoughts' and 'unpremeditated isolated insights' are, may be read as a commentary on the political situation in the narrow sense. At the same time, it highlights the core of Qián's criticism as it evolved from the time of his first reviews published in 1932 and 1933:

The earlier essays had illustrated various faults within traditional theory without showing any way for modern writing to get around them. The attitude of the younger writer is generally pessimistic about literature and cultural reform; the author of *Tan Yi Lu*, however, while not denying the drawbacks of traditional theory [...] seeks to deny ultimate significance to these faults. He attempts to demonstrate that they can be overcome, both for literature in general and for the re-appraisal of Chinese literary history, which necessarily antecedes its re-arrangement as an organic basis for future literary creativity. (Huters 1977:174)

Huters finds in *Tán yì lù* 談藝錄 (On the Art of Poetry, first edition 1948) – despite "its lack of overall structure" – "a unifying spirit". This systematic intention is trying to pull the two fields of traditional literature and literary theory clear of "traditional notions and the modern extreme response to or continuation of them, which Qián determines as being damaging to literature as he himself would define the term." This task has to be fulfilled in order "to create an autonomous literature which incorporates both the capacity for self and cultural expression, both a sense of the present and of the literary heritage of the past" (Huters 1977:166-167).

²³ Chinese text in Qian Zhongshu 1997C:222-223 which has some addenda and stylistically improves Qian Zhongshu 1979B:26-27. Qián 1962 does not include these introductory remarks, yet, and sets out with the second chapter of later editions. Brackets added by MF.

This purpose has obviously remained unchanged, but the experience of the so-called Cultural Revolution has led to an even more radical historicization of theoretical approach as to be seen in the introduction to the essay on Lessing's *Lokoon*. It is hardly an accident that it was published in 1979, the year in which also *Guǎnzhū biān* appeared, and therefore should be read in conjunction with section 1 as methodological introduction. While young Qián still wanted to reconcile past and present, the author of *Guǎnzhū biān* sees the Chinese tradition as a vast expanse of ruins (Motsch 1994:42), which has to be carefully searched for valuables.

One of the ten works Qián comments on in *Guǎnzhū biān* is the versified divination manual *Yilin* 易林. After its use had ceased, its literary art originally serving ancillary functions remained and was freed from auxiliary status (Qian Zhongshu 1979A:2.539). The method is literary criticism, the result is the critical work which aims at "saving the precious leftovers" of tradition and thereby perfecting it by dialectical "Aufheben".²⁴ Qián may have found consolation in, amongst others, the literary criticism of Jena Romanticism. Especially the early works of Friedrich Schlegel, which he seems to have taken notice of only after the first publication of *Tán yì lù*, may have inspired his praise of fragment, the methodological application of irony, and the exaltation of literary criticism as a means of perfecting and keeping alive literary tradition.²⁵ In the 1946 (or 1947) edition of an essay on Chinese poetry and Chinese painting, Qián mentions an 'objective criticism' of literature which perfectly tallies with the one proposed by young Schlegel:

[W]hen a tradition is completely destroyed, the new ambiance and the new education contribute to man's habitual forgetfulness. We may, therefore, be able to create a more objective criticism of traditional works of literature. This type of criticism perhaps will grant new knowledge to authors, perhaps will have a great actualité for them--are not the so-called "immortal works" which continue this sense of actualité, those which can stand this re-appraisal? (Huters 1977:179)

The 1979 edition completely rephrases and camouflages not only the original meaning of this paragraph,²⁶ but also deletes the sentence: "Traditions are living entities rather than dead things".²⁷ This might be one of the 'smuggled goods' in *Guǎnzhū biān*, since the last paragraph of section 1 culminates in a praise of the dialectical nature of creativity.

²⁴ Confer Qian Zhongshu 1979A:1.1.

²⁵ See Benjamin 1973:46-47 on 'fragment'; 63-64 and 102-103 on the 'perfection of literary works by literary criticism'; 76-81 on 'irony'; 85-87 on 'progressive Universalpoesie'; 87-90 on 'Transzendentalpoesie' and 'Poesie der Poesie'. See Qian Zhongshu 1984:35 on 'progressive Universalpoesie'; 371 on 'Poesie der Poesie' – the 1984 edition of *Tán yì lù* closes with a Schlegel quote on the dialectics of emotions (Qian Zhongshu 1984:622).

²⁶ Qian Zhongshu 1979C:3.

²⁷ Huters 1977:178, confer Qian Zhongshu 1979C:2.

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