



Qian Zhongshu.

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Southeast Asia, she lacked a protective legal system and stable political institutions. This is in part true. Godley's small and select merchants, now complemented by Omohundro's larger body of average merchants, remind us that a more crucial reason for China's failure is human attitudes and goals.

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Qian Zhongshu. By THEODORE HUTERS. Boston: Twayne Publishers (Twayne's World Authors Series, no. 600), 1982. vi, 187 pp. Chronology, Notes, Selected Bibliography, Index. \$18.95.

Theodore Hutters has written an excellent study of the life and works of Qian Zhongshu, an Olympian figure considered by many to be twentieth-century China's leading man of letters. In seven extremely well-written chapters, Hutters presents a biographical sketch, studies of Qian's literary criticism, his familiar essays, his fiction, and a brief overall evaluation. In keeping with the theme of his earlier doctoral dissertation (Stanford, 1977), "traditional innovation," he consistently presents Qian's attempts to solve the seemingly "insoluble problem of balancing the weight of Chinese tradition with the demands of a pressing social and literary modernization" and adds greatly to our appreciation and understanding in each area.

Hutters' short biography shows Qian to be a scholar, an urbane modern skeptic, and a survivor. Combining a near-photographic memory with great talent and "a certain arrogance" and having "an omnivorous appetite for fiction," he amassed great erudition, becoming literate in "three or four" European languages as well as classical and modern Chinese, and adopting the literary tastes of post-World War I English dandies. He describes himself as "antisocial" and "not afraid to be alone," holds the vast majority of China's modern intelligentsia in contempt for their vainglorious attempts to participate in political activity and influence the course of Chinese history, and believes that the essence of political wisdom lies in "knowing when not to write." Although that should be "what not to write," he is indeed living proof of the efficacy of such a principled stand.

In his discussion of Qian's *Tan Yi Lu* (Causeries on classical Chinese poetics), Hutters performs a minor miracle doing what Qian (writing in "an obscure classical style" bristling with erudite allusions recited from memory without references) consistently refuses to do: set forth the major ideas and themes that make up Qian's "general theory of aesthetics" as well as demonstrate Qian's attempts at a creative transformation of the Chinese literary tradition through a judicious application of European literary theories in order to liberate Chinese literature from historicism and moralism and establish the idea of "literary autonomy" in China. These liberal goals still remain to be achieved in China.

Hutters shows Qian in his familiar essays to be increasingly iconoclastic, employing a style analogous to the "baroque style" of seventeenth-century Europe in which traditional prose elements or ideas are ironically employed in a deliberate attempt to undermine "the traditional force of morality," demolish "traditional stereotypes," and create "more critical awareness." The end result of many of his essays is that "the certainty of all received values comes into question." And here lies a danger undiscussed by Hutters: Qian's style of argument always borders on nihilism and risks the destruction not only of the hypocritical and harmful elements of traditional

morality, but also of the very concept of morality itself. Although not a "totalistic iconoclast" and certainly not committed to any program of social reform, simplistic or sophisticated, Qian has nevertheless done his intellectual share in his essays and fiction to contribute to what Michael Polanyi called the "self-destruction of thought" (*Meaning*, Chicago, 1975) and Lin Yü-sheng called the *Crisis of Chinese Consciousness* (Madison, 1979).

Huters finds Qian's short fiction to be rather unsuccessful because of the intrusive nature of his "thematic concerns": the entropy and futility that he believes to be the "essence of life." Huters agrees with the majority opinion that Qian's novel *Fortress Besieged* (*Wei Cheng*) is a masterpiece in which theme, narrative, and dialogue "achieve satisfactory cohesion," and he makes a detailed structuralist analysis à la Roland Barthes to demonstrate why this is so. He is most persuasive in his argument that Qian's illustration of humanity's constant "pursuit of what is unattainable and discontent with what is directly at hand" goes from facile satire to true pathos through the skillful manipulation of point of view to establish two opposing modes of narration: that of an omniscient narrator (presumably the author of "God's Dreams" who believes that human ideals are "idle dreams that are at bottom nothing but vanity") and a useless moral coward whose growing awareness of the fatal consequences of his actions is matched only by his increasing inability to do anything about them. "The final meaning of the novel," then, "is surely the demonstration of how the alienation which a corrupt world brings is manifested in *everyone*." Huters concludes that the novel offers "an almost tragic sense of knowledge coming forever too late to be of any use," something that he and Qian believe to be "*of course . . . a universal human condition*" (my italics). That modest conclusion just about completes the "self-destruction of thought" by thought mentioned above and, if it were true, effectively precludes the combination of moral passion with human reason that is so vital to the solution of the many problems facing modern China today. Perhaps one would not be amiss to paraphrase Qian: "As a writer he is happiest when others fail: It gives him a topic for a nihilistic novel."

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Ch'ing Policy toward the Coolie Trade, 1847–1878. By ROBERT L. IRICK.
Taipei: Chinese Materials Center, 1982. xviii, 452 pp. Maps, Plates, Glossary, Bibliography, Index. \$29.75.

Robert Irick's book on Ch'ing policy toward the coolie trade covers an important episode in Sino-Western relations during the early stage of the treaty system. It is significant because it presents evidence that documents the Ch'ing government's successful manipulation of the treaty system to achieve the regulation and prohibition of this trade, but it is also interesting because it touches on moral issues connected with the mid-nineteenth century crusade against slavery in the West—issues that caused even the most unabashed Western imperialists to blush when confronted with the seamier aspects of the coolie trade.

The book covers the origins of the trade from 1847 to 1859; the first locally based Sino-Western attempts to regulate it in Canton in 1859–1860; the successful Ch'ing drive to regulate the trade on China's terms from 1866 to 1872; the abolition of the trade by 1874; and, finally, the attempts to protect Chinese emigrants abroad (1875).