

Qian Mu. *Zhongguo jinsanbainian xueshu shi* (*Chinese intellectual history of recent three hundred years*). Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1937. vi + 709 pp.

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Published on H-Ideas (August, 2000)

[Note: This review is part of the H-Ideas Retrospective Reviews series. This series reviews books published during the twentieth century which have been deemed to be among the most important contributions to the field of intellectual history.]

This two-volume set was originally Qian Mu's lecture notes of a course he taught at Peking University in 1931. Earlier the famous Liang Qichao (1873-1929) had taught the same course at the prestigious Tsing-hua (Qinghua) University and published his lectures as *Zhongguo jin sanbainian xueshu shi* (*Chinese intellectual history of the recent three hundred years*) in 1929. Qian Mu read Liang's work and used the same title for his own book. Qian said that he had different views about the subject from Liang's. But he also shared quite a few Liang's views that he did not acknowledge. Qian's much heavier book supersedes Liang's concise pioneer work in many ways; however, his concept appears less impressive in comparison. Liang's concept more or less reflects the impact of the West and the dawn of the twentieth century. Qian, a twentieth-century scholar, wrote a nineteenth-century book in terms of methodology, interpretation, and style. Nevertheless, both books carrying the same title have been repeatedly reprinted in China. A new edition of Qian's book appeared in Taiwan as late as 1996.

Basically, like Liang, Qian deals with the intellectual history of Qing China (1644-1911). Qian's

intellectual history, however, is basically a collection of short intellectual biographies from Huang Zongxi (1610-1695) to Kang Youwei (1858-1927). Every great scholar has a chapter with minor figures being treated as "appendix," though some of Qian's great scholars, such as Zeng Guofan (1811-1872) and Chen Li (1810-1882), appear more controversial than others, while the distinguished Wei Yuan (1799-1856) being treated as minor figure by Qian. Each chapter begins with a brief biographical note before highlighting principal ideas and thoughts, showing little, if any, transition of ideas and thoughts from one period to another. Nor do the chapters present the "profound forces" of history. While it is useful to provide an orderly catalog of ideas, the author left his readers little sense of the development of ideas and their relation to each other in time, let alone the reasons for their rise at a particular time and their effects on concrete historical situations. The great scholars Qian had included in his book chronologically fall into three major periods of time, early Qing, middle Qing, and late Qing, but again no movement of thought from one period to another can be discerned.

The four giants of the early Qing, namely, Huang Zongxi, Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692), Gu Yanwu (1613-1682), and Yan Yuan (1635-1704), reacted principally against what they considered the disastrous escapism deriving from the Wang Yangming school of Neo-Confucian idealism,

which was held responsible for the downfall of the Ming state. In response they campaigned for the more pragmatically and useful knowledge under the banner of the so-called Han learning in contrast to Neo-Confucianism, also known as Song learning. Although critical of Gu Yanwu's originality, Qian Mu conceded to Liang the preeminence of Gu's role in bringing forth Han learning in Qing China. With regard to these early Qing scholars, Qian's views are quite similar to Liang's, and twentieth-century scholars home and abroad have generally accepted them.

Mid-Qing represents the heyday of Qing scholarship. By this time, the abstract and metaphysical intellectual trend had given way for the "climate of opinion," which stressed empirical research and textual criticism. Dai Zhen (1723-1777) was arguably the most eminent Han-learning scholar of the period. He did not really oppose philosophical inquiry, although he insisted that such inquiry had to be made on the basis of exact and thorough philology. During his later years, he developed his own philosophy that directly challenged Zhu Xi's (1130-1200) orthodoxy in particular and Neo-Confucianism in general. He thus won admiration of many modern scholars. Liang Qichao praised Dai's pragmatism, while Hu Shi (1891-1962) compared Dai's thought favorably to Bentham's Utilitarianism. But Dai in his own time raised a furor. The men of letters affiliated with the Tongcheng School, Fang Dongshu (1772-1851) in particular, launched vigorous attacks on Dai and Dai's followers of Han learning. Tedious textual criticism rather than polemics, however, eventually cost the popularity of Han learning and resulted in its decline. Unlike Liang and Hu, Qian Mu was not really Dai Zhen's fan, as he preferred Dai's rival Zhang Xuecheng (1738-1801) more. Qian regretted Dai's assault on Zhu Xi, for which he blamed Hui Dong's (1667-1758) vicious influence on Dai, and attributed the excessive and unwarranted attacks on Zhu's orthodoxy to the fading of Han learning. Hence for Qian the new generation of Han-learning scholars, such as Jiao

Xun (1763-1820), Ruan Yuan (1764-1849), and Ling Tingkan (1755-1809), had to seek a synthesis of Han and Song learning. Qian believed the intellectual crisis could be settled by accommodating the overshadowed Song learning. Here Qian revealed his preference for Song learning.

But synthesis was no longer an answer during the late Qing. During the late Qing period of crisis, to the disapproval of Qian Mu, the New-text school of Han learning, rather than the orthodox Neo-Confucianism, was on the rise. In Qian's view, the New Texters' absurdities helped bring down the Qing, both its learning and its state. The revival of the New Text School in late Qing did not begin with Gong Zizhen (1792-1841), but Gong, as both Liang and Qian believed, was the real "spiritual pioneer," the one who first made scholarly views bear on politics since the prevalence of literary inquisition in the eighteenth century. But strangely Qian did not give much credit to the pioneer whom he considered passive and thus unfulfilling. Qian's real hero turned out to be Zeng Guofan (1811-1872). He appreciated Zeng's taking the intellectual heritage over from the Tongcheng School that had vehemently opposed Han learning. He praised Zeng's great merits in restoring the world by suppressing the Taiping rebels as well as by promoting Song learning. He cherished the soundness of Zeng's scholarship as "rarely seen in the period of two hundred years." Hence as Zeng passed away from the scene, in Qian's words, late Qing was doomed to fall.

Qian also gave extraordinary attention to Chen Li (1810-1882), an ivory-tower scholar without worldly fame. Qian's interest in Chen, it seems, arose largely because Chen, as a Han-learning scholar, was willing to make self-criticisms and eager to accommodate Song learning. Qian's overall view of Chen, however, was not complimentary: Chen was compared unfavorably to the earlier Qing scholars, such as Yan Yuan and Zhang Xuecheng.

Qian made Kang Youwei conclude his book, but he in effect held Kang in contempt. He repeatedly accused Kang of plagiarism: Kang evolved his Datong utopianism, but it showed no differences from Tan Sitong's "Learning of Benevolence" (Renxue), while stealing his New-text interpretations of Confucianism from Liao Ping (1852-1932). Kang was indeed not a very serious scholar; worse still, he showed weakness in inventing the facts for the arguments. But no one should dismiss the powerful intellectual impact he had brought to bear on the political scene. Liao Ping was simply not in Kang's rank, whether in terms of breadth or depth, not to mention of actual influence. Nor could Tan match Kang in constructing utopianism. According to the monumental study of Kung-chuan Hsiao, Kang's Datong philosophy was a world-class utopian thought. Disregarding the importance of Kang's using New-text Confucianism for the purpose of reform as well as his scheme of gradual evolution of human societies, Qian found his reinterpretation of Confucianism ridiculous and his entertainment of utopianism pointless. Thus Qian concluded his intellectual history of China's recent three hundred years in despair: Kang's arbitrariness and inconsistency delivered a fatal blow to the traditional Chinese scholarship, and later scholars would have to start all over again. Did Kang truly sweep the intellectual slate clean? Perhaps he did not. Whatever merits Qian's book has, it is clearly outdated.

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Citation: Young-tsu Wong. Review of Mu, Qian. *Zhongguo jinsanbainian xueshu shi (Chinese intellectual history of recent three hundred years)*. H-Ideas, H-Net Reviews. August, 2000.

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