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- Cover Illustration A painting commemorating the *Huanghua gang* martyrs
by the Famous Lingnan School painter He Jianshi 何劍士,
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HISTORIAN AND COURTESAN: CHEN YINKE 陈寅恪 AND THE WRITING OF *LIU RUSHI* *BIEZHUAN* 柳如是别传

文 Wen-hsin Yeh 葉文新

Prefatory Remarks

I am grateful to Professor Barmé for this opportunity to deliver the G. E. Morrison Lecture that honors the best-known Australian in China. As I made my way over across the Pacific Ocean, my thoughts were drawn to his epic journeys of the last century and more. Morrison was a great traveler in his day. His explorations included the memorable walk from one end of Australia to the other. His journeys across several continents brought him eventually to Beijing 北京, the place where he spent much of his last two decades and where he earned recognition as the most influential foreigner in China.

It was in Beijing that Morrison met my great-grandfather, Yan Fu 严复, who had embarked upon his journeys earlier from a different direction. Yan Fu sailed for England in 1877 as a young navel cadet from the countryside of Fuzhou 福州. In London and Paris he came upon a whole intellectual universe of social Darwinism and liberal political thought. The further he ventured beyond the confines of established Chinese ways the more difficult his subsequent homeward journey became. In Beijing in the 1900s he was recognized as a leading intellect on account of his “Western learning.” He had also become progressively marginalized. As I see it, my great-grandfather was very much a frustrated man, being unable to move his country to share his view of the world.

Both Morrison and Yan Fu developed extensive connections with a network of officials and diplomats centered upon the governors-general Li Hongzhang 李鸿章 and Yuan Shikai 袁世凯. I have no exceptional

The 64th George Ernest Morrison Lecture was delivered by Professor Wen-hsin Yeh, University of California, Berkeley, at the Australian National University, on 8 July 2003. [—Ed.]

insight into the relationships or connections between them. They exchanged letters on matters of state, especially about the 1911 Revolution (*Xinbai geming* 辛亥革命). They seem also to have shared book lists and reading materials.

It gives me special pleasure nonetheless to deliver this year's lecture that honors the name of G. E. Morrison. In Morrison's life I found an unsuspected family connection. The epic journeys of his century did much to shrink the world and weave connections. His was an era of telegraphs and steamships. Ours today is a world poised to be transformed by the internet and space shuttles. It is with these reflections in mind that I offer my lecture, which contains but preliminary findings about how a prominent twentieth-century Chinese historian negotiated these fundamental issues of space and time through war and revolution.

* * *

Introduction

¹ John Dunn, *The history of political theory and other essays* (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.219.

When considering the heritage and future of the European left, the Cambridge philosopher John Dunn notes that to inherit, "one must be alive."¹ Inheritance, he suggests, "is not a naturally grateful category for the left" as it would be for a feudal aristocracy. The left cannot simply hope to draw its legitimacy from its past. It needs to remake its future in order to claim that past.

When Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 came to power after the Gang of Four 四人帮, the first task his supporters performed was a careful pronouncement on the legacies of Mao Zedong 毛泽东: on what seemed right and what had gone wrong, on what was to be inherited and what was not. Throughout much of its history, the Chinese Communist leadership had turned the act of striking a calculated balance between a critique of the past and an assumption of that past into a fine art. It has never been easy determining what to criticize and what to inherit, how much to discard and how much to retain. Each of these decisions carried grave political consequences. Yet none seemed definitive in the ceaseless dialectics between the past and the present.

One trend emerged over the course of the last two decades: the past of the Party itself had become progressively depleted as a fount of value and a source of knowledge. Unlike the situation facing the European left, it became imperative for the Chinese Communist Party to look beyond its conventions and history in order to replenish the symbolic resources that sustain the present. For the Chinese left to claim the future, it was necessary to remake the past.

Textbook simplifications notwithstanding, the pre-1949 “old China” (*jiu Zhongguo* 旧中国), in the context of the 1980s and 1990s, has been refashioned to become not just a target for smashing or suppressing, being transformed instead into “traditional China” (*chuantong Zhongguo* 传统中国) and a repository of cultural heritage (*wenhua yichan* 文化遗产). There is much—from Confucius 孔子 to Tang 唐 poetry, from Han 汉 tomb paintings to Dunhuang 敦煌 grotto manuscripts—that the new China would rediscover and inherit from an excavated past. Maoist classics such as the 1926 “Report on the Hunan Peasant Movement” (*Hunan nongmin yundong diaocha baogao* 湖南农民运动调查报告), to be sure, retain their doctrinal status in institutional niches. But the “feudal” is no longer fashioned to be merely the antithesis of and backdrop to the drama of socialist emancipation. By becoming simply the “past,” it is transformed into an added source of value and an expanded source of pride. Its symbolic resources, when properly mobilized, will serve to rescue Chinese socialism from the exhaustion of its own norms and imagination.

This new use of the past thus opens up a vision of history that is not peopled by the agents and precursors of the Communist victory in China (i.e., peasant rebels, urban workers, socialist martyrs, and cultural iconoclasts) but by a collection of their opposites. For decades since 1949, the Party apparatus had employed means of erasure and suppression to reduce to oblivion unwanted parts of the past. To undo what was done and renegotiate the Party’s relationship to that history, much needs to be done to repair that loss of memory and to break the silences of the past.

This massive refashioning of collective memory—this re-engineering of a nation’s sense of its own history and culture—takes many forms. The project began, in the late 1970s, with a re-evaluation of eminent individuals of the recent past, and the use of commemorative gatherings as remedial funerary services for victims of the Cultural Revolution.

The use of remedial commemoration, to be sure, falls well within established Party norms. Mao Zedong set the terms of such a practice in his 1944 talk, “Serve the People” (*Wei renmin fuwu* 为人民服务),² a funerary speech that turned rites of commemoration into sorting devices separating out class enemies from the “people.”³ If friends and comrades were to receive proper commemoration, it follows that traitors and enemies were to receive none. The Cultural Revolution not only purged class enemies from positions of power but also obliterated them from the collective memory. Political reversals in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution thus entailed not only the return of the still living but also the commemorative resurrection of the dead.

² *Mao Zedong xuanji* [Selected works of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1991), vol.3, pp.1004–6.

³ Funerary ritual and proper grieving for the politically disfavored could cause an official’s downfall, as Wu Han has shown in the case of Wang Shizhen grieving for the executed Yang Jisheng. Wu Han, “*Jin Ping Mei de zhuzuo shidai ji qi shehui beijing* [The date and the social background for the writing of *The Golden Plum*],” *Du shi zhuji* [Notes on history] (Beijing: Sanlian Shidian, 1956), pp.8–12.

⁴ On Deng Tuo, see Timothy Cheek, *Propaganda and culture in Mao's China: Deng Tuo and the intelligentsia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). On Wu Han, see Mary Mazur, "Wu Han: a man of his times," PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1994.

⁵ Chou Dayang, "Wu Han zai women de xinzhong—yijiujuling nian mo Beijing 'Guxiang de huainian' shoufa shi qianqian houhou" [Wu Han in our hearts—before and after the publication of *Remembrances of the hometown* in late 1990, Beijing], in *Wu Han zizhuan shuxin wenji* [Wu Han autobiography, correspondence, and collected essays], ed. Su Shuangbi (Beijing: Zhongguo Renshi Chubanshe, 1993), pp. 247–9.

For Deng Tuo 邓拓 and Wu Han 吴晗, high-ranking cultural cadres and early victims of the Cultural Revolution, the road to rehabilitation began with the re-issue of their writings in the 1970s and 80s.⁴ This was followed by the appearance of political biographies compiled by Party insiders. Other signs of the rehabilitation include the marking of places in their memory and public presentations of their suppressed works. In Beijing, Wu Han's alma mater Tsinghua University 清华大学 named a pavilion in his honor and graced the site with a plaque bearing the calligraphy of Deng Xiaoping and Peng Zhen 彭真. In Wu's hometown Jinhua 金华, in Zhejiang 浙江 province, the local Communist Party produced Wu's fateful historical play, "Hai Rui's Dismissal from Office" (*Hai Rui baguan* 海瑞罢官), in the local dialect and sent the performers to Beijing in the summer of 1985 to mark the 64th anniversary of the founding of the Party. The full rehabilitation of Wu Han came when the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Party sponsored a conference in Beijing on "Wu Han and His Glorious Life" (*Wu Han he ta guangrong de yisheng* 吴晗和他光荣的一生). Finally, the Jinhua Party secretariat brought out a volume called "Hometown Remembrances" (*Guxiang de huainian* 故乡的怀念) commemorating all honours given to Wu since the late 1970s.⁵

In the 1980s the life and work of Chen Yinke, who died in 1969 during the Cultural Revolution, came out in print. Like Wu Han, Chen was a former Tsinghua historian and an intellectual luminary who had enjoyed a scholarly reputation prior to 1949. Yet unlike Wu, Chen was neither a member of the Chinese Communist Party nor a cultural cadre in the post-1949 regime. Wu had held the title of deputy mayor of Beijing and died a victim of a carefully orchestrated political plot. Chen had never held government positions. He died, like many other intellectuals, in the general campaign unleashed against China's learned and educated. Wu's rehabilitation had remained within the bounds of carefully calculated sentiments endorsed by the Party. Chen's commemoration, in contrast, stemmed from non-Party sources. The publication of Chen's writings inspired admiration not only for a style of scholarship that was non-Marxist but also because it opened up a pre-socialist imaginary space of poetry and aestheticism.

The past, though dead, was not pliant. Chinese Communist Party historiography has traditionally maintained sharp distinctions between heroic martyrs versus inevitable losers, lost fights versus defeated causes. It has been resolute in turning the gaze away from sites and zones of buried causes, abandoned fights, suppressed memories, and proscribed ways of life. Historical memory, no less than visions for the future, required diligent management in the forward-looking ideology of Chinese communism. The past, freely accessed, posed as much of a problem as the present or the future. The celebration of Chen Yinke, more than the rehabilitation of Wu Han, thus raised interesting questions in a new way.

Biographical Construction of Liu Rushi

Between 1954 and 1964, on the campus of Zhongshan University 中山大学 in Guangzhou 广州, Chen Yinke devoted himself to the writing of the biography of Liu Rushi, a courtesan, poetess, and occasional painter of the 17th century. Chen, a founding figure of Dunhuang studies and famed for his earlier research on the political and religious history of China's Middle Ages (4th–14th centuries), was blind. He worked with an assistant who took down his words verbatim. The research, which eventually involved references to over six hundred titles in classical texts, was done by and large from memory.⁶ The book, entitled *An Ulterior Biography of Liu Rushi* (Liu Rushi biezhuàn), laid before the reader a late-Ming elite world of poetry, pleasure, elegance, and opulence amidst the ponds, streams, gardens, and pavilions of central China. There seemed to be so much identification between the historian and the biographical subject of his research that Chen named his study the Hall of Golden Illumination (*Jinmingguan* 金明馆)—an encoded reference to the studio in which the courtesan composed her poetry.

Well before 1949, Chen Yinke had attained a solid reputation as China's most eminent academic historian of his generation. Part of this had to do with the eminence of his family. Much more was attributable to his educational experience and scholarly contributions.⁷

In the 1910s and 1920s Chen Yinke traveled extensively and studied for some years at Harvard and Berlin. At Harvard he studied Sanskrit with Charles Lanman, who recognized Chen's exceptional talent in a letter to Harvard University President Lawrence Abbot Lowell. Lanman was the one-person Department of Indic Philology that had declared its independence from the Classics Department. He was at the same time a keen promoter of the intellectual benefit of learning Sanskrit, insisting that it trained the mind in much the same way that Greek and Latin did. Lanman worked with Indian scholars who helped him compile Sanskrit textbooks. An enterprising man, he also presided over translation projects of Sanskrit texts into English and maintained a network of connections with German orientalists.⁸

From Harvard, Chen Yinke went to Berlin at the end of the war. He continued his study of Sanskrit and learned Pali with Heinrich Luders. German orientalists led the field in those days in historical archaeology. German excavations laid the foundation for the reconstruction of extinct Sogdian and Turkic languages in the Central Asian desert. In Berlin, Chen Yinke led a style of life that revolved around the libraries and museums of the former imperial capital. In addition he traveled extensively, writing poems from the tops of the Swiss Alps as well as on the shores of the North Sea. Ever an avid collector, he apparently spent handsomely on a large number of books.

⁶ Hu Shouwei, "Liu Rushi biezhuàn du hòu" [On reading *An ulterior biography of Liu Rushi*], in *Liu Rushi biezhuàn yu guoxue yanjiu* [An ulterior biography of Liu Rushi and national learning], ed. Hu Shouwei (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1995), p.27.

⁷ Wang Rongzu, *Chen Yinke pingzhuàn* [Chen Yinke: biography and assessment] (Jiangxi: Baihuazhou Wenyi, 1992); also *Shijia Chen Yinke* [The historian Chen Yinke] (Taipei: Lianjing Chubanshe, 1984). Yu Dawei, "Huainian Chen Yinke xiansheng" [Remembering Mr. Chen Yinke], in *Chen Yinke xiansheng lunji* [Collected essays on Chen Yinke] (Nankang: Academia Sinica, 1971), pp.3–8.

⁸ Harvard University Archives, HUC 8920.115, box 914, "Office of the Registrar of Harvard University," and UA15.160, 1919–22, "Lanman, Charles R."

⁹ A first draft of *Lun Zaisheng yuan* was completed in 1954. An unauthorized printing, by Youlian Chubanshe, appeared in Hong Kong in 1959. A revised draft was completed in 1964. Jiang Tianshu, p.177. Despite Hu Qiaomu's promise and Guo Muoruo's support, Kang Sheng killed the publication plan by the Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe in 1962. See Lu Jiandong, *Chen Yinke de zuibou ershi nian* [The last two decades in the life of Chen Yinke], pp.368-73.

In 1925 he returned to Beijing to take up a professorship at Tsinghua and to serve, along with Liang Qichao 梁启超 and Wang Guowei 王国维, as a founding member of the Research Institute for National Learning (*Guoxue yanjiu suo* 国学研究所). He taught courses on Buddhist scriptures, and also lectured on the history of translations of Buddhist texts into Chinese. His work amounted to an archaeological excavation in historical linguistics. From this angle he approached the question of the role of Buddhism in the fashioning of Chinese culture and politics in the Middle Ages. He worked with texts in Manchu, Mongol, and Tibetan in addition to Sanskrit and Pali. To fill gaps in standard dictionaries, he dispatched teams of research assistants to conduct interviews in Manchuria and Mongolia. Meanwhile, the curators of the National Beijing Library (*Beijing guojia tushu guan* 北京国家图书馆) presented their new acquisitions of rare books to him on schedule. Chen produced essays that were terse, densely packed with textual references, technically challenging, and intellectually provocative. Women and foreigners—central Asians in particular—featured prominently in his work. Considerable attention was also given to material artifacts and visual images.

This style of scholarship came to an end in the late 1930s, when the war broke out and the universities moved out of Beiping (formally Beijing). Chen Yinke was not only deprived of his access to the libraries of that city but also lost his personal collection of books. His wartime correspondence recorded the hardship on the road as he moved to China's southwest. One day his family of five shared a meal of a single boiled egg. His wife fell ill and was unfit to travel. Chen lived apart from his family during parts of the war so as to perform his teaching duties. His reading taste changed to include essays and poetry. He told friends that when reading historical accounts of the fall of Kaifeng 开封, the northern Song 宋 capital, to the invading Jurchens, it brought tears to his eyes. He immersed himself in the poetry of Yuan Zhen 元稹 and Bai Juyi 白居易, poets who chronicled the military uprisings and social upheaval of the mid-Tang period. Other historians—Guo Moruo 郭沫若 and Wu Han among them—turned, in 1944, to orchestrate large-scale public commemoration of the third centennial of the fall of the Ming dynasty to the Manchus.

Chen Yinke's post-1949 research continued to break new ground. His Tang studies had alerted him to the multifaceted connections linking formal poetry, fictional writings, vernacular literature and the oral practices of storytelling. As Chen's eyesight deteriorated, he turned to the aural consumption of rhymed prose and performed narratives. The result was a close study of the elite world of female literacy and vernacular writing in the 18th century, as seen through story telling (*pingtan* 评弹) text, *Born-again reunion* (Xai sheng yuan 再生缘) and the lives of its two women authors, Chen Duansheng 陈端生 and Liang Chusheng 梁楚生.⁹

Chen's *magnum opus* in the 1950s and 1960s, however, was *Liu Rushi biezhuān*, initially entitled *Qian Qianyi—Liu Rushi Poetry: an Annotation*

(Qian Liu yinyuan shijian 钱柳姻缘诗笺), Liu Rushi was a controversial woman married to Qian Qianyi—a prominent, influential and much written about court Minister—but, until Chen, she had not been the subject of a full biography. Chen gave Liu nearly a decade of his time and produced a text over 800,000 characters in length. Briefly, he showed that she was of humble origin, had a career as a high-paid courtesan, entered the household of a man twenty-something-years her senior and bore him a daughter. Chen's reconstructed Liu Rushi occasionally cross-dressed in men's clothing that barely concealed her bound feet. She was a "patriot" during the Ming-Qing transition. A mere decade into the new dynasty, she was pressured, upon the death of her spouse and patron, to take her own life in bitter protest.

This monumental record of noble deeds, elegant accomplishments, strong will, and tragic death restored Liu Rushi to full historicity. Yet Chen was also provocatively enigmatic on the subject of who she was. On the question of the courtesan's natal family Chen played up his erudition and dexterity as a philologist and textual scholar. Through daring maneuvers in textual readings he traced her early life back to the age of eight, when the future *femme fatale* was sold into a high official's household as a bonded maid. The woman who bore a name evocative of poetic images of dainty willow and aesthetic luminance turned out to have been born someone else altogether. Here the textual trail, which consistently led to the deconstruction of the received image of the courtesan, came to an abrupt end. The "real" person, in the master's manuscript, receded into a past beyond the reach of the text. The woman in Chen's manuscript, in that sense, was a subject in a literary fiction. Yet paradoxically she became all the more the master of the narrative as she had quite deliberately given herself new names and fashioned her own identity.

In the context of historical writing of the 1960s, *The Ulterior Biography of Liu Rushi* was an enigmatic text that subverted several conventions. First, Professor Chen had taken a classical form of literary biography, until then reserved for moral icons and leaders, and used it to frame the life of a high-class prostitute. Second, he had turned the limelight on a life that was downtrodden and oppressed, presumably in keeping with the new socialist historiography. Yet he had chosen his subject for her gender rather than class. He had also selected a woman who displayed all the upper-class trappings of literacy—affluence, beauty and comfort—at a time when Great Leap Forward (*dayuejin* 大跃进) posters were celebrating women tractor drivers. Third, despite Mao's 1942 "Yan'an Talks" (*Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui shang de jianghua* 延安文艺座谈会上的讲话 [Remarks at the Yan'an meeting on literature and arts]) and the official injunction to harness all cultural work for the construction of socialism, Chen Yinke made no pretense of making a contribution in that direction. He steadfastly maintained, instead, that this biography was no more than the idle work of an aging man looking

for a way to fill his time in his failing years. The work should be accorded no greater significance, according to him, than a playful exercise carried out in the privacy of his study and home.

Three elements thus stand out in Chen Yinke's writing of the Liu biography: gender, memory, and the writing of history. Each in turn pertains to a broader set of questions concerning modern Chinese politics and culture, whether in the context of the 1960s or the more recent decades.

Gender

¹⁰ Cai Hongsheng, "'Song bongzhuang' song" [An ode to 'Singing the praise of the red sleeves'], lists nine major works by Chen Yinke between 1935 and 1964 that are focused on women. See Hu Shouwei, ed., *Liu Rushi biezhuang yu guoxue yanjiu*, pp.36–7.

¹¹ Chen Yinke, *Yuan Bai shi jian zheng gao* [A draft annotation and philological study of the poetry of Yuan Zhen and Bai Juyi] (Taipei: Shijie Shuju, 1975; Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1982), pp.88–90.

¹² Chen Yinke, *Yuan Bai shi jian zheng gao*, pp.1–44, 107–16.

Women occupied a prominent place in Professor Chen's historical work.¹⁰ More than any of his fellow scholars, Chen departed from the conventional tendency to relegate women to the historical background. In his earlier work he brought before the modern audience vivid portraits of striking figures such as Empress Wu (Wu Zetian 武则天) and Imperial Concubine Yang (Yang Guifei 杨贵妃). His reading of Tang political history had much to do with his reading of marriage alliances formed by the aristocracy. Inspired by early 20th-century ethnography, Chen drew connections between Tang aristocratic marital practices and Central Asian tribal and communal conventions. Central Asian conventions of female kinship rights and property claims played a key role in Tang politics and society, Chen suggested, as marriage alliances were widely formed between the Han and the non-Han. This supplied the social foundation for the fashioning of the legal codes and political norms under the Tang, which in turn became the basis of subsequent dynastic codes. The dynamics of Tang history would have been inexplicable had women—and the Central Asian foreign connections that they represented—been screened out of view.

Women's prominence in Chen's history did not decline with the fall of the aristocracy. The mid-Tang rebellions and social upheaval served as the backdrop for the rise of a second type of woman in Chen's writings. These were the long-suffering genteel wives of impoverished literati, who gave their men a sense of home and an anchorage despite their own trials and tribulations during the war.¹¹

Chen's writings after 1949 marked the rise of a third type of woman. These tended to be of dubious marital standing and genealogical origin. They also enjoyed, thanks to their literacy and accomplishments, a certain public fame or notoriety. Women of this sort who went beyond bounds had surfaced, to be sure, in Chen's writings well before 1949. Chen's studies of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* (Chang hen ge 长恨歌) and *The Biography of Ying Ying* (Ying Ying zhuan 莺莺传) were fine examples.¹² In his post-1949 research Chen Yinke focused his attention

even more sharply on such women. His studies of the courtesan Liu Rushi and the woman author Chen Duansheng explored, from divergent perspectives, the intersections between textual and verbal cultures as seen in the lives of these women. Like some of the most captivating fictional females of earlier centuries, Liu and Chen maintained unstable relationships with their men and achieved legendary stature in the oral context of their time. The ambiguity in their formal status liberated them from the bonds both of familial obligations and tribal connections. At the same time these women had attained enough proficiency to break into the literati discourse of the men around them.

Memory

We know, from the recollections of the project's research assistants, just how Chen wrote the book. By the 1950s the professor had lost his ability either to read or to write. He thus had to rely upon others to look up references and to take down his words. Wartime dislocation had scattered his research collection. Deprived of his reference materials and dictionaries, he gave up dealing with topics requiring any consultation of non-Chinese sources. To proceed with the writing of his book, he directed his assistant, instead, to track down books held in public libraries. Chen's biography of the courtesan, in more than one way, was palpably a work of memory. It not only drew upon his stunning command of a large corpus of books, but also his ability to recall the text by heart. A light sleeper towards the end of his life, Chen often spent day and night composing in his head, then recording his words when the assistant arrived in the morning.¹³ There being only so many phrases that the mind could hold for so long, the somewhat truncated nature of the text of *Liu Rushi biezhuān* reflected the particularity of the circumstances of Chen's writing.

Memory worked on other levels as well in the writing of *Liu Rushi biezhuān*. The very origin of the work, if the author was to be believed, had something to do with a red bean the color of deep maroon that had presumably fallen from a long-standing tree in front of the old home of Qian and Liu. It was a complicated tale how the bean had come to rest in Chen's palm one day after centuries of war and revolution, destruction of fortune and vicissitudes of sorts. Chen was on a quest for rare books during the war, when he was brought to the doorsteps of a book dealer, who turned out to have little to offer. The warfare and dislocation had "reduced to ashes" much of the heritage of the centuries.¹⁴ In lieu of the books that Chen had sought, the dealer offered this bean that seemingly embodied a tangible link to that different place and distant time, when

¹³ Lu Jiandong, *Chen Yinke de zuibou ershi nian*, pp.67–71.

¹⁴ Chen Yinke, *Liu Rushi biezhuān* (Shanghai: Guji Chubanshe, 1980), vol.1, pp.1–3.

¹⁵ Chen Yinke, *Liu Rusbi biezhuān*, vol.1, pp.3–4.

¹⁶ Chen Yinke, “Qinghua daxue Wang Guantang xiansheng jinian bei ming” [Inscriptions on the commemorative stele erected in the memory of Wang Guowei at Tsinghua University], “Wang Jing’an xiansheng yishu xu” [Foreword to the posthumous collection of Wang Jing’an’s writings], *Jinmingguan congkao er bian* [Hall of golden illumination, manuscript compendium, second compilation] (Shanghai: Guji Chubanshe, 1980), pp.218–20. See also Bian Huixin, “Chong du ‘Wang Guantang xiansheng wanci bing xu’” [On re-reading ‘eulogy and prefatory remarks in commemoration of Wang Guowei’], in *Jinian Chen Yinke xiansheng danchen bainian xueshu lunwen ji* [Commemorative volume on the centennial of the birth of Professor Chen Yinke] ed. Beijing Daxue Zhongguo Zhonggushi Yanjiu Zhongxin (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshu, 1989), pp.35–44.

¹⁷ Wu Han, “‘Shehui xianda’ Qian Muzhai” [“Social notable” Qian Muzhai], in *Du shi zhai* (Beijing: Sanlian Shidian, 1956), pp.342–58.

¹⁸ Chen Yinke, *Liu Rusbi biezhuān*, vol.1, p.177.

¹⁹ Chen Yinke, *Liu Rusbi biezhuān*, vol.1, p.340.

Qian and Liu sat in the midst of their still intact garden of books and exchanged poems.

Chen’s pursuit of the project afforded an opportunity to reconnect with the past in yet another sense. He had gained his first exposure to Qian Qianyi’s poetry while still a youth, browsing through the fine collection of hand-copied manuscripts in his maternal uncle’s private study. *Liu Rusbi* brought his mind back to Nanjing 南京, where his childhood home used to be, and to the mild climate and soft landscape of Jiangnan 江南, where his parents and grandparents had been buried.¹⁵ Poets and courtesans, to be sure, were equally prominent in that tradition, along with classicists and degree-holders. It was an open issue how this culture had retained its capacity to address China’s modern concerns.¹⁶

Chen Yinke punctuated his study of the courtesan with his own poetic compositions and carried out a dialogue with the literary couple three centuries earlier. He rhymed to the couple’s tunes and themes and retraced their steps. He placed himself in the historical landscape and responded to his characters’ moods. The revisionism in *Liu Rusbi biezhuān* lies not only in the unalloyed praise of the courtesan, but also in the portrait of the poet as an underground resistance hero. This latter construction contrasts sharply with the then prevalent view in the People’s Republic of China, which was put forward by Wu Han in the late 1940s. In that earlier essay Wu had roundly denounced Qian’s political opportunism and his loss of integrity.¹⁷ Chen Yinke focussed, instead, not on the poet’s compromises and collaborations but on the tragedy of dynastic transition. Chen Yinke showed that Ming resistance failed despite the endeavors of Qian and Liu. But more to the point, dynastic transition was lamentable because a whole culture would be destroyed following the crushing of the resistance. A decade into the new dynasty, Jiangnan’s brightest and most talented youth had perished or dispersed. Their books and paintings had been burned; their towers and pavilions had crumbled.¹⁸ It was only natural that Qian and Liu, the main characters in the story, should follow this demise with their own deaths.¹⁹

Liu Rusbi biezhuān leads its readers ultimately to a landscape of ruins and graveyards. It was not just the picnics and the banquets of the spring days that Chen Yinke sought to invoke. It was how the brilliance of spring had given way to the bitter rain of autumn that he sought to depict. With the aid of philological work and by treating poetry as records of those ethereal moments, Chen attempted to hear the voices of silence and fill a void that was centuries old. The book ends with the burning of the poet’s library and the suicide of the courtesan. It thus would seem an irony that in the 1990s, through the commemoration of Chen, generations of his former students were to use the text to reconstruct their own descent from a lost culture that he had presumably embodied.

The Writing of History

Throughout his life Chen dedicated himself tirelessly to his research. He had also insisted, increasingly in the post-1949 years, that his work not be taken seriously. He was widely admired as the most erudite man and the greatest classicist of China's twentieth century—greatest, that is, in the old school, as an unreformed “white” expert (*bai zhuan* 白专) who had “elevated the past over the present” (*hou gu bo jin* 厚古薄今), therefore a scholar who set the benchmark in the 1958 *Hou jin bo gu* campaign as a target to be criticised and surpassed.²⁰

Chen Yinke's towering reputation and extensive connections in scholarly circles outside mainland China no doubt helped to assure that his writings would receive close reading. In 1958 a hand-copied version of *Lun Zai Sheng Yuan* reached Hong Kong. This prompted the historian Ying-shih Yu 余英时 to publish a review essay in Hong Kong's *Rensheng zazhi* 人生杂志 (December 1958), in which he argued that the book amounted to a coded critique of the Communist regime.²¹ Yu's essay, augmented later by Yu's reading of Chen's poetry, set off, in the 1980s, a series of reactions orchestrated by the Central Propaganda Department (*Zhongyang xuanchuan bu* 中央宣传部) in Beijing.²² The polemic exchanges, though polite and erudite, transformed Chen's text into a veritable battleground of propaganda.

Meanwhile Chen Yinke had steadfastly fought off subtle pressures that would force him to change his style of work. He declined repeated invitations in the 1950s to serve as the director of the Institute of History of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (*Zhongguo kexueyuan zhexue shehuikexue xuebu lishi yanjiusuo* 中国科学院哲学社会科学学部历史研究所). He refused to revise his pre-1949 writings to conform to the Party line. He never attended any study sessions of Marxism and Leninism, nor would he take part in political study sessions.²³ Even the dating system in his work combined the old *ganzhi* 干支 and the Western calendar while ignoring all reference to the new People's Republic.

Guangdong provincial authorities, under Party Secretary Tao Zhu 陶铸, nonetheless accorded Chen proper deference and special care. The professor was supplied with over-quota food rations even during the worst years of famine in the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward. One visitor reported a dinner at his home with dishes of meat and fish. Party heavyweights and cultural bureaucrats paid calls from time to time. He received his supply of writing paper made to his specifications. After breaking a leg in the bathtub he was cared for at home by three nurses. In addition there was butter, fish, chicken, eggs, fresh fruit, mushrooms, Quaker oats and cocoa powder, as well as Western medicine.²⁴ There were also gifts of theater tickets, record players, books and radios.

²⁰ Lu Jiandong, *Chen Yinke de zuibou ershi nian*, pp.233–50.

²¹ Yu Yingshi, “Chen Yinke ‘Lun Zai Sheng Yuan’ shu hou” [“Postscript to Chen Yinke, ‘On Born-again reunion’”], in *Chen Yinke wannian shiwen shi-zheng* [Poetry and essays of Chen Yinke, the final years: annotation and empirical study] (Taipei: Dongda Tushu, 1998), pp.227–42. See also the editor's preface to Chen Yinke, *Lun Zai Sheng Yuan* (Hong Kong: Youlian Chubanshe, 1959).

²² Feng Yibei, *Chen Yinke wannian shiwen ji qita* [Poetry and essays of Chen Yinke, the final years—and other matters] (Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe, 1986).

²³ Lu Jiandong, *Chen Yinke de zuibou ershi nian*, p.387.

²⁴ Lu, *Chen Yinke de zuibou ershi nian*, pp.380–97.

But none of Chen's new writings were published in China in the last two decades of his life. His interaction with students was also restricted to a select handful. His teaching activities came to an end in fall 1958 in the aftermath of the *Hou jin bo gu* campaign. Some of his best students took up the Party's attack against him. Two personal assistants left. He was accused of poisoning young minds with erroneous thoughts. The writing of *Liu Rusbi biezhuān* coincided with the parting of ways and severing of connections among former fellows and associates. The monumental work that he produced was neither for an audience nor for a project. The act of writing became the very essence of living towards the end of his life.

The Commemoration of Chen Yinke

²⁵ These conferences resulted in the following volumes: Jinian Chen Yinke Jiaoshou Guoji Xueshu Taolun Hui Mishuzu, ed., *Jinian Chen Yinke jiaoshou guoji xueshu taolunhui wenji* [Symposium volume from the international conference held in commemoration of Professor Chen Yinke] (Guangzhou: Zhongshan Daxue Chubanshe, 1989); Hu Shouwei, ed., *Liu Rusbi biezhuān yu guoxue yanjiu* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1995); Hu Shouwei, ed., *Chen Yinke yu ershi shiji Zhongguo xueshu* [Chen Yinke and Chinese scholarship in the 20th century] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Renmin Chubanshe, 2000). Chen Yinke's former students at Peking University printed a Festschrift to commemorate Chen's centennial. The volume, *Jinian Chen Yinke xiansheng danchen bainian xueshu lunwen ji*, appeared in 1989.

Chen's writings appeared in print in 1980. They included two books (*Liu Rusbi biezhuān* and *Yuan Bai shijian zhengao* 元白诗笺证稿), dozens of scholarly essays, hundreds of poems, and several chapters of a draft autobiography. It came to a seven-volume set edited by the Fudan University 复旦大学 historian Jiang Tianshu 蒋天枢. The set was accompanied by an annotated chronological bibliography compiled by Jiang, based on excerpts from Chen's notebooks and self-examination materials written under Red Guard pressure during the Cultural Revolution.

Editor Jiang was a former student of Professor Chen. His editorial preface records how he had been entrusted, in one last visit during the tense time of the late 1960s, with a hand-copied collection of Chen's poetry. These poems encode the master's private thoughts and feelings. Meanwhile Jiang maintained regular correspondence with the Chen family through to the bitter end. This turned him into an emissary with a privileged message to share. In contrast with the Party secretaries of Jinhua who had acted to restore Wu Han's good name in line with new Party judgment, Jiang Tianshu was to rescue from oblivion a record that had been denied print access and buried in private memories. Not a Party functionary but a witness and a survivor, Jiang delivered his message for a self-selected audience that had once shared the plight and now the memory.

It was not until 1988 that Chen's former students and associates gathered to remember his life and work at Zhongshan University. Two more symposia, also hosted by Zhongshan, took place in 1995 and 1999.²⁵ Beijing classicists attended *en masse*. Others came from Nanjing 南京, Xi'an 西安, Shanghai 上海, Hong Kong and elsewhere. Some had studied or taken courses with the master. Others had received their instructions from teachers who did. Still others presented themselves as sons of friends or former colleagues. Chen's daughters and his former research assistants were much in view. In the opening speech of one of these gatherings the ailing Zhou Yiliang 周一良, himself in his 90s, expressed

his remorse about the attack he had launched on Chen in the 1960s and asked for forgiveness in the next world.²⁶ Despite the presence of a handful of foreign scholars, the conference was a family affair for the private memories of an intellectual lineage.

The 1990s witnessed a renewed effort to review the historical scholarship that Chen had inspired. What he had practiced then has now come to be known as “national learning” (*guoxue* 国学). The historiographical tradition connected not only backward in time but also outward to embrace a network of scholars who had long left the Chinese mainland.²⁷

One after another, Chen and a whole generation of Republican-era cosmopolitan classicists—Wang Guowei, Gu Jiegang 顾颉刚, Tang Yongtong 汤用彤, Feng Youlan 冯友兰, Chen Yuan 陈源, to name but a few—have been resurrected as grand masters (*dashi* 大师) and venerated for their cultural ease with the modern West as well as the Chinese past.²⁸ These individuals are awarded founding stature in modern Chinese intellectual history (*xueshu shi* 学术史). They have been confirmed as patriots (*aiguo zhe* 爱国者) who had refused to leave their fatherland. Their works presumably point the way to a new kind of cultural work that served the needs of modern China at the close of the 20th century.

Commemorative evaluations of Chen Yinke meanwhile stuck to the safe ground: Chen as a paragon of truth-seeking empiricism; Chen, the founding figure in several areas of medieval Chinese history in his Tsinghua days; and Chen, a simple “dialectician” free of ideological elaboration.²⁹ His post-1949 works did not fall below the high standards that he himself had set in the pre-war years. *Liu Rusbi biezhuān* was praiseworthy both for its characteristic erudition and for the presentation of the figure of a courtesan patriot. It is perhaps noteworthy that with but one or two exceptions, most Chinese commentators seem to have refrained from the suggestion that the mature historian, in the final decades of his productivity, had in fact gone beyond the conventional bounds of disciplines and attained a new intellectual height.

Liu Rusbi biezhuān, meanwhile, is a vast, layered, unwieldy, and complex text that has gone well beyond a tale about a woman’s dynastic loyalty to the fallen Ming. Central to the text, for example, are the liaisons and romantic entanglements that powered the courtesan’s circulation in a male-dominated universe of culture and politics, and the violence and brutality that reduced that world to ashes. In the 1950s, during the anti-“white-expert” campaign, big-character posters had pointed to Chen’s earlier work on Tang aristocrat women, characterizing his scholarship as a “chronicle of whores.” Party critics had often been unhappy with the dark mood and pessimism in Chen’s post-1949 poetry, which could only be taken as a lack of enthusiasm for the benefits of the new socialist order. Readers and authors were both weary, meanwhile, of over-readings of the *Liu Rusbi biezhuān*—of someone pointing to the Qian Qianyi alliance with the Taiwan-based Zheng Chenggong 郑成功

²⁶ Zhou Yiliang is the author of several essays on Chen Yinke. These include “Jinian Chen Yinke xiansheng,” in the symposium volume on *Jinian Chen Yinke jiaoshou guoji xueshu taolunhui wenji* and “Wo suo liaojie de Chen Yinke xiansheng” [Professor Chen Yinke as I knew him], in the symposium volume on *Liu Rusbi biezhuān yu guoxue yanjiu*, reprinted in Zhou Yiliang, *Zhou Yiliang ji* [Collected works of Zhou Yiliang], vol.5 (Liaoning: Liaoning Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1997), pp.190–221.

²⁷ For a comprehensive bibliographical treatment of the historiographical tradition that Chen had inspired, see Li Yumei, *Chen Yinke zhi shixue* [The historical scholarship of Chen Yinke] (Hong Kong: Sanlian Shudian, 1997).

²⁸ There is a growing body of literature on early Republican historiography published in Chinese in recent decades. In English, see Wang Fan-sen, *Fu Ssu-nien: a life in Chinese history and politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), and Q. Edward Wang, *Inventing China through history: the May Fourth approach to historiography* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001). Also, of course, Joseph Levenson, *Confucianism China and its modern fate; a trilogy* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1968), Lawrence Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang and China’s new history* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1971), and Arif Dirlik, *Revolution and history: origin of Marxist historiography in China, 1919–1937* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1978).

²⁹ In addition to conference and Festschrift volumes, see, for instance, Wang Yongxing, *Chen Yinke xiansheng shixue shulüe gao* [The historiography of Chen Yinke—a draft outline] (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 1998); Wang Yongxing, *Chen men wenxue conggao* [Notes of study while studying with Professor Chen Yinke] (Nanchang: Jiangxi Wenhua Chubanshe, 1993), especially pp.1–20; and Liu Yihuan, *Guoxue dashi Chen Yinke* [Chen Yinke: master of Chinese national learning] (Chongqing: Chongqing Chubanshe, 1996).

³⁰ Hu Shouwei, "*Liu Rusbi biezhuān* du hou," pp.26–7.

in *Liu Rusbi*, for instance, to accuse its author of secret sympathy for the Taiwan-based Chiang Kai-shek 蒋介石.³⁰

Gender, memory, and the writing of history, then, continued to pose difficulties in the politics of reading in the present day. Joseph Levenson, in his work on Confucian China and its modern fate, draws the distinction between the culturally "traditional" and the "traditionalistic." While the former often describes an inherited condition, the latter can only be about a deliberate choice over alternatives. It is, furthermore, a self-conscious positioning in response to non-intellectual concerns. "To inherit," writes John Dunn, "one must be alive." But the past that one seeks to inherit is far from tame or given. For a forward-looking regime reaching into the past to help its chance with the future, backward-looking glances sometimes conjure up unwanted visions.

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Yet it is precisely through issues of this sort that modern Chinese historians must rethink the norms of the historical profession beyond the realms of sanctioned and institutionalized possibilities. It was in the writing of *Liu Rusbi biezhuān* that twentieth-century China's grand historian, frail, nearly blind, confined to his house and isolated from all but his immediate family, re-examined the meaning of the past against the backdrop of Maoist China's fervent pursuit of modernity.

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