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**WERZNER, Eugenia. *Ein neuer Klang der alten Lieder: Eine Analyse des Bedeutungsbegriffs in qingzeitlichen Shijing-kommentaren*. Leipziger Sinologische Studien – Band 3. Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2020. Pp. 324.**

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Eugenia Werzner's monograph is a welcome and valuable addition to Western scholarship on the *Shijing* 詩經 or *Book of Odes*. Rather than rehash familiar problems of interpretation, she has chosen instead to present the interpretations of three Qing dynasty scholars of the *Odes*, namely Yao Jiheng 姚際恆 (1647–1715), Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724–1777), and Cui Shu 崔述 (1740–1816). Though Werzner is following in the footsteps of a great wave of Chinese-language scholarship on classical reception, in particular, Huang Chung-shen's 黃忠慎 monograph *Qingdai duli zhi Shi san dajia yanjiu: Yao Jiheng, Cui Shu, Fang Yurun* 清代獨立治《詩》三大家研究——姚際恆、崔述、方玉潤,<sup>1</sup> which is rather similar in conception, Qing-dynasty *Shijing* scholarship has heretofore received little attention in Western scholarship. Werzner's sympathetic readings ought to attract the three scholars she has chosen a broader audience and encourage much future research.

Though the selection of these three particular scholars out of the vast body of Qing philology might seem somewhat arbitrary, Werzner justifies the choice as a representative set of case studies, with the three scholars identified as the philologist Dai Zhen, the historian Cui Shu, and the literary theorist Yao Jiheng (252). From another perspective, they are all similar in being scholars of tremendous erudition who are also known for their critical approach to tradition. Dai Zhen was a polymath with contributions in phonology and philosophy, and *Shijing* scholarship forms just a modest portion of his collected works. Cui Shu's best-known work is the *Kao xin lu* 考信錄, whose very title conveys a skeptical attitude. It is unfortunately the case that few of

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1 Huang Chung-shen 黃忠慎, *Qingdai duli zhi Shi san dajia yanjiu: Yao Jiheng, Cui Shu, Fang Yurun* 清代獨立治《詩》三大家研究——姚際恆、崔述、方玉潤 (Taipei: Wunan wenhua, 2012).

the writings of Yao Jiheng, who may be the most original of the three in his *Shijing* scholarship, are extant, though he is also known for his examination of the authenticity of other classic texts, *Gujin weishu kao* 古今偽書考.

One task that Werzner has set herself is to examine how these scholars balance their devotion to the classical tradition with the self-conscious, critical sensibility of a Qing philologist. In response to this difficult question, her primary thesis is that all three of the scholars, in spite of their difference in approaches, are all seeking to find in the *Shijing* not so much to discover an essential “meaning” (Bedeutung), as to produce an imaginative “application” (Anwenden) in response to the text (229). They are all selective in their use of evidence and flexible in their identification of historical circumstances. They reinterpret poems as paradigms of an idealized world (229ff.), and conceive of them as exemplars of traditional Confucian categories (241ff.). Their interpretations of specific images are often radically different (200), but this reflects the creativity in their handling of the material.

Though Werzner devotes relatively little attention to the contemporary context of the Qing dynasty or historical issues relating to “evidential research” (*kaoju* 考據) scholarship in general, she is scrupulous in setting forth the place of the three scholars in the long history of *Shijing* interpretation in China. In the third chapter of the book, she first introduces each of the scholars and their writings, and then surveys “The Debate with the Tradition” (Die Auseinandersetzung mit der Tradition), elucidating the complicated judgments of the three scholars on earlier scholarship. Yao Jiheng and Cui Shu are both skeptical of the Mao commentary’s pretensions to historical accuracy, and all three scholars protest various aspects of Zhu Xi’s interpretation, notably his designation of *yin shi* 淫詩 “lascivious poems.”

Throughout this study, Werzner highlights and further analyzes numerous points of interest in all three scholars’ works, which can reveal to us the complexity and richness of Qing classical scholarship. One high point for this particular reader is Yao Jiheng’s view that “Once you understand how marvelous the words are, then you can understand the meaning as well. Once you understand how marvelous the meaning is, then you can understand the main idea as well. In this way the student can appreciate the greater part.” 知其辭之妙而其義可知；知其義之妙而其旨亦可知。學者於此可以思過半矣 (120; English translations are my own unless otherwise stated). This is a principle that any reader of the *Shijing* or of later Chinese poetry ought to take to heart: not to be satisfied with conventional associations or assimilated doctrine, but to begin from mere wonder at the splendors of the text. Nor is Yao bluffing here, as his commentary is indeed rich in appreciative commentary

at the poetic artfulness of the *Shijing*. Another splendid passage comes from Cui Shu, who criticizes the Mao prefaces for focusing too narrowly on the historical circumstances of the poems, to the extent of drawing attention away from their moral-political significance, since “history is inadequate to account for all of the governance” 史之未足以盡政也 (148). The distinctive views of these scholars on myriad issues of interpretation are too complex and varied to sum up in any simple periodization such as that of the Han learning versus Song learning; as Werzner shows, they are each freely and independently making sense of the *Shijing* in their own distinctive ways.

My one quibble with the overall conception of Werzner’s otherwise excellent study is that she goes slightly too far in treating Qing scholarship as production rather than reception. In this regard, she has been led astray, I believe, by the pattern of contemporary Western scholarship on the *Shijing*, in three fundamental and interrelated ways: 1) a view of all traditional scholarship on the *Shijing* as representing “hermeneutical” principles that seem to exist independently of the *Shijing* itself; 2) a disparagement of the main Han commentaries as mispresenting the text as “political”; and 3) a tendency to overinterpretation of and pathological fixation on the so-called “Greater Preface” to the *Shijing*, rather than on the huge corpus of traditional commentary that survives apart from it. In Werzner’s first chapter, she patiently surveys modern scholarship on the *Shijing* in a way that inadvertently reflects all these faults in modern Western scholarship.

The emphasis on “hermeneutics” at first seems to suggest theoretical sophistication, but in practice is often underwhelming. Modern scholars seem to have forgotten that hermeneutics means a dialogue with the source text, not imposing one’s will upon it. This point is shown dramatically and unforgettably in Werzner’s list of six different modern interpretations of Mencius’ famous formula, *yi yi ni zhi* 以意逆志 (26). Of the six, three belong to scholars writing in English, two in German, and one in modern Chinese. All three of the examples in English specify to whom the *yi* and *zhi* belong, making Mencius’ remark about “the intention of the poet,” or “your own intentions,” or even “what was originally in the writer’s mind.” In other words, each tries to extrapolate from this enigmatic formula a sort of hermeneutic theory about the relation between writer and reader, which is in fact never mentioned in the Mencius passage. Indeed, early Chinese commentary on the *Shijing* rarely mentions the authors of the poems, as one ought to expect, since in most cases we have no record of any particular author. What Mencius seems to me to be saying is simply that in understanding a text, one aims to reconcile various specific meanings with one’s sense of a broader idea underlying the piece as a

whole, as indicated in Karl-Heinz Pohl's translation as quoted by Werzner: "Nur wenn man mit Ideen/Sinn den Intentionen des Stücks nachgeht, trifft man's." Or consider James Legge's rendering two centuries ago: "They must try with their thoughts to meet that scope, and then we shall apprehend it."<sup>2</sup> The effect of more recent translators' spin on the Mencius formula is they end up viewing the Chinese exegetical tradition in a personalized way that is not inherent to either the *Odes*, its early commentaries, or to Mencius.<sup>3</sup>

A related defect in much modern scholarship is the assumption that the Mao commentary has its own tendentious "interpretative Strategien" (46) that obscure the real meaning (or lack of meaning) in the poems. Though Werzner rightly refers to more sophisticated analyses by Saussy and Svensson (51–52), the dominant theme in her survey is illustrated by her comment on how the Mao commentary treats *Shijing* 3, "Juan er" 卷耳: "Auf diese Weise übersetze der *Mao-Kommentar* die poetischen Bilder der 'südlichen' Kapitel in moralisch-politische Intentionen" (48). While there is no doubt that the specific reading of "Zhou hang" 周行 to refer to the ranks of Zhou officialdom does seem tendentious, Werzner neglects to explain what alternative there is to finding "moralisch-politische" meaning in the poems. After all, a bit later in the book she refers to Dai Zhen's own erudite discussion of the two ritual vessels mentioned in this same poem, concluding that the *sigong* 兕觥 "rhinoceros-horn flask" was the vessel used to rebuke someone who had drunk to excess and erred in following ritual etiquette (171–73). There may be better interpretations of these phrases than those presented in the Mao commentary or by Dai Zhen, but Werzner herself does not offer any, and it does not seem adequate simply to identify them as "poetic images" and leave the matter there. Poetic images can be full of meaning, even empty vessels laden with moral-political significance.

Finally, Werzner recapitulates the error of so many Western *Shijing* scholars in devoting excessive attention to the "Great Preface," an interesting but brief essay that is only one infinitesimal fragment of the scholarship on the classic that survives from the Han alone. Werzner includes yet another complete translation (39–42) to add to the huge number presented in the past several decades. The academic world would have benefited more from new German renderings of key passages from Yao, Dai, and Cui that have never

2 Legge, *Chinese Classics*, vol. 2, *The Works of Mencius* (rpt. Taipei: SMC Publishing, 1991), 353.

3 As in the puzzling title of Steven Van Zoeren's oft-cited study, *Poetry and Personality: Reading, Exegesis, and Hermeneutics in Traditional China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

been translated into any foreign language, rather than yet another presentation of this familiar preface. To return to the question of the key term *zhi*, for instance, too much ink has been spilled here and elsewhere on a single line: “The Ode is where the *zhi* has gone to. In the mind it is a *zhi*, articulated in words it is an Ode” 詩者，志之所之也，在心為志，發言為詩 (39). This is often treated as a key statement of Chinese poetics, but in the context of the preface, this sentence has a transitional function in aid of the larger argument. The previous sentence discusses the suasive and pedagogical function of poetry, its social value; the succeeding one the way that music and song serve as outlets for inner feeling. So this sentence provides a link between the role of poetry in society at large, and its personal, even physical use. Though *zhi* can have a more lofty and specific sense of personal ambition as in *Analects* 5/26, it also has the very simple gloss as given in the *Shuowen* 說文 of *yi* 意, “thought, idea.” From this point of view, this sentence within the preface sets forth the tautological distinction that thoughts unexpressed remain in the mind, and it is only when they are articulated as words that they become poems.

Again, Werzner herself is not to be blamed for the peculiar fixations of earlier Western scholarship, but it is a pity that she devotes so much space within this volume to recapitulating these rather than presenting her groundbreaking Qing material. Moreover, setting aside the “hermeneutical assumptions” imposed on traditional scholarship, what we are left with in examining the *Shijing* is a large number of exceedingly complex philological and historical problems that can only be tackled with the utmost erudition, caution, and subtlety. Partly because there is so much previous scholarship to cover in the first portion of the book, Werzner barely even deals with the bulk of the classic, focusing quite narrowly on the first two “South” 南 sections. Still, even here, her trinity of Qing scholars offers us many worthy insights to mull over. To cite an example, consider the second poem in the anthology, “Ge tan” 葛覃:

The kudzu spreads, ah!  
 Over the middle of the valley.  
 Its leaves grow lush.  
 The orioles are flying,  
 And they gather in the brush,  
 Calling out *kriy-kriy*.  
 The kudzu spreads, ah!  
 Over the middle of the valley.  
 Its leaves are dark green.

Cut them and boil them,  
 Make hemp-cloth thin and thick,  
 Wear it without distress.  
 I will tell my nurse,  
 Tell her I am going home.  
 I clean my underclothes,  
 I wash my dress.  
 Whether they are clean or not,  
 I'll go back to comfort my parents.  
 葛之覃兮，施于中谷。  
 維葉萋萋，黃鳥于飛。  
 集于灌木，其鳴喈喈。  
 葛之覃兮，施于中谷。  
 維葉莫莫，是刈是濩。  
 為絺為綌，服之無斃。  
 言告師氏，言告言歸。  
 薄汙我私，薄澣我衣。  
 害澣害否，歸寧父母。

The whole line of thought represented in the modern criticism cited by Werzner suggests that there is some more obvious interpretation of this poem, one too long ignored by its traditional commentators in favor of a moral-political one set in an imagined historical context. In fact, though, the traditional commentators can also be seen to be gradually refining a quite plausible interpretation of the poem. The Mao preface states that it is about the “essence of the Royal Consort” 后妃之本也, and praising her as an exemplar of feminine virtue. This is a compelling interpretation because the speaker of the poem has an “Instructor” *Shishi* 師氏, an official title in the *Zhou li* 周禮. Though here it would have to be slightly different, being a teacher for women, the context is very much a court or royal setting.

The Mao Commentary makes a good start at interpreting the poem but remains vague, so Werzner's Qing scholars all attempt to make sense of the contradictions and ambiguities in the text. In particular, why does the poem first discuss the gathering of the kudzu plants, and then switch to visiting the lady's parents? Yao Jiheng's contribution here is a patient and lengthy analysis of the poem, both as a whole and broken down into individual stanzas. He makes the important interpretive point that the poem does not have to be about a single moment or action, but instead can refer to different actions at different points in time. The clothes woven in the second stanza are not necessarily the

same as those washed in the third, yet they “reflect on one another and so stir up some feeling, somewhere in between a conscious and unconscious effect. This is the ultimate marvelousness of the Airs poets” 映帶生情，在有意無意之間。此風人之妙致也。<sup>4</sup> Werzner is correct in saying that this kind of elaborate reinterpretation is nowhere specified in the original words of the poem and is better seen as an application of creative ingenuity, though this might equally be said of any of the best literary criticism of past or present.

By drawing our attention to these original commentators and interpreting them with sensitivity, Werzner has made an important contribution to Western sinology. Let us hope that future scholars will continue to explore these intricate byways of the great hermeneutical tradition in the classics, and thereby do justice to the richness of the original poems.

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4 Yao Jiheng, *Shijing tonglun* 詩經通論 (Taipei: Guangwen shuju, 2012), 1.19. Werzner quotes extensively from Yao's interpretation (189–90), though not this particular sentence.

