

Wang Shizhen (1634–1711) and the “New” Canon

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to investigate how Wang Shizhen's poetics of *shenyun* 神韻 (spiritual resonance) came to occupy a canonical position in literary judgment during early Qing, and how its gradual canonization resulted from both aesthetic and political discourses of the time. The article also discusses how Wang Shizhen became one of those great authors who constantly revised their own writings until the last moments of their lives.

Key Words: literary canon, Wang Shizhen, spiritual resonance, Qian Qianyi, partisan views, “entering Zen”, Zhao Zhixin, Qian Zhongshu, Yuan Mei, “great authors”, “popular authors”

Who are the arbiters of the standards and direction of literature? Which writers are central to the literary canon? Who are the ideal literary models and precursors? Such questions, although to all appearance belonging in a post-modern world, in fact were the basis of heated literary debate during the late Ming (i.e., late 16th and early 17th century China) when different schools of literary criticism contested their individual agenda in literary taste (either “pro-Tang” or “pro-Song”) in a consistent, and even vociferous, manner. Indeed, the number of schools of literary criticism in the late Ming was in itself quite unprecedented. Most important, “cultural belatedness” (to borrow a felicitous phrase from Harold Bloom)¹ seems to characterize the spirit of the age, when the late Ming literati not only felt the “anxiety of influence” that came from the tremendous burden of the past, but also engaged in constant competition against each

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1. Harold Bloom, “The Anguish of Contamination,” Preface to *The Anxiety of Influence*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), xxv.

other in search of a creative space that would allow them to find their own voices. The result was the unusual proliferation of “partisan schools” (*menhu* 門戶), and among them each one insisted on its own agenda and refused to listen to the voices of others. Responding to this phenomenon in literature, scholars such as Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 harshly criticized the politicizing tendency of contemporary critical schools, a tendency which in his view was responsible for the widespread influence of the poetic works of many hypocrites (*xiangyuan* 鄉愿) at the time.²

Meanwhile the beginning of the Qing also witnessed an overwhelming desire to find the center of the canon. From the 1660s on Qing society began to enjoy an atmosphere of peace and promise. It was also during this transitional period that the poet-critic Wang Shizhen 王士禎 (1634-1711) came to be recognized as a canonical figure. The purpose of this paper is to investigate how Wang’s poetics of *shenyun* 神韻 (spiritual resonance) came to occupy the center of literary judgment during this period, and how its gradual canonization resulted from both aesthetic and power discourses of the time.

A child prodigy who produced beautiful verses from the age of seven, Wang Shizhen was destined to lead a life of celebrity. He represented the “second-generation” Chinese who grew up under the Manchu rule (Wang was only 10 years old when Ming dynasty fell) and did not mind serving in the Qing court. Wang Shizhen began his political career as Judge (*tuiguan*) of Yangzhou prefecture at the age of 26, and later was promoted to a series of high positions at the Imperial court, where he served dutifully until past 70.³ Indeed, few Chinese literati living under the Qing could boast a more distinguished and lengthy official life than Wang. Most important, known as a leading poet of his day, Wang Shizhen was especially favored by the Kangxi Emperor and was hand-picked by him to serve as an imperial tutor in the Hanlin Academy. Their special friendship was marked by frequent gifts of the imperial painting and calligraphy, tangible tokens of Kangxi’s esteem. In a culture where imperial favor or disfavor could dictate virtually everything, it was only natural that Wang Shizhen would attract ardent admirers due to his imperial connections.

However, more than twenty years before Wang was favored with his first imperial audience in 1678 he had already won widespread recognition for his

2. Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲, “Tianyue chanshi shiji xu” 天嶽禪師詩集序, *Nanlei wending* 《南雷文定》, ji 3, juan 1. See also Hu Youfeng 胡幼峰, *Qing chu Yushan pai shilun* 《清初虞山派詩論》 (Taipei: Guoli bianyi guan, 1994), 384.

3. Fang Chao-ying, “Wang Shih-chen,” in Arthur W. Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing Period* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943), 833.

poems, especially the poem-series “Autumn Willows” (“Qiuliu shi” 秋柳詩) which he wrote at a large poetic gathering near the scenic Daming Lake in Ji’nan, Shandong, in 1657. A young poet of 23, Wang suddenly found himself a popular author who inspired hundreds of male and female poets to compose matching verses to his “Autumn Willows.” That his “Qiuliu shi” could evoke such a sensational response from writers and readers at the time was a total surprise to Wang himself. But modern scholars, notably Yan Dichang 嚴迪昌, have argued that there was a certain “inevitability” to the unusually enthusiastic reception of the “Autumn Willows” poems, and hence that of Wang as a writer, at this particular juncture in history.⁴ What Yan Dichang has seen is the meeting of a “new poetry” and a “new age” which combined to form a “new taste” that was particularly timely during the period of peace and reconciliation which accompanied the Kangxi reign. The “new” taste so defined refers to Wang Shizhen’s aesthetic of “spiritual resonance” (*shenyun*),⁵ characterized in his poetry by gentle and moderate expression, with a sense of lingering emotion that was thought to be most appropriate for the new age. Although Yen Dichang’s notion of “historical determinism” might not be entirely convincing to all, it is important to note that such eminent Ming-Qing figure as Chen Weisong 陳維崧 who personally lived through the dynastic transition also viewed Wang Shizhen’s special poetics as a kind of “poetic education” (*shijiao* 詩教) that was needed for promoting the morals of a “peaceful world”.⁶

That Emperor Kangxi, and later Emperor Qianlong, would favor Wang Shizhen’s “poetic education” was—at least to many traditional Chinese scholars—perfectly understandable. For according to this view, the recognition of Wang Shizhen as a preeminent poet and critic, and consequently making him the center of the canon, necessarily involved the workings of Qing imperial power. Needless to say, the emperor’s approval did open the door for further promotion of a poet who had already won the respect of his contemporaries.

Nonetheless, we should remember that a large percentage of Wang Shizhen’s contemporary readers who favored his poetry were older Ming loyalists who attempted to interpret Wang’s “Autumn Willows” poems as works of

4. Yan Dichang 嚴迪昌, *Qing shi shi* 《清詩史》 (Taipei: Wunan tushu gongsi, 1998), 1:411; Gong Xiaowei 宮曉衛, *Wang Shizhen* 《王士禛》 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji chubanshe, 1993), 18.

5. Richard John Lynn, “Orthodoxy and Enlightenment: Wang Shih-chen’s Theory of Poetry and Its Antecedents,” in Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed., *The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1975), 246-253.

6. Chen Weisong 陳維崧, “Wang Ruanting shiji xu” 王阮亭詩集序, *Jialing wenji* 《迦陵文集》, juan 1. See also Yan Dichang, 1:413.

topical allegory expressing secret loyalty to the Ming. Granted that the “Qiuli” poems were perhaps only meant to mourn the passing of the Courtesans’ quarters in Nanjing without any specific political agenda,⁷ still the ambiguous nature of the poems—reinforced by the vague images of beauty and melancholy—provoked readers to further explore the hidden meaning of the “autumn willows”. Just the opening couplet alone (“When autumn arrives what place moves us most?/ The setting sun and the west wind at the White Gate”) was likely to evoke nostalgic memories of the Ming, for the “White Gate” (Baimen) in Nanjing could symbolize the lost splendors of the former dynasty. Certainly the ending couplet in Poem # 1 conveys a feeling of melancholy with a particular lingering quality:

Don't listen to the windblown flute,
The sadness of Jade pass is always beyond words.
莫聽臨風三弄曲
玉關哀怨總難論

It is in this sense that Wang Shizhen’s poetics of “*shenyun*”—a poetics of implicit rhetoric conveying infinite meanings “beyond words”—became extremely popular among the circles of Ming loyalists as something they could safely turn to in both reading and writing poetry, without incurring the dangers of literary inquisition which had posed a steadily increasing threat to them.⁸ For example, after reading some of Wang Shizhen’s *huaigu* 懷古 poems (poems on historical themes), the elder poet Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 commented that Wang’s lyric verses were most moving because they subtly evoked “mournful feelings toward one’s country”,⁹ and that, in particular, the “Qiuli shi” series were a rewriting of the richly allegorical “xiaoya” of the *Shijing* 詩經.¹⁰ Needless to say, Qian’s strategy of reading was a direct reflection of his own writing aesthetics, in which

7. Yan Dichang, 1:422–423.

8. Gong Xiaowei, 18, 57.

9. Qian Qianyi 錢謙益, “Wang Yishang shiji xu” 王貽上詩集序, in Wang Shizhen 王士禎, *Yuyang Shanren jinghua lu* [jianzhu] 漁洋山人精華錄 [箋注], commentary by Jin Rong 金榮 (1720?; rpt. Taiepi: Guangwen shuju, n.d.), juan 1, 1b.

10. Qian Qianyi, “Wang Yishang shiji xu,” in Wang Shizhen, *Yuyang shangren jinghua lu* [jianzhu], 2a. For the tradition of writing and reading allegorically in traditional China, see also Pauline Yu, *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1987); Longxi Zhang, “The Letter or the Spirit: The Song of Songs, Allegoresis, and the Book of Poetry,” *Comparative Literature*, 39.3 (Summer 1987):193–217; Earl Miner, *Comparative Poetics: An Intercultural Essay on Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990); Haun Saussy, *The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetics* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1993).

historical allusions were often heavily embodied with topical and symbolic meanings.¹¹ Such a method of reading and writing indeed reminds one of Leo Strauss’ idea of a peculiar type of literature, in which the true meaning can only be understood by reading between the lines:

That literature is addressed, not to all readers, but to trustworthy and intelligent readers only. It has all the advantages of private communication without having its greatest disadvantages—that it reaches only the writer’s acquaintances. It has all the advantages of public communication without having its greatest disadvantage—capital punishment for the author.¹²

Whether Wang Shizhen had actually intended his “Quiliu shi” to be read in the way adopted by Qian Qianyi and other Ming loyalists is of course difficult to know—although several decades later Wang’s poems were almost banned and burned during the Qianlong period due to an accusation of some sort, but Emperor Qianlong himself came to the rescue and decided that both the “language and meaning” (*yuyi* 語意) of the verses by Wang Shizhen were innocent.¹³ In fact, Wang Shizhen might have already become concerned that his “Autumn willows” series would one day become a target of political criticism, as he obviously decided not to include in his own Collected Work *Yuyang shanren jinghua lu* 漁洋山人精華錄 (a definitive collection which Wang edited and published himself in 1700) the poems’ original “Preface” which contained words that could easily be misinterpreted.¹⁴

During Wang Shizhen’s lifetime, however, Ming loyalists still dominated the literary world of the times despite their marginal political status. After all, these loyalists were the true bearers of Chinese culture and they were most anxious to demonstrate their trustworthiness by continuing to possess “power” in literary influence, as may be seen in the notable examples of Qian Qianyi, Wu Weiye 吳偉業, and Mao Xiang 冒襄 who were all extremely prolific and all came to appreciate the talent of the young poet Wang Shizhen.¹⁵ If anything, it was through

11. See Chi-hung Yim, “The Poetics of Historical Memory in the Ming-Qing Transition: A Study of Qian Qianyi’s (1582-1664) Later Poetry,” Ph.D. diss. Yale Univ., 1998.

12. Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1952; rpt. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), 25.

13. Gong Xiaowei, 18-19.

14. For the original preface, see Wang Shizhen, *Yuyang jinghua lu* [*ji shi*] 漁洋精華錄集釋, ed. by Li Yufu 李毓芙 et al. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999), I:67.

15. See Yan Dichang, 1:424; Wang Shizhen 王士禎, *Wang Shizhen nianpu* 王士禎年譜, ed. by Sun Yancheng 孫言誠 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 29.

Wang's close contact with the Ming loyalists that he came to learn about the legends of the fallen Ming,¹⁶ legends which formed the basis of much of Wang's early poetry. It seems that, in many ways, it was precisely the force of repression (or oppression) under the early Qing that allowed the older Ming loyalists to create their new imaginative space in the literary world. The idea that repression can breed identity and creativity in literature might recall Foucault's theory of the "repressive power",¹⁷ a theory that can perhaps provide further insight into our consideration of the powers of literature in the early Qing.

It is important to note also that it was the Ming loyalists who presided over the literary scene during the early Qing who gave Wang Shizhen the grand title "yidai zhengzong" 一代正宗 ("Orthodox poet of our age"),¹⁸ for they saw in the young poet a real hope for the future, and hence a continuity of the poetic tradition. Most of what we call canonicity in Ming-Qing literature is this quest for continuity, especially continuity in influence. In this regard no one was more conscious of the powers of literary influence than the famous and erudite Qian Qianyi who, even in his 80th year, went out of his way to promote the 27-year-old Wang Shizhen. In their first meeting, Qian was so impressed with Wang that he praised Wang Shizhen for producing works that were like "a forest of pearls" and "a sea of jade," and quickly viewed the young genius as his successor.¹⁹ In a poem to Wang, Qian Qianyi further remarked:²⁰

瓦釜正雷鳴
君其信所操
勿以獨角麟
儷彼萬牛毛

Comparing Wang Shizhen to a "unicorn" (*du jiao lin* 獨角麟) was perhaps the best compliment the elder Qian Qianyi could give to the young poet, while Qian categorically labeled all the other contemporary poets and critics as ordinary "hair" that could be found easily on "the bodies of ten thousand cattles" (*wan niu mao* 萬牛毛). Similarly, in a preface to Wang's poems, Qian wrote that Wang

16. For details, see Gong Xiaowei, 30.

17. Michel Foucault, "The Repressive Hypothesis," in Part 2 of *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 15-49. I am indebted to Jonathan Kaufman for this point.

18. Gong Xiaowei, 56-57.

19. See Gong Xiaowei, 31.

20. Wang Shizhen 王士禛, *Dai jing tang shihua* 帶經堂詩話, juan 8 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1982), 1:194.

Shizhen was the “rising star” of an age of revival.²¹ It is easy to understand why years later Wang would choose to put this important preface of Qian’s in the beginning section of his own collected work, *Yuyang shanren jinghua lu*, the collection already mentioned above. When recollecting the joys and frustrations of his younger days, Wang Shizhen once said that Qian Qianyi was his “first real friend (zhiji) in life.”²²

For Qian Qianyi, Wang Shizhen was the saving grace of the new age. Ever since the late Ming, Qian had been disappointed with leaders of the Pro-Tang School of poetry, such as Li Meng Yang 李夢陽 and Li Panlong 李攀龍, for their obsession with imitation of the High Tang style.²³ He was also extremely critical of Zhong Xing 鍾惺 and Tan Yuanchun 譚元春, poets of the “Jingling School”, for creating vulgar poetry that was intended to please the popular crowd through the use of bizarre and fantastic images, images that according to some contemporary critics were omens of a dying dynasty.²⁴ Even the Yuan brothers, whom Qian respected very much, had produced works that were in Qian’s view problematic—they emphasized true feelings (*zhen xingqing*) at the expense of formalistic considerations.²⁵ To Qian, all these poets had ignored the basic principle of writing poetry, according to which both learning (*xuewen* 學問) and feeling (*xingqing* 性情) should be deemed equally important.²⁶ Now, finally, Wang Shizhen (who was extremely well-grounded in classical learning and appreciated all styles of poetry regardless of their dynastic origins) seemed to promise an authentic poetry that would represent a continuity of the identity of past and present, an identity for which Qian had been longing.

Indeed, from the beginning, Wang Shizhen was trying to break away from the “Pro-Tang versus Pro-Song” debate (like Qian), and in particular from the confusing “partisan views” (*menhu zhi jian* 門戶之見) fashionable from the late Ming. Wang modeled his poetry not only on works of the Tang masters but also on those of Song and Yuan poets, and in addition, he often called attention to the beauty of Six Dynasties poetry. But, unlike Qian, Wang was able to appreciate the true value of Ming poetry, claiming that the best works of the Ming were

21. Qian Qianyi, “Wang Yishang shiji xu,” in Wang Shizhen, *Yuyang shanren jinghua lu* [*jian-zhu*], 2a.

22. Wang Shizhen, *Dai jing tang shihua*, juan 8, I: 194.

23. Hu Youfeng, 320.

24. Hu Youfeng, 203.

25. Hu Youfeng, 195.

26. Wang Shizhen 王士禎, et al., *Shiyou shi chuan lu* 師友詩傳錄, in Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞, ed., *Qing shihua* 清詩話 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978), 1:125.

produced by the four masters during the Hongzhi and Zhengde period (1488–1521), which of course included Li Mengyang, the poet and critic whom Qian Qianyi had severely attacked.²⁷ Thus, compared to Qian, Wang was far more open-minded in his critical views, though both of them were seeking primarily to provide remedies for the ills of the contemporary poetic scene.

As Oscar Wilde once remarked, “every disciple takes away something from his master.”²⁸ Wang was most indebted to Qian Qianyi for the notion of authority in literature, which Wang Shizhen had learned by consciously cultivating a solid ground in classical learning and the first-hand experience of writing poetry. Like Qian Qianyi, Wang emphasized both poetic writing and literary criticism and seemed to suggest that a good critic should first of all be a competent poet. What the modern scholar Chou Ts’e-tsung 周策縱 said in the following seems to describe most accurately the views of Qian Qianyi and Wang Shizhen:

Contrary to the conventional belief that one’s poetic works are first of all conditioned by his critical theory, I feel that the reverse is true. For a poet’s critical views are determined most profoundly by the style of his own poetic writing.²⁹

Thus, although it was often assumed that Wang Shizhen’s *shenyun* idea was a mere borrowing from Sikong Tu’s 司空圖 “*Ershi si shipin*” 二十四詩品 and Yan Yu’s 嚴羽 *Canlang shihua* 滄浪詩話,³⁰ it was largely from his own experience of writing poetry that Wang derived the real essence of his critical thought. In contrast to Sikong Tu and Yan Yu who were primarily critics, Wang Shizhen represented a new kind of poet-critic in the Ming-Qing who insisted on the balance

27. Hu Youfeng, 150.

28. Quoted in Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), 6.

29. Tse-tsung Chow 周策縱, “Yi cha zi hao: Qingdai shixue cezheng” 一察自好：清代詩學測微, *Qingdai xueshu yantao hui lunwen ji* 清代學術研討會論文集 (Kaohsiung, Taiwan: Chungshan Univ., 1993), 7.

30. Richard Lynn, 240–243. Recently Sikong Tu’s authorship of “*Ershi si shipin*” has been called into question. See, for example, Chen Shangjun 陳尚君 and Wang Yonghao 汪涌豪, “Sikong Tu ‘*Ershi si shipin*’ bianwei” 司空圖《二十四詩品》辨偽, *Zhongguo guji yanjiu* 中國古籍研究 (1994): 39–73; Zhang Jian 張健, “‘Shijia yizhi’ de changsheng shidai yu zuozhe—jian lun ‘*Ershi si shipin*’ zuozhe wenti” 《詩家一指》的產生時代與作者——兼論《二十四詩品》作者問題, *Beijing daxue xuebao (Zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 北京大學學報 (哲學社會科學版), 5 (1995):34–44. The controversy has inspired a large panel discussion on the topic at an international conference in Jiangsi, China in 1995. It has also become the main topic of discussion in a recent issue of *Zhongguo shixue* 中國詩學 5 (1997), in which articles by such noted scholars as Wang Yunxi 王運熙, Zhang Shaokang 張少康, Zhang Bowei 張伯偉, and Jiang Yin 蔣寅 can be found (e.g., pp. 1–56). I am indebted to Prof. Zhang Hongsheng 張宏生 of Nanjing University for providing these important sources for me.

of theory and practice, and thought that practice should always come before theory. In the case of Wang Shizhen, the idea of *shenyun* was always a part of his poetic training. Under the instruction of his elder brother Wang Shilu, Wang began to compose poems in the style of Tang poets Wang Wei and Meng Haoran at a very young age.³¹ It can also be said that in general Wang’s poetic insight began with the way in which he viewed landscapes. Later, when asked to define the meaning of *shenyun*, he remarked that the concept could best be described by the quality of “purity” (*qing* 清) and “distance” (*yuan* 遠), and then he gave examples from the landscape poems of the Six Dynasties poet Xie Lingyun 謝靈運.³² Here *qing* clearly refers to the serenity of “pure” landscape and *yuan* in all probability implies a sense of detachment from everyday life.³³

The idea of “purity” and “distance” reminds us of a perceptive traveler who enjoys gazing into the distant sky and sea. And, indeed, Wang Shizhen was such a traveler. As he said in his *Ju yi lu* 居易錄, he had “always been obsessed with mountains and waters” from the times of his youth.³⁴ In fact, he acquired his famous style name “Yuyang Mountain Man” (*Yuyang shanren* 漁洋山人) only after he, as a traveler, became deeply moved by the overpowering landscapes near Lake Tai. According to his preface to his anthology of travel poems titled *Ru Wu ji* 入吳記, Yuyang was the name of a mountain by lake Tai. During his trip to the lake area, Wang stayed in a Buddhist temple that directly faced the mountain. Day and night he enjoyed the beauty of the mountain amidst clouds and fog. Such inexhaustible visual pleasure was beyond description, which then led the poet to think that there was perhaps a predestined relationship between himself and Mt. Yuyang. The shock of recognition was both spiritual and aesthetic at the same time. From that point on Wang Shizhen called himself “Yuyang Mountain man.”³⁵

Travel and writing were the two things in Wang’s life that gave him a true sense of freedom, and thus it was during his trips to mountains and rivers that he had produced most of his poems. This explains why his five years in Yanzhou—from 1660 to 1665 when he had the most opportunities to tour the scenic areas in South China—turned out to be the most productive years in his life, when he

31. See Wang Shizhen, *Wang Shizhen nianpu*, 7. For translation of the passage, see Richard Lynn, 245.

32. Richard Lynn, 248. For the poetry of Xie Lingyun, see my book *Six dynasties Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1986), 47–78.

33. Richard Lynn, 248.

34. Wang Shizhen 王士禛, *Juyi lu* 居易錄, juan 4, cited in Gong Xiaowei, 48.

35. Wang Shizhen, *Dai jing tang shihua*, juan 7, 1:175.

composed well over 1,000 poems, constituting roughly one third of his entire poetic corpus. For Wang Shizhen writing poems during travel was not only an act of creation, but more importantly it was a time of re-creation. It was the temporary “stepping out of real life” that provided imagination for the poetic excursion, which may be understood as both a spiritual freedom and a “play” activity in leisure.³⁶ The setting and tone of his poems written during his Yanzhou years particularly fit this sense of enlightenment and play, and perhaps implied in his notion of *shenyun* was precisely this combination of spiritual transcendence and the carefree act of recreation. For *shen* (spirit) signifies a transcendence over *xing* (form), a transcendence that is beyond the descriptive similitude of things; and *yun* (resonance) refers to the blissful moments of enjoyment that go outside of the routine world of everyday life, moments whose infinite quality would extend endlessly in the realm of imagination. Indeed, in his *Xiangzu biji* 香祖筆記 Wang Shizhen once used words such as “*ru chan*” 入禪 (“entering Zen”) to describe the marvelous quality of Wang Wei’s and Pei Di’s poems, saying that such poetry “is capable of effecting sudden enlightenment”.³⁷ In the same passage he also cited from his own landscape poems—all composed during

very quality of “purity” (*qing*) and “distance” (*yuan*) that define the essential meaning of *shenyun*. It is interesting to note that it is this style of short *shenyun* verse—though Wang himself also produced many other extremely long poems—that appealed to the readers of the early Qing.

Earlier we have mentioned that Wang’s *shenyun* poetry has often been viewed as the “correct” style of poetry needed for the establishment of a new dyansty, largely because of its moderate tone suggestive of a time of peace. On the other hand, many Ming loyalists liked to read Wang’s poems as expressing feelings of nostalgia to the fallen Ming. Both of these readings are no doubt political readings that may or may not reflect the original meaning of Wang’s poems. Perhaps Wang Shizhen would rather that his works be appreciated for their pure aesthetic *shenyun* qualities. But ironically it was the political interpretation, regardless of the original intent of the author, that would ultimately bring Wang Shizhen to his canonical position in literature.

It should also be mentioned that as the foremost writer in his times, Wang Shizhen was fully aware of the cultural significance of canonicity. Like most of the Chinese literati, Wang wished to leave a name in history, in the memory of the cultural tradition. The “anxiety of influence” which Harold Bloom has described for Western authors is by no means irrelevant to Chinese authors, for whom the desire to “wrestle with” their precursors is equally strong.⁴⁰ In the case of Wang Shizhen, his strongest precursor in poetry-writing seems to be none other than the Tang poet Wang Wei, as we have already mentioned above. However, Wang also looked up to the Song poet Su Shi 蘇軾 as a model of a poet-official, and eventually as a exemplary canonical figure. Wang’s admiration for Su Shi, both for his poetry and his character, was clearly reflected in his miscellaneous essays, most notably in his preface to the *Gui mo shi juan* 癸卯詩卷 (1663).⁴¹ But more importantly, Wang Shizhen also viewed himself as a public official who followed in Su Shi’s footsteps: Su Shi used to serve as a Magistrate of Yangzhou, and now Wang Shizhen had his first official post in Yangzhou too. And, like Su Shi, Wang also enjoyed hosting guests in all sorts of outings and especially treasured the poetic compositions exchanged between himself and his friends on such occasions. Thus, Wang always gathered all the exchanged poems and had them published as separate anthologies, as in the case of the Red Bridge

40. Harold Bloom said that strong poets are often “wrestling with” their strong precursors. See Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 88.

41. Wang Shizhen, *Wang Yuyang shiwen xuanzhu* 王漁洋詩文選注, ed. by Li Yufu 李毓芙 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1982), 311–314.

Collection *Hongqiao changhe ji* 紅橋唱和集.⁴² Indeed, many of Wang's poems that were most admired by his readers and peers had been composed on such leisurely occasions. His poetry gatherings were so famous, and the people who imitated and chanted his verses were so numerous, that Wang quickly established himself as the most famous writer of the area. Like Su Shi, Wang was able to devote himself to both administrative duties and leisurely gatherings, and as Tobie Meyer-Fong pointed out in a recent article, these two activities "were not entirely separate enterprises."⁴³ Perhaps it was through the social gatherings where colleagues and personal friends convened at leisure that Wang was able to experience the sense of true play and hence able to display his ability to enjoy the art of writing for its own sake. In other words, his innate talent in poetic writing combined perfectly with his worldly obligations. In fact, Wang's remarkable ability to combine these two spheres of work (or play) was so great that the famous poet Wu Weiye called him a "true genius" (*zhen tiancai* 真天才)⁴⁴, while the Ming loyalist Mao Xiang described him as a "god-like" person.⁴⁵ Clearly Wang Shizhen, following the model of his precursor Su Shi, was among those literati in traditional China who were able to cultivate the sphere of play activity as a catalyst for poetic creativity.

Aside from his prolific tendencies, Wang's generous support to many of his contemporaries also reminds us of the quality of Su Shi. But unlike Su Shi who was constantly in conflict with powerful groups in the capital, Wang Shizhen had a relatively smooth political career. His fame as a public cultural figure was significantly enhanced after 1666 when he began to serve in Beijing, the center of imperial power. Soon after his arrival in the capital Wang distinguished himself as one of the most prolific and talented writers there, and with the publication of his collected Works titled *Yuyang ji* 漁洋集 in 1669 he suddenly found himself to be at the center of cultural activities in Beijing. Still in his 30s, he had already obtained stature as a master of poetry and criticism, and his patronage and sanction were frequently sought after. Then in 1678 he was granted an audience with Emperor Kangxi, and along with the imperial sanction and subsequent promotion there came a new sense of power. Soon afterwards Wang was able to draw a large group of disciples under his wing, especially after 1680 when a whole

42. Wang Shizhen, *Wang Shizhen nianpu*, 20.

43. Tobie Meyer-Fong, "Making a Place for Meaning in Early Qing Yangzhou," *Late Imperial China*, 20.1 (June 1999):57.

44. Wu Weiye, "Meicun jiachang gao;" cited in Gong Xiaowei, 37.

45. Wang Shizhen, *Wang Shizhen nianpu*, 28.

generation of older poets such as Qian Qianyi, Wu Weiyi and Gong Dingzi 龔鼎孳 had already died.⁴⁶ According to reliable sources, young poets who sought Wang’s instructions were numbered in the hundreds.⁴⁷ The sheer size of Wang’s followers somewhat reminds one of the famous Yushan School of Poetry which Qian Qianyi led during the Ming-Qing transition.⁴⁸ But in contrast to Qian Qianyi who generally imposed his own preferences of poetic styles on his followers and often attacked those in the rival schools of poetry, Wang Shizhen took a more flexible approach and was far more open-minded about including young prominent writers in his school. Moreover, while Qian Qianyi’s School was largely limited to people in the local area of Yushan, Wang’s was non-discriminating in terms of the disciples’ place of origin. For example, in the anthology *Shi zi shi lue* 十子詩略 (Selected Poems of the Ten Masters) which he compiled and edited in 1680, all the poets included in the collection came from different regions and among them only two or three strictly practiced Wang’s poetics of “*shenyun*.” The rest of the poets produced poems in widely different styles, and yet Wang acknowledged them as his “*mensheng*” 門生 (disciple) nonetheless. Wang Maoling, one of Wang’s followers, had this to say about his mentor:⁴⁹

My teacher has many, many disciples. Once his instruction and direction had been received, the students would naturally learn how to write, but were never restricted by any one style . . .

By nature Wang Shizhen was inclined to give support to all young writers who would seek his advice, and he often gave generous praises to his students by either quoting their lines in his *biji* or including their works in the new anthologies he edited. With the authority that his own voice carried, promoting these new writers was certainly a way of securing for himself an inclusion in the canon. But it was, of course, also a way of enhancing one’s social network too. In any case, such was the new approach to canonicity that Wang Shizhen and others were taking in the early Qing, an approach that would exercise great influence on poets and teachers in later generations.

A long time after his death, Wang Shizhen continued to exercise “power” with the imperial system’s cultural and political backing. In 1765 Emperor Qian-

46. Yan Dichang, 1:437.

47. Yan Dichang, 1:438.

48. See Hu Youfeng, *Qing chu Yushan pai shilun*, 227-369.

49. Yan Dichang, 1:471.

long conferred on Wang the posthumous name, Wenjian 文簡, and announced in an imperial edict that Wang's poetry deserved public praise and recognition because of its "correct" (zheng 正) content.⁵⁰ Other major critics, such as Shen Deqian 沈德潛 and Weng Fanggang 翁方綱, also joined in promoting theories of literature that were in one way or another supported Wang Shizhen's basic aesthetics of *shenyun*. However, Wang's imposing stature as a canonized poet did not go unchallenged. Even when he was still alive, Wang received countless criticisms from a younger scholar Zhao Zhixin 趙執信 (1662–1744), a relative of Wang's who resented Wang for not writing a preface for him in time.⁵¹ Later it was Zhao Zhixin's published volume of criticism, *Tan long lu* 談龍錄, that did the most damage to Wang Shizhen's name. But there were other poets and critics who simply could not appreciate Wang's poetic style and thus questioned his canonical status. For example, the 18th century poet Yuan Mei judged Wang Shizhen against giant authors like Li Bai 李白, Du Fu 杜甫, Han Yu 韓愈, and Su Shi and concluded that Wang was lacking in "innate ability" (*caili* 才力). The modern critic Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 was even harsher in his criticism: Qian believed that the reason Wang Shizhen promoted the *shenyun* theory, a theory that endorsed implicit rhetoric, was precisely because he had to conceal his in-born weakness, namely a lack of innate ability.⁵² At the same time, Wang Shizhen became a target of widespread attack in Mainland China, for his poetry seemed to convey the kind of "regressive" and "reactionary" tendencies typical of a feudal, aristocratic culture.⁵³ It was not until recently, when the broader cultural practices had changed, that Mainland scholars such as Wang Yingzhi 王英志 and Yan Dichang began to grant prestige to the poetry of Wang Shizhen and encouraged a new canonization.⁵⁴

The process of canonicity is indeed a complex one, for it involves inevitably the workings of cultural memory.⁵⁵ What authors manage to occupy a permanent place in the national cultural memory, what authors fail to maintain their magnitude in time, and by what process some canons are established and then be

50. See "Wang Shizhen zhuan," 王士禎傳 *Qingshi gao* 清史稿, juan 266; cited in "Appendix", Wang Shizhen, *Wang Shizhen nianpu*, 120.

51. Gong Xiaowei, 67–68.

52. See Yan Dichang's discussion of Qian Zhongshu's view, in Yan Dichang, *Qing shi shi*, 1:456.

53. Wang Yingzhi 王英志, *Qing ren shilun yanjiu* 清人詩論研究 (Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1986), 68.

54. See Wang Yingzhi, 68–85; Yan Dichang, 1:411–481.

55. See Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1994), 37, where he says: "The greatest authors take over the role of 'places' in the Canon's theater of memory, and their masterworks occupy the position filled by 'images' in the art of memory."

forgotten—all these questions need to be addressed in the context of cultural and political constructions, aside from pure aesthetic considerations.⁵⁶ Such questions have also been the concern of traditional Chinese poets and critics. In his discussion of canonicity, for example, the Qing poet and critic Yuan Mei 袁枚 distinguished between “great authors” (*da jia* 大家) and “popular authors” (*ming jia* 名家), saying that the former would remain immortal under whatever circumstances, but the latter could only try to manipulate their influences in their own lifetimes.⁵⁷ There have been people who believed that Wang Shizhen belonged to the class of great authors whose importance would transcend the boundary of their times, but few authors know with certainty whether they themselves will eventually achieve immortality. But we can be sure of one thing: Wang Shizhen was one of those great authors who constantly revised their own writings until the last moments of their lives. While still working on his deathbed in 1711, Wang Shizhen was surely thinking about the challenge of canonizing himself. Indeed, Harold Bloom’s words are especially pertinent here: “The anxiety of influence cripples weaker talents but stimulates canonical genius.”⁵⁸

Notes

This paper was written in commemoration of my former teacher Prof. Earl R. Miner, who was the Townsend Martin Class of 1917 Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Princeton University.

56. In his book, *The School of Hawthorne* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), Richard H. Broadhead uses Hawthorne as an example to illustrate writers’ rise and decline in the canon in time. See pp. 201–202 where he discusses the importance of cultural constructions with regard to canonicity.

57. Zhang Jian 張健, *Qingdai shihua yanjiu* 清代詩話研究, (Taipei: Wunan tushu chubangongsi, 1993), 475–476.

58. Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1994), 10.

王士禎與文學新典範

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摘 要

本文主要在探討王士禎的「神韻說」如何在極其複雜的清初文學環境中獲得很高的評價。而王士禎之所以一躍而成一代之宗的文學新典範，既與美學的考量有關，也與當時的政治環境有著密切的關係。同時，本文也深入討論所謂「典範大家」的文化情懷。以王士禎為例，他一直到生命的最後一刻，還在病床上不斷努力改寫他的作品。

關鍵詞：文學典範，王士禎，神韻，錢謙益，門戶之見，入禪，趙執信，錢鍾書，袁枚，大家，名家

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