On the world stage, as well as in China, Qian Zhongshu (1910–1998) was one of the most learned humanist scholars of our time. We may think of him in the company of such savants as Erich Auerbach or Ernst Robert Curtius except that in addition to his vast knowledge of the Western tradition, read in five or six languages (English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Latin), Qian also had an encyclopedic familiarity with the Chinese tradition and was himself a master of classical Chinese. “His knowledge of Chinese literature, of the Western tradition, and of world literature is immense (Sa connaissance de la littérature chinoise, du patrimoine occidental, de la littérature universelle, est prodigieuse),” as Pierre Ryckmans observed in Le Monde as early as 1983. “There is no one like Qian Zhongshu today in China, not even in the world (Qian Zhongshu n’a pas son pareil aujourd’hui en Chine et même dans le monde).” I have cited this remark several times on different occasions simply because its statement is true, and its truthfulness does not diminish with repeated citations. Despite his incredible erudition and his enormously high reputation in China, however, and despite his election as an honorary member of the Modern Language Association of America in 1985, Qian Zhongshu’s name and works remain very little known in the West except in a small circle of Sinologists. And yet Qian’s scholarship is not confined to China studies or literary studies, for his magnum opus, the modestly named Guan zhui bian 管錐編 or Limited Views, is so quintessentially interdisciplinary, contains such insightful discussions of Chinese classics in an intertextual dialogue with Western works, and comments on so many different subjects and fields that it becomes very difficult to classify it and put it under a subject heading in any library catalogue system. For understanding the Chinese tradition in the context of East-West comparisons, Qian Zhongshu’s works represent the very best of contemporary scholarship, and it is high time that we brought out translations and critical evaluations of his works for the appreciation and recognition they so richly deserve.

With the rising interest in China and its culture, the situation has started to improve in recent years, and some of Qian Zhongshu’s works are now available

2 In my university library, the book is put under PL anyway, but that is totally arbitrary and misleading, because PL usually covers books in Chinese literature.
in English translation. His only novel, *Fortress Besieged*, which C.T. Hsia praised “for its delightful portrayal of contemporary manners, its comic exuberance, and its tragic insight,” was translated by Jeanne Kelly and Nathan Mao and published by Indiana University Press in 1979, reissued more recently by New Directions in 2004. Qian’s major scholarly work, *Guan zhui bian*, a real treasure trove of knowledge and wisdom, is now at least partially available in English. Out of the original five-volume set, Ronald Egan selected and expertly translated 65 passages under the title of *Limited Views*, which was published by Harvard University Asia Center in 1998. A collection of Qian’s essays and short stories, *Humans, Beasts, and Ghosts*, edited and largely translated by Christopher Rea, was brought out by Columbia University Press in 2011. In the present volume, we have yet another important work, a collection of seven essays by Qian Zhongshu, originally entitled *Qi zhui ji* 七綴集 (literally “seven stitched-together collection”), now beautifully translated by Duncan Campbell as *Patchwork: Seven Essays on Art and Literature*, and published by Brill to inaugurate our East Asian Comparative Literature and Culture book series.

First published in 1984, this collection contains essays with consistently developed arguments on particular themes and are written in elegant modern vernacular, as distinct from Qian’s two other scholarly works, the massive *Guan zhui bian* or *Limited Views* and the much expanded *Tan yi lu* 談藝錄 or *On the Art of Poetry*, both written in classical Chinese in the traditional form of loosely connected notes and commentaries. The present collection represents Qian’s works in the modern form of critical essays written in the modern vernacular, but these essays include, as all his writings do, numerous quotations in classical Chinese and several European languages. The first essay in this collection is on poetry and painting; it offers, as the author states at the beginning, “no appraisal of either old Chinese poetry or old Chinese painting in and of themselves,” but “an elucidation of the comparative evaluation given these two arts within traditional Chinese criticism.” A critical examination of the “comparative evaluation” of poetry and painting becomes necessary because some often-heard conventional views would have it, particularly since the Song dynasty, that painting is “soundless poetry,” while poetry is “paintings of sound,” as though these two forms of art share the same origin and the same criteria in aesthetic judgment. Modelled on the division of Chan Buddhism, Dong Qichang (1555–1636), a famous painter and scholar of the Ming dynasty, divided traditional painting into the Southern and the Northern Schools and traced that division back to the Tang. Painting of the Southern School with the

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