

QIAN Shouchu: Editor and Painter

QIAN Shouchu is well known in medical publishing in China. He is senior editor of the *Chinese Medical Journal (CMJ)*; guest editor and managing editor of *Hepatobiliary & Pancreatic Diseases International* and the *World Journal of Pediatrics*, which are two new English-language journals published by Zhejiang University; and professor of scientific communication at Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China. Yet what seems to make him especially popular is his interest and talent in the arts, particularly traditional Chinese painting.

Qian's interest in the arts emerged during his boyhood in Wuxi, a beautiful city close to Suzhou and Shanghai. He recalls that his parents, an agricultural technician and a housewife who had keen intellects and high standards, set a good example for him by seeking excellence in everything they did. Anything that was worth their time, they felt, was worth doing well, Qian says. They valued education highly and gave their children every opportunity to learn and to fulfill their potential, not only in school performance but in outside interests as well. That philosophy inspired and encouraged young Qian greatly. In addition to excelling in every course he took, he developed a love for the arts. Of all the artistic forms he tried, he loved painting most, simply because he could make things look natural or beyond natural at will. His potential in painting was apparent in the figures of human beings and animals he engraved on bamboo blocks, which were easy to find.

Because of his love for the arts, Qian admired his high-school teachers who demonstrated talent in Chinese arts and literature. The one he admired most was CHU Feng, a member of the Jiangsu Academy of Fine Arts in Nanjing. It was under Chu's instruction that Qian started his formal training in painting. "In my memory", Qian says, "he was very easy-going. He often asked me to see his artworks at his home and office and explained to me their techniques, styles, and the materials used." Very often, he would demonstrate to Qian the techniques not only of painting, but also of paper cutting, seal carving, and

calligraphy when he was in high spirits. Occasionally, he compared his works with those of other contemporary artists, pointing out the weaknesses and strengths of each piece. "Perhaps Mr Chu was the one who influenced me more than anyone else in my arts", Qian says gratefully.

After graduating in 1969 from Beijing Foreign Studies University, where he majored in English, Qian worked for the Bureau of Foreign Relations, Ministry of Health of China, where he served as editor and translator in preparing documents in Chinese or in English for the General Health Assemblies held in Geneva every year before 1972. In 1973, he joined the editorial staff of the *CMJ*. Soon thereafter, he took undergraduate courses in his spare time at Beijing Medical College, predecessor of Peking University Health Science Center. Of the four editors who worked on re-establishing the journal after the Cultural Revolution, he is the only one still working for the journal.

Beijing, the capital of China, set the stage for Qian to further his interest in painting. Numerous art galleries and museums exhibited paintings of various themes, techniques, styles, and schools of thought every day. Thousands of artists gathered there. They formed their own circles and held regular parties to exchange ideas about artistic creation. Qian soon made friends with some of these professional artists. He was often invited to their parties and exhibitions. That exposure, with his incessant industrious practice, improved Qian's painting skills and perception dramatically.

As his career as an editor unfolded, Qian was promoted to more senior positions in medical editing and publishing and became more involved in editors' associations at home and abroad. He was managing editor of the *CMJ* from 1975 through 1985. He then spent a year at the Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles, California, and the University of California, Los Angeles as a visiting scholar. He has been director of editing services of the Chinese Medical Association's Publishing House. From 1997 to 2003, he was a

Other Than Editing

continued

member of the Board of Directors of the World Association of Medical Editors. He is a member of the European Association of Science Editors and the Chinese Association of Science Editors. He is one of the founding editors of *Acta Editologica*, a bimonthly bulletin of the Chinese Association of Science Editors, and is on the editorial board of Chinese Science Journals

Research, sponsored by the Chinese Academy of Science. In September 2005, he attended, in Chicago, the Fifth International Congress on Peer Review and Biomedical Publication, for which he served as a member of the advisory board.

In addition to his involvement in those organizations, Qian has long been devoted to education in biomedical writing and editing, because he is fully aware of the wide gap between the research output of Chinese scientists and the small number of their papers published in international journals. He has organized several seminars or training courses for medical writers and editors in China in the last few years and has given lectures on medical writing and editing at universities, research institutes, hospitals, and medical conferences. He has published three books on scientific writing, which have made him the most widely read writer on this subject today in China.

With such a heavy workload and busy schedule, can Qian still find time for his painting? The answer is yes. “To me, painting has actually become a part of my daily life. It is to relax after hours of work on manuscripts or writing when you move from logical thinking to imaginary thinking”, Qian says. “The variety of colors on the xuan paper, a type of high-quality paper made especially for traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy, is a joyful diversion when I feel somehow tired of looking at the black lines on white paper of the manuscripts.” Usually, when he



Qian Shouchu

returns home from a trip to another city or a beautiful place for a meeting, he has a strong desire to record or express his feelings on the xuan paper, no matter how full his work schedule is.

Qian's inspiration for traditional Chinese painting also stems from his profound understanding of Chinese literature through extensive reading of Chinese classics, including the writing of outstanding poets in different dynasties of ancient China. In Qian's eyes, a painting is like a poem that has characters, ideas, and spirit; these go hand in hand with form, rules, and methods. “No matter how unrealistic the painting looks”, he says, “it should come from nature, and the structure should comply with the laws of nature. So painters should not only be romanticists, but realists as well.”

Qian has produced countless paintings, of which he is satisfied with about 500 with regard to theme, color, technique, and style. Some of these paintings are in the hands of customers who bought them at cooperative exhibitions held by the Beijing Amateur Artists Association; some are in gallery collections; some are published sporadically in magazines and newspapers; and some are kept by Qian's friends at home and abroad. (One appears on the cover of this issue of *Science Editor*.)

Qian's paintings have long been favorite gifts symbolizing friendship. Since the late 1980s, he has met many visitors from abroad. The doctors and medical editors

Other Than Editing

continued

often ask Qian for his paintings as gifts when they learn about this interest and talent of his. Tom Patterson, a psychiatrist at the Veterans Memorial Hospital in Kentucky, who visited China in 1985, was one of them. Patterson and Qian soon became good friends. They communicated frequently, discussing American popular music and behavioral arts. Patterson kept several of Qian's paintings until his death several years ago. James McFarland, a pediatrician and artist in Ireland, visited China in the late 1980s as a guest of the Chinese Medical Association. During his stay in Beijing, McFarland often invited Qian to help him select paintings at the Yongbaozha Gallery, a well-known painting shop in China. They exchanged views on Chinese and British paintings, especially watercolors.

"To be honest, I cannot say how great or fantastic my painting is. I don't want to leave people the impression of self-promotion or big talk", Qian says modestly. However, many friends are urging him to publish a collection of his representative works. Recognizing, though, that doing so

requires much time and effort, he refrains from it because he is still heavily engaged in medical-journal publishing. Qian says, half seriously and half jokingly, "If you want to see a book with the collection of my paintings, wait until after I retire."

The practice of painting, Qian has found, is more than mental relaxation and self-entertainment. It is of great help to his work of manuscript editing and journal publishing. For example, the selection of photos; the art design of covers, inserts, and advertisements; the layout of pages; and the choice of type all require the editor to have some artistic insight. "In a broad sense, medical editing is to make manuscripts fit to publish scientifically and artistically," Qian says. His statement summarizes well his combination of roles as an editor and a painter.

CAI HEBING (JACK CAI) *teaches English at Fudan University, Shanghai, China. He recently completed a China Medical Board internship in biomedical editing.*