

Qi Wenying's American History Studies

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Qi Wenying (齐文颖, 1930-2021), from Ningjin, Shandong province, was born in a scholarly family. His father, Qi Sihe (齐思和, 1907-1980), was a well-known historian of the older generation. He was the dean of the History Department and then the Dean of the Faculty of Liberal Arts of Yenching University, and the Professor of the History Department of Peking University. He had pioneering contributions in all fields and are well-known in academic circles. Qi Wenying received a good education. She was admitted to Yenching University in 1949 and then transferred to Peking University. After graduating from the Department of History of Peking University in 1954, she studied under the famous world historian, Professor Yang Renying (1903-1973). Her major was European and American history, and graduated in 1958 which made her one of the earliest postgraduate students in the world history sphere cultivated by New China. After teaching for two years at South-Central University for Nationalities, Qi Wenying came back to the Department of History of Peking University and worked there for a long time since 1960. She has served as assistant, lecturer, associate professor, deputy director of the European and American History Office, deputy director of the Yenching Center for American Studies, Peking University, research librarian of Peking University Library, and concurrently serving as vice chairman and consultant of the Chinese American History Research Association. She is the author of “Qi Wenying Manuscript”, has translated “The History of U.S.-China Relations”, “New American History”, etc. She also worked as the Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the “Encyclopedia of Chinese Women” and “Chinese Women and Higher Education”.

This article aims to comb and summarize Qi Wenying's contributions and

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influences on the research, talent training, and academic exchanges in early American history and women's history, in order to pay tribute to her, a respected female historian.

I. Research Contribution

Qi Wenying's early academic research focused on modern British history. The one that best demonstrated her academic skills was "The First Revolutionary Faction of the British Equality School and New Model Army" published in "Journal of Peking University" in 1963.² This article focuses on the first revolutionary program of the Equality faction, the relationship between the Equality faction and the New Model Army, and the Putney Army Representative Conference. Based on the research results of British historians, her research was specific and subtle, and gave an in-depth study on the history of the British revolution. From the perspectives of politics, economy, law, religion, etc., the article summarized the revolutionary program of the equality faction as: depose the king, abolish the upper house, abolish all privileges, and replace it with the establishment of a unicameral parliament on the basis of free elections of the people; abolish monopoly privileges, abolish tithes; improve the legal system and ensure that everyone is equal before the law; freedom of belief; believes that "these claims reflect the requirements of the petty bourgeoisie such as urban handicraftsmen and the rich rural peasants", and to a certain extent are in line with the interests of the urban and rural people. "Draw a picture of the petty-bourgeois democrats' political ideals," "Therefore, we say that it is a petty-bourgeois-democratic program, and its realization means the establishment of a bourgeois democratic republic."

Since the reform and opening up, Qi Wenying's contribution to the study of early American history can be highlighted in the following three aspects:

First, take early American history as an independent stage of American history and devote herself to the construction of the discipline of American early history. According to Qi Wenying's view, Early American History research is "the starting point and focus of the re-study of American history under the new situation of reform and opening up". It is also "a breakout to the teaching and research on American history since the 1930s in China. Before that, the history of the colonial period had never been treated as an independent part of American history."³ This is indeed a new expansion of the field of American history research in the new era. Some

² Qi Wenying, "The First Revolutionary Faction of the British Equality School and New Model Army" (齐文颖:《英国平等派的第一个革命纲领与新模范军》), *Journal of Peking University* (《北京大学学报》), no. 3, 1963.

³ Qi Wenying, *Inquiry into American History* (齐文颖主编:《美国史探研》), Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2001, Introduction.





scholars believe that Qi Wenying “committed to the disciplinary construction of early American history and linked the colonial period, the American Revolutionary period, and the constitutional period together, thus bringing China’s early American history research into a new stage and opening up the systematic study of Chinese scholars in the history of British North America during the 17th to 18th century.”⁴

Second, take the lead in conducting in-depth research around key issues in the early history of the United States. Qi Wenying’s most representative monographs in the field of early American history are: Is the “Declaration of Independence a symbol of the birth of the United States of America?”⁵ and “Study on the Issue of the U.S. vessel Queen of China Coming to China”⁶.

In China, since the late Qing Dynasty, the publication of the “Declaration of Independence” on July 4, 1776 has been regarded as the “symbol of the birth of the United States of America.” Based on the interpretation of the text, the historical background of the drafting and adoption of the Declaration of Independence, and the historical development of the American Revolution, Qi Wenying argued that it’s hard to find any content about the independence or birth of the United States of America in its articles. “The ‘independence’ declared in the Declaration of Independence is the independence of the 13 colonies of British North America. It refers to the 13 new countries born out of 13 colonies, not the independence and birth of the United States of America as described in general textbooks.”⁷

One of the greatest characteristics of the independence history of the British North American colonies is that the colonies successively declared independence, and then, on this basis, united and jointly issued the “Declaration of Independence”, and then achieved all the independence of the thirteen colonies. For the majority of people in the thirteen colonies, until the “Declaration of Independence” was issued in 1776, there was no requirement and desire to unite the colonies into a whole and establish a unified United States of America. The development from “united colonies” to “United States” does not mean the establishment of a unified country.⁸ Qi Wenying pointed out that, judging from the available materials, the term “united colony” was used at

⁴ Man Yunlong, Chen Yong, and Yang Yusheng, *Investigation of American History (Continued)* (满运龙、陈勇、杨玉圣主编:《美国史探研(续编)》), Shijiazhuang: Hebei People’s Publishing House, 2010.

⁵ Qi Wenying, “Is the ‘Declaration of Independence a symbol of the birth of the United States of America’ (齐文颖:《〈独立宣言〉是美利坚合众国诞生的标志吗?》), *World History* (《世界历史》), no.1, 1985.

⁶ “Study on the Issue of the U.S. vessel Queen of China Coming to China” (《关于“中国皇后号”来华问题》) and “A preliminary analysis of the reasons for the success of the ‘Queen of China’ maiden voyage” (《“中国皇后号”首航成功原因的初步分析》) are comprehensively revised. The above two articles were originally published in the first and second series of the “Essays on the History of Sino-US Relations” edited by the Editorial Committee of the History of Sino-US Relations Series (edited by Ding Mingnan) (丁名楠主编:《中美关系史论文集》), Chongqing: Chongqing Publishing House.

⁷ Qi Wenying, *Qi Wenying Manuscript* (《齐文颖文稿》), Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2020, p. 17.

⁸ Qi Wenying, *Qi Wenying Manuscript*, pp. 18-19.



the first Continental Congress in 1774 and gradually became a popular term, but it was merely a name, rather than a new country, let alone a national-level organization. The 13-nation alliance developed from the united colonies is a temporary alliance rather than a permanent nation. "It is precisely because the union mentioned in the Declaration of Independence is temporary, that is why the "permanent union" between the thirteen countries solemnly declared in the Confederation Regulations in 1781, namely the "United States of America", and then there was "A more complete union" stipulated in the Federal Constitution, 1787. This is a trilogy in the process of the establishment of the United States, and the "Declaration of Independence" is a prelude to the founding of the country." In short, "No matter from the literal view of the "Declaration of Independence," or from its historical background and people's ideological conditions at the time, it is clear that it is not accurate enough to describe the Declaration of Independence as a symbol of the birth of the United States of America."⁹

In the article "Study on the Issue of the U.S. vessel Queen of China Coming to China", based on original documents and research results, Qi Wenying conducted a systematic analysis on the background, process and historical impact of the "Queen of China" maiden voyage to China. The article pointed out that the Sino-US trade relationship established by the "Queen of China" not only brought obvious economic benefits to the businessmen in the eastern United States, but also became an important part of the primitive accumulation of capital in the early days of the United States, and played a certain role in the early prosperity of the United States economy. The commercial communication between China and the United States also helped the development of early capitalism in the United States, and had a certain impact on strengthening the understanding, cultural exchanges and ideological communication.

Qi Wenying's academic contribution to the research of the early history of the United States was approved by scholars of American history. Professor Huang Annian pointed out that: "The early history of the United States is the history of the foundational era, and it is also the foundational project of American research. Doing this foundational work laid a good foundation for our American research. Qi Wenying and other researchers of American history at Peking University have made unremitting efforts in this academic field. Not only taking it as the starting point of re-studying American history under the new situation of reform and opening up, but also treating the early period as an independent and important stage of American history."¹⁰ Because of the foundation-laying work of Qi Wenying and other scholars, early American history has become one of the shining fields in the study of American

⁹ Qi Wenying, *Qi Wenying Manuscript*, p. 25.

¹⁰ Qi Wenying, *Qi Wenying Manuscript*, p. 4.



history in China.

Third, Qi Wenying established the women's history research in China.

Qi Wenying believes that women's history is "a new field extended from the study of American history, and it is also a new contribution we have made to the study of American history in China."¹¹ Qi Wenying's "Inquiry into American History" contains several articles on American women, which reflected the pioneering achievements of American women's history research since the reform and opening up. Qi Wenying said, "Seriously summarizing historical experience and writing a history of foreign women with characteristics of the times and Chinese characteristics, through which we can understand the world more comprehensively, and the world can better understand us. This is an urgent need for us".¹²

Qi broadened the academic horizons of women's history research through the compilation of women's historical documents at home and abroad. She reviewed the world's largest dictionary of women,¹³ participating in the first International Conference on Women's History,¹⁴ rediscovered China's first comprehensive and systematic study of the world women's movement, "The World Women's Movement Series",¹⁵ and systematically collected and published "A Survey of Chinese Women's Literature".¹⁶ From a new perspective of women's studies, the book is divided into categories according to books, newspapers, and stone inscriptions. It fully includes the bibliography of women's studies compiled by Chinese (including overseas Chinese scholars), and runs through the ancient and modern millennia and spans multiple fields with more than 10,000 kinds of writings. Its academic value and contribution lies in "The compilation of a national women's research bibliography that links historical research results with current developments and includes various fields was never been seen in China. In other countries in the world, except for Harvard University Women's Library in the United States, which established a database for all its collections, there has not seen such publications in women's studies."¹⁷

¹¹ Qi Wenying, *Inquiry into American History*, Preface.

¹² Qi Wenying, *Qi Wenying Manuscript*, p. 105.

¹³ Qi Wenying, "A Review of A Dictionary of Famous American Women" (齐文颖: 《〈美国著名妇女人物辞典〉评介》), *Historical Research* (《历史研究》), no. 3, 1986.

¹⁴ Qi Wenying, "Impressions of the First International Conference on Women's History Research" (齐文颖: 《首届国际妇女史研究大会印象》), *Women's Studies* (《妇女研究》), no. 6, 1990; Qi Wenying, Zhou Jie, "Summary of Women's Studies in Northern Europe" (齐文颖、周洁: 《北欧地区妇女学研究综述》), *Women's Academy* (《妇女学苑》), no. 3, 1992.

¹⁵ Qi Wenying, "Mr. Wang Senran's Contributions to the History of Women" (齐文颖: 《王森然先生对妇女史的贡献》), in Jin Shangyi (ed.), *Wang Senran Research Materials* (靳尚谊主编: 《王森然研究资料》), Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 1994.

¹⁶ Qi Wenying, *A Survey of Chinese Women's Literature* (齐文颖主编: 《中华妇女文献纵览》), Beijing: Peking University Press, 1995.

¹⁷ Qi Wenying, *A Survey of Chinese Women's Literature*, Preface.





Qi Wenying's "A Historical Survey of the American Women's Movement" examined the American women's movement from the colonial period to the 1960s and 1970s in general. She pointed out that although the history of the United States is relatively short compared with Europe, "American women struggle for national independence, arouse women's own emancipation, and fight for bourgeois democratic rights, etc. They were never fallen behind, on the contrary, they started earlier than others. The scale of their movement was large and had made important contributions to the women's movement around the world".¹⁸ Through a review of Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of the Rights of Women", Qi Wenying believes that this book is the first masterpiece in the world that women stand up for women's rights, fight for gender equality and liberation. It is a sign of the beginning of the international women's movement. "it is indeed an epoch-making work." Wollstonecraft "should be the pioneer of the Western women's movement and the first banner of the Western women's liberation movement." In advocating the equality between men and women, breaking up the traditional forces of male superiority and inferiority, Wollstonecraft is "the first woman to make a major contribution" in the history of the world¹⁹. Some scholars highly praised Qi Wenying's academic contribution to women's history: "Qi Wenying was one of the earliest scholars who advocated women's history and women's studies. Since the 1980s, she has written a series of groundbreaking papers of the women's history in the United States, guided students to study women's history topics, invited well-known overseas women's historians to give lectures, and established relevant research groups and academic centers to lead and promote domestic historical research on American women."

II. Talent Training

Beginning in the fall semester of 1981, Qi Wenying offered a course on American General History for undergraduates in the Department of History, and then offered seminars on American Colonial History and American History for graduate students. This is a reboot of American history course at Peking University. The Department of History of Peking University set up an independent course on American history since 1936 and then suspended it due to the "Marco Polo Bridge Incident". Qi Wenying said: "Coincidentally, the first American history course in the History Department of Peking University was taught by my father, Mr. Qi Sihe. After the reform and opening up, the first American history course was offered by myself."

¹⁸ Qi Wenying, *Qi Wenying Manuscript*, p. 85.

¹⁹ Qi Wenying, *Qi Wenying Manuscript*, p. 182.





In 1981, Qi hosted a one-semester lecture series on American History, invited Professor Yang Shengmao and Professor Zhang Youlun from Nankai University, Professor Huang Shaoxiang and Professor Huang Songkang from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Editor Deng Shusheng from People's Publishing House, Professor Huang Annian from Beijing Normal University, etc. Students whose major was world history, as well as graduate students in various liberal arts departments of Peking University and off-campus American history colleagues, joined in this lecture.²⁰ They recalled, "These lectures by famous teachers are really unforgettable for the students who have been out of school for a long time and are thirsty for knowledge."²¹

Qi took the lead in establishing an American history master's program featuring early American history in the History Department of Peking University, setting a precedent for the cultivation of graduate students and talents in American early history. Since 1981, Qi Wenying instructed a number of early American history graduate students. The topics of their master's thesis include the Virginia Colony Parliament, the Puritanism of the Massachusetts Bay, the Catholicism of Pennsylvania, the "Glorious Revolution" of North American, the tobacco industry in Chesapeake, the system of subrogation rent, women in the colonial period, changes in the relationship between the United Kingdom and the colony, the British "Renaissance" and colonial immigration in North America, etc.²² "The topic selection of these postgraduates' papers reflects a certain overall layout, and obviously reflects Qi's understanding of the framework and main lines of the early period history. The themes and content of these papers have their own focuses and cohesion, which outlines the early stage of the United States."²³ Qi has successively instructed 13 graduate students in the Department of History of Peking University. They all have achieved success in their professional fields and are "the backbone of the academic research and education in the United States and China."²⁴

In 1988, the Yenching Center for American Studies at Peking University was formally established, and Qi Wenying was appointed as the deputy director of the center. The center held a variety of academic activities such as exhibitions, symposiums, and special lectures, which became a research base featuring the study of early American history.

²⁰ Qi Wenying, *Qi Wenying Manuscript*, p. 3.

²¹ Qi Wenying, *Qi Wenying Manuscript*, p. 10.

²² These papers are published by Qi Wenying, *Inquiry into American History*.

²³ Li Jianming: "The Founder of Early American History Studies in China-Recalling Professor Qi Wenying" (李剑鸣:《中国美国早期史研究的奠基人——追忆齐文颖教授》) (March 28, 2021), unpublished manuscript. I would like to thank Professor Li Jianming.

²⁴ Qi Wenying, *Qi Wenying Manuscript*, p. 3.





III. Academic Exchange

In promoting academic exchanges between China and the United States, Qi Wenying was also an outstanding leader.

First, Qi actively promoted Sino-foreign exchanges in historiography, especially Sino-US historiography, and “built a bridge for in-depth exchanges and friendly cooperation between Chinese and American historians.”²⁵ She invited some famous professors and scholars in American history to Peking University to give lectures and guidance to undergraduates and graduate students, which “played a particularly important role in promoting the academic exchanges of history between China and foreign countries.”²⁶ Scholars invited by Qi Wenying to give lectures in the Department of History of Peking University include Professor William Whiteside of Bowdoin College in Maine, USA, who gave systematic lectures on American history and donated a batch of history book of English edition to the Department of History. There are also short-term lecturers, such as Professor JR Pole from Oxford University who studies the early modern history of Britain and the United States, Professor Michael Kammen from Cornell University who studies the early modern history and cultural history of the United States, and Professor Leon Litwack from Berkeley campus, the University of California, who studies American racial history. As well as Professor Lawrence Levine who studies African American history, Professor EB Smith who studies 19th century American history at the University of Maryland, and Professor Bruce Stave from University of Connecticut who studies urban history and oral history. In addition, well-known historians such as Professor Mary B. Norton, a women’s historian, Professor Stanley N. Katz, Chairman of the American Association of Scholars, and Professor Oscar Handlin, a professor of American history at Harvard University, have also been invited to give lectures at Peking University.

These scholars introduced the latest achievements in American cultural history, urban history, oral history, and North American colonial history to the Chinese academic community through lectures, “increasing our educational strength in American history, strengthening cultural exchanges, and enhancing mutual understanding to establish a long-term friendship.”²⁷

Second, Qi strongly recommends students to study in the United States. Mainly thanks to the cultivation and recommendation of her, ten of his thirteen disciples went to the United States for further study. Nine of them learned at Johns Hopkins University, Cornell University, University of Maryland, Oregon University, University

²⁵ Man Yunlong, Chen Yong, and Yang Yusheng, *Investigation of American History (Continued)*, p. 4.

²⁶ Man Yunlong, Chen Yong, and Yang Yusheng, *Investigation of American History (Continued)*, p. 3.

²⁷ Qi Wenying, *Qi Wenying Manuscript*, p.182.





of Illinois, University of New Mexico, etc., and received a doctorate in history. These students have their own achievements in the field of American history research, which reflects Qi's cultivation and contribution to young students.

Third, presided over the translation of works by American scholars, such as the "New American History" edited by Eric Foner,²⁸ and "American-East Asian Relations: A Survey" edited by Ernest R. May.²⁹ The translation, introduction and publication of these works representing the latest academic orientation of American historiography at that time would boost the exchanges of Sino-American historiography. Through which, American historians of China could understand the trends in American history research, and their research got a chance to go global.

Qi Wenying's academic contribution is outstanding among scholars. In March 2010, on the 80th birthday of Qi Wenying, Professor Bruce Stave wrote an article "Thank you, Qi Wenying". Combining with his teaching experience at Peking University, Bruce examined Qi Wenying's achievement.

She is a colleague, friend, mentor and teacher who is respected in Peking University, Beijing and China. Professor Qi is a well-known scholar in the field of early American history. When the study of women's history was rarely involved in China, she foresaw the opportunity. She trained all kinds of outstanding students, and left an indelible mark on the history of China. ... She has a deep understanding of American society and Chinese society. She was my precious colleague. For any university, any department, she will be a precious person. Obviously, many of her achievements are the inheritance of her family. People can't help but stand in awe of such an outstanding person.³⁰

Edited by Du Juan

²⁸ Eric Foner, et al., *New American History*, translated by Qi Wenying et al. (埃里克·方纳等著, 齐文颖等译:《新美国历史》), Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press, 1992.

²⁹ Ernest May, James Thomson Jr., *American-East Asian Relations: A Survey*, translated by Qi Wenying and others (欧内斯特·梅、小詹姆斯·汤姆逊编, 齐文颖等译《美中关系史论》), Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1991.

³⁰ Man Yunlong, Chen Yong, and Yang Yusheng, *Investigation of American History (Continued)*, p. 6.

