

Envisioning Antiquity: Yi Bingshou and the Politics of Memory in the Qing Dynasty

By

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Abstract

Beginning in the seventeenth century, engraved texts on ancient monuments became a vital source for Confucian scholarship and artistic practice in China. Scholars used these inscriptions to establish meanings of Confucian classics, verify recorded historical events, and reconstruct lost sites of cultural legacy. This methodological trend, known as *kaozheng*, or Evidential Scholarship, stresses the importance of textual analysis to the attainment of authentic knowledge of the past. Intrigued by the materiality and archaic scripts of these engravings, painters and calligraphers of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) deployed prodigious efforts to interpret them in different media in pursuit of aesthetic originality. This stylistic revolution, later termed *beixue*, or the “stele tradition,” advocates the engraved calligraphy on early stelae as the ideal model.

My dissertation examines how Yi Bingshou (1754–1815), a key figure in the stele tradition, employed archaic styles of calligraphy to establish new aesthetic standards, commemorate historical figures, and negotiate meaningful social connections. Drawing on the social theories of memory, I have chosen three crucial episodes in Yi’s life and art to investigate the antiquarian culture of Qing China, involving critical reflections upon the genesis of the stele tradition, the re-invention of historical figures, and the modes of artistic patronage. The case of Yi offers a vantage point to reconsider the varied roles of artistic writings in the production of space, memory, and identity. It also helps illuminate the intellectual transformation toward “authenticity,” “materiality,” and “medium” behind the formation of new aesthetic judgements.

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Introduction

Beginning in the seventeenth century, engraved texts on ancient monuments, ranging from the Qin (221–206 BCE) to the Tang (618–907) dynasties, became a vital source for Confucian scholarship and artistic practice in China. Scholars used these inscriptions to establish meanings of Confucian classics, verify recorded historical events, and reconstruct lost sites of cultural legacy. This methodological trend, known as *kaozheng* 考證, or evidential scholarship, stresses the importance of textual analysis to the attainment of authentic knowledge of the past.¹

Intrigued by the materiality and archaic scripts of these engravings, painters and calligraphers of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) deployed prodigious effort to interpret them in different media in pursuit of aesthetic originality. This stylistic revolution, later termed *beixue* 碑學, or the “stele tradition,” advocates the engraved calligraphy on early steles as the ideal model.² Its profound impact continues to this day.

My dissertation examines how Yi Bingshou 伊秉綬 (1754–1815), one of the key artists in the stele tradition, employed archaic styles of calligraphy to establish new aesthetic standards, commemorate historical figures, and negotiate meaningful social connections. Born in Ninghua, Fujian Province, Yi held several important posts in Beijing, Huizhou, and Yangzhou. He was also widely celebrated by his contemporaries for his innovative appropriation of the clerical script on Han-dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) monuments. Drawing on the social theories of

¹ For discussions on *kaozheng*, see Benjamin A. Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1984); Benjamin A. Elman, *Classicism, Politics, and Kinship: the Chang-chou School of New Text Confucianism in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). For the employment of *kaozheng* in the reconstruction of cultural traditions, see Tobie Meyer-Fong, *Building Culture in Early Qing Yangzhou* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

² Amy McNair, “Engraved Calligraphy in China: Recension and Reception,” *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 77, No. 1 (Mar. 1995): 106–14; Qianshen Bai, *Fu Shan’s World: The Transformation of Chinese Calligraphy in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003); Aida Yuen Wong, *The Other Kang Youwei: Calligrapher, Art Activist, and Aesthetic Reformer in Modern China* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

memory construction, especially works of Eric Hobsbawm, Pierre Nora, Charles Steward, and Jan Assmann, I use critical concepts of “historicity,” “invented tradition,” and “sites of memory” to interpret Yi’s artistic career.³ This methodological framework is important and necessary because artistic traditions, whether an early painting, calligraphy, or stone engraving, gained unprecedented importance for the antiquarian circle of Yi. These people were not passive recipients of ancient artifacts but active agents who carefully selected historical objects to assert meanings for the present and future. I have chosen three crucial episodes in Yi’s life and art to investigate the antiquarian culture of Qing China, involving critical reflections upon the genesis of the stele tradition, the re-invention of historical figures, and the modes of artistic patronage. The case of Yi offers a vantage point to reconsider the varied roles of artistic writings in the production of space, memory, and identity. It also helps illuminate the intellectual transformation toward “authenticity,” “materiality,” and “medium” behind the formation of new aesthetic judgements.

Significance and Contribution

Scholarship on Yi Bingshou and calligraphers in the eighteenth century tends to celebrate artistic genius as the major manifestation of creativity.⁴ In China, for example, scholars praise Yi and other renowned calligraphers of the period as ingenious artists who transformed the styles of

³ Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Tradition,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1–14; Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (Spring, 1989): 7–24; Jan Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” *New German Critique*, No. 65, Cultural History/Cultural Studies (Spring-Summer, 1995): 125–133; Charles Steward, “Historicity and Anthropology,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 45 (2016): 79–94;

⁴ For some recent important works on Yi Bingshou, see Li Shuqing, “Yi Bingshou shufa zhi yanjiu 伊秉綬書法之研究” (master’s thesis, Zhongguo wenhua daxue, 1985); Pik Ki Ho (He Biqi), “Qingdai lishu yu Yi Bingshou 清代隸書與伊秉綬” (master’s thesis, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2001); Jin Dan, *Zhongguo shufajia quanji: Yi Bingshou Chen Hongshou 中國書法家全集: 伊秉綬 陳鴻壽* (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2006); Zhou Hanyun, “Yi Bingshou shufa yanjiu 伊秉綬書法研究” (PhD diss., China Academy of Art, 2014); Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu 伊秉綬年譜* (Shanghai: Dongfang chubanshe, 2017).

early stone inscriptions with unparalleled erudition and skill. In my dissertation, I critically consider the social factors in the creation of originality in Qing China. My research reconstructs the network of collecting stone inscriptions in Beijing, the patronage of frustrated scholar-officials, and the thriving art markets in Qing Guangzhou. It challenges the conventional view of Yi as a lofty intellectual deprived of social connections and monetary support and addresses the reciprocal networks at Yi's disposal. As my project shows, Yi achieved fame as an innovative calligrapher not only because of his talent but also due to his creative use of his social resources.

Scholars have long recognized the genesis of the stele tradition as a transformative juncture in the history of Chinese art.⁵ *Tiexue* 帖學, or the model-letters tradition, promoted the study of the elegant, gestured handwriting of Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361) and Wang Xianzhi 王獻之 (344–386) through printed compendia of their letters.⁶ This stylistic tradition rose in the tenth century and dominated the development of Chinese calligraphy for hundreds of years. In contrast, *beixue*, or the stele tradition, advocated the engraved calligraphy on ancient steles as ideal models and promoted the anomalous effects of stone carving as a desirable aesthetic. Such artistic transformation began in the seventeenth century and remains influential until today. Yi Bingshou, a key figure in the stele tradition, incorporated many Han-dynasty stone inscriptions in his personal style of writing. However, scholars have generally overlooked why Qing calligraphers were interested in promoting specific steles, and how these stone inscriptions came to embody different meanings in varied social and intellectual contexts. In my dissertation

⁵ See, for example, Qianshen Bai, *Fu Shan's World: The Transformation of Chinese Calligraphy in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003).

⁶ Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); McNair, "Engraved Calligraphy in China: Recension and Reception," 106-14; Amy McNair, "The Engraved Model-Letters Compendia of the Song Dynasty," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 114, No. 2 (Apr.-Jun. 1994): 209-25.

(especially Chapter Two), I ask how Yi and his circle of antiquarians appropriated epigraphic inscriptions to search for their own identities in the late eighteenth century and how their investigations about the materiality of stone monuments paved the road for the emergence of a new stylistic canon. The present project departs from the celebratory mode of analysis, bringing fresh insights of memory studies into the re-evaluation of the stele tradition.

Recent comparative studies of antiquarian practices have shown that antiquarianism is a worldwide phenomenon.⁷ The scholarship of *world antiquarianism* underscores the historiographical value of antiquarian inquiries as the precursor of modern disciplines such as history, art history and archaeology. It also suggests the significance of material remains to the advancement of historical research. My project contributes to this discourse by examining Yi Bingshou and the group of cultural elites associated with him, who fashioned artistic objects of the past into aesthetic authorities.

The history of collecting Chinese art is an important field of inquiry which involves interdisciplinary perspectives from art history, museology, and cultural studies. As noted by Vimalin Rujivacharakul, collecting is a significant aspect of human culture because material objects always function to connect people and generate meanings for beholders.⁸ The issue of collecting is also an integral part of Qing antiquarianism not only because antiquarians of this period happened to be avid collectors but also because meaningful relationships and artistic discourses took shape through these acquisition behaviors. A variety of objects that were once owned by the group of Yi's friends and associates later entered museum collections in the United

⁷ See, for example, Alain Schnapp, ed., *World Antiquarianism: Comparative Perspectives* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2013); Peter N. Miller and François Louis, eds., *Antiquarianism and Intellectual Life in Europe and China, 1500-1800* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011).

⁸ Vimalin Rujivacharakul, ed., *Collecting China: The World, China, and a History of Collecting* (Newark Del.: University of Delaware Press, 2011).

States. My project, especially Chapter Five, offers insight into the provenance of these objects and shed light on their social trajectories in the twentieth century.

Dissertation Structure

Chapter One “Seeing Yi Bingshou” presents an artist biography of Yi in the cultural milieu under the reigns of Qianlong (r. 1735–1796) and Jiaqing (r. 1796–1820) Emperors. I focus on the interactions between Yi and his immediate socio-political environment. Born in Ninghua, Fujian Province, Yi grew up in a prominent gentry family and was mentored by noted scholar-officials of the eighteenth century. He had held several important posts in Beijing, Huizhou, and Yangzhou, and developed an expansive network with court officials, regional scholars, and merchant families. During his years in Beijing, Yi was deeply involved with the thriving antiquarian community led by Weng Fanggang 翁方綱 (1733–1818) and came to be recognized for his bold and vigorous interpretation of the Han-dynasty clerical script. Government corruption and local uprisings in the late eighteenth century had a profound impact on Yi’s career in Huizhou. He lost his position as the Prefect of Huizhou due to the Boluo Rebellion and began to seek political patronage from maritime merchants in Guangzhou. During his final appointment as the Prefect of Yangzhou, Yi collaborated with the influential scholar-official Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849) on restoring important cultural sites in the region.

Chapter Two “Problems of the *Zhang Qian Stele*” investigates Yi’s calligraphic copies of a controversial inscription from the second century. A reassessment of the reception of the *Zhang Qian Stele* reveals how Yi and his cohort formulated a new conception of historicity in the eighteenth century. Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682) first identified the inscription as conflicting with Han-dynasty orthography, and thus believed the work was forged during its excavation in the late sixteenth century. By reading the varied responses to Gu’s argument, I demonstrate how

the leading *kaozheng* scholars distinguished the roles of carver, transcriber, and calligrapher in the production of engraved texts. In addition, they appropriated the origin myth of the clerical script to establish the *Zhang Qian Stele* as an exemplary historical style, and used the eleventh-century idea *zhihou* 質厚, or “substantial and blunt,” to articulate the aesthetic experience of the inscription as a genuine expression of oneself. I argue that Yi’s repeated transcriptions of this stele not only aestheticized the “mistakes” in this inscription as an emblem of historical materiality but also celebrated its style as his ancestral heritage.

The following two chapters delve into the archaeology of Su Shi (1037–1101) in Huizhou, Guangdong Province. After becoming the region’s prefect, Yi relied on a group of poems, essays, and inscriptions, written during Su’s banishment to Huizhou in the eleventh century, to excavate and restore sites related to this renowned cultural paragon. These two vignettes about the re-invention of a historical figure exemplify how Yi manipulated material objects to narrate his contemporary concerns. Chapter Three “A Story of the Inkstone” examines an alleged Song-dynasty (960–1279) inkstone, miraculously unearthed during the renovation of Su’s residence at the White Crane Peak in Huizhou in 1800. I offer a contextual reading of this enigmatic object in the regional gazetteer, the empire-wide ceremony on Su’s birthday, and the imperial production of “Su Shi” artifacts. I argue that Yi harnessed the inkstone as a multi-sensorial relic to announce moral rectitude and unadorned aesthetic to the local audience. Chapter Four “The Tomb of Wang Zhaoyun” analyzes Yi’s reconstruction of Zhaoyun’s (1062–1096) epitaph near the West Lake of Huizhou. A beloved concubine of Su, Zhaoyun followed her husband to the south and died during the exile. Not only did Su write about her at length, but she was also depicted by “remnant subjects (*yimin* 遺民)” from the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), such as Bada Shanren (1626–1705) and Shitao (1642–1707). Through a detailed comparison of these varied

representations, I showcase how Zhaoyun was imagined by male scholars as a loyal companion, a talented woman, and a wandering ghost. Yi's re-engraving of her tomb epitaph speaks about his appropriation of female voice to reinforce gender norms, and the contemporary zeal for fanciful accounts of unseen spirits.

The final chapter "Remembering the Ye Family" discusses three types of works Yi dedicated to the Ye family, a distinguished maritime merchant clan of Qing Guangzhou, with an emphasis on the contexts in which they were created, used, displayed, and exchanged. The first category, "architectural calligraphy," refers to artistic writings on the media of couplet and placard, which were designed to embellish and identify a specific architectural space. I argue that these graphic writings functioned as "poetic images" to generate a fictionalized reality eliciting imaginative responses from occupants of the space. The second category, "occasional gift," tackles his innovative transcriptions of early calligraphy and stone inscriptions for different social events. I showcase how Yi encoded his emotions, especially gratitude and sympathy, with his selection of stylistic models. The last genre, "painting colophons," explores the reception of Chinese paintings in the nineteenth century. These inscribed texts uncover the desire of these educated elites to invent an artistic tradition of Guangdong and project their contemporary experience into the historical images. This large body of calligraphic pieces reveal this merchant family as loyal friends and devoted supporters of Canton scholars and artists.

Chapter One: Seeing Yi Bingshou

Yi Bingshou (1754–1815) is most remembered today as a dedicated government official and an ingenious calligrapher during the reigns of the Qianlong (r. 1735–1796) and Jiaqing (r. 1796–1820) Emperors. He held important posts in several crucial regions across the Qing empire, including the capital city Beijing, Huizhou in Guangdong Province, and Yangzhou in Jiangsu Province. He belonged to a generation of scholars who practiced evidential scholarship (*kaozheng* 考證), a methodology that advocates the use of rigorous textual analysis to reconstruct knowledge about the past.⁹ These evidential scholars promoted early epigraphical materials (i.e., engraved texts on steles, bronze vessels, ceramic tiles, and coins) as original, untouched, and authentic styles from historical times.¹⁰ Yi was a key figure in the stylistic transformation of calligraphy spurred by the burgeoning of evidential scholarship. His boldly creative interpretation based on the calligraphy of Han-dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE) steles was widely praised by his contemporaries. Yi was posthumously promoted by Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927), a major theorist of Chinese calligraphy in the late nineteenth century, as one of the “founders” of “stele-school calligraphy” in China.¹¹

This chapter presents an artist biography of Yi that will serve as a matrix of my analyses in the following chapters on how Yi and his close associates promoted new stylistic models,

⁹ For discussions on *kaozheng*, see Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China*; Elman, *Classicism, Politics, and Kinship: the Chang-chou School of New Text Confucianism in Late Imperial China*. For the employment of *kaozheng* in the reconstruction of cultural traditions, see Meyer-Fong, *Building Culture in Early Qing Yangzhou*.

¹⁰ For the emergence of epigraphical calligraphy, see McNair, “Engraved Calligraphy in China: Recension and Reception,” 106-14; Bai, *Fu Shan’s World: The Transformation of Chinese Calligraphy in the Seventeenth Century*.

¹¹ Zhu Jia, ed., *Guang Yizhou shuangji shuzheng* 廣藝舟雙楫疏證 (Kowloon: Zhonghua shuju, 1979). For English discussions on Kang Youwei and his theories, see Yuli Wang, trans., *The Mirror of Writing: Kang Youwei’s Curriculum for Chinese Calligraphy Art* (Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2017); Wong, *The Other Kang Youwei: Calligrapher, Art Activist, and Aesthetic Reformer in Modern China*.

commemorated historical figures, and negotiated social relationships. My narration of Yi's life thus focuses on his participation in the antiquarian culture of eighteenth-century China. The life of Yi has been well-documented through a large body of texts and objects related to him. The "Epitaph for the Prefect of Yangzhou Yi Bingshou," written by the poet and scholar Zhao Huaiyu 趙懷玉 (1747–1823), offers an immediate profile of Yi from the perspective of his close friend.¹² There are also two traditional biographies of this man, compiled slightly later than his lifetime, in the dynastic histories of the Qing. He is a featured cultural luminary in the section "Literary Garden (*wenyuan* 文苑)" in the *Biographies of the Qing Dynasty* (*Qing shi liezhuan* 清史列傳).¹³ His other biography is listed in the section "Principled Officials (*xunli* 循吏)" in the *Draft History of the Qing Dynasty* (*Qing shi gao* 清史稿).¹⁴ Consistent with one another, these three major texts portray Yi as a compassionate and upright official who was good at poetry and calligraphy. Modern scholars, including Li Shuqing, Ma Guoquan, Zhou Hanyun, and Tan Pingguo, have reconstructed several detailed chronicles of this renowned calligrapher, highlighting both his life trajectory and social network.¹⁵ Using these early sources and recent scholarship, I sketch an account of Yi's life that emphasizes his interactions with leading scholar-officials, influential tastemakers, resourceful collectors, and wealthy patrons. Through a biography of this kind, I aim to outline Yi's cultural endeavors in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

¹² Zhao Huaiyu, "Yangzhou zhifu Yi jun Bingshou mubiao 揚州知府伊君秉綬墓表," in *Bei zhuan ji* 碑傳集, by Qian Yiji (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1993), 3155-7.

¹³ Wang Zhonghan, ed., *Qing shi liezhuan* 清史列傳 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 5956-7.

¹⁴ Zhao Erxun, et al., *Qing shi gao* 清史稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 485:13407-8.

¹⁵ Li Shuqing, "Yi Bingshou shufa zhi yanjiu 伊秉綬書法之研究" (master's thesis, Zhongguo wenhua daxue, 1985); Ma Guoquan, "Yi Moqing xiansheng nianbiao 伊墨卿先生年表," *Shupu* 書譜, vol. 51, No.2 (1983): 38-52; Zhou Hanyun, "Yi Bingshou shufa yanjiu 伊秉綬書法研究" (PhD diss., China Academy of Art, 2014); Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu* 伊秉綬年譜 (Shanghai: Dongfang chubanshe, 2017).

This chapter begins by introducing Yi's family background of Yi, especially the origin of the Yi family and the career of Yi's father. Each of the following three sections delineates Yi's major activities in Beijing, Huizhou, and Yangzhou, as well as his exchanges with prominent scholar-officials in these cities.

1.1 Family Background

Born in Ninghua, Fujian Province, Yi Bingshou grew up in a prominent gentry family that had a distinguished genealogy. His ancestors were said to have migrated from Henan to Fujian in the late Tang Dynasty (618–907).¹⁶ In particular, Yi Bingshou recognized Yi Yin 伊尹 (trad. c. 1649–1549 BCE), a legendary minister of the Shang Dynasty (c. 1600–1046 BCE), as his ancient ancestor.¹⁷ Their shared surname is derived from the Yi River (Yishui 伊水) in Henan because the Yi clan is believed to have originally settled along this famed waterway. Such family history had a deep impact on the artistic practice of Yi Bingshou. The artist once indicated that he chose the *Heng Fang Stele* 衡方碑 as a stylistic model because he and the protagonist of this stele were of the same origin. Dated to 168, the *Heng Fang Stele* commemorates an otherwise unknown military official named Heng Fang (106–168) of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220).¹⁸ The inscription tells that Heng Fang identified Yi Yin, who was also known as “E Heng 阿衡” during the Shang, as the beginning of his family tree.¹⁹ The style of the *Heng Fang Stele* thus became a channel through which Yi Bingshou could place himself in a venerable genealogy of

¹⁶ Zhao Huaiyu, “Yangzhou zhifu Yi jun Bingshou mubiao,” 3155.

¹⁷ Yi talked about this ancestral lineage and his stylistic choice in a poem, see Yi Bingshou, “Ti Heng Fang bei yin tong Tanxi xiansheng ji Gui Weigu daling 題衡方碑陰同覃溪先生寄桂未谷大令,” in *Liuchun caotang shichao* 留春草堂詩鈔 (Guangzhou: n.p., 1815), 4:7a-b.

¹⁸ For the text of the *Heng Fang Stele*, see Gao Wen, *Hanbei jishi* 漢碑集釋 (Kaifeng: Henan daxue chubanshe, 1997), 307-23.

¹⁹ “E heng,” also known as *baoheng* 保衡, was a synonym for the official title of Yi Yin as the minister of the Shang Dynasty, see <https://www.zdic.net/hans/%E9%98%BF%E8%A1%A1> (accessed 04/06/2022).

historical figures. Yi Bingshou also had a personal seal, reading “a Seedling of E Heng (*E Heng zhi miao* 阿衡之苗, Figure 1.1).”²⁰ A detailed discussion about the creation of this “ancestral style” can be found in Chapter Two.

Yi Chaodong 伊朝棟 (1729–1807), the father of Yi Bingshou, was an eminent court official.²¹ In his youth, Yi Chaodong began to gain recognition from important scholars in Fujian. He studied with Lei Hong 雷鉉 (1696–1760), an esteemed scholar-official from Ninghua, and was highly regarded by Cai Shiyuan 蔡世遠 (1682–1733), a notable court academician from Zhangpu in Fujian. Yi Chaodong received his *jinshi* degree, the highest degree in the civil service examination, in 1769 at the age of forty. Such achievement was not easy because the annual quota of degree holders was limited, and the competition was fierce. Benjamin Elman has noted that “the odds for success in all stages of the selection process were perhaps only slightly better than the 1 in 6,000” during the Qing.²² After gaining the degree, Yi Chaodong was appointed by the Qianlong Emperor to several significant positions. He first served at the Board of Justice (Xingbu 刑部) for eighteen years. Later Yi Chaodong was promoted to serve as Vice Minister at the Court of Judicial Review (Dalisi shaoqing 大理寺少卿) and subsequently as the Chief Minister at the Court of Imperial Entertainments (Guanglusi

²⁰ Lian Xinfu, ed., *Yi Bingshou fashu daguan* 伊秉綬法書大觀 (Fuzhou: Haichao sheying yishu chubanshe, 2009), 254. This seal is also impressed on a collaborative work by Yi and his colleagues (a set of four calligraphic hanging scrolls) at Shanghai Museum, see the entry Hu 滬 1-4258 in Zhongguo gudai shuhua jianding zu, ed., *Zhongguo gudai shuhua tumu* 中國古代書畫圖目 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1986), 5:354. I would like to thank Dr. Yan Xiaojun at Shanghai Museum for allowing me to examine this work in person, as well as providing me with high-resolution reproductions of this work.

²¹ For an account of Yi Chaodong’s life, see Qin Ying, “Guanglusi qing Yi jun Chaodong jiazhuan 光祿寺卿伊君朝棟家傳,” in *Bei zhuan ji*, 1172-3.

²² Benjamin A. Elman, “the Social Roles of Literati in Early to Mid-Ch’ing,” in *The Cambridge History of China: The Ch’ing Dynasty to 1800*, edited by Willard J. Peterson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 384.

qing 光祿寺卿).²³ He also served as an editor for the imperial encyclopedia project *Complete Library of the Four Treasuries* (*Siku Quanshu* 四庫全書).²⁴ In 1796, Yi Chaodong was invited to the Banquet of a Thousand Elders (Qiansouyan 千叟宴) in the Forbidden City, which celebrated the longevity of the Qianlong Emperor. He was awarded a set of imperial gifts, including a precious inkstone. Thereafter Yi Chaodong named his personal study the “Studio of the Bestowed Inkstone (Ciyán zhāi 賜硯齋)” to commemorate this distinct honor.²⁵ Yi Bingshou had accompanied his father to the imperial banquet and witnessed this magnificent court ceremony.

The remarkable career of Yi Chaodong paved the way for Yi Bingshou to enter the circle of educated elites in Fujian. As a young man, Yi Bingshou studied with Yin Chengfang 陰承方 (1715–1790), an eminent educator in Ninghua.²⁶ He also developed close friendships with emerging talents in the region including Zhang Tengjiao 張騰蛟 (1759–1795) and Wu Xianxiang 吳賢湘 (1748–1828). The early social engagement between Yi Bingshou and his peers in Fujian is perhaps best represented through the handscroll *Autumn Willows* (*Qiuliutu* 秋柳圖, Figure 1.2) by Huang Shen 黃慎 (1687–1772).²⁷ A man from Ninghua, Huang Shen mainly established his reputation as an eccentric artist in Yangzhou during the eighteenth century. In 1782, Yi Bingshou and four local friends – Wu Xianxiang, Yin Donglin 陰東林 (c.

²³ Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 74-5.

²⁴ Yi Chaodong had several poems about his participation in the editorial work of *Siku quanshu*, see Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 42-3.

²⁵ Wu Xiqi 吳錫麒 (1749–1818) had written an essay, titled “*Ciyán jì* 賜硯記,” to commemorate this rare honor for Yi Chaodong, see Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 110-1.

²⁶ Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 23.

²⁷ This painting is now in the collection of the Tokyo National Museum of Art, see <https://webarchives.tnm.jp/imgsearch/show/C0090808> (accessed 04/06/2022).

late eighteenth century), Yin Anlü 陰安履 (c. late eighteenth century), and Xie Zun 謝尊 (c. 1730–1782) – viewed the image together and left a series of poetic inscriptions on the scroll.²⁸ Yi's colophon in the small standard script (*xiaokai* 小楷), to the best of my knowledge, is likely to be his earliest surviving calligraphic work.

1.2 Early Career in Beijing, 1784–1799

The years in Beijing were defining for Yi Bingshou. He was mentored by several prominent senior scholar-officials at the capital and came to be recognized for his calligraphy. In 1784, Yi arrived in Beijing to prepare for the civil service examination and became acquainted with important court academicians. He is said to have studied calligraphy with the Grand Secretary Liu Yong 刘墉 (1720–1805), whose handwriting reinvigorated the classical styles of Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361) and Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101).²⁹ Between 1785 and 1787, Yi was on the staff of Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724–1805), one of the chief editors for *Siku Quanshu*, and he served as an instructor to Ji's grandchildren.³⁰ Ji was impressed by Yi's ability to produce archaic styles of calligraphy. It is recorded that Ji often commissioned Yi to write court memorials on his behalf because the Qianlong Emperor was particularly fond of Yi's clerical-script calligraphy.³¹ Many of the inscriptions on Ji's treasured inkstones were also carved from Yi's calligraphy. This collection of inscribed objects was later published as the *Inkstone Manual of the Cottage of Close Scrutiny* (*Yuewei caotang yanpu* 閱微草堂硯譜).³²

²⁸ Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 29. Xie Zun was a painter in Fujian.

²⁹ This story that Yi obtained the calligraphic teaching of Liu Yong was told by Bao Shichen (1775–1855), see Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 33. Liu Yong is known to have creatively re-interpreted many of Su Shi's calligraphic works. One good example is the hanging scroll at the Freer Gallery of Art (accession number: F1982.6), see <https://asia.si.edu/object/F1982.6/> (accessed 04/06/2022).

³⁰ Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 32.

³¹ Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 58.

³² Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 121. For reproductions of these inkstones and their inscriptions, see Fu

Yi prospered as a government official in Beijing. After gaining his *jinshi* degree in 1789, Yi, like his father, began his career at the Board of Justice and was widely recognized for being ‘impartial and empathetic.’³³ In 1798, he was awarded the top distinction during the annual review of capital officials.³⁴ Yi also developed meaningful friendships with colleagues at this position. The seal-script calligrapher Sun Xingyan 孫星衍 (1753–1818), for example, was among the people at the Board of Justice who shared Yi’s interest in early stone inscriptions.

Yi was deeply involved with the thriving antiquarian culture at the Qing capital. The reputation of the Yi Family as an emerging clan of notable capital officials made Yi a welcomed member to varied cultural circles in Beijing. He was especially close with leading scholars of ancient Chinese writings, including Weng Fanggang 翁方綱 (1733–1818), Huang Yi 黃易 (1744–1801), and Gui Fu 桂馥 (1736–1805). A brilliant court academician and bibliophile, Weng was an influential tastemaker who had numerous students across the Qing empire because of his position as education commissioner in Guangdong, Jiangxi, and Shandong.³⁵ This man authored several important treatises on early stone engravings, including the *Records of Stone Inscriptions in Eastern Guangdong* and the *Records of Stone Inscriptions of the Two Han Dynasties*.³⁶ Huang Yi was known for his extensive research on historical monuments in Henan

Xuancong, Zhang Chuqiao, Zhang Guangyan, and Wang Duo, eds., *Ji Xiaolan pidian Song shi fu Yuewei caotang yanpu* 紀曉嵐批點宋詩附閱微草堂硯譜 (Beijing: Xiandai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2009), 261-344.

³³ Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 73.

³⁴ Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 147.

³⁵ For the career of Weng, see Zhao Erxun, et al., *Qing shi gao*, 485:13394-5; Shen Jin, *Weng Fanggang nianpu* 翁方綱年譜 (Taipei: Zhongyanyuan wenzhesuo, 2002).

³⁶ Weng Fanggang, *Yuedong jinshi lue* 粵東金石略, in *Shike shiliao xinbian* 石刻史料新編 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chubanshe, 1982); Weng Fanggang, *Liang Han jinshi ji* 兩漢金石記, in *Lidai beizhi congshu* 歷代碑誌叢書 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1998).

and Shandong.³⁷ His rich experience of examining stone monuments in situ was valued by this group of epigraphic scholars. Huang also provided them with access to ink rubbings of early stone monuments. The distinguished paleographer Gui Fu once invited Yi to collaborate on the seal-script dictionary *Mouzhuan fenyun* 繆篆分韻.³⁸ Yi was responsible for the transcription of ancient characters in this publication. The passion for early epigraphical materials was perceived as a fashionable pastime among educated elites in the eighteenth century.³⁹ Such antiquarian community offered Yi an opportunity to establish himself as a calligrapher with great erudition in ancient writings.

This community of antiquarians were equally interested in “spiritual communion (*shenhui* 神會)” with cultural paragons in Chinese history.⁴⁰ In the second half of the eighteenth century,

³⁷ For the antiquarian endeavor of Huang Yi, see Michael J. Hatch, “Outline, Brushwork, and the Epigraphic Aesthetic in Huang Yi’s Engraved Texts of the Lesser Penglai Pavilion (1800),” *Archives of Asian Art*, 70.1 (April 2020): 23-49; Lillian Lan-ying Tseng, “Retrieving the Past, Inventing the Memorable: Huang Yi’s Visit to the Song-Luo monuments”, in *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Margaret Olin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 37-58; Lillian Lan-ying Tseng, “Mediums and Messages: The Wu Family Shrines and Cultural Production in Qing China”, in *Rethinking Recarving: Ideas, Practices, and Problems of the “Wu Family Shrines” and Han China*, ed. Cary Y. Liu (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 260-8; Qianshen Bai, “The Intellectual Legacy of Huang Yi and His Friends: Reflections on Some Issues Raised by *Recarving China’s Past*,” in *Rethinking Recarving*, 286-37; Qin Ming, “Huang Yi fangbeitu qianzhuan: jianlun Huang Yi fangbei situ de neizaiguanxi ji zhengtijiegou 黃易訪碑圖前傳：兼論黃易訪碑四圖的內在關係及整體結構,” *Zhongguo meishu* 中國美術, no. 5 (2019):82-9; Xue Longchun, *Guhuan: Huang Yi yu qianjia jinshi shishang* 古歡：黃易與乾嘉金石時尚 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2019); Xue Longchun, “Huang Yi jinshi shoucang zhong de difangguan 黃易金石收藏中的地方官,” *Taida Journal of Art History*, 46 (2019): 117-173; Lu Hui-wen, “Hanbei tuhua chu wenzhang: cong Jining zhouxue de hanbei tan shiba shiji houqi de fangbei huodong 漢碑圖畫出文章：從濟寧州學的漢碑談十八世紀後期的訪碑活動,” *Taida Journal of Art History*, 26 (2009): 37-92; Gugong bowuyuan, ed., *Penglai suyue: Gugong cang Huang Yi Han Wei beike teji* 蓬萊宿約：故宮藏黃易漢魏碑刻特集 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2010); Huang Yi, *Xiaopenglai ge jinshi wenzi* 小蓬萊閣金石文字, in *Shike shiliao xinbian disan ji* 石刻史料新編第三輯 (Taipei: Xin wenfeng chuban gongsi, 1986), 1: 529-650; Gugong bowuyuan, ed., *Gugong cang Huang Yi chidu yanjiu: shouji* 故宮藏黃易尺牘研究：手跡 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2014); Gugong bowuyuan, ed., *Gugong cang Huang Yi chidu yanjiu: kaoshi* 故宮藏黃易尺牘研究：考釋 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2015).

³⁸ Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 115-6. Gui Fu, *Mouzhuan fenyun* 繆篆分韻 (n.p.: 1796), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/keio.10811425274> (accessed 04/06/2022).

³⁹ Xue Longchun, *Guhuan*, 169-212; Shana Brown, *Pastimes: From Art and Antiquarianism to Modern Chinese Historiography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2011).

⁴⁰ The term “spiritual communion” is used by Patricia Berger and Alfreda Murck in their analyses on the veneration of past by Chinese literati, see Patricia Berger, *Empire of Emptiness: Buddhist Art and Political Authority in Qing*

scholars in Beijing began to commemorate the birthdays of historic personalities. A huge admirer of the Song (960–1276) polymath Su Shi, Weng Fanggang established a tradition known as *Shou Su hui* 壽蘇會, or the Celebration of Su Shi's Birthday.⁴¹ A detailed description and analysis of this creative reception of Su Shi can be found in Chapters Three and Four. The noted poet Fashishan 法式善 (1753–1813), who was also a Mongol bannerman, brought his friends to celebrate the birthday of Li Dongyang 李東陽 (1447–1516).⁴² Fashishan owned the former residence of Li Dongyang in Beijing and used the place for the ceremony. An upright official of his day, Li Dongyang was an acclaimed poet and calligrapher of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). Participants of these birthday celebrations often composed rhymed verses to early poems by these figures, and inspected artifacts, such as portraits and calligraphic works, related to these cultured men. Yi was a frequent invitee to both social events in Beijing and became obsessed with these renowned historical literati. His running-script calligraphy resembles the style of Li Dongyang. During his post in Huizhou, Yi also restored several ruined sites related to Su Shi. These repeated and ritualized transhistorical appropriations made Su Shi and Li Dongyang into symbols of value through which Yi and other likeminded scholars could express their political beliefs, cultural preferences, and social status. These birthday celebrations also generated a sense of belonging for educated elites who self-identified as students and followers of these cultural figures.

China (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 126; Alfreda Murck, "Spiritual Communion: The Cult of Su Shi," in *Eccentric Visions: The Worlds of Luo Ping*, edited by Kim Karlsson, Alfreda Murck, and Michele Matteini (Zürich: Museum Reitberg Zürich, 2009), 80-7.

⁴¹ Michele Matteini, "The Aesthetics of Scholarship: Weng Fanggang and the Cult of Su Shi in Late-Eighteenth-Century Beijing," *Archives of Asian Art* 69.1 (April 2019): 103-120; Murck, "Spiritual Communion: The Cult of Su Shi," 80-7.

⁴² Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 161.

The cosmopolitan environment of Beijing also allowed Yi to interact with Korean scholars. He developed friendships with several prominent envoys from Chosŏn (1392–1897) Korea. In 1791, Yi wrote a farewell poem to Pak Chega 朴齊家 (1750–1815), a distinguished scholar and poet of the late Chosŏn, for his journey back to Korea.⁴³ The following year, when Kim Ido 金履度 (1750–1813) prepared to return to Korea, Yi was asked to inscribe a painting which Zhang Daowo 張道渥 (1757–1829) produced for Kim.⁴⁴ The exchange between Qing scholars and Chosŏn envoys contributed to the emergence of transnational intellectual trends and artistic styles. Michele Matteini has discussed how Chosŏn scholars took portraits of Su Shi to Korea and continued the celebration of Su Shi’s Birthday with local educated elites.⁴⁵ Maya Stiller has pointed out that the styles of some archaic stone carvings at Kŭmgangsan were inspired by contemporaneous Chinese calligraphers, such as Yi Bingshou, Huang Yi, and Sun Xingyan.⁴⁶ Such trans-regional movement of material objects and aesthetic ideas was integral to the world Yi lived in.

1.3 Life in Huizhou, 1799–1803

In 1799, Yi was promoted to serve as Prefect of Huizhou in Guangdong Province. Because Su Shi lived in Huizhou from 1094 to 1097 during his Lingnan exile, the restoration of cultural ruins related to the Song paragon became a vital aspect of Yi’s administration of the region.⁴⁷ In 1800,

⁴³ Yi Bingshou, “Song Gaoli Piao Jianshu Qijia guiguo 送高麗朴檢書齊家歸國,” in *Liuchun caotang shichao*, 2:3a.

⁴⁴ Yi Bingshou, “Ti Zhang Shuiwu cishi Daowo huace song Gaoli Jin Lüdu guiguo 題張水屋刺史道渥畫冊送高麗金履度歸國,” in *Liuchun caotang shichao*, 2:6b.

⁴⁵ Matteini, “The Aesthetics of Scholarship,” 115.

⁴⁶ Maya K. H. Stiller, *Carving Status at Kŭmgangsan: Elite Graffiti in Premodern Korea* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2021), 82-3.

⁴⁷ For Su Shi’s Huizhou exile, see Ronald Egan, *Word, Image and Deed in the Life of Su Shi* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 86-107, 213-5.

Yi initiated the renovation of the old residence of Su Shi at the White Crane Peak (*Baihefeng* 白鶴峰). At the site, he miraculously unearthed an inkstone that bears Su Shi's signature and seal. This enigmatic object and its multilayered meanings are examined in detail in Chapter Three. The following year, Yi re-engraved two stone plaques – “Virtue-Has-Neighbors Hall” (*De you ling tang* 德有鄰堂) and “No-Deviant-Thoughts Studio” (*Si wu xie zhai* 思無邪齋), a name which Su Shi chose for his residence in Huizhou.⁴⁸ Yi also transcribed Su Shi's *Inscription for the No-Deviant-Thoughts Studio* (*Si wu xie zhai ming* 思無邪齋銘), in which Su explained his choice of the tile for his personal study, and had the inscription engraved in stone.⁴⁹ At Mount Gu (Gushan 孤山) near Huizhou's Feng Lake 豐湖, Yi rebuilt the tomb of Wang Zhaoyun 王朝雲 (1062–1096), Su Shi's beloved concubine. The prefect transcribed Su's *Epitaph for Zhaoyun*, originally upon the death of Zhaoyun in 1096, and had it erected next to the tomb.⁵⁰ In Chapter Four, I examine this reconstruction of Zhaoyun's Tomb with an emphasis on how male scholars appropriated her cultural image during the Qing dynasty. These monuments related to Su Shi also reached audiences beyond Huizhou. Yi reported his cultural restorations to his friends, especially Weng Fanggang in Beijing, through personal letters and ink rubbings of these re-engraved stone inscriptions.⁵¹

⁴⁸ For an interesting discussion on these re-engravings, see <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Fju0Hr3G0N4gCmTEipafsA> (accessed 04/06/2022).

⁴⁹ Su Shi, “Siwuxie zhai ming bingxu 思無邪齋銘並序,” in *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Wenji* 蘇軾全集校註: 文集, edited by Zhang Zhilie, Ma Defu, and Zhou Yukai (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 2010), 3:2186-9.

⁵⁰ Su Shi, “Zhaoyun muzhiming 朝雲墓志銘,” in *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Wenji*, 3:1630.

⁵¹ Yi was known to have sent ink rubbings of the inkstone he discovered at the White Crane Peak to Weng Fanggang, see Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 201.

Another significant achievement of his career in Huizhou was the construction of Feng Lake Academy (Fenghu shuyuan 豐湖書院).⁵² Educated elites in and around Huizhou had long expressed the need to rebuild the old regional school but the plan had always been delayed due to the high expense. When Yi arrived as the new prefect, he responded to the request by setting up a plan to establish a new Confucian academy near Feng Lake in Huizhou. The construction began in the summer of 1800 and was completed in the winter of 1801. The total cost was five-thousand taels of silver, which roughly equal to one hundred and sixty thousand US dollars today. Yi wrote and dedicated the inscription “Sincere and Venerable (*dunzhong* 敦重),” for the school, which aimed to stress the Confucian value in honest and respectful behaviors. This calligraphic work was originally hung at the central hall of Feng Lake Academy. A modern re-engraving of the inscription can be seen at the site today. Yi invited Song Xiang 宋湘 (1756–1826), a prominent scholar from Jiaying, in Guangdong, to head the school as the primary instructor. In the nineteenth century, Fenghu Academy produced many significant scholars and was deemed one of the largest educational institutes in Guangdong.

The post in Huizhou connected Yi Bingshou to wealthy maritime merchants in nearby Guangzhou.⁵³ The city had produced many important merchant families because Guangzhou was designated by the Qing government as the only trading port with foreigners. Yi was especially close to the Ye Family. This clan gained prominence in the second half of the eighteenth century through their lucrative business with noted companies from Europe and America. The Ye Family was also an important patron of the arts in the Cantonese region. Ye Menglong (1775–1832), for

⁵² Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 194, 210-1.

⁵³ For a recent discussion on the relationship between Yi and the Ye Family, see He Biqu, “Sushi dikun: Yi Bingshou yu Ye Menglong jiazu de qingyi 夙世弟昆：伊秉綬與葉夢龍家族的情誼,” *Zhongguo shufa* 中國書法, 376, No. 6 (2020): 84-9.

example, assembled an impressive collection of Chinese paintings and sponsored the production of several calligraphic compendia (*fatie* 法帖).⁵⁴ They also offered financial support to distinguished scholars and artists in the region. Yi was a valued guest to literary gatherings at the estate of the Ye Family. He also dedicated many calligraphic works to different members of the family. In Chapter Five, I examine these dedicatory works in the context of social exchange between Yi and the Ye Family.

The social upheaval and bureaucratic corruption of the early nineteenth century brought an abrupt end to his position as the Prefect of Huizhou.⁵⁵ In the seventh month of 1802, a felon in Boluo county of Huizhou escaped from jail. The Jiaqing Emperor suspended the positions of Yi, as well as several other involved officials in Guangzhou, because the incident was considered negligence in the supervision of local affairs. The following month, an uprising started in Boluo and quickly spread across eastern Guangdong. Yi quickly advised Gioro Jiqing 覺羅吉慶 (1753–1802), the Governor-general of Guangdong and Guangxi, to contain the riot with proper military strategies. However, Gioro Jiqing not only dismissed Yi's suggestion but also blamed Yi for the escalation of local rebellion. Yi was sent to jail in Guangzhou and set to be banished to the military base in Yili, in distant Xinjiang Province. After the Boluo rebellion was pacified, the Jiaqing Emperor ordered the case to be thoroughly investigated. Not long after he was suspended from his position, Gioro Jiqing committed suicide. In addition, educated elites in Huizhou reported to the imperial investigator how the insightful suggestions of Yi had been ignored by Jiqing. In 1803, the emperor issued an edict to release Yi from the prison and revoke his

⁵⁴ For the calligraphic compendia that Ye Menglong sponsored, see “Youshizhai fatie sijuan 友石齋法帖四卷,” and “Fengmanlou jitie liujuan 風滿樓集帖六卷,” and “Zhenyinyuan fatie shijuan 貞隱園法帖十卷” in Rong Geng, *Cong tie mu* 叢帖目 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 2:606-14; 4:1523-8.

⁵⁵ My following reconstruction of the event is built upon the rigorous research of Tan Pingguo, see Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 217-226, 233-4.

upcoming banishment. Yi stayed in Guangzhou for a while before he returned to his home in Fujian.

1.4 Life in Yangzhou, 1805–1807

The final position Yi held was Prefect of Yangzhou.⁵⁶ In the Qing dynasty, officials who had been punished and dismissed from their posts could submit a significant amount of cash to be re-considered as candidates for government employment. Such practice is known as *juanfu* 捐復, literally “to donate and recover.”⁵⁷ The epitaph of Yi says that some of his close associates (unspecified) assisted him with the required donation to “recover” his imperial appointment.⁵⁸ I surmise that the Ye Family of Guangzhou was among the people who offered financial support. Feng Minchang 馮敏昌 (1741–1806), one of their common friends, noted that if not for thousands of taels of gold from the Ye Family, Yi would not be able to walk around free.⁵⁹ In 1805, with the recommendation of Tiebao 鐵保 (1752–1824), then the Governor General of Jiangnan and Jiangxi, and Wang Zhiyi 汪志伊 (1743–1818), then the Governor of Jiangsu, Yi was appointed to serve as the Prefect of Yangzhou.⁶⁰ At the new post, Yi devoted himself to flood control in the lower Yangtze River region. He solicited contributions from salt merchants

⁵⁶ For detailed accounts of Yi’s life in Yangzhou, see Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 249-366.

⁵⁷ Zhao Degui, “Qingdai Qianlong chao «tuiguang juanfu zhi li» yanjiu 清代乾隆朝《推廣捐復之例》研究,” *Lishi dang’an* 歷史檔案, no. 1 (1991): 98-108; Wu Yue, *Zhongguo de juanna zhidu yu shehui* 中國的捐納制度與社會 (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2013); Zhao Yapu, “Qingdai juanna pingxi 清代捐納評析” (master’s thesis, Suzhou University, 2020).

⁵⁸ Zhao Huaiyu, “Yangzhou zhifu Yi jun Bingshou mubiao,” 3155-7.

⁵⁹ This comment is part of a colophon by Feng Minchang on an album of poems that Yi brushed for Ye Tingxun, see “Yi Moqing shice 伊墨卿詩冊,” in Ye Menglong, *Fengmanlou shuhua lu* 風滿樓書畫錄, in *Minguo gaochao ben* 民國稿抄本, edited by Guangdongsheng Zhongshan tushuguan and Zhongshan daxue tushuguan (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe and Nanfang chubanshe, 2016) volume 32: 341-2. The original Chinese text reads: “...然當時非吾花谿兄之敦古, 傾數千金相助, 即吾墨卿豈能行止自如哉?”

⁶⁰ Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 298.

in Yangzhou to build shelters and supply porridge for local refugees. Residents of Yangzhou remembered Yi as a caring and competent administrator.

Yi also worked with Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849) to restore important cultural sites in Yangzhou. A native of Yangzhou and a proponent of evidential scholarship, Ruan had held prominent positions in Zhejiang, Hubei, Guangdong, and Guizhou.⁶¹ Between 1805 and 1807, Ruan returned to Yangzhou to observe the requisite period of mourning for his father. At the end of 1805, Ruan completed the construction of the Wenxuan lou 文選樓, or the Tower of Literary Selection, which honored Yangzhou as the origin place for the famed sixth-century literary anthology *Wenxuan*.⁶² Yi composed a calligraphic couplet for the new building. The following year, Yi invited Ruan to collaborate on the compilation of *Yangzhou tujing* 揚州圖經, an illustrated gazetteer of Yangzhou. Yi also contributed his salary to cover the expense of this publication.⁶³ In 1807, when Ruan re-discovered the mausoleum of Emperor Yang (569–618) of the Sui Dynasty (581–618), he requested Yi to brush a stele inscription commemorating this finding (Figure 1.3).⁶⁴ The monument remains extant today in the north of Yangzhou.

Yi Bingshou relinquished the post in Yangzhou due to the sudden death of his father. In the eighth month of 1807, Yi Chaodong passed away at the age of seventy-nine. Yi Bingshou

⁶¹ For discussions on Ruan Yuan and his cultural engagements, see Eric Lefebvre, “L' "Image des antiquités accumulées" de Ruan Yuan: La représentation d'une collection privée en Chine à l'époque pré-moderne,” *Arts Asiatiques*, Vol. 63 (2006): 61-72; Wei Peh T'i, “Private Patronage of Scholarship and Learning During the Mid-Qing: Ruan Yuan and the Scholars Around Him,” *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 31 (1991): 40-64; Betty Peh-T'i Wei, *Ruan Yuan, 1764-1849: The Life and Work of a Major Scholar-Official in Nineteenth-Century China before the Opium War* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006); Steven B. Miles, *The Sea of Learning: Mobility and Identity in Nineteenth-century Guangzhou* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006); Ye Pengfei, *Ruan Yuan Bao Shichen* 阮元 包世臣 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2003); Man-kam Leung, “Ruan Yuan: The Life, Works and Career of a Chinese Scholar-Bureaucrat” (PhD diss. University of Hawaii, 1977).

⁶² Meyer-Fong, *Building Culture in Early Qing Yangzhou*, 75–127.

⁶³ Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 309.

⁶⁴ Meyer-Fong, *Building Culture in Early Qing Yangzhou*, 118–9; Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 339–340.

returned to his hometown Ninghua to conduct a proper burial for his father and fulfill his Confucian obligation as a filial son. Unfortunately, Yi's mother, Madame Luo, also passed away in 1808 at the age of eighty-one. Yi was devastated by the loss of both parents and chose to stay in Ninghua to mentor younger members of his family. In 1815, Yi felt motivated again to seek an official appointment in Beijing.⁶⁵ However, on his way north, Yi died in Yangzhou due to a sudden illness (possibly pneumonia). Local scholars commemorated the former prefect by registering his name in the Four Worthies Shrine (Sixian ci 四賢祠) in Yangzhou.⁶⁶ The shrine previously honored Su Shi, Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072), and Wang Shizhen 王士禛 (1634–1711) for their contributions to the cultural history of Yangzhou. The addition of his name to the shrine immortalized Yi as an integral part of the city's cultured past.

⁶⁵ Tan Pingguo suggests that Yi decided to return to officialdom because he was asked to pay a fine of seven thousand and five hundred taels of silver due to the flood in Yangzhou in 1806, see Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 371. Qing laws required that local officials (both former and current) be fined when local facilities went wrong. In this case, because the riverbanks had been re-built and strengthened under his administration, Yi was responsible when these structures were damaged.

⁶⁶ Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 504-5.

Chapter Two: Problems of the *Zhang Qian Stele*

A transmitter and not a maker, trusting in and loving antiquity.⁶⁷
述而不作，信而好古
– From *Lunyu* 論語 (the Analects)

For students of Chinese calligraphy today, the *Zhang Qian Stele* (Zhang Qian bei 張遷碑) is considered as one of the most significant models of the clerical script (*lishu* 隸書), an ancient script type traditionally believed to have originated in the time of the First Emperor (259–210 BCE) of the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BCE).⁶⁸ Dated to 186, the *Zhang Qian Stele* was originally erected in Dongping County of Shandong Province as a memorial to an unrecorded minor official, one Zhang Qian of the Eastern Han period (25–220).⁶⁹ The monument is now housed in the Temple of the Great Mountain (Dai miao 岱廟) at the foot of Mount Tai in Tai'an,

⁶⁷ For the translation, see Burton Watson, trans., *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 48. For the original Chinese text, see Cheng Shude, *Lunyu jishi* 論語集釋, 4 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 2:431.

⁶⁸ In the standard narrative about the invention of different script types, Cheng Miao, a low-ranking clerk of the Qin dynasty, was named as the “founder” of the clerical script, see Zhang Huaiguan, “Shu duan 書斷,” in *Fashu yaolu* 法書要錄, by Zhang Yanyuan (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2013), 166-7. I discuss this traditional belief in the section “Style of the Clerk.” Scholars in recent decades have used archaeological findings, such as covenant texts in Houma and Wenxian during the Spring and Autumn Period (c. 771–476 BCE) and bronze inscriptions from the Warring States Period (c. 475–221 BCE), to investigate the phenomenon of *libian* 隸變 (lit. the development of the clerical script), especially how the clerical script evolved from earlier script types. The issue is important because it serves as the foundation of the Chinese writing system that remains in use today. A rather progressive view is that the characteristics of the clerical script had already emerged on covenant texts during the late Spring and Autumn Period, roughly around 497–489 BCE, see Liu Fengshan, “Libian yanjiu 隸變研究” (PhD diss., Capital Normal University, 2006); Tian Fang, “Libian xintan 隸變新探” (master’s thesis, Tianjin Normal University, 2014). For a recent dating of these covenant texts, see Crispin Williams, “Dating the Houma Covenant Texts: The Significance of Recent Findings from the Wenxian Covenant Texts,” *Early China* 35-36 (2012-13): 247-275. A more conservative viewpoint is that the creation of the clerical script should have taken place at least by the late Warring States Period, roughly around 361–381 BCE, see Qiu Xigui, *Wengzixue gaiyao* 文字學概要 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2013), 74-79. For the ceremonial use of the clerical script during the Tang dynasty, read Liu Xiaoling, *Sheng Tang Bafen shu yanjiu* 盛唐八分書研究 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 2009); and Robert E. Harrist, *The Landscape of Words: Stone Inscriptions from Early and Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 219-70. For the study of the clerical script as a part of epigraphic inquiry during the Song dynasty, read Harold Mok, “Seal and Clerical Scripts of the Sung Dynasty,” in *Character and Context in Chinese Calligraphy*, ed. Cary Y. Liu, Dora C. Y. Ching, and Judith G. Smith (Princeton: Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999), 174-198.

⁶⁹ For the text of the inscription, see Gao Wen, *Hanbei jishi* 漢碑集釋 (Kaifeng: Henan daxue chubanshe, 1997), 489-501.

Shandong. The inscription is best known for the plain and angular brushstroke, and the compact and dense character structure. Take the beginning section of the stele as an example (Figure 2.1), each character is tightly constructed by strokes of even thickness. The starting point of each stroke, however, is marked by a distinct square edge. These formalistic features, often described in terms such as “vigorous,” “substantial,” and “heavy,” are not only thought to represent an authentic historical style but also considered as a direct and unadorned expression of one’s inner self.

Such aesthetic experience of the *Zhang Qian Stele* did not take shape until the second half of the eighteenth century. In the seventeenth century, educated elites began to promote ancient epigraphical materials as authentic and uncorrupted examples of early calligraphic styles.⁷⁰

However, the value of the *Zhang Qian Stele* was heavily contested.⁷¹ Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–

⁷⁰ For a discussion on the emergence of the epigraphical calligraphy in the seventeenth century, see Qianshen Bai, *Fu Shan’s World: the Transformation of Chinese Calligraphy in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003). I follow Bai to term the type of calligraphy inspired by ancient epigraphical materials as “epigraphical calligraphy.” I also avoid using the term “stele school (*beixue* 碑學)” to address this kind of calligraphy because the term became popular in a slightly later period and is thus often used to speak about cultural and political concerns that were different from the period under discussion in the present article. For a recent discussion on the theories of the “stele school,” see Aida Yuen Wong, *The other Kang Youwei: Calligrapher, Art Activist, and Aesthetic Reformer in Modern China* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016); Amy McNair, “Engraved Calligraphy in China: Recension and Reception,” *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 77, No. 1 (Mar. 1995): 106-14. The study of epigraphical materials first emerged in the eleventh century. Epigraphists viewed these inscriptions as authentic historical documents vis-à-vis “transmitted texts” that were compiled and edited by historians of later periods and used these quasi-archaeological materials to verify recorded historical events. For discussions on this intellectual tradition, see Ronald Egan, “Ou-yang Hsiu and Su Shih on Calligraphy,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 49.2 (1989): 365-419; Ronald Egan, “Rethinking ‘Traces’ from the Past: Ouyang Xiu on Stone Inscriptions,” chap. 1 in *The Problem of Beauty: Aesthetic Thought and Pursuits in Northern Song Dynasty China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 7-59; Hsü Ya-hwei, “Antiquaries and Politics: Antiquarian Culture of the Northern Song, 960-1127,” in *World Antiquarianism: Comparative Perspectives* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2013), 230-248; Hsü Ya-hwei, “Bei Song wanqi jinshi shoucang de shehui wangluo fenxi 北宋晚期金石收藏的社會網絡分析,” *Xinshixue* 新史學, vol. 29, no. 4 (Dec. 2018): 71-124; Yunchiahn C. Sena, *Bronze and Stone: The Cult of Antiquity in Song Dynasty China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019); Jeffery Moser, “Learning with Metal and Stone: On the Discursive Formation of Song Epigraphy,” in *Powerful Arguments: Standards of Validity in Late Imperial China*, ed. Martin Hofmann, Joachim Kurtz, and Ari Daniel Levine (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020), 135-74; Chen Wenbo, “Huang Tingjian yu Beisong houqi de jinshi jiancang shijie 黃庭堅與北宋後期的金石鑒藏世界,” *Wenyi yanjiu* 文藝研究, no. 12 (2021): 129-42.

⁷¹ In recent years, several scholars in China have re-visited issues related to the stele’s authenticity, see Cheng Zhangan, “Du Zhang Qian bei zhiyi 讀張遷碑志疑,” *Wenxian* 文獻, No. 2 (April 2008): 3-16; Cheng Zhangan, “Du Zhang Qian bei zai zhiyi 讀張遷碑再志疑,” *Wenxian* 文獻, No. 3 (July 2009): 128-39; Cai Fuquan and Xiong

1682), an influential scholar of epigraphy during the early seventeenth century, severely questioned the authenticity of the *Zhang Qian Stele* and argued that the work was a counterfeit of the late Ming. Following Gu's viewpoint, other contemporary scholars had pointed out additional problems of this inscription, such as the poor quality of carving and the unorthodox use of characters. In the eighteenth century, Yi Bingshou and his close associates re-conceptualized the *Zhang Qian Stele* as the original style of the clerical script. Proponents of *kaozheng* 考證 (evidential research) advocated that rigorous philological analyses of early texts could clarify meanings of ancient Confucian classics and restore lost sites of cultural legacy.⁷² Drawing on relevant historical documents, these *kaozheng* scholars placed the *Zhang Qian Stele* into a stylistic lineage which they considered congruous with the development of Chinese writing. They also connected the blunt and robust brushwork of this inscription with an age-old idea about spontaneity.

In this chapter, I argue that Yi contributed to the construction of the stele's authenticity through his copies of the *Zhang Qian Stele*. *Lin* 臨, literally "to copy," was the critical term that Yi used to denote this type of artistic practice. Copying an earlier piece suggests that the writer

Shuangping, "Zhang Qian bei zhenwei bian 張遷碑真偽辨," *Shufa yanjiu* 書法研究, No. 1 (2018): 78-102; Wu Chaoyang and Jin Wen, "Du Zhang Qian bei bianyi yu Cheng Zhangcan xiansheng shangque 讀張遷碑辨疑-與程章燦先生商榷," *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲, Vol. 322, No. 1 (2011): 164-8; Zhang Ming and Li Lingli, "Zhang Qian bei xiangguan wenti kaobian 張遷碑相關問題考辨," *Zhongguo guojia bowuguan guankan* 中國國家博物館館刊, No. 12 (2015): 129-41; Zhang Ming, "Zhang Qian bei de faxian ji qi liuchuan wenti kaobian 張遷碑的發現及其流傳問題考辨," *Rongbaozhai* 榮寶齋, No. 3 (2015): 164-75. For an English discussion on the issues of the *Zhang Qian Stele*, see Peter Sturman, "Aesthetic Dimensions of the Clerical Script," in *Double Beauty: Qing Dynasty Couplets from the Lechangzai Xuan Collection*, edited by Jason C. Luo, and Peter C. Sturman (Hong Kong: Art Museum, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2003), 36-7.

⁷² Benjamin Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); Benjamin Elman, *Classicism, Politics, and Kinship: The Ch'ang-chou School of New Text Confucianism in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). For examples on the use of *kaozheng* method in the artistic culture, see Michele Matteini, "The Aesthetics of Scholarship: Weng Fanggang and the Cult of Su Shi in Late-Eighteenth-Century Beijing," *Archives of Asian Art* 69.1 (April 2019): 103-120; Michele Matteini, "The Story of a Stone: Mi Fu's Ink-Grinding Stone and its Eighteenth-century Replications," *Arts Asiatiques*, vol. 72 (2017): 81-96.

considered the work an inspiring model of calligraphy and intended to master its style through close and repeated transcriptions. Beginning in the sixteenth century, however, the idea of *lin* expanded far beyond the faithful imitation of ancient masterpieces. Katharine Burnett has translated the term as “innovative transcription” to underscore the conceptual originality of copying in the field of Chinese art.⁷³ Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636), for example, had employed a wide range of styles to transcribe time-honored calligraphic pieces and identified such practice as “copying.”⁷⁴ Yi’s copies of early stone inscriptions fall under the purview of this updated notion of *lin*. He was known to have copied a variety of early stone inscriptions, the majority of which had never been considered as calligraphic exemplars prior to his time.⁷⁵ Among these innovative transcriptions, the *Zhang Qian Stele* stands out immediately for the sheer number of copies and the wide span of time that Yi had devoted to this single monument. Six different transcriptions of this Han stele by him have survived today (Appendix I). Scholars in the past have thus identified the *Zhang Qian Stele* as one of the major sources for the style of Yi’s clerical-script calligraphy.⁷⁶ Yet, rather than merely portraying Yi as a follower of this historical style, I propose that his calligraphic copies of the *Zhang Qian Stele* played a role in the formation of a new artistic canon and demonstrated the evolving conceptions of historicity at the time.⁷⁷

⁷³ Katharine P. Burnett, *Dimensions of Originality: Essays on Seventeenth-Century Chinese Art Theory and Criticism* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2013), 209-19.

⁷⁴ For discussions on Dong Qichang’s copies, see Bai, *Fu Shan’s World*, 35-50.

⁷⁵ For a list of inscriptions that Yi had studied, see Pik Ki Ho, “Qingdai lishu yu Yi Bingshou 清代隸書與伊秉綬” (master’s thesis, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2001), 106-7.

⁷⁶ Jin Dan, *Zhongguo shufajia quanji: Yi Bingshou Chen Hongshou 中國書法家全集: 伊秉綬 陳鴻壽* (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2006), 55-6. Ho, “Qingdai lishu yu Yi Bingshou,” 110. Zhou Hanyun, “Yi Bingshou shufa yanjiu 伊秉綬書法研究” (PhD diss., China Academy of Art, 2014), 43-6.

⁷⁷ For a discussion on the issue of canon and canonicity, see Richard Vinograd, “Classification, Canon, and Genre,” in *A Companion to Chinese Art*, eds. Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang (West Sussex, England: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 254-76.

My use of the term “historicity” in this chapter is not limited to its dictionary definition as “historical authenticity,” which suggests an actual occurrence of the past. I am also inspired by the use of “historicity” in anthropology and sociology as an analytical framework on the experience of time, especially the complex relationship between the past, present, and future.⁷⁸ Eric Hirsch and Charles Stewart, for instance, adopt the concept to investigate the social production of history, especially how present people “make sense of the past, while anticipating the future.”⁷⁹ The formulation of historicity as a position one takes to interpret historical materials for the future could be a useful approach to the antiquarian culture of eighteenth-century China. As strong adherents of *kaozheng*, scholars of this period were skeptical about knowledge from the past and never ceased to question the materials in front of them. Yet, they also expressed a shared desire to re-imagine fabled stories in classical texts. I would argue that this ambivalent stance, both as critical students of the history and devoted followers of the tradition, exemplifies how they navigated through different temporalities to conceive their own historicity. Yi’s copies of the *Zhang Qian Stele* produced a “version of the past” that could demonstrate his cultural beliefs to future generations.⁸⁰ Together, these artistic writings not only probe the shifting paradigm of aesthetic preference but also indicates how scholar-artists formulated unprecedented relationships with the past.

⁷⁸ I am especially inspired by the following works: Charles Stewart, “Historicity and Anthropology,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 45 (2016): 79-94; François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, trans. Saskia Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Eric Hirsch and Charles Stewart, “Introduction: Ethnographies of Historicity,” *History and Anthropology*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (September 2005): 261-74; Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Tom Rockmore and Joseph Margolis, eds., *History, Historicity and Science* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2006).

⁷⁹ Hirsch and Stewart, “Introduction,” 262.

⁸⁰ “Versions of the past” is a phrase that Hirsch and Stewart have used in their definition of “historicity,” which highlights the malleability of historical memories. Their original sentence reads: “... ‘historicity’ describes a human situation in flow, where versions of the past and future (of persons, collectives, or things) assume present form in relation to events, political needs, available cultural forms and emotional dispositions. ...,” see Hirsch and Stewart, “Introduction,” 262.

The chapter begins with an analysis about the critique of the *Zhang Qian Stele* by Gu Yanwu and others. The problems of this inscription center on its ambiguous provenance, inflated text, and unconventional style. In the following sections, I showcase how eighteenth-century scholars, especially Niu Yunzheng 牛運震 (1706–1758), Weng Fanggang 翁方綱 (1733–1818) and Gui Fu 桂馥 (1736–1805), re-established the *Zhang Qian Stele* as an authentic model of the clerical script through the lens of historical materiality. They distinguished the roles between transcriber and carver in the making of stone inscriptions, arguing that the textual mistakes of the *Zhang Qian Stele* were signs of authenticity because the anonymous clerk who transcribed the memorial onto the stone could produce unintentional errors.⁸¹ To their eyes, these careless mistakes signified the historicity of the Han dynasty, because the stone medium should document those unintentional errors. Referring to the origin myth of the clerical script, Weng theorized the style of the *Zhang Qian Stele* as “the style of the clerk.” He also appropriated the early idea of “substantial and blunt” (*zhihou* 質厚) to articulate the aesthetic experience embodied in the plain and unmodulated brushstrokes of this stone inscription. In the final section, I delve into Yi’s motivation for making different copies of the *Zhang Qian Stele*. In his early works, Yi voiced his support for the stele’s authenticity by closely tracing the carving effect of the variant characters on the *Zhang Qian Stele*. In addition, I argue that Yi chose the *Zhang Qian Stele* as a stylistic model because the style of the inscription was closely associated with his ancestry. Yi later also transcribed the *Zhang Qian Stele* with other renowned Tang-dynasty (618-907) calligraphies to announce a lineage of Chinese calligraphy that he and his friends had envisioned. His emphasis on the spatiality of this inscription in his late copies of 1813 speak of his desire to pass on the

⁸¹ Clerks and scribes making mistakes was a perennial problem in Chinese history. For similar problems in the Song dynasty, see Susan Cherniack, “Book Culture and Textual Transmission in Sung China,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 54, no. 1 (1994): 5–125. I would like to thank Alfreda Murck for sharing this source with me.

method of *kaozheng* to his younger generation. In all, this chapter examines the layered meanings behind Yi's stylistic choice through the shifting receptions of the *Zhang Qian Stele*.

2.1 Critique of the *Zhang Qian Stele*

Prior to the eighteenth century, many scholars had raised questions about the authenticity of the *Zhang Qian Stele*. Because the inscription was not associated with any traditional masters of the clerical script or recorded in early epigraphic treatises, collectors and antiquarians had formulated different opinions, even contradicting ones, about its provenance, text, and calligraphic style. Although renowned calligraphers such as Fu Shan 傅山 (1607–1684) and Zheng Fu 鄭簠 (1622–1693) owned ink rubbings of this stele, they did not seem to develop their own styles of the clerical script based on the *Zhang Qian Stele*.⁸² These contested viewpoints likely undermined its status as a proper stylistic source in the seventeenth century.

2.1.1 Provenance

The provenance of the *Zhang Qian Stele* is not entirely orthodox. The inscription was not collected by famed Song-dynasty (960–1279) epigraphic scholars, such as Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072), Zhao Mingcheng 趙明誠 (1081-1129), and Hong Kuo 洪适 (1117-1184). Their catalogues had long been deemed important sources that serve to verify the origin of early stone inscriptions.⁸³ Responses to the absence of the *Zhang Qian Stele* in these classical texts vary from each other. Avid collectors such as Du Mu 都穆 (1459–1525) and Sun Chengze 孫承澤

⁸² Bai Qianshen and Xue Longchun, mentioned about Fu Shan's and Zheng Fu's collections of the *Zhang Qian Stele*. See Bai, *Fu Shan's World*, 188; Xue, *Zheng Fu yanjiu* 鄭簠研究 (Beijing: Rongbao zhai, 2007), 124.

⁸³Ouyang Xiu, *Jigu lu bawei* 集古錄跋尾 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1982); Zhao Mingcheng, *Song ben Jinshi lu* 宋本金石錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991); Hong Kuo, *Lishi lixu* 隸釋 隸續 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985). Shana Brown also notes the importance of these Song scholars in her discussion about the history of Chinese antiquarianism, read Shana Brown, *Pastimes: From Art and Antiquarianism to Modern Chinese Historiography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011), 13-32.

(1592–1676) expressed their sense of excitement for encountering the new.⁸⁴ For them, the opportunity to acquire an ancient stele that had not been discovered by Song scholars was invaluable, which enabled them to “surpass” the Song legacy. Epigraphic scholars, including Gu Yanwu, however, were troubled by the fact that the stele was not from Song collections. For them, this new discovery only implied that serious steps of verification should be carried out.

In addition, the discovery of the *Zhang Qian Stele* is as much a mystery as a known fact. Historical texts offer little clue as to when and how this stone monument was found in the first place. The earliest note about the *Zhang Qian Stele* dates to the fifteenth century by Yang Shiqi 楊士奇 (1365–1444), a distinguished official of the Ming dynasty.⁸⁵ Yang received an ink rubbing of the *Zhang Qian Stele* from his friend at the Confucian academy of Dongping County in Shandong. Nothing was mentioned about the provenance of the stele. The only record that indicates the origin of the *Zhang Qian Stele* comes in the Ming Jiajing-period (1522–1566) *Gazetteer of Shandong*, which tells “the stele was unearthed in recent times.”⁸⁶ The temporal ambiguity of these textual accounts produces many uncertainties about the origin of *Zhang Qian Stele*. It is generally believed today that the *Zhang Qian Stele* was unearthed as early as the late fourteenth century in Dongping.

2.1.2 Text

⁸⁴ Du Mu, *Jinxie linlang* 金薤琳琅, in *Lidai beizhi congshu* 歷代碑誌叢書 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1998), 2:206; Sun Chengze, *Gengzi xiaoxia ji* 庚子銷夏記, 5:12 (accessed through the Electronic SKQS).

⁸⁵ Yang Shiqi, *Dongli ji* 東里集, xuji 續集 juan 卷 20:24 (accessed through the Electronic SKQS).

⁸⁶ I used the digital database *Zhongguo fang zhi ku* 中國方志庫, published by the Beijing Erudition Digital Research Center, to locate this entry, see *Shandong tongzhi* 山東通志 (Jiajing Period of the Ming, 1522–1566), *juan* 22. Also, Gu Yanwu mentioned this record in his discussion about the *Zhang Qian Stele*, see Gu Yanwu, *Jinshi wenzi ji* 金石文字記, in *Lidai beizhi congshu* 歷代碑誌叢書 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1998), 2: 501.

The text of the *Zhang Qian Stele*, in some Confucian scholars' views, has an inflated style of writing. The inscription commemorates the life of an unrecorded minor official Zhang Qian (d. 186) in Gucheng 穀城, the present-day Dongping, during the late Eastern Han period.⁸⁷ The text begins by tracing the ancestral lineage of Zhang Qian to several famous historical figures with the same surname Zhang, such as Zhang Zhong 張仲 (c. 800 BCE) of the Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BCE); and Zhang Liang 張良 (c. 250–186 BCE), Zhang Shizhi 張釋之 (c. 150 BCE) and Zhang Qian 張騫 (164–114 BCE) of the Western Han period. Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526–1590) of the Ming was not convinced by this genealogical narrative and criticized it as a fabrication.⁸⁸ In his view, these people had no obvious connection with the family of the stele's protagonist because all of them were from different geographical regions in history.⁸⁹

Gu Yanwu had a much more alarming opinion on the textual authenticity from the philological perspective. After carefully examining the content of this new inscription, Gu concluded as follows:

The stele is at the Confucian academy of Dongping county. In the sentence “huang yuan ji bin zhe,” the character *bin* is written wrongly. In the sentence “zhong qian yu chao zhe,” the character *zhong* is written wrongly. In the sentence “yuan ji qie yu jun,” the character *ji* is written in separate parts as *ji* and *qie*. Ancient characters are interchangeable; however, adding the radical *dai* to *bin* is already ridiculous; how could one character be separated into two? The stele was not collected by Ouyang Xiu, Zhao Mingcheng or Hong Kuo. *Gazetteer of Shandong* says that the stele was recently excavated from the earth. Isn't this the case of some interested parties obtaining an ancient rubbing and re-engraving the [inscription] on the stone? This must be why [the text] is so absurd.⁹⁰

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其文有云：「荒遠既殞者」，賓之誤；「中騫於朝者」，忠之誤。而又有云：「爰既且於君」，則暨之誤。古字多通，而「賓」旁加「歹」已為無理，又何至以一字離為

⁸⁷ For the full text of the *Zhang Qian Stele*, read Gao, *Hanbei jishi*, 489-501.

⁸⁸ This kind of fabrication was common during the Han dynasty and was a part of the “status inflation” that people used to enhance their social standings. I would like to thank Professor Amy McNair for pointing this out.

⁸⁹ Wang Shizhen, *Yanzhou sibu gao* 兗州四部稿, 134:3 (accessed through the Electronic SKQS).

⁹⁰ Gu, *Jinshi wenzi ji*, 501.

二字也。歐陽、趙、洪三家皆無此碑，《山東通志》曰：「近掘地得之。」豈好事者得古本而摹刻之石，遂訛謬至此耶。

Gu here used a couple of mistaken characters in the text to claim that the *Zhang Qian Stele* must have been a forgery. In his opinion, the writer of the inscription was not capable of adhering to the standard orthography and therefore the stele cannot be authentic. Gu's approach of verification was rooted in the Song epigraphic tradition. He took Ouyang Xiu as the model and attempted to use epigraphic materials as one of the primary sources to help verify the meanings of early Chinese characters and texts.⁹¹ As a result, Gu compared the *Zhang Qian Stele* with other inscriptions of the Han period, hoping to establish the inscription as reliable evidence that could be used to verify transmitted texts. Moreover, Gu's disavowal of this inscription can also be explained in the context of the Ming-Qing transition. As Benjamin Elman and Bai Qianshen have pointed out, Gu severely attacked the heterodox ideals of late-Ming intellectuals and believed they were the reasons for the "corrupted" popular culture of the sixteenth century.⁹² The late-Ming connoisseur Li Rihua 李日华 (1565–1635), for example, mentioned multiple times in his diary that antique dealers of Suzhou and Jiaying often produced forgeries of stone inscriptions for monetary gain.⁹³ Being aware of these "unorthodox" practices, Gu may have been skeptical about any "new" discovery from the late Ming. It is thus not surprising to see him attribute the textual mistakes of the *Zhang Qian Stele* to some "interested parties" who possibly forged this stone inscription in the recent decades.

⁹¹ Gu had stated his admiration for Ouyang Xiu in his preface to *Jinshi wenzi ji*. For a translation of this important text, one can read Bai, *Fu Shan's World*, 162.

⁹² Bai, *Fu Shan's World*, 159; Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology*, 3, 51.

⁹³ Wan Muchun, *Weishui xuan li de xianju zhe: Wanli monian Jiaying de shuhua shijie* 味水軒里的閒居者：萬曆末年嘉興的書畫世界 (Hangzhou: Zhongguo meishu xueyuan chubanshe, 2008), 105-6.

As a well-revered philologist, Gu's viewpoint on the *Zhang Qian Stele* could not be easily overlooked. Contemporary and later scholars nonetheless responded to his opinion when dealing with the *Zhang Qian Stele*. Some had voiced agreement with Gu. Feng Ban 馮班 (1614–1681) pointed out a few additional paleographical mistakes in the inscription and Lin Tong 林侗 (1627–1714) decided to transcribe the words of Gu in his study of the inscription.⁹⁴ Some, however, chose to be reticent about the issue of authenticity. Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629–1709) noticed two unusual characters in the inscription but was able to find precedents in other stone inscriptions. In addition, Zhu did not even mention Gu's view at all, which may be read as a subtle expression of disagreement.⁹⁵ Others, such as Gu Aiji 顧藹吉 (fl. 1718) and Wan Jing 萬經 (1659–1741) admitted the textual problems but felt reluctant to fully embrace Gu's assertion.⁹⁶ They acknowledged the atypical writing of characters in the text, but they quibbled about Gu's bold claim that this inscription was a fake. Although these opinions vary from each other, what had been a consensus was the idiosyncrasy of the text of the *Zhang Qian Stele*.

2.1.3 Style

The calligraphic style of the *Zhang Qian Stele* is archaic but unconventional (Figure 2.1). Viewers of this inscription in the Ming and early Qing nearly all agreed that the brushstrokes of the *Zhang Qian Stele* were antique. For example, Wang Shizheng, though being critical about the content of the inscription, praised its calligraphy for being “craft-less” and possessing the

⁹⁴ Feng Ban, *Dunyin zalu* 鈍吟雜錄, 6:7 (accessed through the Electronic SKQS); Lin Tong, *Laizhai jinshike kaoliu* 來齋金石刻考略, *juan shang* 卷上:24 (accessed through the Electronic SKQS).

⁹⁵ Zhu, *Pushuting jinshi wenzi bawei*, 22-3.

⁹⁶ Gu Aiji, *Li bian* 隸辨, 7:106 (accessed through the Electronic SKQS); Wan, *Fen li ou cun*, *juan shang*:28-9.

“antique spirit.”⁹⁷ Gu Aiji took similar view and believed that the calligraphy was archaic.⁹⁸ The most articulated opinion came from Wan Jing. In his view, the characters were appealing but the carver of the inscription was not skillful enough to reproduce it. As a result, Wan criticized that the engraved characters do not possess “the method of the brush.”⁹⁹ In my view, the main reason behind Wan’s critique lies in the stylistic difference between the *Zhang Qian Stele* and the *Cao Quan Stele*. Dated to 185, the *Cao Quan Stele* (Figure 2.2) commemorates the Han official Cao Quan (c. 169–184) for his exemplary Confucian character of filial piety and loyalty.¹⁰⁰ Ever since its discovery during the late sixteenth century, the inscription was lauded for its fresh and complete appearance, in comparison with those eroded and damaged inscriptions found centuries earlier. The style of the *Cao Quan Stele* was also championed by scholars in the seventeenth century as an authentic model of the clerical script.¹⁰¹ Wan, in particular, spoke highly about the *Cao Quan Stele* for its fluid and sharp brushstroke and praised its fine carving for exhibiting the precise brush movement. On the contrary, the characters in the *Zhang Qian Stele* often appear blunt and individual strokes sometimes feature jagged outline edges (Figures 2.3 and 2.4). Wan’s aesthetic preference for the *Cao Quan Stele* could have led him to downplay the *Zhang Qian Stele* as a “poorly carved” monument. The refreshing aesthetic experience with the *Cao Quan Stele* likely played a role in the reception of the *Zhang Qian Stele* as unconventional at the time.

⁹⁷ Wang, *Yanzhou sibu gao*, 134:3.

⁹⁸ Gu, *Li bian*, 7:106.

⁹⁹ Wan, *Fen li ou cun*, juan shang:28-9.

¹⁰⁰ For the complete text of the *Cao Quan Stele*, see Gao, *Hanbei jishi*, 472-88.

¹⁰¹ One example for this promotion of the *Cao Quan Stele* can be found in the comment by the important epigraphist Guo Zongchang 郭宗昌 (d. 1652), see Guo Zongchang, *Jinshi shi* 金石史, 1:12-3 (accessed through the Electronic SKQS).

The entry of the *Zhang Qian Stele* in the *Calligraphy and Painting Catalogue of the Peiwen Studio* (*Peiwen zhai shuhua pu* 佩文齋書畫譜) encapsulates the controversy over this stone inscription at the turn of the eighteenth century. Completed in 1708, this one-hundred volume project was intended as an imperial encyclopedia of arts under the reign of the Kangxi Emperor (r. 1661-1722). A special section, entitled “Anonymous Calligraphies of the Preceding Dynasties (*Lidai wuming shi shu* 歷代無名氏書),” was dedicated to inscriptions on bronze vessels and stone monuments. These records are mostly transcriptions of earlier written documents including official dynastic histories and scholarly treatises. In the entry for the *Zhang Qian Stele*, editors of this imperial catalogue selected a few lines from Du Mu and Gu Yanwu to introduce this inscription.¹⁰² The words by Du suggests the date and function of the work, whereas Gu’s remarks tell its location and provenance. In addition, this publication acknowledges Gu’s proposition that the stele was a recent forgery. The inclusion of the *Zhang Qian Stele* in this project as an important artwork affirmed its potential to become a monument of Chinese calligraphy. At the same time, the selected annotation from Gu’s scholarship nonetheless framed the *Zhang Qian Stele* as a work of questionable content and style.

2.2 New Conceptual Framework

The increasing interest in examining stone monuments in situ during the eighteenth century prompted the emergence of a new framework to consider the meaning of a text in relation to the materiality of its medium. Antiquarians such as Niu Yunzhen and Weng Fanggang traveled across China to survey and examine how texts were engraved on extant monuments. These onsite investigations enriched their knowledge about the materiality of stone engravings. Rather

¹⁰² Sun Yueban, et al., eds., *Yuding Peiwen zhai shuhua pu* 御定佩文齋書畫譜, 61:60-1 (accessed through the Electronic SKQS).

than merely focusing on the text and style represented by two-dimensional ink rubbings, scholars of this period broadened their investigations into issues surrounding the medium of inscription, the effect of carving, and the condition of stone. These newly emerged inquiries reconsidered the creation process of a stone inscription, which, in the minds of evidential scholars, is at the core of defining the historicity of any ancient artifact. Amid this intellectual awakening, Weng and his cohort re-established the authenticity of the *Zhang Qian Stele* and constructed it as an exemplary monument of art. Its style of the clerical script became a dominant mode of expression during the second half of the eighteenth century.

2.2.1 Chu Jun and Niu Yunzhen

The collaborative project by Chu Jun 褚峻 (c. 1740s) and Niu Yunzhen was the first publication that responded to the problems of the *Zhang Qian Stele* in the eighteenth century. According to Lillian Lan-yin Tseng, their illustrated catalogue of stone inscriptions has been published in three editions and under two different titles.¹⁰³ The first one, *Records of Viewing Epigraphic Inscriptions* (*Jinshi jingyan lu* 金石經眼錄), was likely completed by Chu Jun alone in 1736. This earliest version contains illustrations of steles, bronze vessels, figurines, and architecture, which are accompanied by short annotations. A native of Shaanxi, Chu stated that he had visited these monuments in person and produced ink rubbings of them with his own hands. Unlike most of his predecessors who only recorded texts of these inscriptions, Chu painstakingly rendered the mediums of these carved texts. For works in the stele format, Chu drew out the complete shape of these monuments, including details of the exterior décor. In addition, if a text were inscribed on the back of steles, Chu would create an independent illustration for the back view. He also

¹⁰³ Lillian Lan-yin Tseng, "Between Printing and Rubbing: Chu Jun's Illustrated Catalogues of Ancient Monuments in Eighteenth-Century China," in *Reinventing the Past: Archaism and Antiquarianism in Chinese Art and Visual Culture*, ed. Wu Hung (Chicago: Center for the Art of East Asia, 2010), 255-6.

documented a variety of engraved medium such as bricks and pillars. The overall effect of his pictures tends to imitate the appearance of an ink rubbing, wherein characters are shown in white against the dark surface of stone. It is worth noting that the author made a special effort to capture the current condition of these monuments by delineating the erosion and cracks on the stone surface. This kind of representational technique, as Tseng suggests, emphasizes the material support of engraved texts, and aims to impress the viewer with a sense of verisimilitude.¹⁰⁴ The second edition, titled the *Illustrations of Epigraphic Inscriptions (Jinshi tu 金石圖)*, was completed in 1743 with Niu's assistance. Niu supplemented each inscription with his annotation, whereas the pictorial representation remained almost unchanged with the first edition. Born in Shandong, Niu was a renowned scholar of Confucian classics and epigraphy. In 1745, Chu and Niu decided to add two volumes of post-Han inscriptions to the *Illustrations of Metals and Stones*, which constitute the third version of the project.

Although Chu intended to convey a sense of realism by depicting the fragmented state of engraved monuments, the pictures of these engraved texts are far from faithful. Not only does the calligraphic style of varied inscriptions appear undifferentiated, the scale of characters in some inscriptions also appear disproportionate. The *Zhang Qian Stele* and the *Cao Quan Stele*, for example, should contrast with one another in terms of calligraphic styles but their illustrations in the catalogue are entirely identical (Figures 2.6 and 2.7). In the catalogue, both inscriptions feature an idealized form of the clerical script, emphasizing the horizontally elongated shape of characters and the modulated, wavy brushstrokes. Moreover, the size of the seal-script title inscription on the *Zhang Qian Stele* should be at least twice as large as the one painted by Chu. In this regard, although the authors claimed to offer a unique visual experience as if “looking at

¹⁰⁴ Tseng, “Between Printing and Rubbing,” 273-7.

the original stele in situ,” the illustrations of these engravings show more interest in their materiality than their actual styles of writing.¹⁰⁵

The acute awareness about the materiality of stone inscriptions is also evident in the annotations of this catalogue. In the *Records of Viewing Epigraphic Inscriptions*, Chu kept meticulous measurements of the *Zhang Qian Stele*, including its height, width, and depth, as well as the different sizes of characters in the heading, front, and back sections.

The authors of this catalogue disagreed with Gu Yanwu who identified this inscription as a later forgery. Chu first stated that the textual mistakes of the *Zhang Qian Stele* were common errors by people who transcribed the text onto the stone.¹⁰⁶ Niu further articulated this point of view in the *Illustrations of Metals and Stones*. He wrote:

For the *Stele of the Divine Spirit of the White Stone* and the *Zhang Qian Stele*, people in the past all took them as fakes. Some said: people of the Wei (220-266) re-engraved old steles to make [these two inscriptions]. Considering all the [material] facts, I do not agree. I have closely looked at the *Zhang Qian Stele*: its straight, upright, unadorned and grand [style] greatly resembles the *Heng Fang Stele*. It is no doubt an exemplary object of the Han dynasty. ... [Many] ancient writings in the bibliography of the Six Arts (Six Classics) were lost after the Han dynasty, only two or three out of the ten engraved on stones have survived. Their shape and style – square or slant, loose or dense – may not all be identical. For people who study the ancient (inscriptions), the foremost is to inspect their outer appearance and make sure their spiritual essence (style) has the merit. Therefore, one should search for those inscriptions that matches with ancient styles. Even if they are fragmentary, they are still valuable treasures that can benefit later generations. [These inscriptions] are documents that can enrich our material knowledge and verify [received] texts. People only see that the shape of characters in the *Zhang Qian Stele* are square-looking and the format of the stele features hornless-dragon decorations, and thus subjectively downgrad it as [a work of] the Wei. And they compare it to [Wei] steles such as the *Stele of Receiving Abdication* and the *Stele of Kong Xian*. What a pity! How is this any different from those who believe hearsay? ... (A re-statement of the mistaken characters, as noted by Gu Yanwu, in the text.) [These mistakes] are merely variations of dots and strokes and errors of the engraving process, which in fact, only prove the simplicity and casualness of ancient writings. Even those who are good at making forgeries are unable to imitate these [textual] mistakes. However, aficionados (such

¹⁰⁵ For Chu’s and Niu’s statements on the purpose of this project, see Niu Yunzhen and Chu Jun, *Jinshi tu* 金石圖 (n.p.: 1743), seq. 3-8 (Harvard College Library Harvard-Yenching Library, <https://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:4910123>, accessed 07/01/2020).

¹⁰⁶ Chu Jun, *Jinshi jingyan lu* 金石經眼錄, 68 (accessed through the Electronic SKQS).

as Gu Yanwu) merely relied on these [variant characters] for the textual verification. Isn't this a paradox?

「白石神君碑」「張遷碑」，昔人皆以為偽也。或曰：魏人翻舊碑為之。綜其實，不然。予觀「張遷碑」之端直朴茂，與「衡方碑」大相類，其為先漢法物，無可疑者。... 古文維六藝之紀，降漢軼於茲金石刻，十不二三存，形體方衰(斜)、踈密未必盡同。志古者，貴在略貌取神第無庸。固求撫其間合於古格，雖殘遺，猶足寶貴，以度越後代，殆亦博物考文之藉也。世徒見「張遷碑」字形方而碑體螭圍，遂臆貶為魏，以與受禪、孔羨諸碑比，悲夫，此與耳食者，何異？...此則其點畫之借，摹刻之訛。益足徵古文之藹易踈濶，雖善贗者不能倣其謬，而好事者迺執此以為依託之卷驗，不亦悖乎？¹⁰⁷

Niu here pointed out two important issues regarding the materiality of the *Zhang Qian Stele*.

First, echoing Chu's opinion, Niu believed that the textual problems were caused by the process of carving. The unconventional use of characters should not be seen as evidence of forgery but a sign of authenticity, because the orthography of early China might not be as rigid as Gu Yanwu assumed, and the diversity of early writings should also be weighed. The idiosyncratic characters in the *Zhang Qian Stele*, in Niu's view, could never be fabricated by professionals who made fakes for a living. In other words, these mistakes were too genuine to be forged, and therefore should be recognized as *lectio difficilior*, a principle of textual criticism that denotes the inevitable scribal errors.¹⁰⁸ The significance of this argument lies in Chu's and Niu's attention toward the issue of transmediality. Gu's textual approach assumed the *Zhang Qian Stele* as an unmediated document written by a literate Han elite who should have closely followed the orthographic conventions of the day. Chu and Niu, however, gave consideration to the roles of transcriber and carver in the completion of an engraved monument. Often illiterate in early times, these workers were responsible for the transcription of the text. In their view, these people inevitably produced mistaken characters when transferring a brush-written text onto stone. It

¹⁰⁷ Niu and Chu, *Jinshi tu*, 2: seq. 65-6.

¹⁰⁸ For this principle of philology, see Emanuel Tov, "Criteria for Evaluating Textual Readings: The Limitations of Textual Rules," *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 75, No. 4 (Oct. 1982): 429-48.

should be clarified, however, that this new analytical framework does not negate what Gu believed was wrong but only illuminates an alternative path in the construction of authenticity. Their interpretations about the *Zhang Qian Stele* prioritized different factors in the creation of an early artifact. For eighteenth-century intellectuals, the material evidence was an integral part of their conception of early China. The “genuine mistakes” in the text of the *Zhang Qian Stele* should be valued because they speak about the materiality of the stone medium.

Second, the calligraphic style of the *Zhang Qian Stele* is also a telling material evidence. Niu established a stylistic connection between the *Zhang Qian Stele* and the *Heng Fang Stele* 衡方碑. Erected in 168 CE, the *Heng Fang Stele* (Figure 2.8) is a classical monument of the clerical script because renowned Song scholars had already collected and studied this inscription in detail. The text begins with a biography of the Commandant of Imperial Guards Heng Fang (d. 168) and ends with tetrasyllabic verses celebrating his Confucian character.¹⁰⁹ Originally located in Wenshang 汶上 in Shandong, the *Heng Fang Stele* was toppled by a severe flood in 1730. Although people of the area soon raised funds to have the monument re-erected, the surface of the stone experienced considerable damage and many characters are now lost.¹¹⁰ To Niu’s eyes, the style of the *Zhang Qian Stele* is similar to the *Heng Fang Stele*. Both inscriptions feature a quadrate shape, and the modulation of individual brushstroke is reduced to a minimum. The characters *jun* 君 on both steles appear almost identical (Figures 2.3 and 2.5). The radical *yin* 尹 is larger than the element *kou* 冂, which creates an unbalanced character structure. The brushstrokes in both characters do not have much variation and one can easily sense the effect of rough carving. Bridging the style of the *Zhang Qian Stele* to a well-established monument of the

¹⁰⁹ For the complete text, read Gao, *Hanbei jishi*, 307-23.

¹¹⁰ Niu and Chu, *Jinshi tu*, 2: seq. 47.

clerical script, Niu was able to establish a new stylistic lineage in the history of Chinese calligraphy. In my view, this stylistic affinity could be explained from a geographical standpoint. Wenshang and Dongping are neighboring counties in Shandong, less than fifteen miles apart. It is plausible that these inscriptions signify a regional tradition during the Eastern Han period. Using the materiality of stone and the style as major evidence, Chu and Niu re-established the *Zhang Qian Stele* as an authentic Han monument.

2.2.2 Weng Fanggang

Weng Fanggang further promoted this material framework of analyzing stone inscriptions. A native of Beijing, Weng was an influential evidential scholar in eighteenth-century China.¹¹¹ A talented student of Confucian classics, Weng obtained his *jinshi* degree in 1752 at the age of twenty. Weng served as one of the editors for the imperial encyclopedia *Siku quanshu*. He also held important posts in Guangdong, Jiangxi, and Shandong as Education Commissioner. These official experiences not only helped him build an expansive social network but also allowed him to visit a variety of historical sites in person for empirical research. His surviving publications demonstrate his impressive range of interests, from annotations to classical texts to analyses of important calligraphic works. Weng's stature as a profound epigraphic scholar is best exemplified by his two monumental catalogues of stone inscriptions, *Records of Stone Inscriptions in Eastern Guangdong*, and *the Records of Stone Inscriptions of the Two Han Dynasties*.¹¹² Weng frequently invited his literati friends to discuss stone inscriptions together and sought help from them to acquire reliable ink rubbings of early steles. For example, Huang

¹¹¹ For details of Weng's life, one can read Shen Jin, *Weng Fanggang nianpu* 翁方綱年譜 (Taipei: Zhongyanyuan wenzhesuo, 2002).

¹¹² Weng Fanggang, *Yuedong jinshi lue* 粵東金石略, in *Shike shiliao xinbian* 石刻史料新編 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chubanshe, 1982); Weng Fanggang, *Liang Han jinshi ji* 兩漢金石記, in *Lidai beizhi congshu* 歷代碑誌叢書 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1998).

Yi, a noted collector of stone inscriptions, had sent ink rubbings to Weng on many occasions and generously shared his own onsite discoveries through letters.¹¹³ The exchange among these epigraphic scholars formed an intellectual community with shared approaches toward early inscriptions.

Weng admired the endeavor Chu and Niu had embarked on and valued their contribution to the field of epigraphy. He wrote a preface for Qian Yong 錢泳 (1759-1844), an acclaimed calligrapher of the clerical script, when Qian decided to produce an epigraphic catalogue in the manner of Niu and Chu.¹¹⁴ He also composed a short essay explaining how he was inspired by the epigraphic approach of Chu and Niu.¹¹⁵ In both writings, Weng identified Chu and Niu as the true heirs of the Song legacy, praising their methods of investigation and innovative illustrations. In his own treatises on stone inscriptions, Weng not only quoted Chu and Niu numerous times, but also offered new evidence to support their claims. Such intellectual lineage is most obvious in dealing with the issues of the *Zhang Qian Stele*. Weng fully embraced Niu's judgement that the textual mistakes were a result of the intermedia transference. In his comment on the Zhang Qian Stele, Weng began by citing a few lines from the *Illustrations of Metals and Stones*, and then added his opinion as follows:

For this stele, the person who composed the text might not be the person who transcribed [the text] on the stone. I thought in the Eastern Han Dynasty, document clerks who were good at calligraphy were not lacking. It seems that [the transcriber] did not review and look at the manuscript closely enough and then absentmindedly brushed the text like this. ... [The textual problems] were all errors of the brush and should not be taken to argue against [the authenticity of the inscription].

¹¹³ For a discussion on the interactions between Huang Yi and Weng Fanggang, see Wang Zhe, "Gugong cang Weng Fanggang zhi Huang Yi Xinsui zha xiaokao 故宮藏翁方綱致黃易新歲札小考," in *Gugong cang Huang Yi chidu yanjiu kaoshi* 故宮藏黃易尺度研究考釋, ed. Qin Ming (Beijing: Gugong chubanshe, 2015), 238-49.

¹¹⁴ Weng Fanggang, "Wei Qian Meixi zhengke Jinshi tu xu 為錢梅谿徵刻金石圖序," in *Fuchu zhai wenji* 復初齋文集 (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1969), 1:107-9.

¹¹⁵ Weng Fanggang, "Ziti kaoding Jinshi tu hou 自題考訂金石圖後," in *Fuchu zhai wenji*, 1:281-3.

是碑撰文之人未必即書石之人。想東漢時能書胥史之類固不乏人。竟似草藁審視未明而茫然下筆者如此。... 或皆誤筆，未可執一以論也。¹¹⁶

Weng made a clear distinction between the writer and the transcriber and suggested that the latter was responsible for the textual mistakes. This line of logic was likely stimulated by the fact that eighteenth-century scholars had encountered numerous discrepant characters in stone inscriptions. For example, in his examination of a Han pictorial engraving, Weng noticed that the character *qi* 齊 was written in several different ways.¹¹⁷ Using the *Zhang Qian Stele* as evidence, Weng explained that this kind of atypical writing of characters was ubiquitous on Han monuments because “document clerks (transcribers)” could never be free of mistakes in their copying process. Consequently, he advised that one should not fastidiously apply the standard orthography to judge Han inscriptions. The flexible use of characters on engraved monuments was perhaps a writing convention during the Han dynasty.

Weng further supported the authenticity of the *Zhang Qian Stele* with his onsite observations. In the autumn of 1779, Weng traveled to Jiangning 江寧 (the present-day Nanjing) because of an official assignment. On the second day of the tenth month of that year, during his journey back to the capital, Weng made a special stop in Dongping to examine the *Zhang Qian Stele*, a work that had fascinated him for almost a decade. He visited the county’s Confucian Academy and found the stele standing to the west of the Hall of Bright Morality (*Minglun tang* 明倫堂). At the time, this free-standing stele was built into a bricked wall and sheltered by a pavilion. Upon close inspection, Weng identified several missing characters and noted that “the stone appeared to be

¹¹⁶ Weng Fanggang, *Liang Han jinshi ji* 兩漢金石記, in *Lidai beizhi congshu* 歷代碑誌叢書 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1998), 13:646.

¹¹⁷ Weng, *Liang Han jinshi ji*, 695.

especially dark and unrefined.”¹¹⁸ According to Weng, the stone texture of the *Zhang Qian Stele* seemed much more “ancient” than *the Divine Omen Stele* (Tianfashenchen bei 天發神讖碑, dated to 276), an inscription that he had just examined in person during his stay in Jiangning. Weng’s generic language does not clarify how he was able to date these different stone materials. Nevertheless, the onsite examination of the stone surface must have allowed Weng to establish his confidence about the historicity of the *Zhang Qian Stele*.

2.2.3 Gui Fu

Scholars in the circle of Weng shared the concern with the materiality of early inscriptions. Gui Fu, a noted scholar of ancient writings, proposed to reevaluate stone as a writing medium. In his view, the unforgiveness of engraving as a textual medium had prevented people from correcting mis-carved characters because it was difficult to edit the carving without damaging the stone.¹¹⁹ As a result, the textual mistakes were common in early inscriptions, simply because the artisans were unable to modify the stone surface once the chiseling was completed. Gui also developed an elaborate theory on *shubei* 書碑, literally “the writing on the stele,” to explain how people worked on this special medium in historical times.¹²⁰ Drawing from relevant textual records and surviving stone inscriptions, Gui argued that all the steles were erected first, and then written and carved with texts. As a result, the placement of characters on the stele had to cope with the physical constraints of the vertical writing surface. For example, inscribed characters sometimes feature utterly long vertical strokes, suggesting that carvers were unable to stop the flow of knife due to the physical setup of steles.¹²¹ These varied material factors probably persuaded Gui to

¹¹⁸ Weng, *Liang Han jinshi ji*, 694.

¹¹⁹ Gui Fu, *Zha pu* 札樸 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 322.

¹²⁰ Gui, *Zha pu*, 219.

¹²¹ Huang Rende also makes a similar point in his study of stone inscriptions from the Northern Wei Dynasty (386–

reconsider the unconventional characters in the *Zhang Qian Stele*. He thus concluded that the textual problems of this inscription were likely caused by the materiality of stone, and people in early China had to bear with these unintentional errors.

2.3 Stylistic Significance

With this new framework of looking at stone inscriptions, mis-written and discrepant characters on steles and bronzes became less problematic but were viewed as a historical phenomenon.

However, the re-conception of the *Zhang Qian Stele*'s historicity posed additional questions that required new justifications. If the text of a stone inscription was not as unmediated as epigraphic scholars always assumed, to what extent could they be deemed as valid evidence to verify received historical documents? What is the proper approach to make use of these engraved texts, which might have entailed considerable interventions from the transcriber and the carver? How could intellectuals reconcile the tension between the material authenticity and the poorly executed text? And eventually, why should calligraphers take the "carelessly-produced" *Zhang Qian Stele* as a model of style?

Weng offered a solution to these questions by proposing an aesthetic approach to early stone inscriptions. He advocated that one should look at them as artistic objects and use them as evidence to sort out the stylistic development of Chinese calligraphy. Weng discussed this methodology in several different essays. First introduced in the two writings on the catalogue by Chu and Niu, this line of thought was further developed in a series of essays on the tenets of *kaozheng*,¹²² Weng had employed a similar language in these different texts to deliver the same

535), see Hua Rende, "The History and Revival of Northern Wei Stele-style Calligraphy," in *Character & Context in Chinese Calligraphy*, edited by Cary Liu, Dora Ching, and Judith Smith (Princeton: Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999), 104-31.

¹²² Weng Fanggang, "Kaoding lun shang zhi yi 考訂論上之一," "Kaoding lun shang zhi er 考訂論上之二," and "Kaoding lun shang zhi san 考訂論上之三," in *Fuchu zhai wenji 復初齋文集* (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1969),

central idea. He began by justifying his approach in the Song epigraphic tradition. The idea that stone engravings embody crucial aesthetic values first emerged in the discourse of Ouyang Xiu and Hong Kuo, who expressed their curiosity over visually appealing inscriptions. He then pointed out the limitation of applying these engraved texts to rectify historical documents. In his view, there were few occasions in which the content of an inscription could in fact help clarify the history. Even if an inscription is different from records of dynastic histories, how could one be certain that the history is mistaken, whereas the inscription is correct? What if the transcriber or the carver was not meticulous enough in the transmedia process of the inscription? As a result, Weng advised caution in using stone inscriptions to verify dynastic histories. He was especially against those who “utilize epigraphy at the expense of the histories.”¹²³ The numerous textual mistakes in engraved inscriptions must have urged Weng to re-consider the relationship between stone inscriptions and transmitted texts.

To achieve his aesthetic vision of stone inscriptions, Weng sought to build stylistic connections between stone inscriptions and renowned Chinese calligraphers. Chu and Niu had already suggested a stylistic link between the *Zhang Qian Stele* and the *Heng Fang Stele*. Going one step further, Weng argued that the style of the *Heng Fang Stele* had “foreseen” the development of Yan Zhenqing’s (709–785) robust mature style.¹²⁴ It should be clarified that Weng never indicated that Yan studied or was inspired by the *Heng Fang Stele*. His conception of this lineage was more formalistic than historical. The visual similarities between the two – compact character composition and dense brushstroke – enabled Weng to locate a Han-dynasty counterpart of the great Tang master. The meaning of this linkage is twofold. First, because the

1:296-305.

¹²³ The original sentence reads: 申石刻以抑史传, see Weng, “Kaoding lun shang zhi san,” 304.

¹²⁴ Weng, *Liang Han jinshi ji*, 648.

styles of the clerical scripts on the *Heng Fang Stele* and the *Zhang Qian Stele* are equivalent to Yan's standard script, all of them should have the same artistic value. Second, one could fathom the origin of Yan's style by studying its Han-dynasty precedents. The obsession to find the origin of things is an integral part of evidential research. Scholars believed that they could enhance their understanding of the Confucian classics if they were able to decipher the original shape, pronunciation, and meaning of Chinese characters. Weng applied this conviction to his study of clerical-script inscriptions and promoted the *Zhang Qian Stele* for its relationship with the style of Yan Zhenqing.

2.3.1 Style of the Clerk

Weng Fanggang further traced the formalistic features of the *Zhang Qian Stele* to the origin myth of the clerical script. After examining the stele in person in 1779, Weng felt inspired to write a long poem praising the antiquity of the *Zhang Qian Stele*. Two lines from the poem touch upon the style of the inscription, especially how it represents the authentic style of the “clerk”:

The method of the clerical script was derived from [the writings] of clerks, [in the *Zhang Qian Stele*], the genuine and unadorned ideas of that time (Qin Dynasty) can still be seen.

Slanted brushstrokes are not like bird tails, *pie* (a type of leftward stroke) strokes are not like waves.

Following the dynamic configuration of [each character], the brushstrokes come into their natural vertical and horizontal positions.¹²⁵

隸法從來出徒隸，猶見當年真朴意。側非隼尾撇非波，隨勢縱橫成位置。

In Weng's view, the *Zhang Qian Stele* signifies an ancient style of the clerical script because of its embodiment of plainness and unadornment. The “bird tail” and “waves” here refer to the kind of gestured brushstrokes that could be observed in the *Cao Quan Stele*. Weng believed that the

¹²⁵ Weng Fanggang, “Zhang Qian bei ge 張遷碑歌,” in *Fuchu zhai shiji 復初齋詩集*, in *Qingdai shiwen ji huibian 清代詩文集彙編* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2010), 381:172. For a detailed explanation on the different types of strokes in a Chinese character, see Lei Xue, *Eulogy for Burying a Crane and the Art of Chinese Calligraphy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019), 11-3.

earliest form of the clerical script should not have such flamboyant brush movement. His conviction, in my view, is based upon the invention story of the clerical script during the reign of the First Emperor. This story is recorded in a number of classical texts and functions as a part of the traditional narrative on the invention of Chinese writing. For example, Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘 (c. 8th century), the famed Tang historian of calligraphy, described the emergence of the clerical script as follows:

As for the clerical script, Cheng Miao, a man of Xiagui from the Qin, created it. Miao's style name was Yuancen. Initially, he served as a prison officer in the county's office. Then he was convicted. The First Emperor imprisoned [Miao] in Yunyang. Ruminating [in the jail] for ten years, [Miao] transformed the square and round shapes of big and small seal scripts into three thousand characters of the clerical script. Presenting them to the First Emperor, who thought [this invention] could be of good use, [Miao] was appointed as the Imperial Censor. Because memorial presentations [at the court] were frequent and numerous, yet characters of the seal script were difficult to write, the clerical script was thus used. Because clerks [used it] to aid the [speed] of writing, it was therefore called the clerical script.¹²⁶ 案隸書者。秦下邳人程邈所作也。邈字元岑。始為衙縣獄吏。得罪。始皇幽系雲陽獄中。覃思十年。益大小篆方圓而為隸書三千字。奏之。始皇善之。用為。禦史。以奏事繁多。篆字難成。乃用隸字。以為隸人佐書。故名隸書。

The passage serves as an important textual basis for what Weng claimed to be the “style of the clerk.” It establishes a key belief that the clerical script was adapted from the seal script. This derivative relationship suggests that the earliest form of the new script should have maintained some characteristics of the old one. In other words, although the clerical script was simplified and distinctive, it shared the same origin with the seal script and thus should embody the principles of the seal script. In the Qin dynasty, the seal script was widely used in state-sponsored stele inscriptions.¹²⁷ Although these original monuments were long lost, eighteenth-

¹²⁶ Zhang Huaiguan, “Shu duan,” 166-7.

¹²⁷ Martin Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2000); Robert E. Harrist Jr., *The Landscape of Words: Stone Inscriptions from Early and Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 211-5.

century scholars were able to gain some idea about the Qin seal script through important early copies of those inscriptions. For example, the *Stele of Mount Yi* (Yishan bei 嶧山碑), attributed to the Legalist Qin statesman Li Si (d. 208 BCE), survives in a re-engraved copy made by the collaboration of Xu Xuan 徐鉉 (916–991) and Zheng Wenbao 鄭文寶 (953–1013).¹²⁸ An ink rubbing of this tenth-century re-engraving at the Freer Gallery of Art (Figure 2.9) shows the perceived hallmarks of the Qin seal script: the structure of each character is utterly symmetrical, and individual strokes are uniform and even. The same formal qualities could also be found in the *Zhang Qian Stele*. Gui Fu had once adamantly argued that one should closely study the seal script in order to understand the development of the clerical script.¹²⁹ The even and ample brushstrokes in the *Zhang Qian Stele*, in Weng’s view, testifies to the development of the clerical script from the seal script. Celebrating the inscription as “the style of the clerk,” Weng thus fashioned the *Zhang Qian Stele* into a fountainhead of the clerical script.

2.3.2 Idea of “Substantial and Blunt”

Weng Fanggang also equipped the unmodulated brushwork of the *Zhang Qian Stele* with an aesthetic experience that is believed to reveal the authentic self. He frequently adopted the term *zhihou* 質厚, “substantial and blunt,” in his prescription for the ideal calligraphy and poetry.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ For a translation of the stele, read Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang*, 10-15. For a discussion on the re-engraving of the stele, see Moser, “Learning with Metal and Stone,” 135-74.

¹²⁹ Gui Fu, “*Shuo li* 說隸 [On the Clerical Script],” in *Wanxueji*, *juan* 2: 6-15, <https://archive.org/details/02103490.cn/page/n12/mode/2up> (accessed March 1, 2022).

¹³⁰ Peggy Pik-ki Ho, “Weng Fanggang yu Qian Jia shiqi beitie shufeng ji jiancang wenhua 翁方綱與乾嘉時期碑帖書風及鑒藏文化,” (PhD diss., National Taiwan University, 2011), 295-7; He Jiwen, “Weng Fanggang de Song shixue 翁方綱的宋詩學” (PhD diss., Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2003), 171-6; Fu Yuanqiong, “Weng Fanggang jinshi shuhua tiba yanjiu 翁方綱金石書畫題跋研究” (PhD diss., Nanjing University, 2012); Wang Bozhe, “Qian Jia lishu guannian de zhuanbian dui beixue sixiang de cujin 乾嘉隸書觀念的轉變對碑學思想的促進,” *Shufa* 書法, no. 5 (2019): 64-9.

In one of his colophons, Weng even essentialized such quality as the principle of Chinese calligraphy:

Although calligraphy is a minor field of study, after the seal and clerical scripts, the standard script was developed. After [the styles of] the Han and Wei (220–266) periods, [the styles] of Jin (266–420) and Tang (618–907) periods were established. If [this development] were summarized in one phrase: it is to be substantial and blunt.¹³¹

書雖小道，而篆隸之後變為正楷，漢魏之後結為晉唐，蓋一言以蔽之，曰質厚而已矣。

In Confucian classics, the meanings of *zhi*, or “substance,” and *hou*, or “bluntness,” usually stand in opposition to *wen* 文, or “embellishment.”¹³² Identifying someone as “substantial and blunt” means that the person does not care to be “embellished” and is thus upright and honest. This dichotomy often prioritizes the unadorned and sincere expression of oneself as the most desirable manner of artistic and literary productions. Weng might have employed this archaic concept as a rhetoric for the age-old belief that “writing is the delineation of the mind.”¹³³

Weng perhaps also chose the term to evoke a preferred method of brushwork that had been well enunciated in the art criticism of medieval China. Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105), a renowned calligrapher and poet of the Song dynasty, is known to have promoted the idea of

¹³¹ Weng Fanggang, “Ba biejian Zengzici ji 跋別建曾子祠記,” in *Weng Fanggang tiba shouzha jilu*, 182.

¹³² Two early examples of this semantic opposition are *wen zhi bingbing* 文質彬彬, or “a perfect balance between embellishment and substance,” and *zhong hou shao wen* 重厚少文, or “valuing bluntness and dismissing embellishment.” The first phrase is from *Lunyu* (the Analects), which describes the desirable quality of a gentleman, see Cheng Shude, *Lunyu jishi*, 2: 400-1; The second phrase appears in *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian), which was used to portray Zhou Bo 周勃 (d. 169) as an honest and frank official, see Sima Qian, *Shiji* 史記, 10 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2014), 2: 491-2. For English discussions on this relationship and the definition of *wen*, see Chow Tse-Tsung, “Ancient Chinese Views on Literature, the Tao, and Their Relationship,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, Vol. 1 (Jan. 1979): 3-29; Stephen Owen, “Periodization and Major Inflection Points,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Classical Chinese Literature*, ed. Wiebke Denecke, Wai-ye Li, and Xiaofei Tian (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 17.

¹³³ Amy McNair touches upon this point in her discussion about the politics of calligraphy. See Amy McNair, *The Upright Brush: Yan Zhenqing's Calligraphy and Song Literati politics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 1-15.

zhihou in his calligraphic practice. In a letter to a friend, Huang argued that one should model on the “substantial and blunt” brushstroke in ancient calligraphic models:

[You] are quite engaged with learning calligraphy. During the spare time after the cultivation of moral character and the study of classics, [calligraphy] is indeed a hobby superior to others. However, one must take the ancients as teachers. Although the method of brush aims to be clear and energetic, *the substantial and blunt [brushstroke]* must be the foundation. When ancients talked about calligraphy, they considered the firm and forthright [brushstroke] that sinks [into the paper] as good. Tang-dynasty calligraphers compared the calligraphy of Xu Jihai (Xu Hao, 703–782) to “wild beast kicking a rock,” and “a thirsty stallion racing toward a spring,” which help explain the general idea of what [the ancients considered as good]. Among the mistakes of calligraphy, the seductive beauty is a trivial flaw, while frivolity is a significant illness. One must directly lay each brushstroke in upright and regular positions. Then when those brushstrokes are released, the running-script calligraphy can be naturally made. Although cursive-script calligraphy is cursory, the intention of each brushstroke should be upright and regular. Most important, one should avoid deliberately decorating and linking [each brushstroke] – this is not what makes the calligraphy.¹³⁴

承頗留意於學書，修身治經之餘，誠勝他習。然要須古人為師，筆法雖欲清勁，必以質厚為本。古人論書，以沉著痛快為善。唐之書家，稱徐季海書如怒猊抉石，渴驥奔泉，其大意可知。凡書之害，姿媚是其小疵，輕佻是其大病，直須落筆一一端正。至於放筆，自然成行，草則雖草，而筆意端正，最忌用意狀綴，便不成書。

The above passage serves as an annotation to *zhihou*. Huang defines the concept as a style of brushstroke that is not only sturdy but also vigorous. He likened the feeling of this brushstroke to the outburst of energy often associated with robust animals such as horses. Characters constructed by such brushstrokes would be “substantial and blunt” because they appear to “sink (*chen* 沉)” into the surface of the paper, almost as if they were engraved. Huang also contrasted *zhihou* with *zimei* 姿媚, or “seductive beauty,” another critical concept in the theories of Chinese calligraphy. Amy McNair has pointed out that the term “seductive beauty” was used as a

¹³⁴ Huang Tingjian, “Yu Yichun Zhu Heshu 與宜春朱和叔,” in *Huang Tingjian quanji* 黃庭堅全集, ed. Liu Lin, Li Yongxian, and Wang Ronggui, 4 vols. (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 2001), 2: 499. I have consulted with several English scholarship on Huang Tingjian’s calligraphy and poem to translate this passage. A small section of the text has been translated by Fu Shen in his dissertation, see Shen C.Y. Fu, “Huang T’ing-chien’s Calligraphy and His Scroll for Chang Ta-T’ung: A Masterpiece Written in Exile” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1976), 213-4. Yugen Wang has translated *zhi* as “substance” in his work, see Yugen Wang, *Ten Thousand Scrolls: Reading and Writing in the Poetics of Huang Tingjian and the Late Northern Song* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), 87-8, 169-70, and 224 (note no. 51).

metonym for the style of Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361), the Sage of Chinese calligraphy.¹³⁵

Because none of his original works are extant, the style of Wang is best exemplified through trusted early copies.¹³⁶ For example, the fluent flow of intensely modulated inked lines in the *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest* (*Xingrangtie* 行穰帖, Figure 2.10), an early Tang tracing copy of a fragment of a letter by Wang, represents a signature style of his running-script calligraphy (*xingshu* 行書).¹³⁷ Such floating, gestured, and conscious movement of the brush, is perhaps exactly what Huang tried to argue against: the frivolous and ostentatious use of the brush. Huang believed that the “substantial and blunt” brushstroke was an authentic ancient method because it avoided deliberate embellishment and did not appear overly decorative. It is quite likely that Weng shared this conviction and appropriated the concept as a pathway toward spontaneity.

Huang Tingjian and Weng Fanggang did put what they advocated into practice. Their extant calligraphic works illustrate how they incorporated the idea of “substantial and blunt” in their artistic creations. In the *Scroll for Zhang Datong* (Figure 2.11), Huang employed a thick and vigorous brushstroke to “engrave” each large-size character on the paper. The beginning section of each stroke is blunt and firm, which generates an impression of the great strength the artist had inserted in his brush. In the *Comments on Calligraphy* (Figure 2.12), Weng seemed to have maintained a stable speed of writing to allow each solid brushstroke to fully saturate the absorbent paper. The z-shaped structure in the character *zhi* 之, for example, is almost reduced to a round vertical line (Figure 2.13). The use of dense ink adds to the overall feeling of “bluntness”

¹³⁵ McNair, *The Upright Brush*, 13-5, and 134-9.

¹³⁶ Robert E. Harrist Jr., “Copies, All the Way Down: Notes on the Early Transmission of Calligraphy by Wang Xizhi,” *The East Asian Library Journal*, Vol. 10, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 176-96; Robert E. Harrist Jr., “Replication and Deception in Calligraphy of the Six Dynasties Period,” in *Chinese Aesthetics: The Ordering of Literature, the Arts, and the Universe in the Six Dynasties*, ed. Zongqi Cai (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 31–50.

¹³⁷ For a detailed study of this object, read Martin Kern, “Made by the Empire: Wang Xizhi’s ‘Xingrangtie’ and Its Paradoxes,” *Archives of Asian Art*, vol. 65, no. 1/2 (2015): 117-37.

in this calligraphic work. Weng transformed all the sharp-edged strokes into plump inked silhouettes. Although these two works are different in terms of personal styles, they highlight a shared visual language that favors the use of the heavy and centered brushstroke. Weng and Huang developed their own “substantial and blunt” styles to express their genuine and unadorned selves.

2.3.3 Celebrating the *Zhang Qian Stele*

The stylistic symbolism of the *Zhang Qian Stele* became widely recognized when Weng and his cohort celebrated this early inscription at their numerous gatherings. After his trip to examine the *Zhang Qian Stele* in person, Weng returned to the capital in the winter of 1779. The renowned painter Luo Ping 羅聘 (1733-1799) immediately paid him a visit in Beijing and brought him an “old ink rubbing of the *Zhang Qian Stele*.” Feeling exhilarated by Luo’s timely gift, Weng asked Luo to paint an image of him looking at the *Zhang Qian Stele*. Entitled *Looking at the Stele* (*Guan bei tu* 觀碑圖), this painting only survives in Weng’s writings and its whereabouts is currently unknown.¹³⁸ Sometime during the next year, Weng lent this ink rubbing of the *Zhang Qian Stele* to Gui Fu and asked him to write a colophon. At the time, Gui, Song Baochun 宋葆淳 (1748-?), and Qian Zai 錢載 (1708-1793), three of Weng’s closest antiquarian friends, were about to leave the capital. To commemorate their shared interests in archaic inscriptions, Weng commissioned another painting from Song, entitled *Appreciating the Stele* (*Pin bei tu* 品碑圖).¹³⁹ Similar to the previous work, this painting also exists only in Weng’s record. However,

¹³⁸ Weng, *Liang Han jinshi ji*, 648.

¹³⁹ Weng Fanggang, “Pin bei tu bing yin 品碑圖並引,” in *Fuchu zhai ji wai shi* 復初齋集外詩, in *Qingdai shiwen ji huibian* 清代詩文集彙編 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2010), 382:514. Shen, *Weng Fanggang nianpu*, 155-6.

we do know that Weng's request for Gui's colophon served as a prelude for this image. It is reasonable to speculate that "the stele" in both paintings referred to the *Zhang Qian Stele*. Weng likely reported his onsite discoveries to his friends and they probably both shared a laugh about Gu Yanwu's earlier assertion. These paintings could have contributed to the new status of the *Zhang Qian Stele* as a model of the clerical script.

Led by Weng Fanggang, scholars in the eighteenth century constructed the historicity of the *Zhang Qian Stele* and fashioned its style into the new aesthetic standard of the clerical script. The process is similar to what Eric Hobsbawm has termed as "the invention of tradition," in which people effectively constructed a new system of beliefs under the guise of historical materials.¹⁴⁰ Weng and his literati group used the materiality of stone inscription and the origin myth of clerical script to re-establish the authenticity of the *Zhang Qian Stele*. Their repeated celebrations of the object in poems, scholarly notes, and paintings re-invented the status of the inscription. It was during this intellectual transformation that Yi Bingshou, an important member of Weng's circle, began to put into practice these new beliefs by selecting the *Zhang Qian Stele* as his stylistic model.

2.4 Early Copies

Yi Bingshou began his study of the *Zhang Qian Stele* around age thirty. The earliest record of Yi's copy of the *Zhang Qian Stele* is dated to 1783, when he embarked on a journey to Beijing for the imperial civil service examination.¹⁴¹ The temporal sequence between Weng's promotion of the *Zhang Qian Stele* around 1780 and Yi's earliest copy, in my view, is unlikely to be a coincidence. Moreover, on his way to the north, Yi had spent a few days in Shandong and met

¹⁴⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, "From 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions'," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, 271-4.

¹⁴¹ The work is in the collection of the Beijing Palace Museum but has never been published, see Zhongguo gudai shuhua jianing zu, ed., *Zhongguo gudai shuhua tumu* 中國古代書畫圖目 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1986), 1:4.

with Huang Yi, who was then in charge of river maintenance in Jining.¹⁴² The *Zhang Qian Stele* and the *Heng Fang Stele* were among those famed inscriptions in the region. During his short stay in Jining, Yi had gifted Huang a clerical-script couplet, executed in a style similar to the *Zhang Qian Stele* (Figure 2.14).¹⁴³ The thick and even brushstrokes remind of “the style of the clerk.”

Another early copy of the *Zhang Qian Stele*, dated to 1788, illuminates Yi’s acute awareness about the materiality of the *Zhang Qian Stele* (Figure 2.15).¹⁴⁴ A large hanging scroll measuring over one meter in height, the piece consists of twenty-nine characters from the beginning section of the inscription. Yi placed eight characters in each of the first three vertical columns and ended with five characters in the final column. The characters in Yi’s copy are around ten centimeters square, which is three times bigger than the ones engraved on the stone. Yi seemed to have applied an even pressure to shape horizontal strokes in plain, flat lines. His enlargement of each character enhances the overall effect of simplicity. The solid and dark brushstrokes allow each character to firmly sit on the paper as if they were carved into stone. Yi paid close attention to the character structures on the original stone surface. Such an interpretative approach was likely inspired by his close observation on the effect of carving on the *Zhang Qian Stele*. Take the final character *mo* 謨 in his copy as an example. His composition is identical with the one on the *Zhang Qian Stele* but differs from the standard way of writing it (Figures 2.16, 2.17 and 2.18).

¹⁴² For Huang Yi’s epigraphic research in Shandong, see Lu Hui-wen, “Han bei tuhua chu wenzhang: Cong Jining zhouxue de Han bei tan shiba shiji houqi de fangbei 漢碑圖畫出文章--從濟寧州學的漢碑談十八世紀後期的訪碑,” *Taida Journal of Art History* 國立台灣大學美術史研究集刊, No. 26 (2009): 37-73.

¹⁴³ For Yi’s life events in 1783, see Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu* 伊秉綬年譜 (Shanghai: Dongfang chubanshe, 2017), 30-1. For this work, see Xie Zhiliu, ed., *Zhongguo lidai fashu moji daguan* 中國歷代法書墨跡大觀 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1987), 15:97.

¹⁴⁴ This work is currently in the collection of the Fujian Museum. For its reproduction, see *Zhonghua shuhua jia* 中華書畫家, No. 96 (Oct. 2017): 29.

The two vertical lines in the *ri* 日 element are extended downward, connecting with the long horizontal stroke below. Considering Gui Fu's theory on the stele creation, this unusual extension of strokes could have been a result of the vertical stone surface. When carving on the stone vertically, carvers sometimes were unable to stop their tools as they wished. Yi decided to maintain this striking feature of the stele medium in his handwritten copy. Through the faithful delineation of the carving effect, Yi expressed his belief that the transmedia process was a telling feature of authentic Han styles.

2.5 Ancestral Style

Yi did not study the style of the *Zhang Qian Stele* merely because of the promotion of his contemporaries. Embedded in his devotion to this inscription was his own agenda to search for the style of his ancestry. In a poem to Gui Fu, Yi indicated that he had copied the *Heng Fang Stele* more than a hundred times because he and Heng Fang shared the same ancestor.¹⁴⁵ The text of the *Heng Fang Stele* tells that Heng Fang's ancestor was Yi Yin 伊尹 (trad. c. 1649-1550 BCE), a legendary minister of the Shang dynasty (1600-1046 BCE). Because Yi Bingshou shared the identical family name with Yi Yin, he believed that the *Heng Fang Stele* could symbolize the calligraphic style of his ancestry. To commemorate this special bonding with the history, Yi also carved a personal seal, reading "A Seedling of Mr. Heng 阿衡之苗 (Figure 1.1)."¹⁴⁶ This seal impression indicates that Yi self-identified as a descendant of Heng Fang and felt proud enough to proclaim this relationship in stone. The *Heng Fang Stele* and the *Zhang Qian Stele* belonged to the same lineage of the clerical script, which Weng and his friends had

¹⁴⁵ Yi Bingshou, "Ti Heng Fang bei yin tong Tanxi xiansheng ji Gui Weigu daling 題衡方碑陰同覃溪先生寄桂未谷大令," in *Liuchun caotang shichao*, 4:7a-b.

¹⁴⁶ I find this seal impression from a set of hanging scrolls at the Shanghai Museum, see the entry *Hu* 滬 1-4258 in *Zhongguo gudai shuhua jianing zu*, ed., *Zhongguo gudai shuhua tumu*, 5:354.

argued was the original “style of the clerk.” It is quite possible that Yi chose to copy the *Zhang Qian Stele* because he deemed the style of this inscription a part of his ancestral legacy.

His friends also appropriated stone inscriptions to help Yi connect with the history. In 1796, Huang Yi started a pilgrimage to Luoyang to survey ancient monuments. He climbed the sacred Mount Song and traveled along the Luo River. Huang had kept a diary during this trip and later painted this journey in a set of album leaves, titled *Visiting Steles in the Song-Luo Area* 嵩洛訪碑圖.¹⁴⁷ One of the pictures in this album depicts Huang’s visit to Mount Shaoshi (Shaoshi shan 少室山) in Henan (Figure 2.19). The two small rectangular structures at the center of this image represent the stone gate-tower Huang had visited in person. Upon close inspection, Huang discovered a semi-hidden character *yi* 伊 beneath the moss on the east side of the monument. Carefully making an ink rubbing of the character with his own hands, Huang then sent the imprinted image to Weng and asked him to share it with Yi. Weng was delighted to learn about this finding and agreed that this ancient engraving should belong to Yi since it was his family name. Based on the rubbing, Weng re-engraved the character *yi* onto an inkstone and gifted it to Yi (Figure 2.20).¹⁴⁸ Looking at the inkstone and hearing about the story, Yi was thrilled to find another connection with the historical past. He even composed a poem to celebrate this meaningful discovery.¹⁴⁹ Listing stone inscriptions that were famously known to have the character *yi*, such as the *Heng Fang Stele*, Yi claimed all of them as his ancestral role models.

¹⁴⁷ Lillian Lan-yin Tseng has discussed this painting, see Lillian Lan-yin Tseng, “Retrieving the Past, Inventing the Memorable: Huang Yi’s Visit to the Song-Luo Monuments,” in *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Margaret Olin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 37-58.

¹⁴⁸ This inkstone appears to have survived today, see Guo Ruoyu, *Zhikan pinyan lu* 智龕品硯錄 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008), 58-61. Hye-shim Yi has also discussed this inkstone in her dissertation, see Hye-shim Yi, “The Calligraphic Art of Chen Hongshou (1768–1822) and the Practice of Inscribing in the Middle Qing” (PhD diss., UCLA, 2019), 99-100.

¹⁴⁹ Yi, “Huang Xiaosong sima ta Songyang sanque wen ji Su zhai suoti 黃小松司馬拓嵩陽三闕文寄蘇齋索題,” in *Liuchun caotang shichao*, 2:19-20.

Such connections with the past allowed Yi to align with exemplary historical figures and formulate a cultural identity that could be traced back through stone inscriptions.

Scholars in the circle of Yi also used the *Zhang Qian Stele* for the purpose of self-fashioning. Weng, for example, had employed the content of this inscription to fabricate a relationship between his student Zhang Tingji 張廷濟 (1768-1848) and Ji Qiao 姬僑 (d. 522 BCE), a legendary minister at the time of Confucius (trad. c. 551–479 BCE). Zhang Tingji once acquired a small fragment of a broken Tang stele from the Temple of Zichan (Zichan miao 子產廟) in Henan.¹⁵⁰ Zichan was the style name of Ji Qiao. A well-known politician of the Zheng State during the Spring and Autumn Period (c. 771-476 BCE), Zichan had been celebrated in a variety of early texts for his exemplary conduct. The fragment bore only three characters, which could be vaguely identified as “the Seventh Year of the Tianbao Era (748).” According to the traditional calendar of Sexagenary Cycle, this date was a *wuzi* 戊子 year. Zhang, who was also born in a *wuzi* year, was therefore enchanted by the fact that the temporal connection between him and the ancient inscription Like Yi, Zhang carved a personal seal to identify his relationship with the Tang stele and the Temple of Zichan. Moreover, Zhang repurposed this fragmented stele into an inkstone, which he could use and interact with daily.¹⁵¹ He then invited Weng to inscribe the inkstone. Reflecting upon the provenance of the artifact, Weng selected a four-character line from the *Zhang Qian Stele* to be engraved on Zhang’s cherished object, reading “[The man from]

¹⁵⁰ Details of this story can be found in Zhang Tingji, “Tianbao qizai Zheng Zichan miao duanbei yan 天寶七載鄭子產廟斷碑硯,” in *Qingyi ge zayong* 清儀閣雜詠, 11-13, in *Guixin tangji* 桂馨堂集, in *Qingdai shiwen ji huibian* 清代詩文集彙編 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2010), 490:443-4; Weng Fanggang, “Zhang Shuwei duanbei yan ge 張叔未斷碑硯歌,” in *Fuchu zhai shiji*, 584.

¹⁵¹ Hye-shim Yi has discussed Zhang Tingji’s inkstone productions, see Hye-shim Yi, “From Epigraphy to Inscribing Objects: Recarving Ancient Relics into Inkstones,” *Orientalism*, Vol. 51, No. 6 (November/December 2020): 64-71.

Dongli embellished the writing (Dongli runse 東里潤色).”¹⁵² The meaning of this content was twofold. First, this phrase identifies the stone’s relationship with the Temple of Zichan. Dongli was Zichan’s hometown. This four-character phrase, derived from a story in the *Analects*, tells that Zichan had “added the finishing touches” to the official documents of the Zheng State.¹⁵³ Second, this brief line is also an important point of connoisseurship for ink rubbings of the *Zhang Qian Stele*. For example, Weng had noted that these four characters on the *Zhang Qian Stele* had experienced severe damage in his lifetime.¹⁵⁴ Consequently, one could date the ink rubbings of the *Zhang Qian Stele* by looking at the condition of these characters. If a rubbing shows these characters as intact, then it should have been made in the seventeenth century or even earlier. In addition, the fact that Weng was able to re-engrave these characters suggests his possession of an early ink rubbing of the *Zhang Qian Stele*. The choice of this inscriptive content therefore not only affirmed Zhang’s association with Zichan but also demonstrated Weng’s erudition as a resourceful antiquarian.

The apparent credulity of evidential scholars in eighteenth-century China may appear difficult to explain. How could these people, who were known for their rigorous study of historical texts, easily fall for these fabricated ancestral lineages? In my view, their efforts in building connections with historic figures of early China could have aimed to solve their anxieties over their own origins in history. The names of Yi Yin and Zichan powerfully resonated with people who had memorized the classical texts by heart. The copy and appropriation of survived inscriptions that had reference to those classical stories served to forge

¹⁵² Weng Fanggang, “Shu jiuben Zhang Qian bei hou zeng Dongping mutai Jiliang jianzeng Zhang Shuwei xiaolian 書舊本張遷碑後贈東平牧臺季良兼贈張叔未孝廉,” in *Fuchu zhai shiji*, 585.

¹⁵³ Burton Watson, trans., *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 97.

¹⁵⁴ Weng, *Liang Han jinshi ji*, 694.

a material link between Qing scholars and the value system of Confucianism. Fashioning identities that were deeply rooted in the Confucian classics, Yi and his peers found ways to insert themselves into the canonical representation of the past. The empirical study of early artifacts then became a new and useful tool of self-fashioning in the eighteenth century.

2.6 Combining the Han and the Tang

Yi supported Weng's ideas on the *Zhang Qian Stele* by copying this Han inscription alongside famed calligraphic pieces of the Tang dynasty. In 1811, Yi combined a five-character excerpt from the *Zhang Qian Stele* with a single line from the *Letter on the Controversy over Seating Protocol* by Yan Zhenqing in a one-meter-long handscroll (Figure 2.21).¹⁵⁵ The juxtaposition of the clerical script with the running script was not unprecedented in Yi's career. Yi had once copied the *Letter* (Figure 2.22) by Yan in conjunction with a clerical-script inscription attributed to Cai Yong (133–192).¹⁵⁶ This compositional scheme, I believe, might have been inspired by the materiality of calligraphic compendium (*fatie* 法帖). In a traditional calligraphic compendium, brief samples of calligraphy in different script types are often arranged next to each other. Yi could have appropriated this presentational format to exalt his transcriptions to the status of exemplary writings in calligraphic compendia. More important, putting the *Zhang Qian Stele* in parallel with Yan's calligraphy, Yi may have aimed to propagate Weng's theory that Yan's calligraphy "originated" from the styles of the *Heng Fang Stele* and the *Zhang Qian Stele*.

¹⁵⁵ Fukuyama Shodō Bijutsukan, *Min Shin no sho to kaiga* 明清の書と絵画 (Fukuyama-shi: Fukuyama Shodō Bijutsukan, 2005), 81.

¹⁵⁶ This inscription attributed to Cai Yong is included in the *Ru tie*, see Wang Jinli, et al., eds., *Ru tie* 汝帖 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2008); Qi Gong, et al., eds., *Zhongguo fatie quanji* 中國法帖全集 (Wuhan: Hubei meishu chubanshe, 2002), Vol. 4. Amy McNair has discussed *Ru tie* in some detail, see Amy McNair, "The Engraved Model-Letters Compendia of the Song Dynasty," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 114, No. 2 (Apr.-Jun. 1994): 209-25.

By placing these works of different time periods in a single handscroll, Yi promoted a lineage of brushwork that he and his friends believed in.

Yi perhaps also used this method of combination to voice his rejection of Gu Yanwu's negative opinion about the *Zhang Qian Stele*. In an undated hanging scroll (Figure 2.23), Yi transcribed the *Zhang Qian Stele* with a seal-script inscription by Li Yangbing 李陽冰 (c. 8th century).¹⁵⁷ Li was a renowned calligrapher of the Tang dynasty and he had collaborated with Yan Zhenqing on projects of stone inscription. For example, Li had written the seal-script heading for the *Yan Family Temple Stele*, while Yan executed the main content of the inscription. Yi's hanging scroll begins with a rectangular cluster of twelve characters from the *Zhang Qian Stele*. In the lower section, Yi copied ten characters from Li's *Record of Three Burials* (*San fen ji* 三墳記). Erected in 767, the text of this inscription was composed by Li Jiqing 李季卿 (d. 767) to commemorate the lives of his three elder brothers.¹⁵⁸ Li Yangbing was responsible for transcribing this essay onto the stone, using his signature style known as the "iron-wire" seal script. The term describes the firm, unmodulated, and slim brushstrokes that look like iron wires. Although this piece of writing had long been recorded in historical texts and studied by calligraphers, scholars had questions about its authenticity due to its unconventional use of seal-script characters. Wang Shizhen believed that because the texture of the stone looked ancient, the inscription was therefore unlikely a re-engraving of later periods. Zhao Han agreed with this point of view, but he despised its calligraphy for not possessing any "spiritual essence" of Li. Sun Chengze, on the other hand, complimented the style of the *Record of Three Burials*

¹⁵⁷ Guojia wenwu ju, ed., *Zhongguo wenwu jinghua daquan shuhua juan* 中國文物精華大全書畫卷 (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1995), 112. I would like to thank Dr. Wang Zhongxu at Beijing Palace Museum for sharing a reproduction of this work with me.

¹⁵⁸ Wang Chang, *Jinshi cuibian* 金石萃編, 94:14-17.

and praised Li Yangbing as the best seal-script calligrapher in the post-Qin eras. However, Qian Daxin 錢大昕 (1728-1804) and Bi Yuan 畢沅 (1730-1797), two of Yi's contemporaries, identified a couple of non-standard seal-script characters in the inscription and suspected that this work might have been a later re-engraving.¹⁵⁹ The issues surrounding the *Record of Three Burials* are comparable to the *Zhang Qian Stele*. Scholars doubted the historicity and stylistic value of this inscription based upon the unconventional use of characters. It was unclear how Weng, Gui or Yi thought about this inscription. Nevertheless, their beliefs in the heterogeneity of ancient characters could have implied their opinions. Juxtaposing the *Zhang Qian Stele* with the *Record of Three Burials*, Yi could have expressed his promotion for the authentic materiality these inscriptions. As controversial as their texts might seem, their calligraphic styles were authentic and meaningful. Combining Han and Tang models in a single work of art, Yi revealed both his conception of the calligraphic history and his methodological stance toward stone inscriptions.

2.7 Material Entirety in the Late Copies

Yi's final copies of the *Zhang Qian Stele* are dated to the year 1813, when he lived a semi-retired life in his hometown Ninghua. The two copies of the *Zhang Qian Stele* that Yi completed this year embodied his desire to pass on his knowledge of the evidential scholarship (Figures 2.24 and 2.25).¹⁶⁰ These two works drastically differ from his earlier copies in terms of style and compositional scheme. In both works, Yi slowly dragged his brush to firmly engrave each character onto the paper. In addition, Yi mixed characters from different sections of the *Zhang*

¹⁵⁹ These viewpoints had been transcribed by Wang Chang in his catalogue of stone inscriptions, see Wang Chang, *Jinshi cuibian*, 94:14-17.

¹⁶⁰ One of these works is reportedly in the collection of Yang Shanshen 楊善深 (1913-2004), see *Shupu: Yi Bingshou zhuanji* 書譜: 伊秉綬專輯, No. 51 (1983): 50; the other one is now in the collection of the Guangdong Museum, see *Zhonghua shuhua jia* 中華書畫家, No. 96 (Oct. 2017): 64-5.

Qian Stele in his late copies, whereas his early copy only selected content from the front surface of the inscription. In the single hanging scroll work of 1813 (Figure 2.24), Yi pieced together twenty-four characters from both the front and back sides of the monument: the first twelve characters came from the façade of the stele while the remaining half were taken from the back. The back section of the *Zhang Qian Stele* records donors' names and the amount of money they had contributed to the project. Rather than conveying any semantic message, Yi could have used these names and numbers to express the spatiality of the monument, a statement about the importance of materiality in epigraphic study. Bridging these physically separated contents on a single hanging scroll, Yi perhaps meant to emphasize that stone inscriptions are not merely texts but three-dimensional objects. This message could only be deciphered by a knowledgeable viewer. Looking at the scroll, an informed audience would first recognize the style of the *Zhang Qian Stele* and then be struck by the strange content. Perhaps with the help of a stone inscription catalogue at hand, the spatial allusion of Yi's innovative transcription would then become apparent. The visual puzzle of this scroll challenges a beholder to imagine the monument *in situ*, and to experience the work as if one was circumambulating the stele in person.

Yi further explored the idea of spatiality in his other copy of the *Zhang Qian Stele* of the same year (Figure 2.25). This monumental work consists of four large hanging scrolls, each of which measures over one meter in height. Yi had copied texts from both the heading, front, and back sections of the stele. From left to right, characters in the first two scrolls derive from the main inscription. The third scroll signifies the back of the monument. In the final scroll, Yi transcribed the entire seal-script heading on the top of the monument. Unlike the previous work, Yi added a brief description at the end of each scroll to identify the original locations of these texts on the stele. Because Yi had transcribed these excerpts on separate scrolls, it is probably

less demanding for a viewer to discern the meaning of this compositional scheme. Reading from left to right, an audience would be oriented toward different spatial sections of the *Zhang Qian Stele* and then come to realize the material entirety of this early stone monument.

Yi's innovative transcriptions of the *Zhang Qian Stele* illuminates his employment and promotion of the evidential scholarship in artistic arena during the eighteenth century. Yi and his friends reconstructed the authenticity of the *Zhang Qian Stele* by considering the transmedia process of making stone inscriptions. In his early copies, Yi showcased his support for the authenticity of the *Zhang Qian Stele* by closely tracing the carving effect of this inscription. In addition, evidential scholars at the time were keen on building personal connections with early artifacts. Yi's repeated transcriptions of the *Zhang Qian Stele* was part of this trend to search for to a historically rooted ancestral style and cultural identity. Yi had also copied the *Zhang Qian Stele* with important works of the Tang dynasty to promote his ideas about the lineage of Chinese calligraphy and the aesthetic approach toward stone inscriptions. In his late years, Yi continued to re-design his transcription of the *Zhang Qian Stele* by emphasizing its spatial orientation. Young students who viewed these late works were able to gain a vivid lesson about the importance of empirical research.

Chapter Three: A Story of the Inkstone

In 1800, an enigmatic inkstone (Figure 3.1) unearthed at the White Crane Peak in Huizhou captivated the attention of antiquarians across the Qing empire.¹⁶¹ The object features a plain rectangular surface and a slight dark-purple shade. Known as *duanshi* 端石, or the Stone of Duan, the rock material is unique to the ancient Duan Prefecture (Duanzhou 端州) in nearby Zhaoqing 肇慶.¹⁶² Yi Bingshou, the prefect of Huizhou at the time, was most excited by two engravings on the back of the inkstone, the semi-cursive character *shi* 軾 and the seal impression “The Virtue-Has-Neighbors Hall (*De you ling tang* 德有鄰堂).” The character was identified as a signature by the renowned Song (960–1279) literatus Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) because many of his surviving calligraphies were signed in a similar fashion. The seal refers to an inscription Su brushed for his newly built home in Huizhou in the late eleventh century.¹⁶³ These carved marks convinced Yi and his friends that the inkstone must have been a precious belonging of Su.

¹⁶¹ The inkstone that I examine in this chapter is now in the collection of the Ninghua County Museum in Fujian Province, see Lian Xinfu, ed., *Yi Bingshou fashu daguan* 伊秉綬法書大觀 (Fuzhou: Haichao sheying yishu chubanshe, 2009), 284-5. Li Shuqing has pointed out another copy of the inkstone, which was previously in the collection of Liang Tingzhan 梁廷柅 (1796–1861), see Li Shuqing, “Yi Bingshou shufa zhi yanjiu 伊秉綬書法之研究” (master’s thesis, Zhongguo wenhua daxue, 1985), 65-9. In her view, the version owned by Liang Tingzhan is unlikely to be the original but perhaps a later copy. I agree with her on this point and believe the inkstone at the Ninghua County Museum to be the original object discovered by Yi Bingshou.

¹⁶² Traditionally, collectors categorized inkstones based on the provenance of stone materials, and these material types had become brand names for different inkstones in imperial China. To learn about the early classification of inkstones, one can read Ng Pak-sheung, “A Regional Cultural Tradition in Song China: ‘The Four Treasures of the Study of the Southern Tang’,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, Vol. 46 (2016): 57-118. In her recent study of inkstones, Dorothy Ko also discusses the different quarries of *duanshi* in Zhaoqing, see Dorothy Ko, *The Social Life of Inkstones: Artisans and Scholars in Early Qing China* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2017), 58-67.

¹⁶³ The seal is never seen on extant works of Su. However, it is possible that Su had carved his studio names into personal seals. For example, a seal reading *No Deviant Thought* (another title inscription Su brushed for his personal study in Huizhou) is imprinted on the famous scroll *Old Tree, Rock and Bamboo* by Su Shi. This work was auctioned by the Christie’s in Hong Kong in 2018. For a discussion related to this work, see Peter C. Sturman, “Su Shi Renders No Emotion,” *The Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture*, 6:1 (April 2019): 15-55; Alfreda Murck, “Su Shi’s *Wood and Rock*,” in *Special Publication: Su Shi’s Wood and Rock* (New York: Christie’s, 2018), 15-7.

The present chapter explores the creative receptions of Su Shi in the Qing dynasty through the layered meanings of this inkstone in the eyes of the nineteenth-century scholars. Su, also known by the style-names Dongpo 東坡 and Zizhan 子瞻, has been remembered and imagined through a vast range of artifacts associated with him. The assemblage of his poems and essays began in Su's lifetime and became further expanded not long after his death. Those written works during his political exiles – first to Huangzhou (1080–1084), then to Huizhou (1094–1097) and Danzhou (1097–1100) – have served as powerful remedy for personal frustrations of later scholars who resonated with the way Su dealt with the unexpected.¹⁶⁴ His handwritings were engraved into stone and promoted as calligraphic exemplars since the twelfth century.¹⁶⁵ Circulating anecdotes, such as his unconventional culinary skills and humorous exchanges with colleagues, were registered into his biography by his admirers.¹⁶⁶ Theatrical performances also fueled colorful imaginations about his eventful life.¹⁶⁷ The inkstone is one among a great variety of works that were discovered and assigned to Su's name. These texts and objects constitute an infinite archive, from which people could extract, or even invent, meanings to serve their own purposes.

¹⁶⁴ For a discussion on Su's literature of exile. See Ronald Egan, *Word, Image and Deed in the Life of Su Shi* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 207-60.

¹⁶⁵ The earliest extant compendium of Su Shi's calligraphy is *Xilou Su tie* 西樓蘇帖, also known as *Dongpo Su gong tie* 東坡蘇公帖. This set of stone engravings was likely completed before 1173 and originally consisted of ten volumes. However, only six out of the original ten survive today. For a discussion on this calligraphic compendium, see Qi Gong, and Wang Jingxian, eds., *Zhongguo fatie quanji* 中國法帖全集 (Song *Dongpo Su gong tie* 宋東坡蘇公帖), vol. 6 (Wuhan: Hubei meishu chubanshe, 2002), 1-5; Rong Geng, *Cong tie mu* 叢帖目 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 3:1148.

¹⁶⁶ For a discussion on Su Shi and the food culture of China, see David R. Knechtges, "Tuckhoe and Sesame, Wolfberries and Chrysanthemums, Sweet-peel Orange and Pine Wines, Pork and Pasta: The *fu* as a Source for Chinese Culinary History," *Journal of Oriental Studies*, Vol. 45, no. 1&2 (December 2012): 1-26.

¹⁶⁷ W. L. Idema, "Poet Versus Minister and Monk: Su Shi on Stage in the Period 1250–1450," *T'oung Pao*, vol. 73 (1987): 190-216. One specific play about Su Shi that I will discuss later in this dissertation is *Jinlian ji* 金蓮記 by Chen Ruyuan (c. 1580), see Chen Ruyuan, "*Jinlian ji pingzhu* 金蓮記評註," edited by Huang Chonghao, in *Liushi Zhong qu pingzhu* 六十種曲評註, edited by Huang Zhusan and Feng Junjie (Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe, 2001), 13:1-403.

In the eighteenth century, with the emergence of *Shou Su hui* 壽蘇會, or the Celebration of Su Shi's Birthday, material things and historical locations connected with Su functioned as *sites of memory* where Qing scholars could make trans-historical connections with the Song paragon and express a "collective shared knowledge of the past."¹⁶⁸ Around 1780, Weng Fanggang 翁方綱 (1733–1826) began to invite scholars and artists to commemorate Su's birthday at his residence in Beijing.¹⁶⁹ They chanted Su's poems and composed rhymed verses to honor Su's literary genius. Occasionally, painters such as Luo Ping 羅聘 (1733–1799) produced images related to Su for this event. Guests were also welcomed to look at Su's calligraphies in Weng's collection. Participants of this special gathering would often report to Weng when they discovered any ancient paintings, calligraphies or stone inscriptions that were believed to be done by Su. Yi Bingshou, a frequent participant in this event, relocated this *invented tradition* to Huizhou when he served as the region's prefect.¹⁷⁰ This ceremony also grew into an international trend when Joseon (1392–1897) envoys replicated some of those efficacious images and brought them to the Korean peninsula for veneration.¹⁷¹

My analysis focuses on the "functional authenticity" of the inkstone found in Huizhou. In her study of the great Yuan (1271–1368) painter Wu Zhen 吳鎮 (1280–1354), Joan Stanley Baker adopts the term to denote the positive reception of famous paintings that cannot be fully verified

¹⁶⁸ Jay Winter, "Sites of Memory," in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 312-24. The concept "sites of memory (*lieux de mémoire*)" first appears in Pierre Nora's influential study on the dynamics between history, memory, and nation state, see Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations*, no. 26, (Spring 1989): 7-24.

¹⁶⁹ Michele Matteini, "The Aesthetics of Scholarship: Weng Fanggang and the Cult of Su Shi in Late-Eighteenth-Century Beijing," *Archives of Asian Art* 69.1 (April 2019): 103-120; Alfreda Murck, "Spiritual Communion: The Cult of Su Shi," in *Eccentric Visions: The Worlds of Luo Ping*, edited by Kim Karlsson, Alfreda Murck, and Michele Matteini (Zürich: Museum Reitberg Zürich, 2009), 80-7.

¹⁷⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Tradition," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1-14.

¹⁷¹ Matteini, "The Aesthetics of Scholarship," 115.

to be genuine or to have existed in history.¹⁷² Because these works had long been believed to be done by the master, they acted as important stylistic sources for later artists. The concept directs our attention from traditional connoisseurship to the efficacy of fabled artifacts, especially their memorial function and didactic power as authentic representations of the lived experience of their alleged creators. These “Su Shi” artifacts gained special significance in the eighteenth century among Weng’s cohort due to their ability to perform meaningful episodes of Su’s life. I am aware that by the most rigorous modern standard, only a small portion of these works can be considered genuine. More pieces only possess dubious connections with Su. Nevertheless, all of them were construed as powerful images by Weng and his friends because they enacted memories of Su and allowed beholders to experience a sense of belonging.

My investigation into the material legacy of Su Shi concentrates both on the micro-regional level and the macro-empire context. In the recent two decades, modern scholars have pointed out that the promotion of sites and figures connected to a region’s unique past exemplifies the increasing localism in Qing China.¹⁷³ Yet, the symbolism of the inkstone was possible to the local audience also because the set of cultural meanings embodied in material things associated with Su had already been established through a national network of knowledge dissemination. As a Fujian native who worked in Beijing for over a decade and was frequently appointed for out-of-capital tours, Yi was key to the formation of this discursive network that appropriated Su’s

¹⁷² Joan Stanley Baker, *Old Masters Repainted: Wu Zhen (1280–1354) Prime Objects and Accretions* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1995), 35-9.

¹⁷³ Tobie S. Meyer-Fong, *Building Culture in Early Qing Yangzhou* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003); Steven B. Miles, *The Sea of Learning: Mobility and Identity in Nineteenth-century Guangzhou* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006); Steven B. Miles, “Creating Zhu ‘Jiujiang’ in Nineteenth-Century Guangdong,” *T’oung Pao*, vol. 90 (2004): 299-340; Steven B. Miles, “Rewriting the Southern Han (917-971): The Production of Local Culture in Nineteenth-Century Guangzhou,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 62, No. 1 (Jun., 2002): 39-75; Steven B. Miles, “Celebrating the Yu Fan Shrine: Literati Networks and Local Identity in Early Nineteenth-Century Guangzhou,” *Late Imperial China*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (December 2004): 33-73.

cultural images. On a regional level, the detailed comparison between Ming and Qing gazetteers of Huizhou sheds light on the state of Su's former residence as Yi began his archaeology. I also examine a group of materials located beyond Huizhou, such as the inkstones produced by the Qing imperial workshop and the paintings by Yangzhou artists.

The chapter has an episodic structure, with each section focusing on an event, a poem, a site, a painting, an inscription, and an object. I begin with a discussion on the farewell gathering Weng hosted for Yi at the annual celebration of Su Shi's birthday, and the send-off poem Weng wrote for Yi. My reconstruction of the event and intertextual reading of the poem reveal how scholars in Weng's circle conveyed emotions of departure through material objects associated with Su's life and artful references to Su's literary corpus. In the following section, I use the painting *White Crane Peak* by Luo Ping to illuminate how scholars in the eighteenth century reimagined Su's residence in Huizhou through literary texts and onsite investigation. However, records from local gazetteers underscore the limits of this antiquarian imagination because the site had undergone several modifications since the fourteenth century. Situating the discovery of the inkstone in the regional history, I argue that Yi found the object in a Ming-dynasty (1368–1644) ruin and established its authenticity based on the eleventh-century idea on the relationship between material things and human enjoyment. At last, I show that inkstones associated with Su were valued in the eighteenth century for their ability to evoke important moralistic lessons and cosmic transformation. Paintings by Li Zongmo 李宗謨 (fl. early seventeenth century) and Huang Shen 黃慎 (1687–1772) about the Heavenly Inkstone speak about the didactic power of this type of object. Another inkstone named “Congxing Inkstone” illuminates how the Qing imperial workshop translated a renowned inkstone inscription by Su into a sensorial design involving astrological movement. Reading the “Su Shi” inkstone from Huizhou against these

paintings and invented objects, I argue that Yi harnessed the artifact as a multi-sensorial relic to announce moral rectitude and unadorned aesthetic to the audience in Guangdong.

3.1 Farewell Banquet

In 1798, after working at the Ministry of Justice in Beijing for a decade, Yi received a new appointment to become the prefect of Huizhou, Guangdong Province.¹⁷⁴ This new post was not a form of punishment (as in Su's time) but intended as a promotion. Yi gained not only an elevation in official rank but also an important experience of local administration. Adjacent to Guangzhou, a growing cosmopolitan of international exchange, Huizhou was the ancestral home for many migrant merchants in the area. Yi's teachers, colleagues and friends all felt happy for him because a crucial position like this was both a testament of Yi's capability and a solid foundation for career advancement in the future. At the same time, the long distance of this relocation, from the northern capital to the southern frontier, prompted his peers to express proper goodbyes.

One of those fond farewells took place during the annual celebration of Su Shi's birthday on the nineteenth day of the twelfth month, according to the lunar calendar, at Weng Fanggang's studio. Weng was known for his profound admiration for Su. This man not only named his study the Su Studio (*Su zhai* 蘇齋) but also self-claimed as a disciple of Su. Michele Matteini has examined the cult of Su Shi in Beijing and pointed out that this ceremony was a rather loosely organized event.¹⁷⁵ Although Weng repeatedly gathered his friends at the same day every year, the celebration did not have a set ritual to follow. Participants varied each year as did their activities. Yi was one of the privileged literati who were frequently invited to the event. In 1798,

¹⁷⁴ For Yi's life, see Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu* 伊秉綬年譜 (Shanghai: Dongfang chuban zhongxing, 2017).

¹⁷⁵ Matteini, "The Aesthetics of Scholarship," 103-120.

when the news of Yi's appointment spread across the capital, Weng decided to fuse this birthday celebration with a farewell theme. Because Su's birthday is only ten days from the Lunar New Year's Eve, this event often seemed a perfect venue for Weng and his cohort to bid farewell to those who had to leave Beijing in the coming spring. This temporal coincidence must have charged this annual gathering with abundant emotion. Aspirations for the new year and reflections on the past year were mingled with heartfelt adieux. This conjuncture was especially meaningful for Yi, since he had not only been a core member of this scholarly community for over ten years, the destination of his new post, Huizhou, was also closely relevant to Su's life. Images and stories about Su thus constitute a poetic channel through which this group of Qing scholars navigated their contemporary experience.

The birthday/farewell party that Weng hosted for Yi can be reconstructed in striking details through surviving texts.¹⁷⁶ It was a quiet snowy day in Beijing. Invited participants, including Zhao Huaiyu 趙懷玉 (1747–1823), Luo Ping, Qian Yong 錢泳 (1759–1844), and Chen Wenshu 陳文述 (1771–1843), gathered indoors at Weng's residence. Until the next morning, they drank wine while looking at various artifacts and composed poems in memory of that day. Although the whereabouts of these artifacts are unknown, annotations in poems by Weng and his friends offer some useful clues to reconstruct the objects they viewed and how they might have been used during the event.

According to these annotations, party participants worshipped (perhaps also burnt incense in front of) a Han-dynasty (202 BCE–220) brick that is inscribed with characters *The Fifth Year of the Wufeng Era* (*Wufeng wunian* 五鳳五年, 53 BCE). This ancient object, Weng noted, also bore

¹⁷⁶ My reconstruction of this event is primarily built upon Tan Pingguo's detailed study of Yi's life, see Tan, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 173-4.

an inscription by the renowned Yuan-dynasty (1279–1368) antiquarian Wuqiu Yan 吾丘衍 (1268–1311). Weng did not own this artifact but borrowed it from another person, whom he did not specify. They also looked at a special painting that Luo created for this year's celebration. Luo was much in demand as a copyist, and this work was a copy of a painting by Shitao 石濤 (1642–1707), *Master Dongpo Traveling in Snowy Weizhou (Pogong Weizhou xuexing tu 坡公灘州雪行圖)*. The title suggests that Shitao's original composition was most likely a pictorial interpretation of a similarly titled poem that Su wrote on the Lunar New Year of 1077.¹⁷⁷ On the New Year's Eve, a heavy snowstorm had kept Su in Weizhou, in present-day Shandong, during his trip from Mizhou 密州 to the capital. Su resumed his journey the next day once the weather permitted. Deeply touched by scenes he saw on the road, especially drought-stricken fields and disheartened farmers, Su hoped that this spring snow would forecast a better harvesting season ahead. Earlier in 1798, Weng saw this Shitao work at the home of Chu Pengling 初彭齡 (d. 1825) and decided to borrow it for Luo to make a copy for the celebration of Su's birthday.¹⁷⁸ Luo completed this commission in a hanging scroll and brought the image to this gathering. Qian Yong also brought an imaginary portrait of his distant ancestor Qian Liu 錢鏐 (825–932), King Wusu 武肅王 of the Wuyue Kingdom 吳越國 (907–978), for his friends to enjoy.

This set of objects prepared by Weng and his guests indicates the creative ways in which Qing scholars appropriated the past to articulate their worldly experience. The veneration of a

¹⁷⁷ Su Shi, "A snowstorm on the New Year's Eve, I stayed in Weizhou; the Next morning was clear, I assumed my trip; however, the snow returned again in the middle of my travel, I thus composed this poem 除夜大雪留灘州元日早晴遂行中途雪復作," in *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Shiji*, 4:1447.

¹⁷⁸ This information is from an inscription by Weng on another Shitao's painting. This set of album leaves was auctioned by the Sotheby's in Hong Kong in 2016. The front leaf also has an inscription by Yi Bingshou. See <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2016/fine-classical-chinese-paintings-hk0635/lot.360.html?locale=en#> (accessed 03/20/2021).

carved Han brick speaks about the epigraphic interests shared among this group of people and their identities as resourceful and erudite antiquarians. The portrait of Qian Liu represents the emerging quests for ancestral lineages that could be testified by excavated objects and engraved stones, an eighteenth-century trend we have observed in Chapter Two through Yi's conception of his family legacy. Luo's copy of the painting by Shitao was the central object that connects both Su and Yi to the event: the wintry scenery outside Weng's residence echoed Su's encounter of the snow in Weizhou, and Su's relocation reminded the guests of Yi's upcoming journey to the new post. The senses of migration, snowfall, and New Year oscillate between the eleventh-century poem and the eighteenth-century gathering, Shitao's original picture and Luo's recreation, and Su's optimism and Yi's promising future. These multi-layered references generate sincere emotions that seem only appropriate for this specific time, place, and person.

3.2 Parting Poem

In one of the parting poems for Yi, Weng devised a similar strategy to commemorate his relationship with Yi through skillful references to Su's life. He wrote:

At the capital, in joint couches [we] gathered for several consecutive years.
In dreams, [we] shared ferry rides in the southern region.
In Shi's (Shi Family of the Southern Song) annotations [of Su Shi's poems], [I was] delighted to find the line by Prefect Fang (Fang Zirong, the Prefect of Huizhou in Su's time).
Su Shi's calligraphy indeed has a tie with Mozhai (the style name of Yi Bingshou).
The Plaque *No Deviant Thoughts*¹⁷⁹ is a place I return to in spirit.
The Hall *Virtue Has Neighbors* inspires awe in my mind.
The scallions¹⁸⁰ and water have said more than I would dare.
The plucked hemp, green and shimmering, [as if] mounted escort calling out to announce [your] arrival.

¹⁷⁹ *Siwuxie* is a difficult term to translate in English and here I adopt the translation by Alfreda Murck, see Alfreda Murck, "Su Shi's *Wood and Rock*," in *Special Publication: Su Shi's Wood and Rock* (New York: Christie's, 2018), 15-7. Peter Sturman translates the term differently as "No Wayward Thoughts," see Peter C. Sturman, "Su Shi Renders No Emotion," *The Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture*, 6:1 (April 2019): 15-55.

¹⁸⁰ I translate *xie* 薤 as scallions here for the sake of brevity. The term refers to a special type of scallion grown in China, known as allium chinese, or chinese scallion.

京華聯榻聚頻年，夢裡炎州共放船。施注喜尋方守句，蘇書果結默齋緣。¹⁸¹
思無邪匾神追處，德有鄰堂意凜然。薤水多言吾豈敢，折蔬青動唱騶前。

This poem epitomizes the kind of literary game that Weng and his friends played at the celebration of Su's birthday.¹⁸² The first two lines indicate the relationship between Yi and Weng as like-minded friends and imply that Yi was about to depart for the south. Coded with elusive references to Su's exile in Huizhou, the remaining verses are intended to parallel Yi's upcoming journey with the one that Su had embarked on centuries earlier.

The phrase "Shi's annotations" refers to *Shi zhu Su shi* 施註蘇詩 (*Shi's Annotations to Su Shi's Poems*), the earliest anthology of Su's poems which had just been re-discovered in the late seventeenth century.¹⁸³ This poetry collection was put together by three obscure Southern Song scholars, Shi Yuanzhi 施元之 (*jinsshi* degree in 1154), his son Shi Su 施宿 (*jinsshi* degree in 1193) and Gu Xi 顧喜 (c. 12th century). The first edition of the book was printed in 1213 and was believed to consist of forty-two volumes. However, when Song Luo 宋犖 (1634–1713), then the Provincial Governor of Jiangsu, found and purchased this age-old manuscript from a book collector in the Jiangnan region, only thirty volumes from the original survived. Song was also a

¹⁸¹ Weng Fanggang, *Fuchuzhai shiji* 復初齋詩集, 52:22, in *Qingdai shi wen ji huibian* 清代詩文集彙編 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2010), 381:487.

¹⁸² Alfreda Murck has discussed poetry of this kind in her examination of the cult of Su Shi during the Qing. In her view, Weng and his friends wrote these poems with undisclosed references to Su because Su had composed similarly encoded poetic lines for his friends during his lifetime. In other words, the practice itself was an homage to Su. Murck also believes that these intentionally obscured references "create a code that provided protection, keeping conversations between friends exclusive." Her political reading of this type of poetry as a deliberate act to avoid censorship is worth noting here, especially in the context of Qing literary inquisition. For her insightful discussion, see Alfreda Murck, "Travel Sites of Immortal Po," in *Eccentric Visions*, 234.

¹⁸³ Two early versions of this anthology are known to have survived. The earliest was printed in 1213, which had been collected by Song Luo and Weng Fanggang. A slightly later version was published in 1262, which used to be in the possession of Weng Tonghe 翁同龢 (1830–1904). For discussions on the history of this important anthology, one can read, Zheng Qian, *Songkan Shi Gu zhu Su Dongpo shi tiyao* 宋刊施註蘇東坡詩提要 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshu guan, 1970); I Lo-fen, "Jingguan zhenshang: Weng Fanggang jiucang ben 'Shi Gu zhu Dongpo xiansheng shi' 敬觀真賞: 翁方綱舊藏本《施顧註東坡先生詩》," in *Shuyi Dongpo* 書藝東坡 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2019), 203-48.

huge admirer of Su. He asked Shao Changheng 邵長蘅 (1637-1704) to edit this fragmented anthology and supplement the missing parts by consulting other extant collections of Su's poems. The project was completed and published in 1699 under the same title.¹⁸⁴ The original thirteenth-century manuscript which Song had collected entered Weng's possession in 1773. Weng carefully studied this rare book and published his own annotations of Su's poems.¹⁸⁵ He valued the object as one of the most important treasures at the Su Studio and often displayed it at the celebration of Su's birthday.

To Weng's eyes, the re-discovery of this ancient anthology was relevant to Yi's new post. "Prefect Fang" in the poem refers to Fang Zirong 方子容 (*jinshi* degree in 1053), the Prefect of Huizhou when Su was there. In 1097, Su had exchanged a series of poems with Fang. The verses that Su wrote have all been well recorded and regarded as tokens of their friendship.¹⁸⁶ However, it was never clear what Fang had composed in response. Surprisingly, in the original *Shi zhu Su shi*, Song Luo and Weng Fanggang found an ink-written record of a rhymed poem by Fang, although only the final line of this fragmented poem was legible.¹⁸⁷ In Weng's view, Yi's appointment as the new prefect was no less exciting than the extraordinary find of the old prefect's lost verse.

In the next line, Weng further stressed the connection between Yi and Huizhou as "predestined." In the fifth month of 1096, Su inscribed *Mohua tang* 默化堂 (The Hall of Silent

¹⁸⁴ The above information comes from Shao Changheng, "Ti jiuben Shi zhu Sus hi 題舊本施註蘇詩," in *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Shiji*, 8:5823-4.

¹⁸⁵ Matteini, "The Aesthetics of Scholarship," 107.

¹⁸⁶ For these poems, see Zhang et al., eds., *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Shiji*, 7:4816-9.

¹⁸⁷ Zha, *Su shi buzhu*, 40:30.

Transformation) for the office of Zhou Yanzhi 周彥質 (c. 11th century) in Xunzhou 循州.¹⁸⁸ Zhou was then the Prefect of Xunzhou, a region neighboring Huizhou. According to Weng's *Records of Stone Inscriptions in Eastern Guangdong (Yuedong jinshi lue 粵東金石略)*, this stone inscription still survived in the eighteenth century.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, when Weng wrote this farewell poem, Yi had just adopted the style name Mozhai 默齋 (Silence Studio). It is unclear if Yi intentionally took this name because of Su. At least, Weng believed that Su's earlier inscription helped Yi to form a special attachment to the place of his new post.

The allusion to Su continues in the last section of the poem. "No Deviant Thoughts" and "Virtue Has Neighbors" were two titles that Su adopted for his newly built residence at the White Crane Peak in Huizhou.¹⁹⁰ In the final verses, Weng made a direct reference to two poems by Su. Su had used the exact same phrase "The scallions and water have spoken more" in his poem "Gate for Remaining Upright (Yizhi fang 遺直坊)" to portray the honesty and uncorrupted office of his friend.¹⁹¹ The metaphor of *xieshui* 薤水 (scallions and water) originates from the story of the famed recluse Ren Tang 任棠 (c. 2nd century CE) in *Hou Han shu*.¹⁹² Ren had once placed a large bunch of scallions and a bowl of water in front of his door when the local prefect Pang Can 龐參 (?–136) visited him. Pang soon realized that Ren intended to teach him a lesson about local governance: he should be as transparent as the water, and when dealing with powerful local clans, he should be impartial and decisive just like pulling the scallions from the

¹⁸⁸ Kong Fanli, *Su Shi nianpu* 蘇軾年譜 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 1227.

¹⁸⁹ Weng Fanggang, *Yuedong jinshi lue* 粵東金石略, 9:6, accessed through the HathiTrust Digital Library.

¹⁹⁰ Zhang et al., eds., *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Wenji*, 3:2186. Su Shi mentioned these two inscriptions in his surviving poems, see Zhang et al., eds., *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Shiji*, 8:5279. Both phrases derive from the Confucian *Analects*, see *ibid.*, 8:5281.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 5:2905.

¹⁹² Fan Ye, *Hou Han shu* 後漢書, Online Siku quanshu (Wenyuange Edition), 81:7.

ground. Su had also used the phrase *zheshu* 折蔬 (the plucked hemp) in one of his poems to Fang Zirong. The line reads:

The pulled scallions have witnessed the achievements of virtuous prefects.
The plucked hemp shall slightly console the heart of old acquaintances.¹⁹³
拔薤已觀賢守政，折蔬聊慰故人心。

Su here again used the image of scallions to praise Fang for following the Confucian standard of governance. The “plucked hemp,” first appeared in the “Nine Songs” attributed to Qu Yuan 屈原 (ca. 3rd century BCE), is a classical expression for send-off. In the original composition, Qu said that he had “plucked the glistening flower of the Holy Hemp (a mythical plant) to give to one who lives far away.”¹⁹⁴ Since then this symbolic gesture since has been adopted by Chinese poets to convey parting from friends.¹⁹⁵ In this regard, the closing lines in Weng’s poem not only match the poem that Su wrote for Fang Zirong but also reinforces the theme of farewell. With these skillful literary references, Weng eloquently expressed his aspiration for Yi to lead an illustrious administration in Huizhou, just like Fang did at the time of Su.

The decoding of this poem requires extensive knowledge about Su’s life and literary corpus. Given Yi’s frequent participation in Weng’s celebration of Su, it should not be a surprise that he was able to penetrate all the poetic allusions in this work. This poem indeed characterizes Yi’s career in Huizhou. Tropes and references in this poem – historical sites, calligraphic inscriptions, and moral lessons – were (re)built, excavated, and taught by Yi after he arrived in Huizhou. Moreover, this kind of textual proficiency was also a strong demonstration of *kaozheng*, or the

¹⁹³ Zhang et al., eds., *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Shiji*, 7:4819.

¹⁹⁴ David Hawkes, *The Songs of the South: An Ancient Chinese Anthology of Poems by Qu Yuan and Other Poets* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 111. I would like to thank Alfreda Murck for informing me about the issues regarding the date and historical reception of Qu Yuan.

¹⁹⁵ The phrase may also have a reference to one of Tao Qian’s 陶潛 (365-427) poem, in which Tao used the same phrase to send off his old friends. For this possible reference, see Zhang et al., eds., *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Shiji*, 7:4820.

evidential scholarship, in eighteenth-century China.¹⁹⁶ This poem showcases Weng’s critical knowledge of Su through his study of the thirteenth-century source *Shi zhu Su shi* and onsite examinations of Su’s engraved inscriptions. As Yi read and deciphered this poem, Su’s major activities in Huizhou became visible.

3.3 Dongpo’s Former Residence

The place where Su once lived in Huizhou is an important *topos* in Chinese literature. Poems and essays by Su about the site have functioned as a core source of historical imagination about his living experience there.¹⁹⁷ In these texts, Su tells of building a small house for himself at the White Crane Peak, a modest hillock measuring only five *zhang* 丈 (less than twenty meters) in height. This hill faces the Eastern River (Dongjiang 東江) that flows through the city of Huizhou. The original construction was completed in the second month of 1097. Orange and lychee trees were planted near the house. To the west were two of his neighbors, an elderly laywoman named Lin (Linpo 林婆) and a certain Mr. Zhai who was a candidate of Metropolitan Examination (Zhai xiuca 翟秀才). A new well was drilled to supply water for the neighborhood. Su invited his neighbors and friends, including Fang Zirong and Zhou Yanzhi, for the housewarming. He brushed the inscriptions, “No Deviant Thoughts” and “Virtue Has Neighbors,” for the studio and hall of his new residence.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Benjamin A. Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 38-56.

¹⁹⁷ The reason for Su’s demotion to Huizhou was not much different than his first exile to Huangzhou, both of which were results of faction politics at the court. He was charged for defaming the emperor and subsequently removed from service. Su had taken shelter at several places in and around the prefecture before his final settlement at the White Crane Peak. For details of this political persecution, see Egan, *Word, Image and Deed in the Life of Su Shi*, 86-107; for the places that Su had lived in Huizhou, see *ibid.*, 213-5.

¹⁹⁸ For Su’s poems on his new residence at the White Crane Peak, see Zhang et al., eds., *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Shiji*, 7:4804-19.

The painting *White Crane Peak* (Figure 3.2) dated to 1780 by Luo Ping illuminates how eighteenth-century scholars combined textual accounts with onsite investigation to conceive the place as an authentic monument of Su's life.¹⁹⁹ A precipitous mountain penetrates clouds in the center of the picture, and a few distant peaks stand in the background. This aggrandized depiction, as pointed out by Alfreda Murck, is perhaps "inspired by Su's descriptions of the vistas that could be seen from his new residence."²⁰⁰ Indeed, in the *Beam Inscription for the New Residence at the White Crane Peak* 白鶴新居上樑文 (hereafter the *Beam Inscription*), a liturgical text for the completion of the new house, Su employed florid language to portray the location as a heavenly terrace:

The myriad households of Goose City (Huizhou) are scattered at the crossing of two rivers; the lonely peak of White Crane Temple stands above a thousand cliffs. Mirage Mountains float in the ocean like phantasms. Immortals and transcendent soar into the sky in constant traffic.²⁰¹

The picture appears to have also been sparked by the empirical research of Weng Fanggang, who inscribed two poems and a long colophon next to the painting. Weng visited the White Crane Peak in Huizhou during his tenure as the Education Commissioner of Guangdong between 1764 and 1772. The well depicted atop the mountain was a monument he had carefully examined in person. Weng especially valued the ruined inscription at the rim of the well and documented it as the most important historical remnant in Huizhou.²⁰² In his view, the fragmented condition of the

¹⁹⁹ This painting, formerly in Wan-go H.C. Weng Collection, is now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. See Kim, et al., eds., *Eccentric Visions*, 236.

²⁰⁰ Alfreda Murck, "Travel Sites of Immortal Po," 234.

²⁰¹ This English translation of the *Beam Inscription* is by Zhiyi Yang, see Zhiyi Yang, *Dialectics of Spontaneity: The Aesthetics and Ethics of Su Shi* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015), 188. For the original text in Chinese, see Zhang Zhilie, Ma Defu, and Zhou Yukai, eds., *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Wenji* 蘇軾全集校註: 文集 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 2010), 9:7150-5.

²⁰² Weng Fanggang offered a detailed account of his onsite investigation at the White Crane Peak, see Weng, *Yuedong jinshi lue*, 9:4-5. Su also wrote a poem about the miraculous spring from the well he drilled at the White Crane Peak, see Su Shi, "At the new residence on the White Crane Peak, I dug a well for forty *chi*, drilling through a gigantic boulder and obtaining the spring 白鶴山新居凿井四十尺遇盘石石尽乃得泉," in *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu*:

inscription testifies to the age of the monument and the historicity of the site. The painting, in this regard, highlights a mode of historical imagination in the eighteenth century that merges textual knowledge and *in situ* observation. Looking at the image, one thus relives not only the poetic vision of Su when the villa was first completed in the eleventh century, but also the recent trip Weng embarked on to survey stone inscriptions in Huizhou.

The condition of the site, as Weng saw and experienced in the late eighteenth century, was by no means “Song original” but had been heavily mediated by local officials of the Ming dynasty. When Yi began to renovate buildings at the White Crane Peak in 1800, the architectural complex had long been registered as “Dongpo’s Former Residence (Dongpo guju 東坡故居) in local gazetteers under the standard category “Ancient Sites 古跡.”²⁰³ Part of the site also assumed the memorial function as the Dongpo Shrine (Dongpo ci 東坡祠) no later than the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368). A clay sculpture (*tuxiang* 土像) of Su Shi was worshipped at the shrine, flanked by several other images. In the Yuan, the image was accompanied by a statue of Chen Yaozuo 陳堯佐 (963–1044), a Song-dynasty official who had served in Huizhou.²⁰⁴ During the Ming, however, the local prefect Li Shuyu 李叔玉 (b. 1408) replaced the statue of Chen with the images of Tang Geng 唐庚 (1070–1120), a prominent Song official banished to Huizhou in the early twelfth century, and Su Guo 蘇過 (1072–1123), the third son of Su Shi who was also

Shiji, 7:4809.

²⁰³ The following discussion is based upon records from three local gazetteers in the digital database *Zhongguo fang zhi ku* 中國方志庫, published by the Beijing Erudition Digital Research Center: *Guangdong tongzhi chugao* 廣東通志初稿 (Jiajing Period of the Ming, 1522–1566), *Qianlong Guishan xianzhi* 乾隆歸善縣志 (1783), and *Guangxu Huizhou fuzhi* 光緒惠州府志 (1884). In what follows, I use the *juan* 卷 number from the original gazetteer and the page number from this digital database to index the source.

²⁰⁴ In a now lost essay, Yuan scholar Xing Shiheng 邢世衡 (c. 14th century) noted this arrangement of images, see *Qianlong Guishan Xianzhi*, *juan* 5, 202.

demoted to Huizhou.²⁰⁵ Gu Sui 顧遂 (*jinshi* degree in 1518), a later magistrate of the region, added Su Zhe 蘇轍 (1039–1112), the younger brother of Su Shi who was exiled to a nearby county, to the group for veneration. However, in 1575, the sculpted images of Tang Geng and Su Zhe were removed from the shrine for unknown reasons. Because these Song-dynasty figures all had sojourned in and around Huizhou during their lifetimes, their images were probably meant to represent important episodes of the region’s cultural history. It is unclear why the set of images went through several modifications. If the above records from local gazetteers are accurate, the Dongpo Shrine possibly housed at least two clay sculptures of Su Shi and Su Guo by the late sixteenth century.

No additional change to the shrine was documented since then but careful maintenance of the site had become an established practice among Qing officials in Huizhou. From 1657 to 1779, the so-called “Dongpo’s Former Residence” went through at least five major renovations sponsored by local administrators.²⁰⁶ Rituals were also held twice a year at the Dongpo Shrine, making it a place for the regional cult that worshipped Su Shi as an immortal. Yi’s renovation of Dongpo’s Former Residence might have stemmed from the shared interest in Su as a cultural luminary among his cohort. However, the project could have also had a special appeal to the local audience due to its deep roots in well-established regional folklore.

3.4 Discovery of the Inkstone

The alleged eleventh-century inkstone, which I introduced at the beginning of this chapter, was excavated from a ruin dated to the late sixteenth century. Yi noted that he found the inkstone in a

²⁰⁵ The following modifications of the images are documented in *Qianlong Guishan Xianzhi*, *juan* 5, 202-3.

²⁰⁶ These restorations, documented in the section “*junshi* 郡事 (prefectural affairs)” in *Guangxu Huizhou fuzhi*, took place in 1657, 1660, 1670, 1723, 1779, see *Guangxu Huizhou fuzhi*, *juan* 17.

place known as Ink Swamp (*mozhao* 墨沼).²⁰⁷ Ink Swamp and Cinnabar Pond (*zhuchi* 硃池), a pair of dried-up shallow pools in the eighteenth century, earned their names from the *Beam*

Inscription:

I shall dig Yishao's (Wang Xizhi, 303–361) Ink Pond, and install Zhichuan's (Ge Hong, 283–343) Cinnabar Stove.²⁰⁸
方將開逸少之墨池，安稚川之丹竈。

The Ink Pond of Wang Xizhi, the sage of Chinese calligraphy, refers to a time-honored anecdote about Wang cleaning his inkstone in a natural pond near his house.²⁰⁹ Because of his extreme enthusiasm for writing calligraphy, Wang transformed this pool of transparent water into a dark pond of ink. The Cinnabar Stove points to a local legend that Ge Hong had once concocted elixirs of immortality in Luofu Mountain (Luofu shan 羅浮山) near Huizhou.²¹⁰ This line, from my reading, should not be taken as an actual plan of construction but more likely conveys Su's aspiration for the newly built environment. Similar to his rendition of the White Crane Peak as a sublime mountain, the language here suggests that Su looked forward to practicing calligraphy and Daoist alchemy at his new home. Although these pools were identified in the sixteenth-century gazetteer as being “dug by Dongpo,” Qing compliers supposed that they were probably “added and built by later people.”²¹¹ Moreover, my survey of extant writings on Dongpo's Former Residence suggests that the Ink Swamp and the Cinnabar Pond first appeared as historical components of the site in a poem by Chen Jin 陳謹 (1525–1566).²¹² Since then, this set

²⁰⁷ The place of discovery is noted in the inscription by Yi on the back of the inkstone.

²⁰⁸ Yang, *Dialectics of Spontaneity*, 188. Zhang, et al., eds., *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Wenji*, 9:7150.

²⁰⁹ Zeng Gong, “Mochi ji 墨池記,” in *Yuanfeng leigao* 元豐類稿, *juan* 17.

²¹⁰ Ronald Egan suggests that Su's interests in alchemy and Ge Hong were not entirely mundane concerns of health but probably also speaks of his desire to “transcend the world of men,” see Egan, *Word, Image and Deed in the Life of Su Shi*, 237-45.

²¹¹ *Guangdong tongzhi chugao*, *juan* 1, 108; *Qianlong Guishan Xianzhi*, *juan* 4, 156-7.

²¹² *Qianlong Guishan Xianzhi*, *juan* 4, 166.

of scenic spots became a standard literary trope delineating Su's residence in Huizhou. It seems likely that this poetic line in the *Beam Inscription* was translated into the physical site around the sixteenth century. From this perspective, the inkstone Yi found in 1800 most likely emerged from a locale which was not invented until the late Ming dynasty.

My analysis here does not aim to cast doubts on Yi's intent behind this miraculous discovery but to illustrate the historical provenance of the inkstone. Yi's archaeological activities can be confirmed by the writings of nineteenth-century scholars.²¹³ For example, those who saw the inkstone were deeply impressed by the sharp contrast between the carving of Su's personal marks and the inscriptions later added by Yi and his friends.²¹⁴ The former possesses a coherent shade of color with the stone material, a sign of gradual erosion caused by the long duration of its underground burial; whereas the latter displays fresh traces of carving that are distinctively crisp and new. My conviction is that Yi did uncover the inkstone during his renovation project and treasured the artifact for its aged appearance and geographical proximity to the place where Su once lived.

The apparent credulity may seem odd on the surface but could be explained in relation to a Song idea about collecting and collectibles. As Su Shi eloquently expressed in the *Beam Inscription*, “material things decline and prosper, at times they hide while other times reveal [themselves] 物有廢興，時而隱顯。” In her study of the text, Zhiyi Yang believes that the

²¹³ Moreover, it seems quite common for people in the area to find early material objects from historical sites. Local gazetteer of Huizhou also documents a few other instances in which engraved stones were unearthed from the old residence of a historical person. For example, a Ming scholar had once unearthed an inkstone inscribed with the character *li* 礪 from the historical residence of an obscure Song official in Huizhou, see *Guangxu Huizhou fuzhi*, *juan* 28, 1083.

²¹⁴ *Shunde xianzhi* 順德縣志 (Xianfeng Period, 1851–1861), accessed through the digital database *Zhongguo fang zhi ku* 中國方志庫, published by the Beijing Erudition Digital Research Center, *juan* 20, 1866-7.

vicissitudes of material things could be read as a metaphor for Su's own tumultuous life.²¹⁵ At the same time, the anthropomorphization of objects was perhaps also spurred by philosophical reflection on the relationship between the human and material world, an important Song-dynasty concept that is best articulated by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072):

As a rule, material things accumulate where they are enjoyed and are likewise possessed where the resources to obtain them are greatest. If there are resources but no enjoyment, or enjoyment without resources, then even if the things in question are close at hand and easy to acquire, they will not be brought to you.²¹⁶

物常聚於所好，而常得於有力之疆。有力而不好，好之而無力，雖近且易有不能致之。

This principle for the lives of material things seems a perfect annotation to Yi's discovery. Earlier people did not find the inkstone because they either lacked interest or capability. The treasure, however, chose to manifest itself in front of Yi because he not only admired Su Shi but was also intellectually able to appreciate the object. Qing antiquarians had referred to these classical lines by Ouyang to justify their collecting of engraved stone materials.²¹⁷ For them, their desire to uncover the past, as well as their appreciation for archaic calligraphic styles, contributed to the finding of ancient inscriptions unknown to earlier scholars. It is perhaps because of this eleventh-century idea that Yi and his friends were able to establish a sense of historicity for the inkstone.²¹⁸ This inkstone happened to “prosper” at a moment when the “enjoyment” of the object was the greatest. The rhetoric of material things' embodiment of

²¹⁵ The English translation is adapted from Zhiyi Yang's work, see Yang, *Dialectics of Spontaneity*, 188.

²¹⁶ Ronald Egan, *The Problem of Beauty: Aesthetic Thought and Pursuits in Northern Song Dynasty China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 11-12.

²¹⁷ For example, Weng Fanggang had quoted this opening line by Ouyang in his discussion on the purpose of collecting stone inscriptions, see Weng Fanggang, “Ziti kaoding Jinshi tu hou 自題考訂金石圖後,” in *Fuchu zhai wenji* 復初齋文集 (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1969), 1:281-3.

²¹⁸ It had been a convention for newly appointed prefects to study a region's geography, customs, and history through local gazetteers. Yi was thus quite likely to have read the Qing gazetteer of 1783 and learnt about the complex modifications of the site. This historical awareness, in this regard, does not undermine the value of the discovery but only serves to strengthen it.

agency broaches a new line of inquiry beyond questions of authenticity and date: what is the enjoyment that the inkstone bestowed upon this group of Qing scholars?

3.5 The Heavenly Inkstone

Answers could be first formulated from the identity of inkstone as an important didactic object, capable of instructing moralistic lessons through the sensorial experience it generates. An essential instrument for producing ink, the inkstone was an indispensable part of scholars' daily lives in imperial China. As observed by Dorothy Ko, the inkstone began to emerge as a quintessential representation of scholarly collectible when Song scholars devoted elaborate writings about it in the eleventh century.²¹⁹ Indeed, Su Shi had written some thirty surviving inscriptions for inkstones.²²⁰ These texts transformed this stone material into symbols of exemplary human character.

In particular, the lesson that Su Shi gained from his favorite inkstone in his youth tells of the meanings that this material object came to embody in the eighteenth century. The intriguing story is recorded in Su's "Inscription on the Heavenly Inkstone (Tianshi yan ming 天石硯銘)":

When [Su] Shi was twelve years old, in the open ground near his house at the Silk Products Guild, he and a group of children dug in the dirt for fun and found an unusual stone. [The stone surface felt] like fish skin, warm and sparkling, with a pale green color. The exterior and interior [of the stone] all had thin silver stars (dots). Knocking on it created a clanging sound. When [Su] tried it out as an inkstone, it made ink quite well, even though it did not have a space to store water. The former gentleman (Su's father) said: "This is a heavenly inkstone. It has the virtue of an inkstone even though its form is insufficient." He therefore bestowed the stone on Shi, saying: "this is auspicious for writing." Shi treasured and used the object, and composed an inscription, reading:

It was created at once and cannot be changed. Some concentrate on virtue and some prefer perfect form. Weighing the two, I am content with my choice. Relying on [words] from other people's lips and bowing to their feet, the world has many like this.

²¹⁹ Ko, *The Social Life of Inkstones*, 160.

²²⁰ For a survey of these texts, see Lu Qingbin (Andrew Lo), "Su Shi yu yan wenhua 蘇軾與硯文化," *Songdai wenxue yanjiu congkan* 宋代文學研究叢刊, no. 8 (2002): 471-93.

In Autumn, the seventh month of the second year of the Yuanfeng Era (1079), I was accused of a crime and sent to jail. My family was driven from our home, and [my] books were scattered in a mess. The next year, when [I] arrived in Huangzhou, I sought the inkstone but could not find it. I thought it was lost. In the seventh month of the seventh year [of the Yuanfeng Era] (1084), as the ferry reached Dangtu (in present-day Anhui Province), I opened my hamper of books and suddenly re-discovered it (the inkstone). Deeply delighted, I handed it over to Dai and Guo (Su Shi's sons). The case [for the inkstone] was not skillfully made but because my father carved [the case] with his hands at the place where I received the inkstone, and then had artisans complete the design, [the case] cannot be changed.

軾年十二時，於所居紗縠行宅隙地中，與羣兒鑿地為戲，得異石，如魚膚溫瑩，作淺碧色，表裏皆細銀星，扣之鏘然。試以為硯，甚發墨，無貯水處。先君曰：“是天硯也，有硯之德，而不足於形耳。”因以賜軾，曰：“是文字之祥也。”軾寶而用之，且為銘曰：

一受其成，而不可更。或主於德，或全于形。均此二者，顧予安取。仰唇俯足，世固多有。

元豐二年秋七月，予得罪下獄，家屬流離，書籍散亂。明年至黃州，求硯不復得，以為失之矣。七年七月，舟行至當塗，發書笥，忽復見之。甚喜，以付迨、過。其匣雖不工，乃先君手刻其受硯處，而使工人就成之者，不可易也。²²¹

Loaded with symbolism of Confucian values, this essay begins by identifying the inkstone as a virtuous object because it fulfilled its primary duty to produce ink and did not fixate on the outer appearance. The term *tianshi* 天石, which can mean either “natural rock” or “heavenly stone,” seems a deliberately ambiguous suggestion that this stone was naturally transformed by a heavenly force. Despite its defect in shape, this inkstone gained its value because of its ability to produce ink. This metaphor intends to anthropomorphize the inkstone as a Confucian gentleman, who receives bodily form from his parents and often engages in righteous behavior. Su Shi's father used this unusual object to teach him a lesson about the attainment of virtue: appropriately performing one's social roles is an important expression of virtue. Just as the inkstone does its job, a gentleman should focus on behaving like a gentleman.

²²¹ Zhang, et al., eds., *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Wenji*, 3:2099-101.

Su Shi's inscription for the Heavenly Inkstone in the second paragraph, however, appears to contradict his father's forthright instruction. Even though he agreed with his father that "virtue" and "form" cannot be attained at the same time, Su did not overtly announce his choice between the two.²²² The final line of Su's inscription could be read as his attitude that one should not bow to mainstream opinions. The preference of virtue over conformity is crucial and correct but one should also stand by one's own beliefs and decisions, even at a time when the majority embrace the opposite. Su was known for this individualist stance, which can be observed in many of his other writings. This insistence on independence also appealed to later scholars who faced similar dilemmas in their own life circumstances.

The epilogue for the inscription appropriates the function of the inkstone as a writing instrument to suggest the restraint of Su's expression during the exile. The loss of the inkstone in 1079 and its re-discovery in 1084 corresponds to the period of Huangzhou exile. In 1079, Su was convicted of treason due to his poems written during the government's new economic policy. Many of these writings were interpreted by his rivals at the court as criticism toward the emperor. He was jailed for several months, faced the death penalty, and was eventually banished to Huangzhou. The imperial edict in 1084 which appointed Su to a post in Ruzhou marked the end of his first political exile.²²³ In addition, Su had also employed expressions, such as "burnt brush and inkstone 焚筆硯" and "abandoned brush and inkstone 廢筆硯," to indicate his self-distancing from literary compositions during his exiles.²²⁴ Ronald Egan notes that when Su Shi

²²² The phrase *jun ci er zhe* 均此二者 may seem open for different interpretations, as it can mean both "weighing the two," or "balancing the two." I translated as the former because I do not think Su was bold enough to make an open statement against his father that he wanted to pursue both the virtue and the form. I believe that Su did not reveal his choice here because he did not feel that his opinion matters, and one should make one's own decision.

²²³ For details that led to this banishment, one can read Egan, *Word, Image and Deed in the Life of Su Shi*, 27-53.

²²⁴ See, for examples, "Responding to Cen Liao," in Zhang, eds., *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Wenji*, 9:6705-6; and "Letters to Mao Zeming," in Zhang, eds., *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Wenji*, 8:5895.

was banished to Huizhou, his brother Su Zhe urged him to “burn the brush and inkstone.”²²⁵ The loss of inkstone perhaps suggests Su’s self-censorship to avoid political troubles, whereas the reunion with the inkstone was meant to announce his joyful reclamation of freedom after the Huangzhou exile.

3.5.1 *Illustrations of Dongpo’s Honorable Traces*

The story of the Heavenly Inkstone began to signify an important episode of Su Shi’s life as early as the seventeenth century. In the late-Ming scroll *Illustrations of Dongpo’s Honorable Traces* (Dongpo xiansheng yiji tu 東坡先生懿跡圖, Figure 3.3), Li Zongmo produced a painted biography of Su through thirteen anecdotes spanning from his adolescence to the end of his life.²²⁶ A man from Fujian, Li was an obscure painter active around the time of Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636). In this work, he divided the vignettes of Su’s life into independent pictorial units and added short inscriptions for identification.

The text next to the third picture (Figure 3.4) summarizes the story in which Su Shi unearthed an inkstone near his house at the age of twelve. The image depicts a young man sitting in an upright position behind a desk, framed by a painted landscape screen. He holds a brush, preparing to dip it into the ink in the inkstone, a gesture implying the literature he will compose with the ink that will be produced by the stone object. The image-text relationship suggests that Li interpreted this anecdote from the perspective of Su’s father and cast the stone as an auspicious sign of literary composition. With the visual emphasis on the given role of the

²²⁵ Egan, *Word, Image and Deed in the Life of Su Shi*, 216.

²²⁶ The painting is currently in the collection of the Beijing Palace Museum, see Gugong bowuyuan, ed., *Qianggu fengliu renwu: Gugong bowuyuan cang Su Shi zhuti shuhua tezhan* 千古風流人物: 蘇軾主題書畫特展 (Beijing: Gugong chubanshe, 2020), 84-7.

inkstone, the picture intends to reiterate the lesson of Confucian virtue that Su gained in his youth.

3.5.2 *Dongpo Appreciating the Inkstone*

Su Shi and his inkstone evolved into a widely popular pictorial theme in the eighteenth century through the hands of Huang Shen. A Fujian native, Huang earned his fame in Yangzhou as a figure painter, whose works were sought after by a diverse clientele. Several of Huang's paintings depict Su Shi holding an inkstone. Ginger Cheng-chi Hsü has discussed these popular images as commodities for sale in the art market of Yangzhou. In her view, these paintings not only cater to Huang's "clients' desire for narrative content," but also help increase Huang's productivity for high market demands.²²⁷ Huang efficiently fashioned new narratives by paring the same Su Shi image with different inscriptions or additional historical figures. These paintings contributed to the dissemination of Su Shi's inkstones stories and the propagation of their intended moralistic messages.

One of these paintings inscribed with the *Inscription on the Heavenly Inkstone* fosters a nuanced image-text relationship to activate the multi-sensorial enjoyment of the inkstone. Titled *Dongpo Appreciating the Inkstone* (Figure 3.5), the painting belongs to a set of undated album leaves now in the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing.²²⁸ Su is portrayed as an old man in frontal view with a standing posture. The man in this painting carefully holds an inkstone with his left hand, and gently touches the stone surface with his right hand. This dynamic gesture

²²⁷ Ginger Cheng-chi Hsü, *A bushel of pearls: Painting for Sale in Eighteenth-century Yangchow* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 120-2. Shanghai Museum and Kyoto National Museum are two institutions that house this kind of identical portrait of Su Shi by Huang Shen.

²²⁸ This album is currently in the collection of the Beijing Palace Museum (BPM), under the title *Album Leaves of Landscapes and Figures* (*Shanshui renwu tuce* 山水人物圖冊). One can find reproductions of this album in the digital collection database (*shuzi wenwu ku* 數字文物庫) of the BPM, <https://digicol.dpm.org.cn/>. Its accession numbers are 新 00099557-1/12 to 新 00099557-12/12. The undated album is made up by a mixture of twelve images about different historical figures and landscapes.

seems to evoke the texture and sound of the unusual stone Su described in the text. In his other inscriptions, Su also employed the phrase *yude jinsheng* 玉德金聲, or “the virtues of jade and the sound of bronze (bells)” to praise the physical feature of inkstones.²²⁹ In Confucian classics, the materiality of a jade symbolizes the five basic virtues of a Confucian gentleman – benevolence, wisdom, righteousness, propriety, and trustworthiness – and the vibration of bronze instruments helps induce these exemplary human characters.²³⁰ Tactile interactions with an inkstone, such as touching and knocking its stone surface, activate meanings traditionally embodied in jades and bronzes, and therefore elevate its status to those classical artifacts. Placing the object firmly in Su’s hands instead of on a scholarly desk, Huang’s picture imparts a rich sensory stimulation, through which viewers could sense the softness of the stone and hear the clinking sound as Su gently stroked the object.

A further comparison with Li’s work underscores the retrospective gaze in Huang’s painting. Staring deeply at the gift from his father, the man is no longer in his adolescence but just went through his first political exile. This contemplative look was perhaps meant to convey Su’s complex array of feelings when reunited with his favorite inkstone in 1084. In addition, this psychological portrait also serves to complement the inscription on the painting. Huang only transcribed the first two sections of the *Inscription for the Heavenly Inkstone* on the image, narrating the discovery of the stone and instructions from Su’s father. The omitted epilogue, on the other hand, is told by the image. The text and the portrait, in this regard, works together to generate a rich experience of viewing – from reading the inscription to looking at the image. This

²²⁹ Su had used this phrase, or phrases with a similar idea in the following inscriptions on inkstones: *Inscription for Wang Pingfu’s Inkstone* 王平甫硯銘; *Inscription for Kong Yifu’s Dragon Tail Inkstone* 孔毅甫龍尾硯銘; *Inscription for Kong Yifu’s Phoenix Beak Inkstone* 孔毅甫鳳喙石硯銘. For the complete texts of these inscriptions, see Zhang, eds., *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Wenji*, 3:2060; 3:2064; 3:2065-6.

²³⁰ For the symbolisms of jade and bronze instrument in early literatures, see *ibid.*, 3:2061.

carefully designed picture constructs Su Shi's inkstone as an embodiment of moral rectitude and unrestrained expression for the eighteenth-century audience.

3.6 Congxing Inkstone

Inkstones attributed to Su Shi in the Qing imperial collection elucidates a different enjoyment of the object as an intermedia pictorial surface mirroring the cosmos. The Congxing Inkstone (Congxing yan 從星硯, Figure 3.6) occupies a special place in the Qing palace because of the intricate relationship between the visual design of the object and the inscription by Su on the side of the stone. Deeply valued by the Qianlong Emperor, the inkstone also bears one poem by the emperor and eight inscriptions by important Qing academicians. Seldom did an inkstone receive recognitions from so many court officials. Liu Yong 劉墉 (1720–1804), one of these inscribers, was a teacher to Yi when he served in Beijing. The case of the Congxing Inkstone thus illuminates the cross-media translation of Su's literary compositions into material designs, a phenomenon contemporaneous to Yi's excavation of the inkstone in Huizhou.

3.6.1 Inkstone Manual of Western Clarity

The Congxing Inkstone is one of the six "Su Shi" objects in the *Inkstone Manual of Western Clarity* (*Xiqing yanpu* 西清硯譜).²³¹ Completed in 1778, this twenty-four-volume catalogue was among the several projects patronized by the Qianlong Emperor to document the massive collection of the Qing imperial household. Modern scholars have pointed out that the emperor used his arts collection to represent his multi-ethnic empire and build his image as a universal ruler of both military might and cultural capability.²³² His collection of inkstones involved a

²³¹ Yu Minzhong, et. al., eds, *Qinding Xiqing yanpu* 欽定西清硯譜, 24 vol.

²³² For example, see Yu Hui-chun, "Bronzes from Afar: Ch'ien-lung's 'His-ch'ing Hsü-chien Chia-pien Fu-lu'", *Taida Journal of Art History*, 31 (2011): 151-96; Nicole T.C. Chiang, *Emperor Qianlong's Hidden Treasures: Reconsidering the Collection of the Qing Imperial Household* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2019); Patricia Berger, *Empire of Emptiness: Buddhist Art and Political Authority in Qing China* (Honolulu: University of

similar purpose but was also distinctive because no similar catalogue on this type of object had been made by rulers of earlier dynasties. This illustrated catalogue includes a wide temporal spectrum of artifacts, ranging from ceramic inkstones of the Han dynasty to recent products from the Qing imperial workshop. Qianlong appointed Yu Minzhong 于敏中 (1714–1779) to head a team of scholars to study and inventory these selected inkstones from the palace collection. Men Yingzhao 門應兆 (fl. 1780s), a court painter specialized in the chiaroscuro technique, was responsible for descriptive drawings of these artifacts. The emergence of an imperial catalogue of this kind speaks about the unprecedented interests in inkstones during the eighteenth century.

It should be noted that this set of documents was compiled in a typical mode of the Qianlong era, which is to say the emperor often disguised his innovations as collecting or tradition. As scholars have noted in recent decades, the emperor not only fabricated a variety of ancient inkstones based on earlier texts but also registered these inventions alongside historical samples he probably did collect, as if they were of equal status and authenticity.²³³ For example, extant archives from the Imperial Household Department (*Zaobanchu* 造辦處) clearly identifies that at least one of these six inkstones attributed to Su was in fact commissioned by Qianlong.²³⁴ In 1743, the emperor asked the Imperial Inkstone Workshop to produce an object known as the Inkstone of the Knotted Rope 結繩硯 (Figure 3.7). Court artisans first submitted a wooden

Hawai'i Press, 2003), 63-82.

²³³ Zheng Jiahua, "Xiqing yanpu guyan 西清硯譜古硯," *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 故宮文物月刊, no. 167 (February 1997): 22-32; Zhao Lihong, "Qing Qianlong shiqi fanggu yan zhizuo chutan 清乾隆時期仿古硯製作初探 (A Preliminary Exploration of Archaistic Ink-stones Produced during the Qianlong Emperor's Reign in Qing Dynasty)," *Gugong xuekan* 故宮學刊, vol. 18 (2017): 168-180; Wang Ziqi, "Wuhui yu xiangxiang touguo Tongque way an de renshi tan yishupin de suzao 誤會與想象: 透過對銅雀瓦硯的認識談藝術品的塑造," *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宮博物院院刊, vol. 215, no. 3 (2020): 76-84.

²³⁴ Zhao, "Qing Qianlong shiqi fanggu yan zhizuo chutan," 169-70. For the original archival record, see Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'an guan, and Xianggang zhongwen daxue wenwu guan, eds., *Qingongong neiwufu zaobanchu dang'an zonghui* 清宮內務府造辦處檔案總匯 (Beijing, Renmin chubanshe, 2005), 10: 765-6.

model (*muyang* 木樣) to the emperor for his opinion. Qianlong approved their design and ordered that the character *shi* 軾, a common signature of Su, be carved on the stone.

Interestingly, the emperor also asked the workshop to burn this inkstone to create an antiqued appearance for the object. This fabricated object was then listed as one of the “Su Shi” inkstones in the *Inkstone Manual of Western Clarity* and is now housed at the Beijing Palace Museum.²³⁵ Records from this catalogue therefore should not be taken as unfiltered historical evidence but read against the inventive antiquarian enterprise that the Qianlong Emperor embarked on in the eighteenth century.²³⁶

In my view, the admiration for Su Shi must have elevated his name to the status of a “super-brand.” Dorothy Ko first uses the term to describe the cultural fascination around Gu Erniang 顧二娘 (fl. 1700–1722), an extraordinary female inkstone maker in Suzhou.²³⁷ In her insightful study, Ko demonstrates how Gu’s personal style grew to be a famous brand through the circulation of her stories and the exchange of products believed to be made by her. A gigantic body of inkstones attributed to this celebrated woman emerged in eighteenth-century China yet none of them could be unequivocally said to be from her hand or her studio. The mechanism, in which artisans across China actively adapted a diverse repertoire of cross-media knowledge about Gu – textual records, textile techniques, ink rubbings, pictorial sketches – for inkstone designs, gave rise to the countless objects with Gu’s name. A similar phenomenon could have occurred with the emergence of “Su Shi” inkstones at the Qianlong court and in the Qing empire

²³⁵ Yu, et. al., eds, *Qinding Xiqing yanpu*, juan 8: 18-21; Fu Qiang, “Su Shi ming duanshi jiesheng wen yan 蘇軾銘端石結繩紋硯,” in *Qianggu fengliu renwu*, edited by Gugong bowuyuan, 366-9.

²³⁶ Patricia Berger also discusses the inventive copies of old paintings in the Qing imperial collection and analyzes the purpose of Qianlong behind commissioning those works, see Berger, *Empire of Emptiness*, 75-8.

²³⁷ Ko, *The Social Life of Inkstones*, 123.

at large. Although the exact provenance of the remaining five objects, including the Congxing Inkstone, are not entirely clear, their varied designs coalesce Su's stories and inscriptions into meaningful visual programs. To modern scholars' eyes, these items in the *Inkstone Manual of Western Clarity* are unlikely to be possessed or produced by Su but rather forged during either the Ming or the Qing.²³⁸ I agree with this general observation but would like to add that the ingenuity of Su's inkstone inscriptions must have inspired the creation of these artifacts. In other words, it was Su's influential literary corpus that functioned as a super-brand, stimulating a fanciful re-imagination of ancient inkstones that this man saw and owned in the eleventh century.

3.6.2 Ink as the Rain, Stone as the Sky

This intermedial fabrication is perhaps best exemplified by the Congxing Inkstone.²³⁹ A modest rectangular shape, this inkstone features an archaic format originated from the Song dynasty, known as *chaoshou* 抄手, literally "to seize by hand."²⁴⁰ The term describes the hollow bottom

²³⁸ I surmise that it might have been created during the late Ming since imageries of constellations was a popular motif associated with Su Shi at the time. For example, Wen Zhengming was known to have collected an *Kui* constellation inkstone that bears Su Shi's signature, see Chiang Pei-Chun, "Wen Zhengming shige shenghuo kongjian yanjiu yi Suzhou weizhu de kaocha 文徵明詩歌生活空間研究 - 以蘇州為主的考察," (MA thesis, National Sun Yat-sen University, 2015), 42-3. Thomas Kelly also mentions this inkstone in his dissertation, see Thomas Patrick Kelly, "Clawed Skin: The Literary Inscription of Things in Sixteenth Century China," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2017), 63.

²³⁹ My use of the term "intermedial" is inspired by W. J. T. Mitchell's and Lars Elleström's definition of "intermediality" as a mixture of "sensory, perceptual and semiotic elements," see W. J. T. Mitchell, "There Are No Visual Media," *Journal of Visual Culture* 4 (2005): 257-266; and Lars Elleström, "The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations," in *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 17-24. Their studies recognize "medium" and "mediation" as a process that involves multiple sensory modalities, such as sight, hearing, and touch. For an introduction to different conceptualizations of "intermediality," see Sonya Petersson, Christer Johansson, Magdalena Holdar, and Sara Callahan, eds., *The Power of the In-Between: Intermediality as a Tool for Aesthetic Analysis and Critical Reflection* (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2018).

²⁴⁰ This inkstone measures about sixteen centimeters in length, nine centimeters in width and around six centimeters in height. It is currently in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, see http://antiquities.npm.gov.tw/Utensils_Page.aspx?ItemId=37854. The object is featured in an exhibition catalogue by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, see Wen C. Fong and James C. Y. Watt, eds., *Possessing the Past: Treasures from the National Palace Museum, Taipei* (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996), 537-8.

cabinet with which people could take up the object without ink dirtying their hands. The stone façade is smoothly curved to form a concaved structure on the top for storage of liquid ink. A relief image of swirling clouds around the moon sits on the edge of this curve (Figure 3.8). The moon imagery frames a light green palette inside, resembling the shape of an eye. Commonly known in Chinese as *shiyān* 石眼, literally “the eyes of the stone,” this natural mark is unique to materials from Duan Prefecture in Guangdong. In the eleventh century, inkstone aficionados such as Mi Fu 米芾 (1052–1107) promoted these “eyes” for their rarity on Duan stones and developed elaborate terminologies, such as “mynah’s eyes (*qūge yān* 鸚鵡眼),” or “cat’s eyes (*mao yān* 貓眼),” to classify them based on their different shapes and colors.²⁴¹ Antiquarians and collectors from the Ming also took up this idea to rank stones based on these special constituents.²⁴² Due to this continued discursive investment, by the eighteenth century, Duan stones with these extraordinary marks were viewed as invaluable materials of historical significance.

The Congxing Inkstone earned its name from an inscription carved on the right side of the object (Figure 3.9). The text reads:

When the moon is between the stars *Ji* (Winnowing-basket) and *Bi* (Net), wind and rain come.

The wide ocean of brush and ink is just like this.

The ink cloud floats in the air, blocking the sky.

As the wind blows and the cloud moves, the stars and the moon become magnificent.²⁴³

月之從星，時則風雨。汪洋翰墨，將此是似。

墨雲浮空，漫不見天。風起雲移，星月凜然。

²⁴¹ Ko, *The Social Life of Inkstones*, 63-67; Liu Yanliang, *Duanyan quanshu* 端硯全書 (Hong Kong: Balong shuwu, 1994), 78-86.

²⁴² One example is Gao Lian, *Zunsheng ba jian* 遵生八牋, 19 vols., Harvard Yenching Institute collection, *juan* 15, 15-9. It is interesting to note that editors of *Xiqing yanpu* referred to this book as an early example of an illustrated inkstone manual.

²⁴³ Zhang, eds., *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Wenji*, 3:2096-7.

My plain English translation here does no justice to Su's ingenious comparison of the ink-grinding process to a natural celestial event. Derived from the Confucian classic *Shangshu* 尚書, or *Classic of Documents*, the first line alludes to the calendar system of Twenty-eight Lunar Mansions, which traces the movement of the moon in relation to constant stars in the cosmos.²⁴⁴ The term *congxing* describes the moment when the moon appears between the stars *ji* 箕 and *bi* 畢. Because these two constellations were symbols of wind and rain, this position of the moon is seen as a prediction of a rising storm. The following two lines use this atmospheric condition as an analogy to the rubbing of inkstick against the stone surface with water. Dark liquid flows out as if thunderclouds shadow the sky.

This poetic metaphor is further animated by the pictorial design of the Congxing inkstone. The slightly slanted plane guides ink to permeate motifs of the moon and clouds at the edge of the concave area. The mini-cylindrical pillars in the cabinet of the object concludes the visual narrative with a sense of astonishment (Figure 3.10). The starry night in the final line is translated into a material design of sculpted columns, each of which is perhaps dyed with the *shiyuan* décor.²⁴⁵ These thinly carved pillars were intentionally made in a broad array of heights to

²⁴⁴ For the original passage in *Shangshu*, see *ibid.*, 3:2096. For a recent discussion on *Shangshu*, see Martin Kern and Dirk Meyer, *Origins of Chinese Political Philosophy: Studies in the Composition and Thought of the Shangshu (Classic of Documents)* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Michael Nylan, *The Shifting Center: The Original "Great Plan" and Later Readings* (Nettetal: Institut Monumenta Serica, 1992). In their introduction, Kern and Meyer mention a forthcoming translation of *Shangshu* by the late Father Paul L. M. Serruys (1912–1999), Michael Nylan, and David Schaberg. For the theory of Twenty-eight Lunar Mansions, see Nicholas Campion, *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 101-9; Philip Yampolsky, "The Origin of the Twenty-Eight Lunar Mansions," *Osiris*, Vol. 9 (1950): 62-83; Joseph Needham and Ling Wang, *Science and Civilisation in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), volume 3: Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth, 242-83.

²⁴⁵ I surmise that these marks are unlikely to be natural but probably fabricated in a similar way as the renowned Meat-shape Stone (*rouxing shi* 肉形石) at the National Palace Museum, Taipei. This jade material was intentionally dyed by court artisans to emulate the color and texture of a real pork belly, see Chen Jie-jin and Xu Jun-xian, *Gugong jingpin daolan* 故宮精品導覽 (Taipei: Xianggang shangyakai diannao yueying gongsi Taiwan fengongsi, 2007), 99.

represent the variable distances of actual constellations. The blinking eyes also serves as a blunt metaphor for twinkling stars in the evening.

The success of this visual program could not be achieved without a fluid set of sensory interactions with the inkstone. Reading Su's inscription first builds a mental expectation for décor on the face of the object. Holding the inkstone and feeling the protruding texture on the back encourage a beholder to flip the object, where a clear evening sky full of stars makes their final début. The sequence of images is enacted through tactile interactions with the material object. This sensorial engagement is a design language to facilitate the movement of astrological symbols on the Congxing Inkstone.

3.6.3 A Theory of Creation

Poems by the Qianlong Emperor and his courtiers suggest that the emperor probably had Su's inscription added to an old Duan stone to create the Congxing Inkstone. This speculation may be first supported by the discrepancy between the words of Qianlong and his subjects. In the spring of 1777, Qianlong composed a poem for the stone and had it engraved both on the inkstone and its wooden case (Figure 3.11). The emperor, however, made no reference to Su but only described the astrological décor and praised the stone for its ancient origin from the Old Pit, the earliest quarry of Duan Stones in Zhaoqing.²⁴⁶ Qianlong also asked eight scholar-officials from the inner court, Yu Minzhong, Dong Gao 董誥 (1740-1818), Peng Yuanrui 彭元瑞 (1731-1803), Shen Chu 沈初 (1735-1799), Liang Guozhi 梁國治 (1723-1786), Chen Xiaoyong 陳孝泳 (1715-1779), Jin Shisong 金士松 (1730-1800), and Liu Yong, to endorse the object. Carved on the four sides of the wooden case, their dedicatory verses identify Su's calligraphic inscription as a

²⁴⁶ Ko, *The Social Life of Inkstones*, 58.

meaningful component of the object. The difference in language makes me wonder whether Su's inscription was a part of the design when Qianlong wrote his poem. A possible reason for the emperor's neglect, other than his ignorance, is perhaps that the inscription by Su had not been attached to the stone surface yet. It should also be noted that these texts are all well documented in the *Inkstone Manual of Western Clarity*. I thus would like to propose that Su's inscription might have been engraved after the emperor's poem in early 1777 and before the completion of the catalogue in 1778.

Two intriguing lines from these officials' poems could further corroborate this hypothesis. Liu opened his encomium with a curious phrase, "(Su) Shi's inscription maintains the Song design 軾銘留宋製." Liang ended his composition with a puzzling remark, "A re-inscription from seven hundred years ago 重題七百載." If their words were taken in the most literary sense, Liu and Liang seem to suggest that Su's inscription was a blueprint for the archaic design and therefore deserved to be re-engraved on the inkstone. These court compositions, infused with intentional ambiguity and inanity, remain open for different interpretations. However, if my reading is correct, Liu and Liang implied that Su's inscription was created at a later point to better perform the theme of the inkstone.

Last, the calligraphic style of Su's inscription (Figure 3.12) could be read as the emperor's attempt to impersonate Su as an icon of Chinese literati culture. The formal characteristics of this engraving on the Congxing Inkstone, to my eyes, display several prominent habits of using the brush that are mostly seen in the Qianlong Emperor's imitation of Su's handwritings. In other words, the inscription speaks of an imperial mode of doing Su's calligraphy in the eighteenth century. For example, the hanging scroll *Copy of Su Shi's Inscription* (Figure 3.13) by Qianlong at the National Palace Museum, Taipei, shows striking similarities with the engraving on the

inkstone. In this work, Qianlong transcribed one of Su's inkstone inscriptions and identified his style of writing as "an imitation of Dongpo."²⁴⁷ The blunt angular shape at the beginning of each stroke, an important feature of Qianlong's study of Su's style, can be observed in both examples. The tendency to expose and tilt the brush tip towards the left when completing the final dot of a character, such as *sun* 損, *huai* 壞, *zhen* 真 in the inked scroll and *yun* 雲, *lin* 凜 and *ran* 然 on the inkstone (Figure 3.14), is further evidence that these two writings could have been from the same hand. The *Model-letters of the Jingsheng Studio* 敬勝齋法帖, an imperial calligraphic compendium of Qianlong's handwritings, also includes many copies of Su's letters that the emperor made during his lifetime.²⁴⁸ In this large body of imitative works, the Qianlong Emperor clearly identified his position as a copyist who was erudite in Su's different modes of expression. On the contrary, the forged signature and seal of Su on the Congxing Inkstone represent a different approach by the emperor to fully masquerade as the Song literatus. The creation of an inkstone like this perhaps also fulfilled Qianlong's enjoyment of the game of identity substitutions.²⁴⁹

3.7 Inscribing the Inkstone

Yi employed the inkstone that he excavated in Huizhou as an expedient tool of self-promotion and to gather support from local scholars. Not long after the discovery, Yi began to invite his colleagues to inscribe the object. For educated elites involved in this project, the inkstone

²⁴⁷ For this work, see https://painting.npm.gov.tw/Painting_Page.aspx?dep=P&PaintingId=2499 (accessed 03/21/2020). Its accession number at the National Palace Museum, Taipei is 故-書-000038-00000. Qianlong copied this inscription from a Ming compendium of Su's calligraphy, see Chen Jiru, *Wanxiangtang Su tie* 晚香堂蘇帖 (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1990), 2:566-8.

²⁴⁸ One copy of this calligraphic compendium in the National Palace Museum, Taipei can be accessed through their digital database *Shuhua diancang ziliao jiansuo xitong* 書畫典藏資料檢索系統, <https://painting.npm.gov.tw/SearchP.aspx>.

²⁴⁹ For another example of the emperor's interest to present himself as a Chinese literatus, see Kristina Kleutghen, "One or Two, Repictured," *Archives of Asian Art* 62 (2012): 25-46.

allowed them to self-identify with Su and ease their career frustrations through Su's experience in the eleventh century. Yi first inscribed an inscription next to Su's signature, documenting the origin of the stone:

In the fifth year of the Jiaqing Period (1800), when renovating the Dongpo's Historical Residence at the White Crane Peak, I obtained the inkstone from the Ink Swamp.
Recorded by Yi Bingshou from Tingzhou.
嘉慶五年，脩白鶴峰東坡故居，得此硯于墨沼。汀州伊秉綬記。

At the time, Yi was generally in a celebratory mood when writing about this unusual excavation. In a fragmented surviving inscription to a now lost portrait of Su (Figure 3.15), Yi assumed the role of a cultural caretaker and likened himself to a re-incarnation of the old magistrate Fang Zirong, who supported Su during his Huizhou exile in the eleventh century.²⁵⁰ Little could Yi foresee the political persecution against him in the coming years. In 1802, Yi was removed from the office because a felony of Boluo County escaped from prison. Subsequently, the Governor of Guangdong blamed Yi for the outburst of the Boluo Rebellion and set him on a planned exile to Xinjiang. Details of these events are examined in the Chapter Five. Here, I intend to call attention to Yi's initial response to the inkstone. A less joyful sentiment toward the object and his time in Huizhou could certainly be observed in Yi's later compositions. However, even with these setbacks in life, he never claimed to be an incarnation of Su, as some of his contemporaries did, but continued to maintain his position as a rebirth of Fang. The inkstone, in Yi's eyes, was perhaps a testament of his capability as a local administrator, who not only had the "resource" to salvage the artifact but also the "enjoyment" of its significance to the region's cultural past.

²⁵⁰ Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, ed., *Yi Bingshou shufa mingpin* 伊秉綬書法名品 (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2015), 47. Yi also expressed a similar self-identification in the poem "Zuo Huizhou Baihe feng tu zhuang yu Suzhai Shi Gu zhu juan nei 作惠州白鶴峯圖裝於蘇齋施顧註卷內," see Yi Bingshou, *Liuchun caotang shichao* 留春草堂詩鈔 (n.p., 1810), 4: 6a, HathiTrust Digital Library, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015079581412> (accessed on 03/21/2021).

Song Xiang 宋湘 (1756–1826) and Feng Minchang 馮敏昌 (1741–1806) also endorsed the image of Yi as a virtuous prefect, who recovered a lost treasure from the earth. Engraved on the back of the inkstone, their inscriptions read:

This is what the Revered Po (Su Shi) bestowed upon the Prefect (Yi Bingshou). Looking at it, I am deeply astonished! Noted by Feng Minchang from Qinzhou.
此陂公所以賚守也，觀之驚歎。欽州馮敏昌識。

The Prefect Moqing (Yi Bingshou) obtained this inkstone, and I had a poem for it. Ever since then, we exchanged poems using this inkstone, ups and downs of our own lives become apparent. Recorded by Song Xiang from Jiaying.
墨卿太守得此硯，余有詩。自後兩人唱和，每用之余亦有遭。嘉應宋湘記。

Feng was born in Qinzhou 欽州, Guangxi Province but he grew up in Guangdong as his family migrated. As an adolescent, Feng first attended school in Zhaoqing, the region known for Duan stones, and later went to study in Guangzhou. His talent as a young Cantonese scholar attracted the attention of Weng Fanggang, who at the time served as the Education Commissioner of Guangdong Province. Feng had studied with Weng for several years and became one of his closest disciples. He was most often remembered as a renowned educator because he had worked and taught in a number of Confucian academies across China. Between 1799 and 1801, Feng worked as the Primary Instructor at the Duanxi Academy 端溪書院 in Zhaoqing, one of the most renowned educational institutions in Guangdong.²⁵¹ The years of his work as a devoted teacher made Feng a well-respected scholar in the eyes of Cantonese elites.

Song had a similar life trajectory and reputable career. Born in Jiaying 嘉應, Guangdong Province, Song was a revered poet and scholar in the region's literary circle. He obtained his *jinshi* degree in 1799 and was appointed to the Hanlin Academy as a low-ranking junior

²⁵¹ The above information comes from “Feng Minchang nianpu 馮敏昌年譜” in *Xiaoluofu caotang wenji* 小羅浮草堂文集, in *Qingdai shi wen ji huibian*, 418:115-142.

compiler.²⁵² Song stayed at the post only for a few months and then decided to return to Guangdong. Contemporary accounts suggest that the poor salary and his aching feet caused by the chilly northern climate likely triggered his leave.²⁵³ Song did return to the capital later in his career and received several important appointments to Yunnan and Hubei. The beginning of his career, however, was probably not as encouraging as he would have imagined.

In 1800, when Yi was planning to re-build the Fenghu Academy 豐湖書院 in Huizhou, he invited Song to work as the Primary Instructor. Song accepted the offer to head the local school. He had witnessed the discovery of the inkstone and wrote a lengthy poem for this event. In the *Song for the Inkstone of the Virtue-Has-Neighbor-Hall* 德有鄰堂硯歌, Song self-identified with Su for their shared underappreciation by the throne.²⁵⁴ In addition, the warm welcome by the region's prefect also made Song wonder "if in the previous life, he was indeed Dongpo 前身莫是東坡子." The ever-changing conditions of human lives, as Song noted in the inkstone inscription, allow him to resonate with Su's eventful career. He ended the poem with a deep sense of liberation that he would enjoy the companionship with Yi in a place far away from capital politics. This kind of sentiment is also omniscient in Su's poems and essays during the exile, which enabled him to avoid sorrow and self-pity.²⁵⁵ The inkstone thus offered a proper platform for Song to spiritually commune with Su and achieve reconciliation with his disappointment in his early career in Beijing.

²⁵² For a brief biography of Song, see Zhao Erxun, et al., *Qingshi gao* 清史稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 485:13401.

²⁵³ Song Yiming, "Chen Shouqi Song Xiang jiaoyou kao jianshu Qian Jia jian hanlin zhi shenghuo 陳壽祺宋湘交遊考兼述乾嘉間翰林之生活," *Jinan shixue* 暨南史學, no. 13 (2017): 115-26.

²⁵⁴ Song Xiang, *Fenghu mancao* 豐湖漫草, in *Qingdai shi wen ji huibian*, 450:125-6.

²⁵⁵ Egan, *Word, Image and Deed in the Life of Su Shi*, 229

The renovation project of Su's Historical Residence continued into 1801. In the fourth month of that year, Yi had the two damaged inscriptions by Su, *Hall of Virtue Has Neighbors* and *Studio of No Deviant Thought*, refurbished and mounted at White Crane Peak. These two inscriptions were mentioned by Weng in his farewell poem to Yi. Being aware of Weng's tremendous interests in Su, Yi sent ink rubbings of these re-engravings and the inkstone to the capital. Weng was more than thrilled to learn about the inkstone as well as Yi's restoration of Su's traces in Huizhou. Between 1801 and 1803, he temporarily changed his studio name as "the Studio of the Virtue-Has-Neighbors Inkstone (*You lin tang yan zhai* 有鄰硯齋)." Weng also composed an inscription for the object, which was engraved on the wooden case of the inkstone (Figure 3.16):

This is Mr. Dongpo's "The Inkstone of the Virtue-Has-Neighbors Hall." His name remained intact [on the stone]. Prefect Yi in Huizhou obtained it. It has been seven-hundred and five years since the former gentleman (Su Shi) had lived here.
東坡先生德有鄰堂之硯，先生書名在焉。惠州守伊公得之，蓋去先生寓此七百有五
□ □

Together, these three inscriptions frame the symbolism of the Huizhou inkstone in relation to the Congxing Inkstone and the Heavenly Inkstone. Top-tier scholars at the court praised the Congxing Inkstone to affirm the Qianlong Emperor's cultural competence, while leading scholars of Guangdong inscribed the artifact to voice their support for the new prefect. The location of Weng's inscription is comparable to Qianlong's gold inlaid poem on the box of the imperial artifact. Weng's profound knowledge of Su serves to strengthen the myth of the inkstone and promote Yi as the rightful owner of the object. The absence of exciting visual program on the Huizhou inkstone remind viewers of Su's *Inscription on the Heavenly Inkstone*. To Yi and his friends, the unadorned surface perhaps showcased an authentic scholarly taste

about the material object. The Confucian lesson on the preference for the inner virtue over the exterior form were heightened by the lack of embellishment on the object.

Chapter Four: The Tomb of Wang Zhaoyun

The excavation of Su Shi in the landscape of Huizhou continued with the commemoration of Wang Zhaoyun 王朝雲 (1062–1096), a beloved concubine of Su Shi. In 1801, Yi also embarked on a more elaborate task to re-build the tomb of Wang Zhaoyun at Mount Gu near the Feng Lake in Huizhou. If Su's former residence at White Crane Peak was for the most part a historical ruin of intense local significance, the tomb of Wang Zhaoyun seemed to have been a fanciful site of considerable national fame and trans-regional allure. Not only had she and her tomb been a common literary trope of feminine beauty and loyalism, the romance between Su and Zhaoyun was also featured in popular theatrical plays.²⁵⁶ Numerous travelers across China had visited the site since the thirteenth century to pay their homage to both Su and Zhaoyun.²⁵⁷ In the Qing dynasty, the stories of Zhaoyun were further appropriated by male scholars to convey a diverse range of their contemporary feelings. The rich repository of their responses had generated political memories and cultural fascinations about the place.

In this chapter, I examine the tomb of Wang Zhaoyun by tracing the layered meanings of her cultural image during the Qing dynasty. I begin by analyzing how Su Shi portrayed Zhaoyun in his extant writings. His poems and essays produce the image of a loyal young woman who died unexpectedly. Next, I focus on two paintings of Zhaoyun by Bada Shanren 八大山人 and Shitao 石濤, two renowned painters during the Ming-Qing transition. I argue that Bada and Shitao appropriated Zhaoyun as a symbol of loyalism to speak about their nostalgia for the collapsed

²⁵⁶ For an example of the theatrical plays that features Su Shi and Wang Zhaoyun, see Chen Ruyuan, “*Jinlian ji pingzhu* 金蓮記評註,” edited by Huang Chonghao, in *Liushi Zhong qu pingzhu* 六十種曲評註, edited by Huang Zhusan and Feng Junjie (Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe, 2001), 13:1-403.

²⁵⁷ The earliest surviving poems about the site were by Liu Kezhuang 劉克莊 (1187–1269), see Liu Kezhuang, “*Liuru ting* 六如亭” and “*Zai ti Liuru ting* 再題六如亭,” in *Song shi chao* 宋詩鈔, Online Siku quanshu (Wenyuange Edition), *juan* 90, 39-40.

Ming dynasty. In the final section, I investigate the possible motivations behind the reconstruction of the tomb of Zhaoyun in the early nineteenth century. I argue that Yi, as the prefect of Huizhou, promoted Zhaoyun for her exemplary female conduct. The increasing interest in fanciful accounts about supernatural beings also fueled the imagination of Zhaoyun as a ghost. Scholars in the circle of Yi believed that rebuilding her tomb offered Zhaoyun and her soul a safe and concrete home.

4.1 Zhaoyun in Su Shi's Writings

Zhaoyun did not have her own voice and it is through Su Shi's writings that we come to meet this eleventh-century woman.²⁵⁸ A native of Hangzhou, Zhaoyun is portrayed in a handful of Su's poems as a faithful, understanding, and talented concubine who accompanied her husband to the far south. Su had two wives and they unfortunately both passed away before the Huizhou exile. Wang Fu 王弗 (1039–1065) was the principal wife. After Fu's death, Wang Runzhi 王閏之 (1048–1093), the younger cousin of Wang Fu, married Su as the secondary wife. Zhaoyun first entered Su's household in 1074 at the age of twelve, when Su worked in Hangzhou. Initially the young lady did not know how to read or write but later learnt calligraphy from Su, and acquired the basic method of the standard script. Although Zhaoyun was never Su's wife, she remained by Su's side during his political exiles.

4.1.1 "The Poem for Zhaoyun"

It was during the banishment to Huizhou that Su dedicated many writings to Zhaoyun. In 1094, when Su just arrived in Huizhou, he wrote "the Poem for Zhaoyun (Zhaoyun shi 朝雲詩)" to

²⁵⁸ My reconstruction of Zhaoyun's life is based upon the following writings of Su: "Zhaoyun shi 朝雲詩," "Dao Zhaoyun 悼朝雲," in *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Shiji*, 4449, 4767; "Zhaoyun muzhiming 朝雲墓志銘," "Huizhou jian Zhaoyun shu 惠州薦朝雲疏," in *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Wenji*, 1630, 6864.

commemorate their unfailing companionship. In the preface to the poem, Su formed a playful pride in his demotion through a comparison with the Tang (618–907) poet Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846):

When people refer to the song lyric by Letian (Bai Juyi), “Selling the *luo* horse (a type of white horse with black mane) and releasing the Willow Branch (Fan Su’s courtesan name),” it was to praise their (the horse and Fan Su) refusal to leave when their master grew old and sick. However, Mengde (Liu Yuxi, 772–842) had a poem, saying: “when the spring ends, flying catkins will not remain; following the goodbye from the wind, which family would they land?” Letian also wrote: “Illness is often the companion of Letian; following the spring, Honorable Fan (Fan Su) returns only for a while.” This suggests that Fan Su must have eventually left! I used to have several concubines, who in the last four or five years left one after another. Only Zhaoyun accompanied my relocation to the south. From reading the anthology of Letian, I humorously composed this poem. Zhaoyun, née Wang, is from Qiantang (present-day Hangzhou). We had a son named Gan’er, who died before the age of one.

世謂樂天有鬻駱馬放楊柳枝詞，嘉其主老病，不忍去也。然夢得有詩云：春盡絮飛留不住，隨風好去落誰家。樂天亦云：病與樂天相伴住，春隨樊子一時歸。則是樊素竟去也。子家有數妾，四五年相繼辭去，獨朝雲者，隨予南遷。因讀樂天集，戲作此詩。朝雲姓王氏，錢塘人。嘗有子曰幹兒，未期而夭去云。²⁵⁹

The beginning quote in the above passage is from the “Song on the Indelible Affections” by Bai Juyi.²⁶⁰ Because of his old age and poor health, Bai decided to downsize the family expenditure. Sadly, both the *luo* horse and Fan Su 樊素 (fl. 9th century) were among the chosen “objects” and “expenses” to be cut off. On the day of departure, the animal was first led to the gate. Realizing its fate, the horse shied away neighing and was reluctant to leave. At the time, the family courtesan Fan Su was in her early twenties, and she earned her fame through singing the song “Willow Branch (yangzhi 楊枝).” In the latter half of the poem, Bai assumed the voice of Fan Su, kneeling on the ground, saying “you have ridden the *luo* for five years, which is about a thousand and eight-hundred days, ... I have served you for ten years, which is about three

²⁵⁹ Su Shi, “Zhaoyun shi,” in *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Shiji*, 4449.

²⁶⁰ Bai Juyi, “Buneng wang qing yin 不能忘情吟,” in *Quan Tang shi 全唐詩* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 461:5250-1.

thousand and six-hundred days.” “Once we both leave,” she continued, “there will be no coming back.” In the end, the courtesan questioned Bai: “even the horse has emotions, how could you, the master, have no feelings?”

In the second quotation, Su used another poem by Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772–842) to underscore the transient nature of things. The reference here was perhaps intended as a satirical comment toward the over-emphasis on worldly emotions in the poem by Bai. Su interpreted the departure of Fan Su as something that cannot be avoided. Such an attitude suggests his desire to be released from mundane entanglements. The philosophy of “non-attachment,” as pointed out by Ronald Egan and others, was a mindset he adopted during his eventful career, which helped him to “keep sorrow and self-pity in check.”²⁶¹ In the next few lines, Su went on to joke about how Fan Su must have left Bai even though Bai portrayed Fan Su as unwilling to leave. Zhaoyun, unlike Fan Su, never left Su and chose to accompany Su to Huizhou. This contrast must have made Su feel proud and grateful for the unwavering support of Zhaoyun during the difficult moments of his life.

In the main poem, Su compared Zhaoyun to several exemplary women in history and hoped that their relationship would transcend the ephemerality of life. He wrote:

Unlike Willow Branch (Fan Su) bidding farewell to Letian, [Zhaoyun] is like Tongde (Fan Tongde, fl. 26–1 BCE) who accompanied Ling Xuan (fl. 26–1 BCE).
A’nu and Luoxiu did not grow old together, [but] the Goddess and Vimalakīrti could always discuss *dhyana* (meditation) together.
Buddhist scripture and alchemical furnace are [my] new livelihoods, sleeve dance and fan sing were [her] previous deeds.
Once the elixir is ready, [Zhaoyun] should follow me to the Three Mountains [of Immortality], and not become the Immortal of Cloud and Rain at the southern ridge of the Wu Mountains.²⁶²
不似楊枝別樂天，恰如通德伴伶玄。阿奴絡秀不同老，天女維摩總解禪。

²⁶¹ Ronald Egan, *Word, Image and Deed in the Life of Su Shi* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 229.

²⁶² Su Shi, “Zhaoyun shi,” in *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Shiji*, 4449.

經卷藥爐新活計，舞衫歌扇舊因緣。丹成逐我三山去，不作巫陽雲雨仙。

The first two lines of Su's poem is embedded with references to three classical stories in the early literary tradition. A literate concubine of the Han-dynasty minister Ling Xuan, Fan Tongde greatly admired the Grand Historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145–135 BCE). Her interest in history equipped her with an acute awareness of the temporal fluidity. She told her husband Ling that neither could his “prosperity (盛 *sheng*)” be maintained, nor his “decline (衰 *shuai*)” be rejected.²⁶³ However, she was content with their encounter and mutual company despite the fleetingness of things. Luoxiu, née Li, is remembered as a virtuous mother during the Jin 晉 Dynasty (266–420), who used her marriage to benefit the political careers of her three sons.²⁶⁴ A'nu was the infant name of her youngest son Zhou Mo 周謨 (d. u.). According to *Jin shu* 晉書, unlike his elder brothers of great intelligence and excellent character, this man considered himself an ordinary person who chose to serve his mother rather than pursuing a political career. Su's reference to the story intends to eulogize the loss of Zhaoyun's son. Had Gan'er grown up like A'nu, he probably would have made the same decision. In the next line, Su likened himself to Vimalakīrti, and Zhaoyun to the Goddess. The Vimalakīrti Sūtra tells that this famous Buddhist layman was impressed by the Goddess's debate with Śāriputra and praised her articulation of Buddhist philosophy.²⁶⁵ Because Zhaoyun had long been interested in Buddhism, the scriptural allusion is an appropriate metaphor to delineate the relationship between Su and Zhaoyun.

²⁶³ Ling Xuan, “Feiyan waizhuan zixu 飛燕外傳自序,” in *Quan Han wen* 全漢文, Online Siku quanshu (Wenyuange Edition), *juan* 56. Her original line in Chinese reads: 識夫盛之不可留，衰之不可推，俄然相緣奄所。

²⁶⁴ Fang Xuanling, et al., *Jin shu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974) *juan* 96, 2514.

²⁶⁵ For an English translation of the story, see *The Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra*, translated and edited by Charles Luk (Lu K'uan Yü) (Boston: Shambhala, 1990), 74.

The remaining verses tells of Su's emerging interests in Daoist pursuit of immortality. Egan has suggested that Su began to model himself after Ge Hong (283–343), an alchemist who had lived in Luofu Mountain near Huizhou, to transcend the ordinary world through Daoist practice during his Huizhou exile.²⁶⁶ The “Immortal of Rain and Cloud” in the final line is a classical expression for the evanescence of love and pleasure. According to a legend from the Warring States Period (475–221 BCE), the daughter of the Wu Mountains once entered the dream of a king and spent a night with him.²⁶⁷ The female immortal left the next morning, but she told the king that she would transform into clouds during sunrises and rain during sunsets. The king had a shrine made for her, named *zhaoyun* 朝雲, literally “the Dawn Clouds.” Interestingly, Su's concubine and the mythical monument shared the same appellation. Perhaps because of this coincidence, Su ended his poem with a humorous note that Zhaoyun should not imitate her ancestor to abandon their male counterparts but indulge his selfish desire to achieve immortality together.

4.1.2 “The Epitaph for Zhaoyun”

Despite of these sincere wishes, Zhaoyun died due to a local plague in 1096, before she could witness the completion of her new home on the White Crane Peak. Su was deeply pained by her death. He buried her near a local monastery and composed “the Epitaph for Zhaoyun (Zhaoyun muzhiming 朝雲墓志銘)” in person. The text is not as elaborate as other contemporaneous examples but vividly constructs a profile of Zhaoyun as a Buddhist laywoman. It reads:

Mr. Dongpo's attendant concubine Zhaoyun, style name Zixia, née Wang, was a person of Qiantang (present-day Hangzhou). Intelligent and keen on righteous conduct. Serving her husband for twenty-three years, [Zhaoyun] was ever loyal and respectful. On the *renchen*

²⁶⁶ Egan, *Word, Image and Deed in the Life of Su Shi*, 242-3.

²⁶⁷ Song Yu, “Gaotang fu 高唐賦,” in *Wenxuan* 文選, edited by Xiao Tong, annotated by Li Shan (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 875.

(the fifth) day of the seventh month in the third year (1096) of the Shaosheng Era (1094–1098), [she] died in Huizhou. On the *gengshen* (the third) day of the eighth month, [she] was buried to the southeast of Qichan Monastery on Feng Lake. [She] gave birth to a son named Dun (lit. “to evade”), who died before one year old. [She] followed the nun Yichong (d. u.) to study the law of the Buddha, and roughly understood her main ideas. On the point of death, [she] chanted four lines of *gāthā* (verse) from the *Diamond Sūtra* before she was cut off. The inscription says:

Gazing up at the pagoda, taking refuge in the monastery.
Since this was where her heart lodged, she shall return to the Buddha.²⁶⁸

東坡先生侍妾曰朝雲，字子霞，姓王氏，錢塘人。敏而好義，事先生二十有三年，忠敬若一。紹聖三年七月壬辰，卒于惠州，年三十四。八月庚申，葬之豐湖之上栖禪寺之東南。生子遯，未朞而夭。蓋常從比丘尼義沖學佛法，亦粗識大意。且死，誦《金剛經》四句偈以絕。銘曰：

浮屠是瞻，伽藍是依。如汝宿心，惟佛之歸。

The illustrious character of Zhaoyun – smart, upright, devoted, and deferent – fulfill the social expectation of women in imperial China. Later scholars also promoted this Confucian image of her as a loyal partner. The aspect of her life as a student of Buddhism exemplifies her understanding about the non-attachment to the illusionary world, two fundamental Buddhist teachings. The four verses she recited before her death are the famous *Six Illusions Gāthā* 六如偈 at the end of the *Diamond Sūtra*:

All conditioned phenomena
Are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a shadow
Like the dew, or like lightning
You should discern them like this ²⁶⁹
一切有爲法 如夢幻泡影
如露亦如電 應作如是觀

The death of family members is one of the “conditioned phenomena,” and thus should be viewed as temporary and transient as the six metaphors in the Buddha’s words. If the death were an illusion, the sorrow brought by this kind of departure would be equally fugitive. Zhaoyun

²⁶⁸ Su Shi, “Zhaoyun muzhiming,” in *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Wenji*, 1630.

²⁶⁹ Translated by A. Charles Muller, see http://www.acmuller.net/bud-canon/diamond_sutra.html#div-33 (accessed 03/21/2021).

perhaps tried to liberate her husband from his pain with this Buddhist message. It is also possible that Su employed Zhaoyun's voice to relieve his own affliction. With the help of monks from the Qichan Monastery, Su had the Pavilion of Six Illusions (*Liuru ting* 六如亭) constructed above Zhaoyun's tomb to remember the teaching of the *Six Illusions Gāthā*. The monument had become a symbolic site where later visitors could envision Zhaoyun in the landscape of Huizhou. In Su's time, Qichan Monastery also housed the Great Sage Pagoda (Dashengta 大聖塔). From Zhaoyun's burial place, the pagoda could be observed, and the temple bell could be heard. The final inscription thus borrows the physical location of Zhaoyun's tomb to send a prayer that she would reach the Buddha's land in the afterlife.

4.1.3 “Mortuary Memorandum Offered to Zhaoyun in Huizhou”

An unusual event after Zhaoyun's death binds her image with elements most often seen in miraculous stories and ghost tales. Three days after the funeral, a heavy storm with gusty winds swept through Huizhou. Su went to inspect Zhaoyun's tomb and observed five enormous footprints, possibly by a giant (*juren* 巨人), near the burial ground.²⁷⁰ Given Zhaoyun's Buddhist background, one may wonder if these signs were received as an auspice since colossal footprints had been a divine symbol of the historical Buddha. However, to Su's eyes, they were perhaps a spiritual message from the deceased that she still lingered in this world. Within two days, Su gathered monks from the local monastery to conduct a postmortem ritual for Zhaoyun. He also composed a prayer text to be burnt at the ceremony, titled “Mortuary Memorandum Offered to Zhaoyun in Huizhou (Huizhou jian Zhaoyun shu 惠州薦朝雲疏).”²⁷¹ In this prayer, Su briefly recounted the hardships of Zhaoyun's life and described the omen he saw at her tomb. At the

²⁷⁰ Su Shi, “Ti Qichan yuan 題棲禪院,” in *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Wenji*, 8115.

²⁷¹ Su Shi, “Huizhou jian Zhaoyun shu,” in *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Wenji*, 6864.

end, Su hoped that the Buddha would “receive and guide the deceased soul to be reborn in the Pure Land 接引亡魂/早生淨土.” Zhaoyun in this story, to borrow Daniel Stevenson’s words, was perhaps a “purgatorial liminoid (*wangling* 亡靈),” who awaited proper ritual performance to lead her “pass through the intermediate state” of the afterlife and eventually “join the company of the buddhas.”²⁷² The manifestation of Zhaoyun as a female ghost also made her grave appealing to eighteenth-century scholars who were interested in fantastic tales of nonhuman spirits. I will return to this aspect of her story in the section “Pacifying the Soul of Deceased.”

4.2 Loyalist Responses

During the decades after the Manchu conquest, educated elites first appropriated the image of Zhaoyun as a loyal concubine to speak of the traumatic experience during the dynastic change and express their loyalist sentiments toward the fallen regime.²⁷³ Bada Shanren and Shitao, two prominent painters of the period, have often been labeled as “remnant subjects (*yimin* 遺民)” because they were descendants from the Ming-dynasty royal family. This identity association contributed to their artistic fame among scholars who felt disheartened by the establishment of alien rulership and encouraged political readings of their artworks as embodiment of loyalist predilection. Both painters had tackled stories of Zhaoyun in their extant works, though with vastly different visual approaches. My reading of these pictures reveals that Zhaoyun and her

²⁷² Daniel B. Stevenson, “Buddhist Ritual in the Song,” in *Modern Chinese Religion I: Song-Liao-Jin-Yuan (960-1368 AD)*, edited by John Lagerwey and Pierre Marsone (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 415-7.

²⁷³ Zhaoyun was not the only courtesan to be appropriated by scholars as a symbol of Ming loyalism. As pointed out by Alfreda Murck, Wai-yee Li, and others, the Nanjing courtesan Kou Mei (b. 1624) was also celebrated for her dedication to the Ming during the seventeenth century. See Alfreda Murck, “Responses to the Manchu Conquest: Wu Hong and Kong Shangren,” *Orientalia* Nov. /Dec/ (2005): 56-65; Wai-yee Li, *Plum Shadows and Plank Bridge: Two Memoirs about Courtesans by Mao Xiang (1611–1693) and Yu Huai (1616–1969)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

grave had been fashioned into a pictorial idiom of undisclosed loyalism in the early eighteenth century.

4.2.1 *Dongpo and Zhaoyun* by Bada Shanren

Bada Shanren was an enigmatic painter whose family origin can be traced back to the Ming Prince Zhu Quan (1378–1448).²⁷⁴ Bada was once a Buddhist monk, but he later renounced his ordination and returned to secular life. The firsthand experience of the collapse of the Ming had a deep impact on Bada's life and his modes of expression. The man is most known for pictures of wild creatures, plants, and landscapes with no obvious political messages. Hui-shu Lee, however, has convincingly demonstrated how the artist transformed these seemingly neutral subjects into laments on the fallen dynasty.²⁷⁵ For example, in his fish paintings, Bada not only appropriated the Chinese homophone of “fish (*yu* 魚)” as “remnant (*yu* 餘)” to self-identify as a Ming loyalist, but also inscribed these images with intentionally ambiguous texts alluding to established metaphors about the death of the emperor. In a similar vein, the painting *Dongpo and Zhaoyun* (*Dongpo Zhaoyun tu* 東坡朝雲圖) (Figure 4.1) should be examined in relation to the artist's living experience during the Ming-Qing transition, rather than merely as an illustration of historic romance.

The formal attributes of *Dongpo and Zhaoyun* give the painting a somber ambience. The picture represents an encounter between Su Shi and Zhaoyun in an open-air setting.²⁷⁶ Sitting in

²⁷⁴ For an English biography of Bada Shanren, see Wang Fangyu, “The Life and Art of Bada Shanren,” in *Master of the Lotus Garden: The Life and Art of Bada Shanren (1626–1705)*, Wang Fangyu, Richard M. Barnhart, and Judith G. Smith (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1990), 23-81. “Bada Shanren” is among the numerous pseudonyms the artist had adopted. Scholars have proposed several theories regarding Bada's actual name, but the issue remains debatable till this day. He is sometimes referred to as Zhu Da 朱聶, one of his more accepted formal names, in Chinese scholarship, but more commonly addressed as Bada Shanren in English literature.

²⁷⁵ Hui-shu Lee, “The Fish Leaves of the Anwan Album: Bada Shanren's Journeys to a Landscape of the Past,” *Ars Orientalis*, vol. 20 (1990): 69-85; Hui-shu Lee, “Bada Shanren's Bird-and Fish Painting and the Art of Transformation,” *Archives of Asian Art*, Vol. 44 (1991): 6-26.

²⁷⁶ One can access this work (accession number: 贈-畫-000118-00000) from the website of the National Palace

a chair, Su is shown in a frontal view with a fan in his right hand. He leans his left arm on a scholarly table and looks directly at Zhaoyun who stands on the other side of the table. Her eyes also meet his. Rocks and plants in the background frame the couple as the focal point of the picture. This pictorial narrative also survives today in a Ming-dynasty fan painting. Kong Zhenyi 孔貞一 (d. u.), an unknown painter from the sixteenth century, had illustrated these two figures in an almost identical pictorial structure (Figure 4.2).²⁷⁷ Dated to 1579, this fan painting stages Su and Zhaoyun across a long table in a delightful garden of rich vegetation. The style of Kong's picture is reminiscent of Wu school artists, such as Shen Zhou 沈周 (1427–1509) and Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470–1559), in terms of the display of color and brushstrokes that build up a rich pictorial surface. Compared with the earlier composition, Bada's painting eliminated such pleasurable sensation with a combination of soft colors and rigid outlines. The contrast allows Bada to formulate an entirely different mood for his picture that favors mourning instead of gratification.

The portrayal of Zhaoyun as a woman holding a brush in the painting, I believe, suggests Bada's cross-gender identification with the female protagonist as a pious concubine. On the surface, the iconography may appear to originate from Zhaoyun's biography as she was known to have studied calligraphy with Su. By the late sixteenth century, however, the brush had

Museum, Taipei, see https://painting.npm.gov.tw/Painting_Page.aspx?dep=P&PaintingId=19116 (accessed 03/21/2021). It is rare to find figure paintings by Bada Shanren. In my discussion with Alfreda Murck, she wonders if the image was a collaboration between Bada and another painter. Murck points out that the meticulously delineated table and the figures are different from Bada's typical composition. The exact authorship of the painting requires further study.

²⁷⁷ This work is also in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, see https://painting.npm.gov.tw/Painting_Page.aspx?dep=P&PaintingId=18295 (accessed 03/21/2021). Alfreda Murck suggests to me that in Kong Zhongyi's painting, the intimacy between Su and Zhaoyun is implied by the lush banana plants. Banana plant, known as *xiangjiao* 香蕉 (banana), is a homophone with *xiangjiao* 相交 (intercourse), which implies both social intercourse and sexual intercourse.

become a popular token of their attachment on the theatrical stage. In the *Story of the Golden Lotus* (*Jinlian ji* 金蓮記), the playwright Chen Ruyuan 陳汝元 (fl. 1580) synthesized Su's official biography with popular anecdotes to design a highly fictionalized drama about Su's life.²⁷⁸ The romance between Su and Zhaoyun is one of the main plots of the play. According to the script, Su asked Zhaoyun's sister to hand the "Jade Tube Brush (*yuguan bi* 玉管筆)" to Zhaoyun as a token of his affection. This historical fiction projects new significance onto the material object as a symbol of their steadfast love. In her study, Wai-yee Li has pointed out that the culture of theatrical performance played an important role in male authors' appropriation of female diction during the Ming-Qing transition.²⁷⁹ Li indicates that the gender substitution allowed male poets to dramatize the perils of the dynastic change and to create a veil of ambiguity for their political commentaries. She also points out the diverse patterns through which seventeenth-century men took up female personae to convey their historical reality. It is possible that Bada employed a similar approach to signal his loyalty to the Ming. The brush in the picture perhaps serves as an emblem for the artist's unchanging devotion to the collapsed regime. In addition, this political message could also be hidden through Bada's public statement about his unsuccessful personal affairs. He was known to have had two short-lived marriages. On several of his other paintings, Bada overtly expressed his frustrations with the marital relationship.²⁸⁰ It is hard to know if these speeches were yet another aspect of his loyalist performance. Nevertheless, his open complaints at least obscured the meaning of the painting

²⁷⁸ Chen Ruyuan, "Jinlian ji pingzhu," in *Liushi Zhong qu pingzhu*, 13:1-403.

²⁷⁹ Wai-yee Li, *Women and National Trauma in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 12-99.

²⁸⁰ Wang, et al., *Master of the Lotus Garden*, 50-1. Joseph Chang, Qianshen Bai, and Stephen D. Allee, *In Pursuit of Heavenly Harmony: Paintings and Calligraphy by Bada Shanren from the Estate of Wang Fangyu and Sum Wai* (Washington, DC: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 2003), 3-5.

Dongpo and Zhaoyun, thereby disguising his political dissent as personal longing for a romantic relationship. Bada's appropriation of Zhaoyun's visage thus serves as a riddle to his identity as a Ming loyalist.

The pictorial motif of female writer also carries a dual symbolism as an archaic representation of a righteous historian. In the painting, Zhaoyun is depicted in profile, gently bending her knees as she is about to compose. Her animated gesture happens to coincide with an image of Ban Zhao 班昭 (45–ca.115) in the famous handscroll *Admonitions of the Court Instructress* 女史箴圖 (Figure 4.3).²⁸¹ Dated to the fifth century, the work is an illustration of Zhang Hua 張華 (232–300)'s renowned essay about the moral instructions to the palace ladies. Zhang, an upright official of the Western Jin (265–316), intended the piece as honest suggestions to the powerful and ruthless Empress Jia (c. 257–300). In the end of the text, Zhang attributed the authorship to Ban Zhao as the instructress of those Confucian principles. A female paragon of the Han dynasty, Ban was not only the author of the *Precepts for Women* (*Nü jie* 女誡) but also participated in compiling the official history of the Han dynasty. Her illustrious biography must have made her an ideal candidate for such a role. Zhang perhaps hoped that the empress would be susceptible to Ban's instruction and follow the proper conduct for the imperial women. Despite his failed attempt to cultivate the empress, Zhang remained loyal to her and refused to join the plot that demolished her royal status.²⁸² At the end of the scroll, Ban makes her appearance as a female historian who is ready to write with the brush in her hands. Because the *Admonitions of the Court Instructress* had been copied and transmitted through a wide range of

²⁸¹ The *Admonitions Scroll* is in the collection of the British Museum, and a high-resolution reproduction of this work is available through Google Arts and Culture, see <https://g.co/arts/dvif2mJxifimmbo67> (accessed 03/21/2021)

²⁸² Julia Murray, "Who was Zhang Hua's Instructress?" in *Gu Kaizhi and the Admonitions Scroll*, edited by Shane McCausland (London: The British Museum Press, 2003), 100-7.

media, the image of Ban as a timeless symbol of moral admonition should not be unfamiliar to Bada.²⁸³ The identical posture in these two pictures thus illuminates a different impersonation, in which Bada assumed the identities of both Zhang and Ban. The role of instructress perhaps enabled the artist to remonstrate with the notorious faction politics that caused the Ming collapse, whereas the camouflage as a loyal advisor facilitated his deep lament about the inevitable loss of his country.

The inscription on the upper left corner of the painting further accentuates the set of political implications Bada had carefully orchestrated. The text is a transcription of “the Poem for Zhaoyun” that I translated and discussed at the beginning of this chapter. The list of exemplary women that Su compared Zhaoyun to – Fan Su, Tongde, Luoxiu and the Goddess – resonates with Bada’s loyalist aspiration. He perhaps hoped to avoid departing like Fan Su and to learn from Tongde’s revelation about the vicissitude of life. He could have equally seen himself as the son of Luoxiu who had little career ambition but only wanted to fulfill his filial duty. His monastery background prompts another self-identification with the Goddess as a devoted follower of the dharma. The diverse experience between these women and their male counterparts allows the artist to shape the painting into a rich performance of loyalism. These romantic literary references and pictorial allusions transform the work into a complex psychological self-portrait.

4.2.2 *Ferry Tour of the Pavilion of Six Illusions* by Shitao

Shitao was younger than Bada Shanren but they shared a similar life trajectory. His formal name, Zhu Ruoji 朱若極, indicates his family origin from a Ming prince in Guangxi. The artist spent

²⁸³ For example, a later copy of this work is in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, see <https://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/paint/231643.html>.

the first half of his life as a Buddhist monk but later set up in Yangzhou as a professional painter. A prolific image maker, Shitao had produced numerous subjects in a variety of stylistic modes. As Jonathan Hay observed, Shitao's identity and the history he lived in sometimes "made politics unavoidable" in his career.²⁸⁴ He made some political-themed images upon the request of his contemporaries. The social context for the creation of these pictures is thus integral to their intended meanings.

The painting *Ferry Tour of the Pavilion of Six Illusions* (*Zhou guo Liuru ting* 舟過六如亭, Figure 4.4), a depiction of the place where the tomb of Zhaoyun is located, exemplifies how a patron's nostalgic feeling toward the Ming was realized through Shitao's creative brush. The work belongs to a large album known today as *Illustrations to the Poems of Huang Yanlü* (*Xie Huang Yanlü shiyi ce* 寫黃研旅詩意冊). Hay has offered a close reading of the set in the cultural context of the early Qing.²⁸⁵ Huang You 黃又 (1661–c. 1725), also known as Huang Yanlü, was an inkstone aficionado and a travel enthusiast who took several grand journeys across China. Between 1699 and 1701, Huang embarked on a pilgrimage to the south, from Yangzhou to Zhejiang, Fujian and eventually Guangdong. Many of the sites he visited were colored with strong loyalist sentiments for their renowned history of resistance toward non-Han regimes. Huang, however, did not experience the catastrophe of the Ming collapse in person because he was born after the Qing establishment. These travels were perhaps Huang's personal attempts to find a sense of belonging from the recent history. Remnant subjects such as Bada and

²⁸⁴ Jonathan Hay, *Shitao: Painting and Modernity in Early Qing China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 57.

²⁸⁵ Hay, *Shitao*, 68. Hay notes that originally Shitao produced two albums of thirty-two leaves in total for Huang; however, these two albums are now mixed up and are mounted in a single large album. Twenty-seven leaves from the original sets survive today. This work is now in the collection of the Hong Kong Museum, with an accession number CL2018.0180, see

https://hkmasvr.lcsd.gov.hk/hkmacs_data/web/object_web.nsf/home?openform&lang=zh (accessed 03/21/2021).

Shitao, as Hay has noted, appealed to Huang because they “were living embodiments of the Ming dynastic afterlife.”²⁸⁶ Huang was a mutual friend of these two artists and had commissioned works from both. When he returned from his trip in 1701, Huang first sought Bada to inscribe on a scroll depicting an episode of his southern expedition.²⁸⁷ He then requested Shitao to produce the above album based on poems he composed on the road.

The painting *Ferry Tour of the Pavilion of Six Illusions* encapsulates a romanticized imagination about the loss of the Ming. Although Shitao was not known to have been to the site, the depiction is fairly accurate to the region’s topography. The small island represents the mount near the Feng Lake where Zhaoyun’s tomb is situated. The watery brushwork and the choice of the bird’s eye view shape the landscape as a lucid dream. The pale yet vivid color further adds to the translucent feeling of the image. Two figures approach the monuments on the island from the right. The overall effect of Shitao’s visual language highlights the idea of transience, as if the scenery would disappear at any moment. In contrast to Bada’s *Dongpo and Zhaoyun*, the style of this work entails less solid bitterness but constructs more of a fantasy about the recent tragedy.

The poem on the painting also speaks of a romantic melancholy on the grave of Zhaoyun:

The water of Feng Lake is green, and the grass is lush;
the jade and fragrance (Zhaoyun) are buried here for five hundred years.
A sojourner stopped rowing to visit the ruin;
near the Pavilion of Six Illusions, I mourn the beauty.
豐湖水碧草芊芊，蘊玉埋香五百年。過客停橈訪遺跡，六如亭畔吊嬋娟。

Unlike Bada’s self-identification with Zhaoyun, Huang seemed to look at the site as an outsider who lamented a past that had already become history to him. Mourning the death of Zhaoyun

²⁸⁶ Hay, *Shitao*, 66

²⁸⁷ Wang, et al., *Master of the Lotus Garden*, 62-3.

was perhaps not to prove Huang's political alliance but to showcase his cultural admiration for loyal conduct.

Such cultural remembrance was supported by the Qing government during the late seventeenth century. In 1675, not long after the Manchus consolidated their rule in the south, the local prefect Lian Guozhu 連國柱 (*juren* in 1666) re-established Zhaoyun's tomb epitaph and the Pavilion of Six Illusions.²⁸⁸ A bannerman from Liaoning, Lian had sponsored the reconstruction of several historical ruins in Huizhou. His cultural maintenance also made Huang's visit to the site possible in the early eighteenth century. In Tobie Meyer-Fong's view of loyalty in seventeenth-century Yangzhou, the frequent interactions between Qing officials and Ming loyalists reveal a fluid definition of loyalism at the time. Some might even consider it to be "a cultural, rather than political, commitment."²⁸⁹ The tomb of Zhaoyun, by Huang's time, served as a sanctioned cultural memorial to a dynastic change that could no longer be overturned.

4.3 Reconstruction of the Tomb

When Yi became the local administrator, more than a century had elapsed since Lian Guozhu's renovation and the site was once again in a dilapidated condition. In 1801, Yi began to reconstruct Zhaoyun's Tomb.²⁹⁰ Yi contributed his own calligraphy to identify the burial structure and re-write the epitaph for the concubine. In addition, numerous scholars were invited to compose essays and poems commemorating the reconstruction. A close reading of these texts reveals that these literary patrons not only aimed to promote Zhaoyun as a female exemplar but also to pacify her unseen presence as a female ghost.

²⁸⁸ *Qianlong Guishan Xianzhi*, juan 4, 190.

²⁸⁹ Meyer-Fong, *Building Culture in Early Qing Yangzhou*, 33.

²⁹⁰ Tan, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 202.

4.3.1 Marking the Female Paradigm

The renovation began with a practical problem: admirers of Zhaoyun were unable to find her tomb due to its extremely ruined state. Yue Jun 樂鈞 (1766–1814/6) proposed to Yi that the grave was so collapsed that the memory of Zhaoyun might be utterly lost anytime soon.²⁹¹

Understanding the urgency, Yi quickly had a stone slab inscribed and erected to identify the location of Zhaoyun's burial place. The text is arranged in three vertical columns and functions as her grave marker (Figure 4.5):

The third year of the Shaosheng Era (1096) of the Song, a *bingzi* year
Tomb of Wang Zhaoyun, Concubine of Lord Su, « Cultured and Loyal, »
The sixth year of the Jiaqing Era (1801) of the Qing, renovated by Yi Bingshou

宋紹聖三年丙子歲
蘇文忠公侍妾王氏朝雲之墓
清嘉慶六年伊秉綬重修

Yi brushed the inscription in his representative style of the clerical script. Each individual brushstroke features strict evenness with little modulation. The horizontal strokes appear parallel with one another to form a strong sense of coherence. Yi had experimented with this vertical format of writing in his study of Han-dynasty inscriptions. For example, in the *Copy of the Eulogy of the Western Gorges* 臨西狹頌 (Figure 4.6), Yi aligned eleven large characters in one single column.²⁹² Dated to 171, the *Eulogy of the Western Gorges* was a memorial to the Han governor Li Xi 李翕 for his achievements in building the local economy.²⁹³ A similar reduction

²⁹¹ Yue Jun, “Chongxiu Zhaoyun mubei 重修朝雲墓碑,” in *Qingzhi shanguan pianji wenji* 青芝山館駢體文集, in *Qingdai shi wen ji huibian*, 481:312-3.

²⁹² Xiling yinshe, ed., *Yi Bingshou shufa jingpin xuan* 伊秉綬書法精品選 (Hangzhou: Xiling yinshe chubanshe, 2013), 40.

²⁹³ Gao Wen, *Hanbei jishi* 漢碑集釋 (Kaifeng: Henan daxue chubanshe, 1997), 356-64.

of space between characters is also seen in the work that Yi produced for the tomb of Zhaoyun. Such visual relationship highlights the commemorative function of Yi's writing.

Additional structures related to the grave were also re-built to aid the veneration of Zhaoyun. A circular bricked structure formed a round altar around the grave, where visitors could make their offerings. The Pavilion of Six Illusions was re-established as a marker for Zhaoyun's Tomb. Next to the pavilion, Yi also transcribed the "Epigraph for Zhaoyun" and had it engraved on a freestanding stele (Figure 4.7). This work features a carefully regulated style of the clerical script. Each character is in identical size and each brushstroke is of even thickness. Yi signed and dated both the epitaph and the newly established grave marker. Scholars touring through these scenic sites at the time would thus be able to recognize Yi's contribution to the maintenance of local culture.

Although Yi did not state his motivation for the project, I surmise that he might have valued Zhaoyun as an excellent example of proper female conducts. His selection of engraved texts tends to strengthen her subordinating relationship to the patriarchal family rather than her romance with Su. The "Epitaph for Zhaoyun" that Yi transcribed define her status as an obedient concubine who was both loyal and respectful to her husband (*zhongjing ruoyi* 忠敬若一). In Yi's time, the identification and promotion of exemplary local women (*lienü* 列女) was an important duty of regional administrators. Yi had written several poems to praise martyred women (*liefu* 烈婦) and faithful maidens (*zhennü* 貞女) of his day.²⁹⁴ These stories portray young women who gave up their lives upon the death of their husbands and those who "pledged lifelong fidelity to

²⁹⁴ For Yi's poems on exemplary women, see Yi Bingshou, "Yu zhennü shi 俞貞女詩," "Zhang liefu shi 張烈婦詩," "Shi liefu shi 施烈婦詩," "Liangxi Tang xiaonü shi 梁溪唐孝女詩," in *Liuchun caotang shichao*, *juan* 2, 4 and 7.

their first betrothed.”²⁹⁵ In many cases, Yi even offered his calligraphy to promote this performance of female loyalty. For example, in the scroll *Poem for the Martyred Madame Zhang* (Zhang liefu shi 張烈婦詩, Figure 4.8), Yi recorded a story from his hometown Ninghua, Fujian Province.²⁹⁶ Madame Zhang, née Lai, was from a local scholar family and her ancestry could be dated back to Lai Lusun 賴祿孫 (d.u.), a historic filial son in Ninghua during the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368).²⁹⁷ She married a certain Zhang Zhaoduo 張朝鐸 (c. eighteenth century) at the age of eighteen but unfortunately, only six years later, her husband passed away. They did not have any child and she decided to end her life in 1795. Yi dedicated an inscription for this woman, reading: “Faithful Martyred Women Bequeathing Her Reputation (*Zhen lie chui fang* 貞烈垂芳).” The “Epitaph for Zhaoyun” which Yi transcribed perhaps carried a similar function to celebrate her loyalty as an exemplary female character. As the prefect of Huizhou, Yi might have sponsored the tomb reconstruction with this didactic purpose in mind.

4.3.2 Pacifying the Soul of Deceased

Yi did not initiate the project entirely on his own but relied upon the recommendations of several scholars who were interested in ghost stories. He was not unfamiliar with this resurging passion toward fantastic tales during the eighteenth century. Discussions on the subject were commonly

²⁹⁵ Weijing Lu, *True to Her Word: the Faithful Maiden Cult in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 1-2. In recent decades, scholars have discussed the construction of gendered exemplars in late imperial China, see Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001); Katherine Carlitz, “The Social Use of Female Virtue in Late Ming Editions of *Lienü Zhuan*,” *Late Imperial China* 12.2 (1991): 117-48; Katherine Carlitz, “Shrines, Governing-Class Identity, and the Cult of Widow Fidelity in Mid-Ming Jiangnan,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 56.3 (1997): 612-40; Katherine Carlitz, “The Daughters, the Singing Girl, and the Seduction of Suicide,” *Nan Nü: Men, Women and Gender in Early and Imperial China* 3.1 (2001): 22-46; Janice E. Stockard, *Daughters of the Canton Delta: Marriage Patterns and Economic Strategies in South China, 1860–1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

²⁹⁶ The work is currently in the collection of the Fujian Provincial Museum. For its reproduction, see *Zhonghua shuhua jia* 中華書畫家, No. 96 (Oct. 2017): 42.

²⁹⁷ The biography of Lai is recorded in *Yuan shi* 元史.

held among scholars associated with him. His teacher Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724–1805), for example, had published a collection of eccentric tales, titled *Random Jottings from the Cottage of Careful Scrutiny* (*Yuewei caotang biji* 閱微草堂筆記).²⁹⁸ Yi had also dedicated poems to the renowned *Ghost Amusement Scroll* by Luo Ping (Figure 4.9).²⁹⁹ These writings, comments, and pictures created a contemporary zeal for supernatural accounts.

Yue Jun was the one who first submitted the idea of reconstruction to Yi. A man of Jiangxi, Yue studied with Weng Fanggang and was selected by his teacher to enter the National University at the capital.³⁰⁰ He later chose the career of itinerant scholar serving as a private advisor to several regional officials. Between 1798 and 1801, Yue worked at the office of Hu Kejia 胡克家 (1757–1816) in Guangdong. He had visited Huizhou and likely met Yi in person. Yue's extensive travels across the Qing empire allowed him to see things and hear stories that were not always available in written forms. In 1792, Yue published an assortment of marvelous tales that he came to learn about over the years. The book *Records of Hearsay* (*Ershi lu* 耳食錄) consists of curious stories of men, women, immortals, Daoist priests, Buddhist monks, desolate ruins, animals, monsters, and nonhuman spirits.³⁰¹ Similar to earlier writers of the genre, Yue used Sima Qian to justify his position as an unconventional historian instead of a novelist.³⁰²

²⁹⁸ Ji Yun, *Yuewei caotang biji* 閱微草堂筆記 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980).

²⁹⁹ Yi Bingshou, "Ti Luo Liangfeng Ping Guiqutu er shou 題羅兩峰聘鬼趣圖二首," in *Liuchun caotang shichao, juan 1*: 11b; Tan, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 93. For a discussion on the scroll, see Judith Zeitlin, "Luo Ping's Early Ghost Amusement Scroll: Literary and Theatrical Perspectives," in *Eccentric Visions*, edited by Kim, et al., 52-66.

³⁰⁰ Li Jinsong, "Yue Jun de wenxue shuxue yu youmu 樂鈞的文學書寫與游幕," *Hanshan shifan xueyuan xuebao* 韓山師範學院學報, vol. 42, No. 1 (February 2021): 29-35.

³⁰¹ Yue Jun, *Ershi lu* 耳食錄 (Project Gutenberg), <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/27459/pg27459.html> (accessed 03/21/2021).

³⁰² For example, Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640–1715), a renowned writer of ghost stories, also self-identified with Sima Qian, see Judith T. Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 1-2.

Sima once criticized ignorant scholars who only believed in the mainstream narrative and laughed at things they did not fully understand. In his view, these people are no different than those relying on hearsay (*ershizhe* 耳食者). Yue adopted this term from Sima's *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史記) to satirically characterize his accounts as marginalized writings in the traditional historiography. The book title perhaps intends to mock those who found these strange stories untrustworthy. The publication was quite popular and was reprinted more than once during the nineteenth century.

Although Yue did not talk about Zhaoyun directly in his book, many of the stories feature graves as homes for deceased souls. The tale “Tomb of Madame Hu (Hu furen mu 胡夫人墓)” describes a romantic encounter between a young student and a fox. For five hundred years, this fox had transformed into a female and attempted to achieve immortality by luring men to spend nights with her. However, she was not successful with this student because his teacher recognized the trick. With her real identity exposed, the fox could no longer become an immortal. Feeling empathetic, the student asked the fox if he could do anything for her. She cried and asked him to entomb her body with a coffin and make annual offerings to her grave. In this way, her lonely soul would not be lingering in this world, and she would be forever grateful to his generosity. The student did bury her with appropriate ritual and even composed a memorial text for her. Because the surname Hu 胡 was a homophone for “fox (*hu* 狐)” in Chinese, the man inscribed her epitaph as “the Tomb of the Madame Hu.” In one poem on Zhaoyun's Tomb, Yue conveyed a similar gratitude to Yi as the fox to the student.³⁰³ He said that he was in profound debt to Yi for his enormous sponsorship to rebuild the ruined monument, and he hoped that he

³⁰³ Yue Jun, “Zhaoyun mu wushou 朝雲墓五首,” in *Qingzhi shanguan pianti wenji* 青芝山詩集, in *Qingdai shi wen ji huibian*, 481:167-8.

would be able to repay the virtuous prefect in the future. To Yue's eyes, the proper maintenance of Zhaoyun's Tomb was meant to safeguard the deceased female spirit.

Such romantic imagination of Zhaoyun is also delineated in the reconstruction record by Wu Xiqi 吳錫麒 (1746–1818). Wu was from Hangzhou, Zhaoyun's hometown, and belonged to the cohort of scholars who frequently participated in the gatherings hosted by Weng in Beijing. He had written the epitaph for Luo Ping and acknowledged Luo's extraordinary vision to observe ghosts and strange things.³⁰⁴ Wu was most known for his compositions of *pianwen* 駢文 (parallel prose), a type of ornate prose that originated in the Han dynasty. Upon Yi's invitation, Wu used this highly stylized form of writing to produce a memorial for Zhaoyun's Tomb.³⁰⁵ Filled with floral language and archaic expressions, this essay describes the difficult and tragic life of the concubine. The opulent prose in this memorial produces a romanticized representation of Zhaoyun. Toward the end, Wu stated that the tomb offered a solid space for people to console her bright spirit. He also hoped that the grave would secure her soul and immortalize her presence for future generations. These sentiments correlate with the "Mortuary Memorandum Offered to Zhaoyun in Huizhou," a ritual text that Su composed to pacify the soul of Zhaoyun in the eleventh century.

When the reconstruction was completed, Yi created an album for Zhaoyun's Tomb and invited his friends and colleagues for their colophons. The whereabouts of this work is unknown at this point but extant texts suggest that it likely contains painting(s) of the site and ink rubbings

³⁰⁴ Wu Xiqi, "Luo Liangfeng muzhi 羅兩峰墓誌" in *Youzhengwei zhai pianti wen* 有正味齋駢體文, in *Qingdai shi wen ji huibian*, 415:395-6.

³⁰⁵ Wu Xiqi, "Huizhou fu chongxiu Zhaoyun mubei 惠州府重修朝雲墓碑" in *Youzhengwei zhai pianti wen*, in *Qingdai shi wen ji huibian*, 415:393.

of the grave marker and tomb epitaph.³⁰⁶ More than ten scholars were known to have inscribed the album with their poems. Yi must have felt proud of this cultural investment because he continued to show the work to people even when he left Huizhou. For example, Bao Shichen 包世臣 (1775–1855) noted that he saw the album when Yi served as the prefect of Yangzhou between 1804 and 1807. The mobility of this work allowed scholars outside Huizhou to re-imagine this eleventh-century concubine as a heroine from the Song.

³⁰⁶ Tan, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 202-3.

Chapter Five: Remembering the Ye Family

A survey of Yi's extant oeuvre reveals that he had dedicated more than twenty calligraphic works to different members of the Ye family (Appendix II). One of the wealthiest maritime merchant clans in Guangzhou, the Ye family was a prominent collector and an important patron of the arts in the early nineteenth century.³⁰⁷ In addition to these dedicatory works, a dozen private letters that Yi sent to Ye Menglong 葉夢龍 (1775–1832), a core figure in the cultural business of the Ye family, also survive today.³⁰⁸ These texts demonstrate the depth of their relationship as well as details of their social engagement. Because these letters all exist in their original material forms, the recipient must have valued these correspondences as works of art – samples of elegant running script by a renowned calligrapher of the day.³⁰⁹ The dual significance

³⁰⁷ My discussion on the Ye family has greatly benefited from the recent scholarship on the artistic culture of Guangdong. For example, I am in tremendous debt to Peggy Pik-ki Ho [He Biqi 何碧琪] for her study on the relationship between Yi Bingshou and the Ye Family, see He Biqi, “Sushi dikun: Yi Bingshou yu Ye Menglong jiazhu de qingyi 夙世弟昆：伊秉綬與葉夢龍家族的情誼,” *Zhongguo shufa* 中國書法, 376, No. 6 (2020): 84-9; and Peggy Pik-ki Ho [He Biqi], ed., *Guangna baichuan: Ming zhi Qing zhongqi Guangdong shuhuaxuan, Xianggang zhongwendaxue wenwuguan cangpin* 廣納百川：明至清中期廣東書畫選，香港中文大學文物館藏品 [Artistic Confluence in Guangdong: Selected Painting and Calligraphy from Ming to Mid-Qing China, Collection of the Art Museum, the Chinese University of Hong Kong] (Hong Kong: Art Museum, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2021). Chuang Shen [莊申 Zhuang Shen]'s monumental work on art collectors of Guangzhou also offers many insights, see Chuang Shen, *Cong baizhi dao baiyin: Qing mo Guangdong shuhua chuanguo yu shoucangshi* 從白紙到白銀：清末廣東書畫創作與收藏史 (Taipei: Dongda tushu gufen youxiangongsi, 1997), 2 volumes; and Chuang Shen, “Five Art Catalogues By 19th Century Kwangtung Art Collectors,” *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 13 (1973): 85-110. The monograph on the Cantonese painter Su Renshan (1814–c. 1850) by Yeewan Koon offers a rich picture of the visual culture of nineteenth-century Guangzhou, see Yeewan Koon, *A Defiant Brush: Su Renshan and the Politics of Painting in Early 19th-Century Guangdong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2014).

³⁰⁸ One example of these personal letters is the *Letter in Running Script* (Accession Number: F1998.96.1-4) in the collection of the Freer and Sackler Galleries of Art, the Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art, see <https://asia.si.edu/object/F1998.96.1-2/>, accessed 01/24/2022. There is also a group of unpublished correspondence between these people at the Beijing Palace Museum.

³⁰⁹ For discussions on the history of personal letters as collectibles in China, see Amy McNair, “The Engraved Model-Letters Compendia of the Song Dynasty,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 114, no. 2 (1994): 209–25; Qianshen Bai, “Chinese Letters: Private Words Made Public,” in *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection*, edited by Robert E. Harrist Jr. and Wen C. Fong (Princeton, NJ: Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999), 381–399; Martin Kern, “Made by the Empire: Wang Xizhi's *Xingrangtie* and Its Paradoxes,” *Archives of Asian Art*, no. 65.1–2 (2015): 117–137; Antje Richter, “Beyond Calligraphy: Reading Wang Xizhi's Letters,” *T'oung Pao* 96, no. 4/5 (2010): 370–407; Amy McNair, “Letters as Calligraphy Exemplars: The Long and Eventful Life of Yan Zhenqing's (709–785) *Imperial Commissioner Liu Letter*,” in *A History of Chinese Letters and Epistolary Culture*, edited by Antje Richter (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015), 53-96; Lik Hang Tsui,

of these objects, both as aesthetic collectibles and social documents, illuminates the ways in which Yi recognized and forged relationships with his contemporaries through calligraphic writings.³¹⁰

This chapter examines a group of works Yi dedicated to the Ye family, with an emphasis on the contexts in which they were created, used, displayed, and exchanged. I focus on three types of artistic writings: 1) architectural calligraphy, 2) occasional gifts, and 3) painting colophons. The first category refers to calligraphic couplets (*yinglian* 楹聯) and placards (*bangshu* 榜書), which were designed to identify a specific architectural space through references to its geographical features and owner. I focus on how these works evoke the lived experience of the Ye family. The second category tackles copies of early calligraphy and stone inscriptions that Yi produced for the Ye family on various social occasions. I examine how Yi encoded his emotions, such as gratitude and sympathy, through his selection of calligraphic texts. I also use extant letters sent by Yi to the Ye family to illustrate the circulation of calligraphic gifts. The final genre of painting colophons delineates Yi's involvement in the collecting activities of the Ye family. A close reading of these colophons offers a vivid picture of the reception of artistic objects in the nineteenth century. Moreover, these texts suggest how educated elites in Guangzhou used paintings to celebrate local worthies and express pride in their native places. I

“Calligraphic Letters as Precious Objects in Chinese History,” in *Was ist ein Brief: Aufsätze zu epistolarer Theorie und Kultur (What is a letter? Essays on Epistolary Theory and Culture)*, edited by Marie Isabel Matthews-Schlinzig and Caroline Socha (Würzburg, Germany: Königshausen & Neumann, 2018), 197–209.

³¹⁰ The social functions of artworks in imperial China have been discussed by many scholars in the recent decades. For discussion in this chapter, I am most inspired by the following works: Chu-tsing Li, ed., *Artists and Patrons: Some Social and Economic Aspects of Chinese Painting* (Lawrence: Kress Foundation Department of Art History, University of Kansas, Kansas City: the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art; in Association with University of Washington Press, 1989); Qianshen Bai, “Calligraphy for Negotiating Everyday Life: The Case of Fu Shan (1607–1684),” *Asia Major* 12.1 (1999): 67–125; Craig Clunas, *Elegant Debts: The Social Art of Wen Zhengming, 1470-1559* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004); Anne De Coursey Clapp, *Commemorative Landscape Painting in China* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012).

argue that Yi used his calligraphic writings to shape the public image of the Ye Family, promoting them both as loyal friends, benevolent merchants, and generous supporters of local culture. Embedded with meaningful social exchanges between the Ye Family and their contemporary scholars, these dedicatory works illuminate the ways in which members of this merchant family would like to be remembered by further generations.

This body of materials also invites us to reconsider the artist-patron transactions in late imperial China. Because the term “patronage” often implies a hierarchical power structure, art historians in the field of Chinese literati culture have found the concept problematic for the analysis of calligraphers, who traditionally enjoyed higher social status and were equipped with greater resources than their “patrons.”³¹¹ However, in this chapter, my study on the exchange between Yi Bingshou and the Ye Family reveal that the Ye family patronized the political career of Yi through financial donations. In return, Yi had not only routinely made calligraphic works for different members of the Ye family but also participated in the collecting activities of this merchant group. I also ask critical questions on the conveyance of emotions in calligraphic gifts, the negotiation of identities through artistic writings, and the functions of social networks in catalyzing a new sense of locality in the nineteenth century. In the exchange between elite calligraphers and their wealthy patrons, my discussion on the social creation of artworks in Qing Guangzhou aims to highlight the production of identities, rather than the display of power,

The chapter begins by introducing the Ye Family, including their international business with foreigners, their literary gatherings in urban Guangzhou, and their connections with Beijing.

³¹¹ One example of this critique is Bai Qianshen’s close study of gift writings done by late Qing officials, see Bai Qianshen, “Wan Qing guanyuan richang shenghuo zhong de shufa 晚清官員日常生活中的書法,” *Zhejiangdaxue yishu yu kaogu yanjiu* 浙江大學藝術與考古研究 (*Zhejiang University Journal of Art and Archaeology*), vol. 1 (2014): 218-251. In this article, Bai offers a detailed case study on how people requested calligraphic works from high-ranking officials, and how this exchange did not necessarily entail monetary transactions.

Each of the following sections focuses on one type of work Yi dedicated to the Ye Family. My selection of gift writings demonstrates how Yi tailored his calligraphies for different built environments and social occasions. As noted by Paul Van Dyke, many merchants in Guangzhou did not have the opportunity or the resource to successfully record their stories.³¹² For the Ye family, Yi was a quasi-historian of their achievement and legacy. His calligraphic works constructed meaningful memories of a maritime merchant family whose stories were often neglected in conventional historical narratives.

5.1 The Ye Family and Urban Guangzhou

On the south coast of the Manchu empire, Guangzhou emerged as a metropolis with a thriving economy and a burgeoning market for cultural consumption. Between 1757 and 1842, the city was designated by the Qing government as the only trading port with foreigners, thereby offering many good opportunities for newcomers.³¹³ Each monsoon season, merchants from Europe, America, and Southeast Asia arrived with their ships and goods, and traded with a special group of licensed Chinese firms in Guangzhou, known as Hong merchants (*hangshang* 行商).³¹⁴ Many

³¹² Paul A. Van Dyke dedicated his monumental book on the Canton Trade to “all Chinese who have no records or memories of their ancestors who lived, worked and died in the Pearl River Delta,” see Paul A. Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700–1845* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007). This dedication is meaningful because most merchants did not have a chance to write their own stories. Steven Miles has also talked about the anti-merchant narrative in nineteenth-century Guangzhou, see Steven B. Miles, *The Sea of Learning: Mobility and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Guangzhou* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), 70-3.

³¹³ Recently, several scholars have portrayed Guangzhou as a city of “newcomers.” For example, Steven B. Miles has discussed the major types of migrants and sojourners to Guangzhou during the nineteenth century and analyzed their contributions to the elite culture in this southern metropolis, see Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 24-42. Yeewan Koon also describes the multiple identities of cultural participants in Guangzhou, see Yeewan Koon, *A Defiant Brush: Su Renshan and the Politics of Painting in Early 19th-Century Guangdong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2014), 21-68.

³¹⁴ *Hong* is the Cantonese pronunciation for the character *hang* 行. The term “Hong merchant” has been widely used in western-language documents and literatures on the commercial history of Qing Guangzhou. In this chapter, I follow the established scholarly convention to address this group of officially appointed Chinese merchants as Hong merchants, instead of using the modern romanization system of pinyin. For a brief discussion of the term, see Paul A. Van Dyke and Maria Kar-Wing Mok, *Images of the Canton Factories 1760-1822: Reading History in Art* (Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2015), XV. For recent discussions on Hong merchants and the trading

of these authorized dealers were recent in-migrants from nearby Fujian province who chose to settle in Guangzhou after gaining some wealth from the global trade. These wealthy elites sponsored local artists, regional academies, Buddhist temples, publishing houses, and the construction of lavish gardens. They were also able to establish and maintain relationships with a wide range of sojourning officials and traveling literati. Their financial success and social network played an important role in shaping the cultural landscape of Guangzhou during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

5.1.1 Ye Tingxun as a Hong Merchant

The Ye family was one of those Hong merchants with an ancestral origin in Fujian. They were recorded to have relocated from Tongan 同安, a small coastal village in southeast Fujian, in the early eighteenth century.³¹⁵ This in-migrant family gained prominence in Guangzhou during the generation of Ye Tingxun 葉廷勳 (1753–1809). As a young man, Ye Tingxun started his career as a clerk at the firm of Pan Youdu 潘有度 (1755–1820), the recognized leader of Hong merchants at the time.³¹⁶ Pan Zhencheng 潘振承 (1714–1788), also known as Poankeequa by westerners, founded the Tongwen Company (Tongwen hang 同文行) and developed his clan

environment of Guangzhou, see Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade 1700-1845*; Paul A. Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao: Politics and Strategies in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Trade* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011); John D. Wong, *Global Trade in the Nineteenth Century: The House of Houqua and the Canton System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Evelyn S. Rawski and Susan Naquin, "Review Essay: A New Look at the Canton Trade, 1700–1845," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Volume 78, Number 2 (December 2018): 491-514.

³¹⁵ Ye Guanqian 葉官謙, ed., *Yeshi jiapu 葉氏家譜* (n.p.: 1924), 145, the original manuscript is in the Zhongshan Library of Guangdong Province 廣東省中山圖書館, a digitalized microfilm version is available at the website FamilySearch, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-89MC-FR2T?cc=1787988&wc=3XKJ-K6L%3A1022397201%2C1021934502%2C1021944401%2C1021957001%2C1022978901> (accessed 08/12/2021). For a biography of Ye Tingxun, see Appendix III: The Tomb Stele of Ye Tingxun.

³¹⁶ Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao*, 181-97; Paul A. Van Dyke, "The Ye Merchants of Canton, 1720-1804," *Review of Culture*, International Edition No. 13 (January 2005): 6-47.

into a credible partner with foreign traders.³¹⁷ Pan Youdu, often referred to as Poankeequa II, inherited the business from his father. Because these men were also recent migrants from Tongan, the shared ancestral kinship contributed to their bonding with the Ye family. The Pan family remained an important source of support throughout Ye Tingxun's career.

The varied aliases and titles of Hong merchants require some clarifications because they signify important social distinction and self-image. Ye Tingxun had several names as a businessman. His original names were Ye Renshang 葉仁商, literally “the benevolent merchant Ye,” and Ye Shanglin 葉上林.³¹⁸ His trading partners most often referred to him as Yanqua, a Cantonese pronunciation for “Renguan 仁官,” because foreigners at the time would add the suffix “mandarin (*guan* 官)” to the first character of Hong merchants' given names to indicate their social superiority.³¹⁹ Many Hong merchants during this period did purchase imperial appointments through huge donations. In 1789, Ye Tingxun acquired an honorary title as the Deputy Salt Controller of the Salt Distribution Commission (Yanyunshi si yuntong 鹽運使司運同, rank 4b).³²⁰ When Yanqua eventually decided to quit the business, he adopted the name Ye Tingxun and fashioned himself as the Old Man of Huaxi (*Huaxi laoren* 花谿老人). The change of names at various moments of Ye Tingxun's life indicated the transformation of his identities

³¹⁷ For the history of the Pan family, see Pan Jianfen, *Guangzhou shisanhang hangshang Pan Zhencheng jiazhu yanjiu* 廣州十三行行商潘振承家族研究 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2017); for a discussion on the art collection of the Pan family, see Koon, *A Defiant Brush*, 26-33; Miles also discusses the connotation of “Tongwen” as the name for the Pan family's firm, see Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 35.

³¹⁸ Ye Guanqian, ed., *Yeshi jiapu*, 96.

³¹⁹ Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao*, 13-4. Jian Hongyi discusses the meanings and implications of the suffixes *guan* and *she* 舍 during the eighteenth century, see Jian Hongyi, “Minnan toujia de mingmingxue: Guan yu She de yiyi yongfa ciyuan 閩南頭家的命名學：官與舍得意義、用法、詞源,” *Hanxue yanjiu* 漢學研究, vol. 43, no. 3 (Sept. 2016): 319-348.

³²⁰ Ye Guanqian, ed., *Yeshi jiapu*, 135. Van Dyke suggests that this kind of title was most often purchased by Hong merchants, see Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao*, 13-4.

in different social environments. In this chapter, I have chosen to identify this man as Ye Tingxun because this name was most frequently used during his cultural interactions with literary friends and scholars.

In 1792, Ye Tingxun was officially appointed as a Hong merchant and started his own firm, the Yicheng Company (Yicheng Hang 義成行).³²¹ He traded many products, including tea, silk, woolens, tin, and lead, with the English East India Company, the Swedish East India Company, the Danish Asiatic Company, and traders from America. The business was quite lucrative. By the Jiaqing period (1796–1820), the Yicheng Company was ranked as one of the four largest firms in Guangzhou, along with the businesses run by the Pan family, the Lu family, and the Wu family.³²²

Ye Tingxun also developed a strong connection with other Hong merchants through intermarriage.³²³ His principal wife was the oldest daughter of Yan Shiming 顏時明 (b. 1730).³²⁴ The Yan family was a well-established clan of merchants in Guangzhou who ran a large-scale business with the Dutch, Danes, and English. Yan Shiyong 顏時瑛 (1727–1792), or Ingsia, the cousin of Yan Shiming, was the head of the family business.³²⁵ Ye Mengkun 葉夢鯤 (1784–

³²¹ For discussions on Ye Tingxun's trading activities, see Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao*, 181-97; Van Dyke, "The Ye Merchants of Canton, 1720-1804," 6-47; Liang Jiabin 梁嘉彬, *Guangdong shisanhang kao* 廣東十三行考 (Taizhong: Sili donghai daxue, 1960), 243-4; Chen Kuo-tung, "The Insolvency of the Chinese Hong Merchants, 1760–1843" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1990), 312-7.

³²² Liang, *Guangdong shisanhang kao*, 243-4; Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao*, 195.

³²³ It was common for prominent Hong merchants to strengthen their relationship through marriage, see Yan Zhiduan and Yan Zuxia, "Shisanhang minji hangshang jiazou lianyin chutan 十三行閩籍行商家族聯姻初探," *Lingnan wenshi* 嶺南文史, No. 3 (2019): 48-53.

³²⁴ Ye Guanqian, ed., *Yeshi jiapu*, 134; *Chongxiu Yanshi qian Yue jiapu* 重修顏氏遷粵家譜, 4 vol. (n.p.: 1887), 3: 73-4, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-L9MF-Q9S5-V?cc=1787988&wc=3XKR-927%3A1023573201%2C1021934502%2C1021944401%2C1021957001%2C1023651801> (accessed: 08/12/2021).

³²⁵ For detailed discussions on the Yan family, see Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao*, 149-67; Paul A. Van Dyke, "The Yan Family: Merchants of Canton, 1734-1780s," *Review of Culture*, International Edition No. 9 (January 2004): 30-85.

1835), the youngest son of Ye Tingxun, had an arranged marriage with the niece of Wu Bingjian 伍秉鑑 (1769–1843), one of the most influential businessmen in the early nineteenth century.³²⁶ These marital relationships formed an additional layer of kinship between prominent merchant families in Guangzhou and provided a network of support in the fast-changing world of commerce.

The strengthening of relationships among Hong merchants helped relieve some stress of the “debt re-distribution,” a payment system mandated by the Manchu government. As the trading environment became especially precarious in the 1790s, failing businesses caused many Hong merchants to close their firms and even attempt suicide.³²⁷ However, the debts they owed could not be dismissed, but could only be transferred to their partners or shared by the collective of Hong merchants.³²⁸ For example, due to the bankruptcy of Shi Zhonghe 石中和 (c. 1800), Ye Tingxun was asked to pay 50,000 taels of Shi’s debts to the English East India Company.³²⁹ Along with some other debts he had to absorb earlier, Ye Tingxun had a difficult time maintaining appropriate cashflow. Fortunately, he was able to secure a loan from Pan Youdu to continue the operation of the Yicheng Company.³³⁰

³²⁶ Ye Guanqian, ed., *Yeshi jiapu*, 134. Wu Bingjian had commissioned many oil portraits of himself and sent them to his foreign partners, several of which have survived today in the United States. John D. Wong has discussed the Wu family and the functions of these portraits, see Wong, *Global Trade in the Nineteenth Century*, 108-25.

³²⁷ Hong merchants in Guangzhou had a high failure rate and tended to maintain their business only for a short period of time. According to Chen Kuo-tung, from 1760 to 1843, 37 out of the total 47 firms went down after less than two years of operation, see Chen Kuo-tung, *Qingdai qianqi de Yuehaiguan yu Shisanhang 清代前期的粵海關與十三行* (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2014), 227-36. I would like to thank Vickie Fu Doll for helping me access this source.

³²⁸ Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade*, 97.

³²⁹ For details of Shi Zhonghe’s bankruptcy, see Chen Kuo-tung, “Guangdong hangshang Shi Zhonghe de pochang – Yingguo Dong Yindu gongsi dang’an yu Qingdai zouzhe 廣東行商石中和的破產—英國東印度公檔案與清代奏折,” *Gujin lunheng 古今論衡*, No. 24 (June 2013): 65-82.

³³⁰ Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao*, 191-6; Chen “The Insolvency of the Chinese Hong Merchants,” 314.

The miserable failures of his colleagues and the uncertainty of global trade may have triggered Ye Tingxun's desire to withdraw from the merchant life. As early as 1794, he began to consider leaving the business, but the plan was delayed due to his obligations as a Hong merchant.³³¹ In 1802, due to his declining health, Ye Tingxun attempted to resign by first seeking consent from his foreign counterparts. At the same time, several Qing officials also appealed to the emperor for Ye Tingxun's retirement.³³² As Paul A. Van Dyke has suggested, Ye Tingxun probably had to contribute a large amount of money to the court for his official exit; however, the details of any such transaction were never clear.³³³ Nonetheless, in 1804, he became the only figure in his generation to have successfully retired, with even a portion of his fortune remaining intact.

5.1.2 Elegant Gatherings

The Ye family was able to transform their financial wealth into cultural prestige by hosting elegant gatherings (*yaji* 雅集) at their estates.³³⁴ Ye Tingxun and his three sons – Ye Menglin 葉夢麟 (1772–1823; *zi*: Kongshu 孔書; *hao*: Wenyuan 文園), Ye Menglong (*zi*: Zhongshan 仲山; *hao*: Yungu 雲谷, Gengju/Yunju 耕菊/芸菊), and Ye Mengkun (*zi*: Shuyu 叔魚; *hao*: Nanming 南溟) – were not only key patrons of such meetings but also distinguished guests to social events held by other educated elites in the area. Their garden and studios were frequented by officials, scholars, and artists for poetry composition, viewing painting and calligraphy, and enjoying

³³¹ Chen “The Insolvency of the Chinese Hong Merchants,” 314-5.

³³² Ye Guanqian, ed., *Yeshi jiapu*, 25.

³³³ Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao*, 196.

³³⁴ The recent catalogue published by the Art Museum, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, touches upon major artists and patrons in Guangzhou during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Ho, ed., *Guangna baichuan*, 316-36.

seasonal flowers and fruits. These constructed sites became important landmarks in the urban landscape of Qing Guangzhou and renowned places of cultural production.

Little Field Garden (Xiaotianyuan 小田園) was the principal residence of the Ye family.³³⁵ Located in Litchi Cove 荔枝灣, a famous tourist site in Xiguan 西關 of Guangzhou, it was among several private mansions that took advantage of the beautiful scenery along the Pearl River (Zhujiang 珠江). For example, their next-door neighbor was the Pan family, who owned the Islands of the Immortals in the Sea Lodge (Haishan xianguan 海山仙館), perhaps the most extravagant garden in nineteenth-century Guangzhou.³³⁶ Inside the Little Field Garden, Ye Tingxun established the Friend's Stone Studio (Youshizhai 友石齋), Deer Gate Monastery (Lumen jingshe 鹿門精舍), and Plum Blossom Library (Meihua shuwu 梅花書屋) for his literary activities. There was also the Tower of the Sweeping Wind (Fengmanlou 風滿樓) that housed the family's art collection.³³⁷ Although none of these structures survive today, poems by Ye Tingxun offer a glimpse into their constructed elegance:

Gold and green jade shine upon each other, reflected in water near the window;
moonlit terrace invites the moon to pillow on the Pearl River.

... Remember to leisurely drift and oar under the bright moon;
following the sound of pipa, [I] recognize [a young lady's] double hair buns.

At the hexagonal pavilion, I plant the Nerium oleander;
red lotus flowers fall while white lotuses grow high.

With the sunset came a rising wind and hasty river waves;
I lean on the railing, listening to the raging rapids.

³³⁵ Huang Foyi, *Guangzhou cheng fang zhi* 廣州城坊志, annotated by Qiu Jiang, Zheng Limin, and Chi Yiwu (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1994), 609-610.

³³⁶ For a recent study of the Pan family garden, see Josepha Charlotte Richard, "The Hong Merchant's Gardens during the Canton System and the aftermath of the Opium Wars" (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 2017), 112-132.

³³⁷ Huang, *Guangzhou cheng fang zhi*, 610.

金碧交輝映水窗，月臺邀月枕珠江。

...

記取月明閒泛櫂，琵琶聲裏認雙鬢。

六角亭栽夾竹桃，紅蓮花讓白蓮高。

夕陽風起江波急，人倚闌干聽怒濤。³³⁸

The verses describe the radiant architecture, vibrant plants, as well as evening views of the Pearl River from the garden. In addition, because the Litchi Cove is within a short distance from the district of Hong merchants' firms, "hasty river waves" and "raging rapids" could be read as a metaphor for the bustling maritime trade. The tranquility of this built environment thus allowed Ye Tingxun to position himself as an outside observer to the world of commerce.

The idea of localism, especially the celebration of cultural figures indigenous to Guangdong, was one of the central themes governing the design of the Little Field Garden. The Friend's Stone Studio was built for a precious "stone couch (*shichuang* 石牀)," once possessed by the renowned local painter and poet Li Jian 黎簡 (1747–1799).³³⁹ A native of Shunde 順德, Li worked his entire career in Guangdong and produced many images of local scenery, such as Mount Loufu 羅浮山 of Huizhou and the Dawu Peak 大烏峯 near Guangzhou.³⁴⁰ The "stone couch" is recorded to be a piece of "wax stone (*lashi* 蠟石)," measuring about fifty-two inches in

³³⁸ Ye Tingxun, *Meihuashuwu jinti shichao sijuán* 梅花書屋近體詩鈔四卷, in *Guangzhou dadian* 廣州大典 (Guangzhou: Guangzhou chubanshe, 2008), volume 448: 775-776.

³³⁹ Yi Bingshou had seen this stone object and written about his visit the studio to commemorate Li Jian, see Yi Bingshou, "Guo Youshizhai huai shiren Li Erqiao 過友石齋懷詩人黎二樵," in *Liuchun caotang shichao* 留春草堂詩鈔 (n.p., 1810), 3:7a.

³⁴⁰ *An Excursion to Mount Luofu (Luofushan youji shuhuace* 羅浮山遊記書畫冊), an album of four double leaves at Guangdong Provincial Museum (B2735), consists of four painted views of Mount Luofu, a transcription of *Luofu Rhapsody* 羅浮賦, and several inscribed poems. The painting *Dawu Peak* is currently in the collection of the Art Museum, Chinese University of Hong Kong (1995.0433). Dawu Peak is also known today as the Dafu Mountain 大夫山. For reproductions of these two paintings, see Guangdong Provincial Museum, Guangzhou Art Gallery, and the Art Gallery, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, eds., *Li Jian Xie Lansheng shuhua* 黎簡謝蘭生書畫 [The Art of Li Jian and Xie Lansheng] (Guangzhou: Guangdongsheng bowuguan and Guangzhou meishuguan; Hong Kong: Xianggang zhongwen daxue wenwuguan, 1993), 38-41; 94-5.

length and twenty-six inches in width.³⁴¹ The object, first acquired by Li from Foshan 佛山, had been anthropomorphized by his owner as a “stone friend (*shiyou* 石友).” However, perhaps due to poverty, Li sold the stone to a pawnshop in 1787 and did not redeem it until three years later.³⁴² Ye Tingxun and Ye Menglong were generous to Li in his late years and frequently invited him to spend time at their estate. In return, Li made several paintings for members of the Ye family. For example, in 1794, Li brushed a set of twelve album leaves (Figure 5.1) for Ye Menglong, in which he made stylistic references to famous painters of the Song (960–1279) and the Yuan (1279–1368) dynasties, including Mi Youren (1074–1151), Li Tang (1066–1150), and Ni Zan (1301–1374).³⁴³ It is unclear if the Ye family played any role in Li’s reunion with his “stone friend.” Nevertheless, after Li’s death, the object went into the Ye family collection and Ye Tingxun constructed a special room for its preservation. The Friend’s Stone Studio, in this regard, was meant to honor the legacy of a regional painting master and display the Ye family’s generosity toward local scholar-artists. Guests to the place would recognize the Ye family as a group of loyal gentlemen, who valued their solid-as-stone friendship with cultural luminaries in Guangzhou.

Another important theme in the Little Field Garden is the creative appropriation of historical literature. People in the Ye family frequently projected their contemporary living experience into the past through classical literary stories. As pointed out by Grace Fong and Alfreda Murck, the

³⁴¹ The current whereabouts of this object is unknown. However, Li Jian wrote about this stone on several occasions, see Su Wenzhuo (So Man-jock), *Li Jian xiansheng nianpu* 黎簡先生年譜 [The Chronological Biography of Li Ch’ien] (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1973), 96-7.

³⁴² In one of the poems, Li talked about this departure and reunion with his two stone friends. In addition to the stone couch, Li also owned a “Purple Cloud Inkstone (*ziyunyan* 紫雲硯).” This inkstone was later gifted to Li’s teacher. For the poem, see Li Jian, “Shiyou 石友,” in *Wubaisifengtang shichao* 五百四峰堂詩鈔, in *Qingdai shi wen ji huibian* 清代詩文集彙編 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2010), 417:184 (the original *juan* 21:2).

³⁴³ This painting album is currently in the collection of Guangdong Provincial Museum (B493), see *Li Jian Xie Lansheng shuhua*, 118-23; and Su, *Li Jian xiansheng nianpu*, 124-6.

Deer Gate, a famous mountain in Xiangyang, Hubei, is a common literary expression for hermitic lifestyle, because during the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220), the famous recluse Pang Degong 龐德公 chose to pick herbs at the place instead of serving the government.³⁴⁴ Meng Haoran 孟浩然 (689–740) of the Tang (618–907) also employed the site in his poem to narrate his ambivalence about withdrawing from court politics.³⁴⁵ By naming his personal study the Deer Gate Monastery, Ye Tingxun publicly announced his longing for a retreat from the maritime trade. In addition, the Tower of Sweeping Wind is derived from a famed poem by Xu Hun 許渾 (788–860):

As clouds rise from the stream, the sun sinks below the gate-tower.
The wind sweeping through the tower portends the rain on the mountain.³⁴⁶
溪雲初起日沈閣，山雨欲來風滿樓。

In the second half of verse, Xu vividly portrayed the transformative atmosphere prior to a storm. This poetic description also seems to resonate with the humid tropical weather of Guangzhou. As the wind from the Pearl River flowed through the garden, the Tower of Sweeping Wind came to manifest a localized vision of this Tang poetry. Applying images in classical poems to personal circumstance and regional topography, Ye Tingxun fashioned himself into a lofty hermit and erudite literatus.

Participants in elegant gatherings at the garden embraced this mode of historicism to produce cultural traditions of Guangzhou and establish a sense of pride. In the spring of 1802, Ye

³⁴⁴ Fong and Murck have discussed literary references to the Deer Gate in later poems, see Grace S. Fong, “A Recluse of the Inner Quarters: The Poet Ji Xian (1614–1683),” *Early Modern Women*, Vol. 2 (Fall 2007): 29-41; Alfreda Murck, “The ‘Eight Views of Xiao-Xiang’ and the Northern Song Culture of Exile,” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, No. 26 (1996): 113-144.

³⁴⁵ Murck, “The ‘Eight Views of Xiao-Xiang’ and the Northern Song Culture of Exile,” 127.

³⁴⁶ Xu Hun, “Xiangyang cheng donglou 咸陽城東樓,” in *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 533:6085.

Tingxun gathered Yi Bingshou, Feng Minchang 馮敏昌 (1741–1806), Mao Chen 毛琛 (c. eighteenth century), and Huang Danshu 黃丹書 (1757–1806) at the Friend’s Stone Studio to admire peony blossoms. Yi composed three poems for this event, which not only historicized their peony viewing but also celebrated the peonies of Guangdong as a unique spectacle in the Qing empire. The first poem reads:

At Jixiang Precinct and Cien Monastery,
the dazzling blooms could once be smelled near the Buddhist banners.
Realizing that the color and fragrance [of the flower] are not things to be attached to,
I sing Bai [Juyi]’s poem and Su [Shi]’s essay at the window.³⁴⁷
吉祥院與慈恩寺，艷藥曾聞近佛幢。悟到色香無着處，白詩蘇記對吟牕。

Jixiang Precinct and Cien Monastery allude to two stories about Su Shi (1037–1101) and Bai Juyi (772–846). In one of his well-known poems, Bai deeply lamented over the fleeting of a prospering season through withered sceneries at Cien Temple.³⁴⁸ During the Tang, Cien Temple was known for its brilliant peonies, as well as the inscriptions left at the Great Goose Pagoda by those who passed the civil service exam. The flower only blooms for a short period of time during the spring, a metaphor for the short-lived joy of new degree holders. Bai thus used the image of Cien Temple to speak about his melancholy on the fading of the year. In 1072, Su was asked to preface the recently compiled *An Account of Peonies* (*Mudan ji* 牡丹記) while enjoying peony flowers at Jixiang Monastery.³⁴⁹ In addition to tracing the history of the peony to the early Tang, Su harshly criticized the contemporary craze over the extreme glamour of this flower. In

³⁴⁷ Yi Bingshou, “Ye Huaxi zhang Tingxun zhaoji Youshizhai kan mudan sanshou 葉花谿丈廷勳招集友石齋看牡丹三首,” in *Liuchun caotang shichao*, 3:6b.

³⁴⁸ Bai Juyi, “San yue sanshi ri ti Cien si 三月三十日題慈恩寺,” in *Quan Tang shi*, 436:4830.

³⁴⁹ Zhang Zhilie, Ma Defu, and Zhou Yukai, eds., *Su Shi quanji jiaozhu: Wenji* 蘇軾全集校註: 文集 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 2010), 2:1031-33. For a translation of this text, see Ronald Egan, *The Problem of Beauty: Aesthetic Thought and Pursuits in Northern Song Dynasty China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 139-40.

his view, promoters of the peony were simply chasing after novel and fashionable things. This essay was later interpreted by the court as an attack on the emperor's new policies, which eventually led to his banishment to Huangzhou. To Yi's eyes, these two historical sites reminded him of the ephemerality of the peony and the Buddhist teaching of non-attachment.³⁵⁰ This literary response allowed Yi to align himself and his friends with Su and Bai, two cultural paragons in Chinese history, who saw the peony not just as a beautiful flower but a reflection of themselves and their social surroundings. The celebratory undertone is most evident in Yi's last poem for this event:

Wind from the east please do not sneer at the poor prefect.
[I] have seen [peonies] in Caonan but the ones at Lingnan are better.³⁵¹
東風莫漫嗤貧守，看遍曹南更嶺南。

Here Yi praised Lingnan (Guangdong and Guangxi) a superior location for enjoying peonies, better than Caonan (present-day Heze, Shandong Province), a place renowned for the flower during the Qing. In his annotation to the final line, Yi further explained that twenty years ago, he had visited Luoyang, an ancient city with a long tradition of peony viewing, but the peonies there could no longer compete with the ones in Caonan.³⁵² This hierarchical comparison established Guangdong as a new center of cultural enjoyment, thereby glorifying the garden of the Ye family as a productive space for literature and art.

5.1.3 Paintings of *Six Gentlemen*

Local painters at these social events also engaged in the production of regional culture by adapting early pictorial themes to contemporaneous emotions. In 1815, Ye Tingxun and Ye

³⁵⁰ Yi might have tried using this story to relieve some of his own political frustration as the Prefect of Huizhou when he was falsely accused by his superior. This episode of Yi's life will be further discussed in conjunction with the work *Copy of the Pei Cen Stele*.

³⁵¹ Yi, "Ye Huaxi zhang Tingxun zhaoji Youshizhai kan mudan sanshou," 3:6b.

³⁵² The Chinese text of this annotation reads: 洛陽花事今遜曹州，廿年前曾游之。

Menglong were invited to a scholarly outing at the Haichuang Monastery (Haichuang si 海幢寺) in Guangzhou.³⁵³ Xie Lansheng 謝蘭生 (1769–1831), a scholar and artist of regional distinction, was recorded to have re-invented “a painting of six gentlemen (*Liu junzi tu* 六君子圖)” to commemorate this group of like-minded friends. As suggested by Steven Miles, the title of this work most likely refers to the canonical painting *Six Gentlemen* by Ni Zan (Figure 5.2).³⁵⁴ In the original Yuan picture, we see six perpendicular trees on the low hill in the foreground, representing Ni and his five friends, and a cluster of distant mountain peaks beyond the misty river in the background. One inscription by Huang Gongwang (1269–1354) on the painting suggests a conventional reading of the image that these straight tree trunks symbolize the upright and impartial characters of Confucian gentlemen.

Although the painting by Xie is no longer available, the theme “six gentlemen” was established as a local visual rhetorical device for commemorating relationships among educated elites in eighteenth-century Guangzhou. Painters and scholars in the region were not unfamiliar with this pictorial subject because Li Jian had re-interpreted the Yuan painting on more than one occasion. In 1786, Li rendered his version of the *Six Gentlemen* on a fan (Figure 5.3).³⁵⁵ His deliberate use of dry and minimal brushwork establishes a strong stylistic affinity with Ni’s composition. However, this painting is not a simple homage to the Yuan master but an emotional

³⁵³ This event was documented in the collected writings of Yun Jing 惲敬 (1757–1817), see Yun Jing, “Tongyou Haichuangsi ji 同遊海幢寺記” in *Dayunshanfang wengao* 大雲山房文稿, in *Qingdai shiwen ji huibian* 清代詩文集彙編 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2010), 449:209-10. Stephen Miles has discussed the gathering in some detail, see Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 60.

³⁵⁴ Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, footnote 11 to Chapter two, 334. The painting is now in the collection of Shanghai Museum, see Shanghai bowuguan, ed., *Danqing baofa: Dong Qichang shuhua yishu teji* 丹青寶筏: 董其昌書畫藝術特集 [The Ferryman of Ink World: Dong Qichang’s Calligraphy and Painting Art] (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2019), 1:120-1.

³⁵⁵ For a reproduction of the painting, see Senro Kawai, *Shina nanga taisei* 支那南畫大成 (Tokyo: Kōbunsha, 1935), vol. 8: 209.

response toward the difficulty of reunion with his friends. Li modified the structure of the original picture by removing the distant mountains and placing the six trees as the focal point of his composition. He also added a flowing stream at the center, breaking the trees into two groups on different sides of the riverbank. Relating the intention behind this new painting, his self-inscription reads:

A few years ago, Zhou Shinong, Lü Jieqing, Wang Yuepo, Wenren Kean, and Yuan Shengfu lodged at the residential studio of Erqiao Shanren (Li Jian). Shanren created a painting *Six Gentlemen* to document [this gathering], which, at the time, was a magnificent event in the Lingnan. This autumn, Shengfu again asked me to paint the image *Six Gentlemen* on a fan. Irresolute, after a period I finally responded to him. The completed painting represents one who flourished, one who withered, one who did not flourish, one who did not wither, one who stood at a distance, and one who departed far away. Across the limpid stream, we looked at each other but could not have a conversation. For the past several years, the state of the six gentlemen has been like this. This is the lamentable situation in Lingnan today. In the ninth month of the *bingwu* year (1786), recorded by Erqiao.

數年前周石農、呂介卿、王月坡、聞人可葦、袁升甫同館與二樵山人寓齋，山人為六君子圖以志之，是時蓋天南一盛事也。今秋升父又囑予作六君子圖于扇，予惘然，久乃應之。畫成，有榮者瘁者；不榮不瘁者；有離立遠去者。有盈盈一水間，相望不得語者。數年來，六君之狀況寓於此矣。此又今日天南一可慨嘆事也。丙午九月二樵記。³⁵⁶

In the passage, Li first explained that previously he had produced a painting of six gentlemen during a joyful assembly with his best friends at his house. This year, upon the request of one of these friends, Li re-painted the theme with a more sorrowful message. He designed the new image as a memorial for his friends who were no longer alive or had become estranged over the years. The “limpid stream” in the painting is a visual symbol of the separation among these Guangzhou-based scholars. The choice of Ni’s archaic style allowed Li to situate himself in the orthodox tradition of Chinese literati painting. His memories and feelings about his friends, however, bring a sense of contemporaneity to the historical image. It is possible that Xie might

³⁵⁶ Su, *Li Jian xiansheng nianp*, 68.

have intended his work at the Haichuang Temple as a tribute to Li and the regional artistic lineage. The layered references heighten the local significance of “six gentlemen” as a remembrance of the scholarly community of Guangzhou.

5.1.4 Network in Beijing

The Ye family sought to extend their connections and influences beyond Guangzhou through purchased official posts at the Qing capital. The eldest son Ye Menglin acquired a position as the Gentleman of the Interior at the Ministry of Justice (Xingbu langzhong 刑部郎中) but stayed less than a year in Beijing and then returned home. Ye Menglong bought a rank at the Ministry of Revenue (hubu 戶部) and spent several years at the capital. Ye Mengkun, the youngest son of the family, was especially fond of travel and said to be good at painting ink bamboo. He purchased a position at the Court of Imperial Entertainments (Guanglusi 光祿寺) and sojourned in Beijing during his tenure.³⁵⁷ Their experience in the north allowed them to develop and strengthen relationships with prominent figures at the capital. In 1812, more than forty officials across the Qing empire signed the memorial essay congratulating the sixtieth birthdays of both Ye Tingxun and his principal wife.³⁵⁸ This expansive network proved to be an invaluable asset to the clan.

Among the family members, Ye Menglong perhaps enjoyed the most success in Beijing in terms of cultural reputation. He acquired paintings and calligraphies during his time at the capital and became recognized as an avid collector. His residence in the Xuannan 宣南 district of Beijing was adjacent to the Taoran Pavilion 陶然亭, a celebrated site of literary outings, and

³⁵⁷ For the above information, see Ye Guanqian, ed., *Yeshi jiapu*, 155, 184, and 256.

³⁵⁸ Ye Tingxun died in 1809 and this essay was meant as a “birthday anniversary of the deceased (*mingshou* 冥寿).” For the original Chinese text, see “Gaofeng Zizheng dafu Huaxi Ye laobo daren ji depei laobomu Yan furen liushi shuang shou xu 誥封資政大夫花谿葉老伯大人暨德配老伯母顏夫人六十雙壽序,” in *Yeshi jiapu*, 139-145.

provided convenient access to the antique market in Liulichang 琉璃廠.³⁵⁹ He even modeled his personal study, the Studio of the Chan of Painting (Huachan zhai 畫禪齋), after the influential Ming (1368–1644) painter and art critic Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636).³⁶⁰ In 1804, when Yi visited Beijing to seek imperial appointment, Ye Menglong invited him to stay at this studio. During their time together, Yi examined a variety of paintings and calligraphic works with Ye Menglong and other sojourning scholars at the capital, including Wu Rongguang 吳榮光 (1773–1843) and Zhang Wentao 張問陶 (1764–1814).³⁶¹ His experience in Beijing allowed Ye Menglong to build his own art collection and gain recognition as an emerging literatus from the south.

Ye Menglong also maintained a strong connection with senior scholar-officials at the capital, especially Weng Fanggang 翁方綱 (1733–1818). A native of Beijing, Weng served as the Education Commissioner of Guangdong (Guangdong xuezheng 廣東學政) between 1764 and 1772 and had mentored a group of important scholars from the region. He had viewed, evaluated, and inscribed many works that Ye Menglong bought in Beijing.³⁶² Through exchanged poems and essays, Weng frequently voiced his support for the cultural endeavors of the Ye family.³⁶³

³⁵⁹ For Ye Menglong's life in Beijing, see Wang Zongyan, *Guangdong shuhua zhengxian lu* 廣東書畫徵獻錄 (Aomen: Wang Zongyan, 1988), 166-7.

³⁶⁰ Dong Qichang named one of his personal studios Huachan shi 畫禪室 (Studio of the Chan of Painting) and his collected writings as *Huachanshi suibi* 畫禪室隨筆 (Random Notes from the Studio of the Chan of Painting), see Xie Zhiliu, "The Ch'an of Painting in Tung Ch'i-ch'ang's Theory," in *The Century of Tung Ch'i-ch'ang, 1555–1636*, edited by Wai-kai Ho and Judith G. Smith (Kansas City: Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 1992), volume 1, xxxv-xxxvi.

³⁶¹ Tan Pingguo, *Yi Bingshou nianpu* 伊秉綬年譜 (Shanghai: Dongfang chuban zhongxin, 2017), 267.

³⁶² For a few examples of Weng Fanggang's poems and inscriptions on works collected by Ye Menglong, see Weng Fanggang "Meidaoren zhu juan wei Yungu ti 梅道人竹卷為雲谷題," in *Fuchuzhai shiji* 復初齋詩集, in *Qingdai shi wen ji huibian* 清代詩文集彙編 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2010), 381:547; "Ba Zhou Zhongjie shouji ce 跋周忠介手蹟冊," in *Fuchu zhai wenji* 復初齋文集 (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1969), 3:1257-8.

³⁶³ Weng Fanggang, "Ye Yungu Hubu jiagui Yuedong yi qi zunfu Huaxi jushi xinliu sanshi shu he 葉雲谷戶部假歸

When Ye Tingxun decided to re-print the collected poems by Wang Shizhen 王士禛 (1634–1711), Weng agreed to write a preface for this new publication.³⁶⁴ In it, Weng praised this anthology as an important handbook for the study of poetry and applauded the Ye family for their effort to promote scholarly works.

5.2 Architectural Calligraphy

Many of Yi's dedicatory works to the Ye family were meant to embellish and identify a specific architectural space. This genre of writings consists of two calligraphic formats – calligraphic couplets (*duilian/yinglian* 對聯/楹聯) and calligraphic placard (*bangshu/biane* 榜書/匾額), which are designed to be hung in room interior or displayed at the entrance of a building. I have chosen to call these works “architectural calligraphy” to underscore their dynamic interplay with various built environments. Inspired by Juhani Pallasmaa's definition of “poetic image,” I analyze these writings not merely as a decoration but also as an “evocative, affective, and meaningful *sensory experience* that ... is in constant interaction with memory and desire.”³⁶⁵ I believe Yi's architectural calligraphy serves to not only encapsulate the individualized living experience of the Ye family, but also create a fictionalized reality that elicits imaginative responses from occupants of the space. Moreover, the production of these works entails close collaboration between Yi and the Ye family. The texts of these works were most often selected

粵東以其尊甫花谿居士新柳三詩屬和,” in *Fuchuzhai shiji*, 381:548.

³⁶⁴ Weng Fanggang, “Chongke Wang Wenjian wuqiyan shichao xu 重刻王文簡五七言詩抄序,” in *Fuchuzhai wenji*, 1:134-6. I believe that the Ye family chose to re-publish this work because Wang Shizhen, a Shandong native who served briefly in Guangzhou, was an integral part of the cultural history of Guangdong, see Miles, *The Sea of Learning*, 25-7. This collaboration between Ye Tingxun and Weng Fanggang was deemed as a highlight in the biography of Ye Tingxun, see Appendix III: The Tomb Stele of Ye Tingxun.

³⁶⁵ Juhani Pallasmaa, *Embodied Image: Imagination and Imagery in Architecture* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2011), 41-6.

or composed by members of the Ye family, while Yi transformed these words into compelling designs with a conscious awareness of its beholders.

5.2.1 *Studio of Well-informed Friends*

Two extant works that Yi brushed for Ye Menglong's residences in Beijing and Guangzhou illuminate how this type of writing effectively evokes the geographical and social environments of their associated buildings. Dated to the winter of 1804, the calligraphic placard *Studio of Well-informed Friends* (*Youduowenzhai* 友多聞齋, Figure 5.4) identifies the personal study of Ye Menglong in Beijing.³⁶⁶ Executed in dense and unmodulated brushstrokes, the piece of writing presents four monumental clerical-script characters on a horizontal plaque. The phrase derives from a Confucian lesson on friendship in the *Analects*:

Confucius said, three kinds of friends are beneficial; three kinds are harmful. Straightforward friends, sincere friends, well-informed friends—these are beneficial. Hypocritical friends, sycophantic friends, glib-talking friends—these are harmful.³⁶⁷
子曰：益者三友，損者三友。友直，友諒，友多聞，益矣。友便辟，友善柔，友便佞，損矣。

At the time, Ye Menglong lived at the Jia Family Alley (Jiajia hutong 賈家胡同) in the Xuannan district, a place occupied by several important provincial guilds (*huiguan* 會館), such as the Southern Guangxi Guild (Guangxi nan guan 廣西南館) and the Puyang Guild (Puyang huiguan 莆陽會館).³⁶⁸ These region-based associations allowed temporary stays for degree-seeking

³⁶⁶ The work is currently in the collection of the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco (object number: 2007.102).

³⁶⁷ Burton Watson, trans., *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 116.

³⁶⁸ Puyang is in present-day Fujian province. For an overview of provincial guilds and their locations in Beijing, see Ma Huijuan, “Beijing huiguan de wenhua kongjian chonggou yanjiu 北京會館的文化空間重構研究” (master’s thesis, Beijing Normal University, 2014), 53-74. I can locate the residence of Ye Menglong to the Jia Family Alley because of an album of poems Yi wrote for Ye Menglong in 1805. Yi began by telling how Ye Menglong generously invited him to stay at the Studio of Well-informed Friends in Beijing, while noting in the end that these poems were brushed in the Jia Family Alley of the Xuannan district, see “Yi Moqing shice 伊墨卿詩冊,” in Ye Menglong, *Fengmanlou shuhua lu* 風滿樓書畫錄, in *Minguo gaochao ben* 民國稿抄本, edited by Guangdongsheng Zhongshan tushuguan and Zhongshan daxue tushuguan (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe and Nanfang

students and itinerant merchants from different parts of the Qing empire. Ye Menglong perhaps adopted the name for his studio in Beijing because of this busy neighborhood. The character *wen* 聞, literally “to hear and observe,” also brings forth the acoustic environment of its original display. Looking at this placard while listening to the different regional dialects from the alley, visitors to the studio were presented with a living interpretation about the Confucian perspective on friendship cultivation. The calligraphic piece is therefore a precise synopsis of what Ye Menglong aspired to achieve at the capital: building connections with people from difference places and becoming a true gentleman of great observation.

5.2.2 Couplet for the Tower of Sweeping Wind

In 1811, upon the request of Ye Menglong, Yi made a calligraphic couplet for the Tower of Sweeping Wind at the Little Field Garden (Figure 5.5). In his inscription on this work, Yi noted that this pair of verses was composed by Ye Menglong and meant to be hung at the tower. Its text reads:

Door opens to a thousand-*li* road.
Tower overlooks a mighty flowing river.³⁶⁹
門通千里路 樓對大江流

Stylistically, these five-character lines remain consistent with the placard *Studio of Well-informed Friends*, which powerfully exhibit the strength of each individual stroke through dense ink and unmodulated lines. From a textual perspective, this work establishes a vivid image about the location of its associated architecture and the identity of its owner. Little Field Garden sat along the Pearl River and was within walking distance of the business district with foreigners. For viewers at the time, the “road” and “river” in this couplet thus not only illuminate the scenic

chubanshe, 2016) volume 32: 335-41.

³⁶⁹ Jason C. Kuo and Peter C. Sturman, eds., *Double Beauty: Qing Dynasty Couplets from the Lechangzai Xuan Collection* (Hong Kong: Art Museum, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2003), catalogue no. 74.

spots surrounding the estate but also proudly announce the far-reaching influence of the Ye family as a significant participant in the maritime trade.

5.2.3 *The Fragrance of Antiquity*

In his architectural calligraphy, Yi also constructed meaningful memories about the Ye family through an active engagement of multiple sensory modalities. *The Fragrance of Antiquity* (Figure 5.6) is one salient example of how Yi designed his writing to accentuate the aroma of plum blossom and ink associated with the personal study of Ye Tingxun.³⁷⁰ The long inscription by Yi on the piece introduces the occasion for which this work was created:

The Huaxi Study Hall is where Master Huaxi (Ye Tingxun) lived. I once inscribed a placard [with the name “Huaxi Study Hall”] for him at the capital. Now it has been seven years. *As the plum grows more ancient, its fragrance becomes purer.* And my younger brother Shuyu (Ye Mengkun) continues the aspirations of his father. During my revisit to the Hall, I inscribed these two characters as an encouragement for his filial piety. In the *xinwei* year of the Jiaqing Period (1811), Yi Bingshou.³⁷¹

花谿學堂者，花谿先生所居。予為題於京師。今七年。梅愈古，香愈清。而叔魚弟克承先志。適再登堂，遂題二字以勸明發之思云。嘉慶辛未伊秉綬。

The passage indicates that the calligraphy was dedicated to Ye Mengkun as a memento of his late father who had recently passed away. Yi also recounted that seven years earlier he had sent Ye Tingxun a placard to decorate his study in Guangzhou.³⁷² Known as the Plum Blossom Library, the place was planted with a group of prunus trees by its owner. The characters *guxiang* 古香 (*The Fragrance of Antiquity*), as explained by Yi in the inscription, alludes to both the pure fragrance of aged plum blossom and Ye Tingxun. The term itself was commonly used to denote

³⁷⁰ *The Fragrance of Antiquity* is current in the collection of the Princeton University Art Museum (accession number: y1976-46).

³⁷¹ The inscription is transcribed and translated by the author from the reproduction of *The Fragrance of Antiquity*.

³⁷² Yi had brushed a placard reading *Meihua caotang* 梅花草堂 (Thatched Hall of Plum Blossom) for Ye Menglin. I believe the work also likely refers to the Plum Blossom Library where Ye Tingxun had devoted himself to poetry and painting. For this work, see Xiling yinshe, ed., *Yi Bingshou shufa jingping xuan* 伊秉綬書法精品選 (Hangzhou: Xiling yinshe chubanshe, 2013), 17.

the smell of ink. The Qianlong Emperor (r. 1735–1796) had imprinted his personal seal, also reading *guxiang*, exclusively on his beloved early calligraphic works and inkstones. For instance, the seal impression can be found on *The Timely Clearing After Snowfall* attributed to Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361) and an early ceramic inkstone from the Qing imperial collection.³⁷³ To further express this dual scent of plum tree and inkbrush, Yi elevated the two characters toward the top, thereby creating an illusion as if the written words were floating in the air and about to emanate from the writing surface.³⁷⁴ This visual effect, along with the inscriptive text and the illusory smell, inspire Ye Mengkun to remember the place where his father once lived and carry on the family legacy.

5.2.4 Making Architectural Calligraphy

The production of architectural calligraphy as poetic image entails a different work method, which prioritizes the structure and placement of characters over the refinement of brushwork. In traditional connoisseurship, the term *bokeshu* 擘窠 denotes the gestural movement in the execution of large characters on a placard.³⁷⁵ *Bo* means the “thumb” and *ke* refers to the space between the

³⁷³ Currently kept by the National Palace Museum, Taipei, *Kuaxiueshiqing tie* 快雪時晴帖 (*the Timely Clearing After Snowfall*) is a letter attributed to Wang Xizhi. The emperor deeply admired this work and had added numerous inscriptions to this work. His seal *guxiang* is imprinted on a separate colophon (1770) attached right above the original calligraphy. This seal is also carved on the alleged Han-dynasty inkstone, titled *Han tongquewa yan* 漢銅雀瓦硯, see Yu Minzhong, et. al., eds, *Qinding Xiqing yanpu* 欽定西清硯譜, volume 1:15-9.

³⁷⁴ Fu Shen has also noted this intentional design in *the Fragrance of Antiquity*, see Shen C.Y. Fu, *Traces of the Brush: Studies in Chinese Calligraphy* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1997), 59-60.

³⁷⁵ By the Qing dynasty, the term *bokeshu* had become a synonym for the large-character calligraphy (*bokeshu* 擘窠大字). However, the original meaning of the term has been debated among scholars. My following reading of the term derives from the Qing scholar Zhu Lüzhèn 朱履貞 (active 1800), see Zhu Lüzhèn, “Shuxue jieyao 書學捷要,” in *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選, edited and annotated by Shanghai shuhua chubanshe and Huadong shifan daxue guji zhengli yanjiushi (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979), 600-1. For an overview on the possible meanings of this term, see Jia Han, “Shenme shi bokeshu 什麼是擘窠書,” *Shufa jiaoyu* 書法教育 (Jan 2021): 16-24. Scholars in Guangzhou were also familiar with the term because Li Jian had written about a large brush that he received from a friend to conduct *bokeshu* calligraphy, see Li Jian, “Youren zeng bokeshu 友人贈擘窠筆歌,” *Wubaisifengtang shichao*, in *Qingdai shi wen ji huibian*, 417:92 (the original *juan* 13:1-2).

thumb and forefinger. In normal daily writing, one usually leaves this area open for a more fluent movement of the wrist. By contrast, *boke* indicates pressing the brush between the thumb and side of the forefinger, in order to generate extra strength to write monumental characters. Writing in this posture also involves more movement of the arm than the wrist, thereby limiting the nuance of individual strokes within a character. During the eighteenth century, scholars and calligraphers also became increasingly conscious of the placard as a special format for writing, especially for its different spatial relationship with the beholder. Wang Shu 王澐 (1668–1743), an important antiquarian calligrapher of the early Qing, once proposed a theory on how characters should be set up on a placard:

For placard writing, in a three-character [line], the central character must be slightly smaller, in a four-character [line], the two middle characters must be slightly smaller. If they were equal and uniform, when hung up high, the central characters would [seem to] protrude. In placard writing, the structural body of a character should be slightly elongated [vertically], [because] when hung up high, it becomes square. If the structural body were already square, then when hung up high, it would flatten and separate, and the energy would disperse.³⁷⁶
凡榜書，三字須中一字略小，四字須中二字略小。若齊一，則高懸起便中間字突出矣。榜書結體宜稍長，高懸則方；若結體方，則高懸起便扁闊而勢散矣。

The passage highlights the impact of the viewing experience on the design of calligraphic placards. Since the writing is placed above eye-level, a beholder often is not able to approach the finished work up close. The intended view is from a distance. The different use of brush, as well as the effect of distance could have encouraged calligraphers to experiment with different structural composition and spatial alignment of characters on this special medium of writing.

To achieve this structural aesthetic, Yi sought inspiration from a wide range of archaic pictorial writings, including the art of seal carving and early engraved ceramic tiles. On the

³⁷⁶ Wang Shu, “Lun shu sheng yu 論書剩語,” in *Ming Qing shufa lunwen xuan* 明清書法論文選, edited and annotated by Xue Erping (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1994), 602-3. A fascinating early story about the creation of *bangshu* 榜書 by Wei Dan 韋誕 (179–253) has been translated by Lothar Ledderose, see Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*, 31.

placard *Cottage for Enjoying Daily Chanting* (*Airiyinlu* 愛日吟廬, Figure 5.7), Yi devised a compelling symmetry by setting two smaller characters in the center, one above the other in a short column, while vertically elongating the first and final characters.³⁷⁷ This unconventional alignment, however, appears as a frequent technique in the medium of seal carving. For example, one of Yi's personal seals, reading "I Obtain Loyalty and Trust (*Wudezhizhongxin* 吾得之忠信, Figure 5.8)," incorporates a similar concept of composition.³⁷⁸ The character *zhi* 之 is stretched vertically at the center to balance the remaining characters on each side.

Another calligraphic placard, *The Residence of 'Long Life' and 'Eternal Joy'* (*Changsheng changle zhi ju* 長生長樂之居, Figure 5.9), exemplifies how Yi appropriated the elastic shapes of engraved characters on early ceramic tiles.³⁷⁹ In the eighteenth century, scholars collected these ancient architectural decorations as a part of their epigraphic study. Huang Yi 黃易 (1744–1802), a renowned aficionado of stone engravings, had assembled a large album of ink rubbings of these engraved roof tiles, known today as *The Collected Eave Tiles of the Qin and the Han Dynasties* (*Ji Qin Han wadang* 集秦漢瓦當).³⁸⁰ Printed books solely dedicated to this genre of molded texts, such as *Illustrated Records of Eave Tiles from the Qin and the Han Dynasties* by Zhu Feng 朱楓 (c. eighteenth century) and *Characters on Eave Tiles from the Qin and the Han Dynasties* by Chen Dun 陳敦 (c. eighteenth century), also emerged during this period.³⁸¹ These collections

³⁷⁷ The whereabouts of this work is unknown to me, but it has been reproduced in black-and-white since the early twentieth century, see Xiling yinshe, ed., *Yi Bingshou shufa jingping xuan*, 34.

³⁷⁸ "Loyalty (*zhong* 忠)" and "trust (*xin* 信)" are two desired characters of a Confucian gentleman. The seal here intends to identify Yi as a loyal and trustworthy official.

³⁷⁹ The whereabouts of this work is unknown to me, but it has been reproduced in black-and-white since the early twentieth century, see Xiling yinshe, ed., *Yi Bingshou shufa jingping xuan*, 51.

³⁸⁰ Gugong bowuyuan, ed., *Penglai suyue: Gugong cang Huang Yi Han Wei beike teji* 蓬萊宿約：故宮藏黃易漢魏碑刻特集 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2010), 66-9.

³⁸¹ Zhu Feng, *Qin Han wa tu ji* 秦漢瓦圖記 (China: s.n., 1759-1769?), <https://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:4909716>,

contributed to an appreciation for the idiosyncratic layout of characters on this ancient format of writing. One important feature among these ceramic tiles is that even the same group of characters could be presented in drastically different geometric forms. Here I use *changsheng* 長生 (long life) and *changle* 長樂 (eternal joy), two common phrases on eave tiles from the Western-Han (202 BCE–9 CE) Chang’an, to illustrate this shared stylistic trait. Some of the characters are molded vertically into fan-shaped squares whereas others are rotated and elongated to generate a sense of coherency with the circular frame of eave tiles (Figure 5.10). The elasticity of these characters’ shapes, in my view, could have inspired Yi to explore different spatial dynamics in his architectural calligraphy because they showcase important ways in which texts were manipulated as images in ancient architectural designs.³⁸² In *The Residence of ‘Long Life’ and ‘Eternal Joy’*, Yi intentionally set up *changsheng* and *changle* in two different directions – the first one in vertical sequence while the other in horizontal orientation – to showcase his erudition in archaic pictorial writings. This innovative appropriation of early architectural decorations was perhaps also intended to complement the function of his architectural calligraphy, evoking both a historically rooted stylistic source and the hope for longevity.

The creative use of early pictorial writings might have resulted from the fact that these inked characters on placards or couplets were carved on actual wooden boards and then displayed at the architectural space. This transmedia process, in most cases, would eliminate nuanced ink

Harvard-Yenching Library, accessed 11/05/2021; Chen Dun, *Qin Han wadang wenzi* 秦漢瓦當文字 (China: Hengqushuyuan, 1787-1794), <https://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:4910127>, Harvard-Yenching Library, 11/05/2021.

³⁸² For discussions on these eave tiles in their original contexts, see Michelle H. Wang, “Characters of Design: Writing and Materiality in Early China” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2014), 48-79; Michelle H. Wang, “Making Writing: The Design of Western Han Chang’an Eave Tiles,” *Artibus Asiae*, v. 78, no. 2 (2018): 101-150.

traces, such as the effect of dry brushwork and saturated ink tonality, and shift viewers' sensibility toward characters' structural bodies and spatial alignments. An extant photo of nineteenth-century Guangzhou offers good evidence that Yi's dedicatory works to the Ye family had been transformed into wooden plaques and hung at a room interior (Figure 5.11). The image belongs to an album of photographs collected by Edward Bangs Drew (1843–1924), a Harvard graduate who served as a commissioner in the Chinese Maritime Customs Service from 1865 to 1908.³⁸³ The picture captures a lively garden scene, in which an old gentleman sits at the center, accompanied by two young men. Behind these door panels reveal one panel of an engraved calligraphic couplet on the back wall, reading “transforming the temperament (*bianhua qizhi* 變化氣質).” The engraving was made after a couplet that Yi made for Ye Mengkun in 1805 (Figure 5.12).³⁸⁴ The use of thick, unmodulated, and forceful brushwork, as well as the re-invention of distinctive spatial structures, only seem to have been enhanced by this intermedia transfer, through which these characters remained powerfully legible even from a distance.³⁸⁵

5.3 Occasional Gifts

The second category of works Yi sent to the Ye family are his copies of early model-letters (*tie* 帖), which refer to short samples of calligraphic works in different calligraphic compendia, and

³⁸³ The photo is titled “Domestic-life gentlemen’s garden, lotus plants, Canton.” This album is digitally available in through the Hollis Images at the Harvard Library, see [https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/ids:16371186\\$1i](https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/ids:16371186$1i), accessed 05 November 2021.

³⁸⁴ The whereabouts of this work is unknown to me, but it has been reproduced in black-and-white since the early twentieth century, see Xiling yinshe, ed., *Yi Bingshou shufa jingping xuan*, 24.

³⁸⁵ Another photo in the same album shows that people at the time actively used early ceramic tiles as a part of their room decoration, see [https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/ids:15971340\\$1i](https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/ids:15971340$1i), accessed 05 November 2021. Two pairs of re-engraved ceramic tiles were displayed at the entrance gates. Below them are brief annotations to these engravings such as their meanings and provenance. Interestingly, one of the tiles read, “Benevolence and righteousness Self-made (*renyizicheng* 仁義自成).” I would like to note that the firm of the Ye family is called Yicheng 義成. The fact that these two photos contain unique objects related to the Ye family make me wonder if they actually represent the garden of the Ye family. Further research is needed to support my speculation here.

stele inscriptions (*bei* 碑). Modern scholars have addressed this kind of calligraphic copy as “innovative transcription” and compared them to classical musical compositions that can be re-interpreted in drastically different manners.³⁸⁶ In this chapter, however, I have chosen to term these writings as “occasional gifts,” not to downplay their value of artistic expression, but to lay emphasis on the social meanings engendered by the contexts of their exchange.³⁸⁷ These innovative transcriptions are an expedient means for calligraphers to demonstrate their brushwork lineage and creative distinction from early masters, whilst fulfilling important social obligations. In these occasional gifts, Yi conveyed a variety of emotions toward the Ye family through a careful selection of text and mode of expression. Although these works were initially tailored for specific recipients, Yi was aware that members of the Ye family might repurpose these works as presents for their friends and relatives. Extant letters between these people reveal that Yi had given his consent for the practice of regifting. These occasional works thus functioned as a social commodity which served not only to recognize the friendship between Yi and the Ye family, but also helped the Ye family to consolidate relationships with those who did not have the social channel to request works from renowned contemporary calligraphers.

5.3.1 Copy of the Pei Cen Stele

The event leading to the creation of the *Copy of the Pei Cen Stele* (Figure 5.13) illuminates how Yi encoded his gratitude toward the Ye family.³⁸⁸ In 1802, an uprising started in Boluo 博羅

³⁸⁶ Katharine P. Burnett, *Dimensions of Originality: Essays on Seventeenth-Century Chinese Art Theory and Criticism* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2013), 209-19; McNair, “Letters as Calligraphy Exemplars: The Long and Eventful Life of Yan Zhenqing's (709–785) *Imperial Commissioner Liu Letter*,” 53-96.

³⁸⁷ My interest in the occasion of exchange is inspired by Craig Clunas’s discussion on the social art of Wen Zhengming (1470–1559), especially his attention to the issues of reciprocity, obligation, and gift-giving in the literati culture of imperial China, see Craig Clunas, *Elegant Debts: The Social Art of Wen Zhengming, 1470–1559* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2004), 7–15.

³⁸⁸ The whereabouts of this work is unknown to me, but it has been reproduced in black-and-white since the early twentieth century, see Xiling yinshe, ed., *Yi Bingshou shufa jingping xuan*, 21.

county of Huizhou and quickly spread across eastern Guangdong. Recognizing the severity of the situation, Yi advised Gioro Jiqing 覺羅吉慶 (1753–1802), the Governor-general of Guangdong and Guangxi, to contain the riot as early as possible.³⁸⁹ Jiqing was dismissive of the incident at the beginning, but he could not withstand Yi's persistent call for action and finally agreed to dispatch a troop of three hundred guards. Yet, as this small unit was likely to be outnumbered by the rebels, Yi proposed to send three or four men to scout the scene first. The governor-general, however, rejected the suggestion and insisted on his original plan. This adamant decision had severe consequences. The team of three hundred men did not engage much in combat but quickly surrendered and joined the riot instead. Aggravated by the escalation of the situation, Jiqing accused Yi of “neglecting his supervisory duties on the society of rebels (*shichajiaofei* 失察教匪).”³⁹⁰ Yi was jailed in Guangzhou and set to be banished to the military base in Yili 伊犁 of Xinjiang. By the end of the regional turmoil, the Jiaqing Emperor (r. 1796-1820) appointed Gūwalgiya Weisibu 瓜爾佳倭什布 (d. 1810) to fully investigate the origin and development of the uprising in Boluo.³⁹¹ Many educated elites in Guangdong spoke to Weisibu about the wrongful conviction of Yi, especially how his insightful suggestions were neglected by his superior. It is possible that Hong merchants of Guangzhou, including the Ye Family, also exercised their financial wealth and political influence to rescue Yi from exile. They were recorded to have donated ten-thousand taels of silver for the pacification of the Huizhou

³⁸⁹ Earlier that year (1802), Yi and several of his colleagues in Guangdong were removed from office because of their involvement with a local corruption case, in which a felony escaped from jail in Boluo country. As a direct supervisor to the region, Yi was punished for not being able to prevent and report the incident. Although he was withdrawn from the official position, Yi assumed an advisory role in the office and still participated in the regional administration. This episode of Yi's life is in Chapter One. For details of the case, see Tan, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 217-9.

³⁹⁰ For a reconstruction of the event, see Tan, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 220-1; Zhao Erxun, et al., *Qingshi gao* 清史稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 43:13047-8.

³⁹¹ Tan, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 226.

uprising.³⁹² Feng Minchang, a common friend of Yi and the Ye Family, commented that Yi would not have been able to freely walk around if Ye Tingxun had not generously offered “several thousands of gold.”³⁹³ In the seventh month of 1803, after reviewing the report by Weisibu, the Jiaqing Emperor issued an edict to release Yi from jail and revoke his planned banishment to Xinjiang.³⁹⁴

In the winter of 1803, Yi decided to transcribe twelve characters from the *Pei Cen Stele* as a meaningful gift to Ye Menglin and an emotional response to the treacherous year. The brief line chosen by Yi as the subject of his calligraphic copy functions as a powerful index to the original monument and its layered implications about the military conquest in Xinjiang:

The prefect of Dunhuang (Pei Cen) eradicated the calamity of the four prefectures [of Gansu corridor], wielding his might at this place.³⁹⁵
敦煌太守除四竟之疾振威到此

Originally erected in Barköl, Xinjiang, the *Pei Cen Stele* commemorates the military achievement of an otherwise unrecorded general Pei Cen (c. 130s) against a king of the Xiongnu in 137. Because the monument was a recent discovery during the Manchu conquest of the Zunghar Empire (1671–1760), it had served as a cultural symbol of the new frontier during the eighteenth century. Court officials portrayed the reclamation of this lost treasure in their writings as key evidence supporting the Qing military expansion into central Asia. Prominent epigraphic

³⁹² Chen Kuo-tung, *Qingdai qianqi de Yuehaiguan yu Shisanhang*, 244-5.

³⁹³ This comment is part of a colophon by Feng Minchang on an album of poems that Yi brushed for Ye Tingxun, see “Yi Moqing shice 伊墨卿詩冊,” in Ye Menglong, *Fengmanlou shuhua lu*, in *Minguo gaochao ben*, volume 32: 341-2. The original Chinese text reads: “...然當時非吾花谿兄之敦古，傾數千金相助，即吾墨卿豈能行止自如哉?”

³⁹⁴ Tan, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 233-4.

³⁹⁵ The full title of the inscription is *Record of Pei Cen's Meritorious Achievements* 裴岑記功碑 and it has been commonly referred to as the *Pei Cen Stele*. For the original Chinese text of the entire inscription, see Gao Wen, *Hanbei jishi* 漢碑集釋 (Kaifeng: Henan daxue chubanshe, 1997), 58-60. I have translated the *Pei Cen Stele* and discussed its political and cultural significance in another article, see Yan Weitian, “Collecting the *Pei Cen Stele* in Qing China,” *Ming Qing yanjiu*, Special Issue “Collecting, Collections, and Collectors,” 24.2 (2020): 245-278. The following discussion is a summary of the central arguments in this article.

scholars at the time also found the inscription significant because the style of its carved characters exemplifies the crucial transition from the seal script (*zhuanshu* 篆書) to the clerical script (*lishu* 隸書). For viewers at the time, the stele thus signified not only the newly acclaimed territory beyond the Jiayu Pass but also the freshly re-gained knowledge of Han-dynasty paleography.

In his *Copy of the Pei Cen Stele*, Yi adopted a visual language that would help underline the idea of restoration embodied in the history of the monument. The vigorous and firm brushwork in Yi's copy sharply contrasts with the broken and eroded engraving on the original stone (Figure 5.14). This stylistic choice appears to have revitalized the age-old monument as if it had never deteriorated in the hundreds of years of its life. The sense of renewal in this visual presentation also resonates with the discovery of the *Pei Cen Stele* – a long-forgotten artifact just recovered in the far west region of the Qing empire – and the recent life circumstance of Yi – his return from detention and canceled exile to Xinjiang. The careful coordination between the text and style in this work contributes to its social function as a thank-you gift to the Ye Family, who expressed profound support during the eventful year. The complex array of emotions – gratitude, solace, pride, perhaps even loyalty – all cumulated in the text and design of this calligraphic writing.

5.3.2 *Copy of the Letter by Yu Shinan*

The creative use of early calligraphic models for narrating contemporaneous sentiments was a frequent strategy Yi employed in his gift calligraphies. In the *Copy of the Letter by Yu Shinan* (Figure 5.15), Yi manipulated the original text to convey his compassion toward the arm pain of his friend Jin Xuelian 金學蓮 (b. 1775).³⁹⁶ Yu Shinan (558–638) was an eminent court official

³⁹⁶ This work of calligraphy is currently in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, see

of the early Tang and a tutor to Emperor Taizong (r. 626–649). His graceful handwriting in the style of Wang Xizhi (303–361) had long been considered a classical model of Chinese calligraphy. The letter by Yu that Yi chose to copy has been transmitted through engraved calligraphic compendia from the tenth century onward (Figure 5.16).³⁹⁷ In this brief epistolary note, Yu began by praising the innovative copy of the *Discourse on Yue Yi* (*Yue Yi lun* 樂毅論) by his brother as transcending the original edition by Wang Xizhi.³⁹⁸ Yet, because of his unbearable arm pain, Yu felt regretful that his recent calligraphic works were hardly worth looking at. Despite the humble stance toward his own calligraphy, this beautiful running-script letter by Yu had been studied, promoted, and interpreted by numerous important calligraphers. For example, in 1637, Wang Duo 王鐸 (1592–1652) had transcribed the letter in its entirety on a fan leaf with a calligraphic style synthesizing the characteristics of both Wang and Yu (Figure 5.17).³⁹⁹

However, in Yi’s copy of the letter, he chose to omit the first section of the text and began his transcription with the line, “My recent arm pain has ruined my writing.” The deliberate

<https://en.dpm.org.cn/collections/collections/2011-03-31/944.html> (accessed 11/17/2021).

³⁹⁷ This letter by Yu Shinan is often titled as *Xianxiong tie* 賢兄帖 (Letter to the Virtuous Brother) and it was engraved in the famed Song calligraphic compendium *Chunhua ge tie* 淳化閣帖 (Model Letters in the Imperial Archives in the Chunhua Era), see Rong Geng, *Cong tie mu* 叢帖目, 4 vols. (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1980–86), 1:7. Rong Geng questioned the authenticity of this letter but did not elaborate on his reasoning. For the history of *Chunhua ge tie*, see Amy McNair, “The Engraved Model-Letters Compendia of the Song Dynasty,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 114, no. 2 (Apr. – Jun. 1994): 209–225. The image that I use here comes from the Freer and Sackler Galleries of Art, the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Asian Art (accession number: F1980.202d), whose collection has a set of fragmented ink rubbings from the *Chunhua ge tie*, dated to the twelfth century.

³⁹⁸ Wang Xizhi was known to have copied the *Discourse on Yue Yi*, a famous essay by Xiahou Xuan (209–51) about the military campaigns of the ancient statesman Yue Yi (c. 279–272 BCE). Wang’s rendition of the essay was deemed as one of the most canonical examples of regular-script calligraphy. For a discussion on this work and its history of transmission, see Rebecca Doran, “How the *Yue Yi lun* Was Lost: Calligraphy, the Cultural Legacy, and Tang Women Rulers.” *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China*, 2017, 11 (3): 427–461.

³⁹⁹ Tilted *Letter by Yu Shinan*, this piece of writing by Wang Duo is now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (accession number: 1989.363.115).

editing of the original letter, in my view, was meant to console the physical suffering of Jin Xuelian in 1804. A native of Jiangsu, Jin was a well-known poet and a good friend of Yi. His extant poems tell that, prior to Yi's visit in that year, Jin had experienced severe agony from his arm for more than twenty consecutive days.⁴⁰⁰ Witnessing the torment of his friend, Yi gifted this calligraphic copy of Yu's letter to Jin, hoping to relieve some of the bodily pain through the power of words. The shared feeling of arm pain also established a sensory connection between Jin and the Tang calligraphy master. With the careful manipulation of the original letter, Yi transformed the writing into a meaningful gift for his friend, without stating the health condition of Jin in an explicit manner. This piece of calligraphy thus embodies an empathetic gesture of literati friendship.

5.3.3 Regifting Practice

Although the meanings of these gift calligraphies could only be realized by their intended recipients in their original contexts of exchange, Yi understood that his handwritings might serve as regifts to people beyond his acquaintance. In fact, Yi even gave his permission to the Ye family to use his calligraphic works for social networking. In one letter to Ye Menglong, Yi noted:

Yungu (Ye Menglong), my second brother, I received your request for my calligraphy but did not catch a moment to respond. I now offer these four works to you, and for the time being, please accept them. On another day when I further improve [my writing], then these recent works can be distributed to others. Shou (I) have been working to advance since then, and now feel that [my calligraphy] is the beyond what Ming-dynasty calligraphers could achieve. One of these works has two inscriptions. Its beginning and ending [brushstrokes] reveal no brush tip, fully eliminating those breaks in (weak) brushwork. My improvement must have reached a crucial point.⁴⁰¹

⁴⁰⁰ Tan, *Yi Bingshou nianpu*, 258. For Jin's poems, see Jin Xuelian, "Moqing guo Han xi er youzuo 墨卿過邗喜而有作," and "Tongbi ershisi yun shang Bingu xiansheng 痛臂二十四韻上賓谷先生," in *Sanlitang ji* 三李堂集, in *Qingdai shi wen ji huibian* 清代詩文集彙編 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2010), 508:210, 217.

⁴⁰¹ The letter is among the body of unpublished works by Yi Bingshou at the Palace Museum, Beijing (accession number: *xin* 新 180719.1-7). I would like to thank Wang Zhongxu, the Associate Curator of Chinese Painting and Calligraphy at the Palace Museum, Beijing, and Jan Stuart, the Melvin R. Seiden Curator of Chinese Art at the

雲谷二兄足下，承贖拙書久未應之。……進呈此四幅姑存之。他日當更進，則近日所書可以分贈侏人。綬從此益刻苦，竊謂非明流可及矣。四幅中雙欸一幅，其起滅無端，虛鋒盡除，即進在機也。

This extant private letter offers a rare vantage point to look at how Yi, as an established Qing calligrapher, operated within a social network of exchange. Responding to a request from Ye Menglong, Yi brushed four pieces of calligraphy and sent them along with the above letter. Yi did encourage the re-distribution of these calligraphic writings by overtly stating his willingness to share even better works with Ye Menglong in the future. Members of the Ye family did follow Yi's instructions. For instance, one inscription on the *Copy of the Pei Cen Stele* indicates that in 1819 Ye Menglin gave the work to a friend, who expressed interest in Yi's calligraphy during a visit to his studio.⁴⁰² Although the original message of this gift became lost during the transfer of ownership, the distinct style of Yi's calligraphy continued to hold sway for later audiences.

5.4 Painting Colophons

The final genre of dedicatory works is the colophons Yi inscribed on paintings owned by the Ye Family. These inscribed texts first demonstrate a shared interest in painting titles associated with famous artists among art collectors in Guangzhou. These painted scrolls were employed by members of the Ye Family as a communal space to commemorate local scholars and celebrate regional landscape. Yi's colophons also underscore the function of these paintings as memorial objects in which the living experience of the Ye Family was crystallized.

Because some of these paintings in this catalogue are now held by major museums in the United States and China, it is possible to reconstruct this private collection with actual extant

Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art (Freer and Sackler Galleries of Art), for helping me access these critical materials.

⁴⁰² The inscription is written on the left edge of the hanging scroll, see Xiling yinshe, ed., *Yi Bingshou shufa jingping xuan*, 21.

works and investigate the reception of Chinese paintings in Qing Guangzhou. In this section, I use a group of surviving colophons to exemplify how these paintings were received, viewed, and construed in the early nineteenth century.

5.4.1 An Overview of *Fengmanlou shuhualu*

Ye Menglong compiled *Records of Painting and Calligraphy at the Tower of Sweeping Wind* (*Fengmanlou shuhualu* 風滿樓書畫錄) in the first half of the nineteenth century to document important artworks that his family came to acquire over the years.⁴⁰³ The catalogue contains 301 titles of artworks ranging from the Tang dynasty to the nineteenth century.⁴⁰⁴ It consists of four volumes. The first two volumes focus on the calligraphic works and the remaining two volumes are about the paintings. Ye Menglong followed the established conventions of the time to register his family collection. Each entry begins with the name of the artist, the given title of the work, and a brief description of the piece, including its medium, format, size, and content. Next to this cluster of information are careful transcriptions of inscriptions, colophons, and seals on these collected works. In his pioneering study of art collectors in Qing Guangzhou, Chuang Shen 莊申 (1932–2000) pointed out that the majority of works in *Fengmanlou shuhualu* were in fact gifts from scholars connected with the Ye Family.⁴⁰⁵ Ye Menglong not only received many early calligraphies and paintings from his close friends but also valued works by contemporary artists whom he or his father had known in person. In other words, these collected works were not merely cultural antiquities but mementos of meaningful relationships. Items in the catalogue

⁴⁰³ Chuang Shen had conducted extensive research about art collectors in Guangzhou, including Ye Menglong and his catalogue, see Chuang Shen, *Cong baizhi dao baiyin*, 1:159-314 and 464-479; Chuang Shen, “Five Art Catalogues By 19th Century Kwangtung Art Collectors,” 85-110.

⁴⁰⁴ In this chapter, I have used a recent reprint of *Fengmanlou shuhualu*, see Ye Menglong, *Fengmanlou shuhua lu*, in *Minguo gaochao ben*, volume 32: 32-275. Chuang Shen has noted that there are ten pages (pp. 24-33) now missing from the fourth volume of this catalogue, see Chuang, *Cong baizhi dao baiyin*, 1:271.

⁴⁰⁵ Chuang, *Cong baizhi dao baiyin*, 1:325-8.

therefore signify important episodes of interaction between the Ye Family and their literary friends.

The attribution of anonymous works in *Fengmanlou shuhualu* was often based on opinions from scholars in the close circle of Ye Menglong.⁴⁰⁶ A key advisor to the collection, Yi Bingshou not only offered his viewpoints on numerous occasions but also introduced Ye Menglong to renowned connoisseurs of the time. In 1805, Yi was asked to take an anonymous landscape painting (Figure 5.18), which was then bought by Ye Menglong at a low price from an unidentified painting store, to seek the judgement of Weng Fanggang.⁴⁰⁷ The painting depicts a group of horseback riders next to a thatched pavilion and three gigantic trees. Behind them is a compelling representation of vast mountain range in the manner of blue-and-green landscape. The highly refined style of this work convinced Weng to identify the artist as the Southern Song (1127–1279) court painter Ma Yuan (c. 1190–1225). In 1814, Xie Lansheng, a noted scholar in nineteenth-century Guangzhou, also examined the painting in person and left an inscription praising the extraordinary brushwork of Ma Yuan. Ye Menglong accepted their attribution and catalogued the work in *Fengmanlou shuhualu* as “A Landscape Scroll by Ma Yuan (*Ma Yuan shanshui juan* 馬遠山水卷).”⁴⁰⁸ This identification, however, was rejected by later scholars and the painting is now labeled as a Jin-dynasty (1115–1234) work in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.⁴⁰⁹ Nevertheless, the history of its early attribution suggests the

⁴⁰⁶ According to Chuang Shen, Ye Menglong did not seem to be an expert in connoisseurship, and there were several careless mistakes in the catalogue. For instance, Ye Menglong once mistook the Ming painter Guo Xu 郭翹 (c. 1456–1528) as a Song artist, see Chuang, *Cong baizhi dao baiyin*, 1:464-78.

⁴⁰⁷ The painting, currently titled *A Diplomatic Mission to the Jin*, is now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (accession number: 1982.1.1), see <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/39959>, accessed 01/24/2022.

⁴⁰⁸ Ye, *Fengmanlou shuhua lu*, 32:357-8.

⁴⁰⁹ For a recent discussion on this work, see Shi-ye Liu, “Epitome of National Disgrace: A Painting Illuminating Song-Jin Diplomatic Relations,” *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 45 (2010): 77-80.

intellectual sources behind the formation of *Fengmanlou shuhualu*. Ye Menglong did not establish the identities of scrolls on his own but relied on scholars specializing in connoisseurship to build knowledge for works in his collection.

5.4.2 Duplicates of Famous Titles

One important characteristic of the Ye Family collection concerns the common quest for renowned paintings in Chinese history. The desire for canonical works of art was shared by collectors in Guangzhou during the nineteenth century. However, because many of these time-honored works were in the Qing imperial collection, wealthy elites outside the Forbidden City were only able to gain a vague idea about early masterpieces through duplicates circulating in the art market. For example, prominent merchant families in Guangzhou owned at least two copies of the canonical painting *Travelers Amid Mountains and Streams* (*Xishan xinglü tu* 溪山行旅圖) by Fan Kuan 范寬 (c. 950–1032), a renowned landscape painter of the Song dynasty. A treasure of the Qianlong Emperor, the original painting (Figure 5.19) is praised as a work by Fan Kuan in the inscription by the Ming connoisseur Dong Qichang on the upper section of the hanging scroll.⁴¹⁰ In the nineteenth century, Pan Zhengwei 潘正煒 (1791–1850), a well-known art enthusiast from the Pan family of Guangzhou, was able to acquire an almost identical landscape painting (Figure 5.20) with the same title.⁴¹¹ In addition to the similar composition, this work also features the same inscription by “Dong Qichang” right above the image. As I have discussed

⁴¹⁰ The painting is now designated as a “National Treasure (Guobao 國寶)” at the National Palace Museum, Taipei. A digital reproduction of this work is available at the Google Art & Culture, see <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/travelers-among-mountains-and-streams-fan-kuan/WAHwkSr8IMK0uA?hl=zh-CN>, accessed 01/24/2022.

⁴¹¹ Chuang, *Cong baizhi dao baiyin*, 2:620. For an early reproduction of this painting, see *Zhongguo minghua* 中國名畫 [Famous Chinese Paintings] (Shanghai: Youzheng shuju, 1922), First Series, no.29: 2 (this rare manuscript is available at the Art and Architecture Library, University of Kansa, folio ND 1042.C66).

earlier in this chapter, the Pan family and the Ye family were not only close business partners but also shared an interest in art collecting. Although it is unclear if they had discussed this famous piece together, another “Fan Kuan” painting with the title *Travelers Amid Mountains and Streams* (Figure 5.21) was in the possession of Ye Menglong.⁴¹² The title inscription signed by “Dong Qichang” on this second copy has a close resemblance with the original and the other copy belonging to the Pan family. In 1817, Ye Menglong invited Weng Fanggang to evaluate the work. In his inscription, which is now mounted on a separate hanging scroll, Weng praised how the monumental central peak in the painting represents a manner of landscape image typical of Fan Kuan.⁴¹³

Another example of this pursuit of famous artworks in Qing Guangzhou is the celebrated painting *Ink Bamboo* (*Mozhu tu* 墨竹圖) attributed to Wen Tong 文同 (1019–1079), one of the most renowned literati-amateur painters of the Northern Song Dynasty. This picture (Figure 5.22) depicts an S-shaped branch of fluttering bamboo leaves against a plain background.⁴¹⁴ Though the original was in the Qing imperial collection, in 1802, Wu Rongguang 吳榮光 (1773–1843), a prominent art collector from Guangzhou whose daughter had married one of Ye Menglong’s sons, acquired an exact copy of this bamboo painting (Figure 5.23), which he

⁴¹² Ye, *Fengmanlou shuhua lu*, 32:452-3. The painting is now in the collection of the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco (Object Number: B66D1.a-b), see [http://asianart.emuseum.com/view/objects/asitem/items\\$0040:4853](http://asianart.emuseum.com/view/objects/asitem/items$0040:4853), accessed 01/24/2022. For an art historical discussion on this work, see Stephen Little, “Travelers among Valleys and Peaks: A Reconsideration of Chin Landscape Painting,” *Artibus Asiae* 41, no. 4 (1979): 285–308.

⁴¹³ This colophon survives today, and it is also recorded in the catalogue of Ye Menglong, see Ye, *Fengmanlou shuhua lu*, 32:452-3.

⁴¹⁴ This painting is currently held by the National Palace Museum, Taipei, see <https://digitalarchive.npm.gov.tw/Painting/Content?pid=49&Dept=P>, accessed 01/24/2022. For discussions on Wen Tong and the ideas of his bamboo painting, see Michael A. Fuller, “Pursuing The Complete Bamboo in The Breast: Reflections on a Classical Chinese Image for Immediacy,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 53, no. 1 (1993): 5–23; Georgiana Ruth Podulke, “The Ink-bamboos of Wen Yü-k’o: The creative moment in Su Tung-p’o’s Aesthetic Theory” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2005).

thought to be genuine.⁴¹⁵ Amazed by this work, Weng Fanggang left two inscriptions on this work, praising the bamboo image as a superb and rare example of Wen Tong's style. Ye Menglong was also quite familiar with this "Wen Tong" painting because he had viewed the work at Wu's place.⁴¹⁶ Later, when he encountered another bamboo painting attributed to Wen Tong at the house of certain Mr. Cui, Ye Menglong did not hesitate to acquire it for his own collection. This *Ink Bamboo* is documented in *Fengmanlou shuhualu*; however, its current whereabouts are unknown.⁴¹⁷

5.4.3 Memento of Local Worthies

In addition to the acquisition of famous paintings, the surviving colophons also suggest how the Ye Family used their collected works to commemorate local worthies. The painting *Plum Blossom* (Figure 5.24) by the Yuan painter Wang Mian 王冕 (1310–1359) portrays a branch of plum blossom in pale ink and crisp outlines, a stylistic choice perhaps meant to express the light yet distinctive fragrance of the flower.⁴¹⁸ A star piece in the collection of Ye Menglong, the painting bears eighteen colophons.⁴¹⁹ This large number of inscribed texts indicates that Ye

⁴¹⁵ Now in the collection of the Guangzhou Art Museum (Guangzhou yishu bowuyuan 廣州藝術博物院), the work, to my knowledge, has not been well published. The painting was briefly introduced by the director of Guangzhou Art Museum Wang Ping in a recent video, see <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Ie--BoHaHlarD6S2U--x0A>, accessed 01/24/2022.

⁴¹⁶ The following information about this painting is from the entry on the *Ink Bamboo* attributed to Wen Tong in the catalogue of Ye Menglong, see Ye, *Fengmanlou shuhua lu*, 32:456-7.

⁴¹⁷ The work is said to have one inscription by the Ming painter Tang Yin (1470–1524), see Ye Menglong, see Ye, *Fengmanlou shuhua lu*, 32:456-7. In my view, these spurious copies are worth investigating further because they constitute a history of Chinese painting for educated elites in Guangzhou. For the Ye Family and their close associates, these painting functioned as a point of references to understand the canonical objects described by texts.

⁴¹⁸ The painting is now in the collection of Shanghai Museum, see Shanghai bowuguan and Tōkyō Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan, *Qiannian Danqing: Riben Zhongguo Cang Tang Song Yuan Huihua Zhenpin* 千年丹青：日本中國藏唐宋元繪畫珍品 [Masterpieces of Ancient Chinese Paintings: From the Tang to Yuan Dynasty in Japanese and Chinese Collections] (Shanghai: Shanghai bowuguan, 2010), 2 volumes, 2: 238-43. For its record in the catalogue of Ye Menglong, see Ye, *Fengmanlou shuhua lu*, 32: 461-6.

⁴¹⁹ Fifteen out of the total colophons were made by scholars who were contemporary to Ye Menglong, including: Pan Zhengwei, Yi Bingshou, Weng Fanggang, Song Baochun, Wu Rongguang, Wei Chengxian 魏成憲 (*jinshi* degree in 1784), Zhang Weiping 張維屏 (1780–1859), Liu Binhua 劉彬華 (*jinshi* degree in 1801), Chen Songqing

Menglong must have proudly shown this work to his friends on numerous occasions. The colophon by Yi right above the image of plum blossom (Figure 5.25) is executed in a stylistic mode similar to his writing of memorial epitaphs. For example, the square structure of each individual character and the careful alignment of unmodulated strokes in this colophon could also be observed in Yi's transcription of "the Epitaph for Zhaoyun" in Huizhou and the Tomb Stele of Ye Tingxun in Guangzhou (Figure 5.26).⁴²⁰ The text of this colophon further accentuates the idea of commemoration by narrating a biography of the painting in relation to its owners:

The painting *Plum Blossom* by Wang Yuanzhang (Wang Mian) was brought to Lingnan by a Ming-dynasty monk. It was secretly enjoyed by the grand historian Zhang Yaofang (Zhang Jinfang), my fellow examinee in the same year (1789). In the past, I have seen the work at the capital. In his late years, the grand historian bestowed it upon Ye Yungu (Ye Menglong), the attendant at the Board of Revenue. In the ninth month of the sixteenth year of the Jiaqing Period (1811), the attendant at the Board of Revenue (Ye Menglong) accommodated me at the Friend's Stone Studio. I was able to sit and recline amid the flowers for ten days.

Inscribed and recorded by Yi Bingshou from Ninghua.⁴²¹

王元章畫梅花，由明僧傳至嶺南。為同年張藥房太史秘玩。往在都曾見之。太史晚年以贈葉雲谷農部。嘉慶十六年九月，農部款我與友石齋，得坐臥花下旬日。寧化伊秉綬題記。

The passage records the provenance of the painting prior to its entrance into the collection of Ye Menglong. The painting was considered a local treasure because it had already arrived in Guangdong during the Ming dynasty and was treasured by Zhang Jinfang 張錦芳 (1754–1792), a renowned poet from Shunde county in Guangdong. At the time, Zhang enjoyed the same cultural reputation as Li Jian because their poetry, calligraphy and painting were deemed as representatives of Guangdong.⁴²² In addition, Zhang and Yi were in the same class of examinees

陳嵩慶 (act. 1801–1836), Yang Yizeng 楊懌曾 (1763–1833), Zhu Weibi 朱為弼 (1770–1840), He Linghan 何凌漢 (1772–1840), Wang Shouhe 汪守和 (1764–1836), Zeng Yu 曾燠 (1760–1831), and Chen Xizu 陳希祖 (1767–1820).

⁴²⁰ I have discussed Yi's transcription of Zhaoyun's Epitaph in the previous chapter. For my translation of the Tomb Stele of Ye Tingxun, see Appendix III.

⁴²¹ Shanghai bowuguan and Tōkyō Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan, *Qiannian Danqing*, 2: 239.

⁴²² For a modern biography of Zhang Jinfang, see Huang Xiaohui, "Longjiang hanlin Zhang Jinfang shishuhua ming

who received the *jinshi* degree in 1789. However, Zhang only stayed in Beijing for three years and then decided to return home because of his declining health. A story tells that during his return from the capital, Zhang's boat encountered an emergency and was about to sink. The poet quickly took out the *Plum Blossom* from his personal luggage and held the scroll firmly in his hand, announcing that he would be willing to die with the object.⁴²³ The fact that Zhang later chose to give the invaluable object to Ye Menglong is indicative of their extraordinary friendship. The scroll is thus a concrete testament to the role of the Ye Family as supporters of prominent scholars in Guangdong. Moreover, the anecdote perhaps also intends to create an image of Ye Menglong as a worthy recipient of important cultural artifacts. Viewers of the painting at the time were not only reminded about the illustrious life of Zhang but also the significance of the Ye Family in patronizing local worthies.

5.4.4 A Vision of Guangdong Landscape

The celebration of things indigenous to Guangdong was an important theme in the enjoyment of paintings among Ye Menglong and his friends. The contested reception of the painting *Farewell Landscape for Wuweng* (Figure 5.27) by Shitao (1642–1707) illustrate how scholars in Guangdong formulated a sense pride in their local lands.⁴²⁴ The image depicts a humid landscape where trees, streams, mountains, roads, and buildings are harmoniously blended through the different layers of saturated ink. In 1805, when Yi viewed this painting at the residence of Ye

zhong Lingnan 龍江翰林張錦芳詩書畫名重嶺南,” *Lingnan wenshi* 嶺南文史, no. 1 (2013): 46-50; Lin Jiaqiang, “Shunde Ming Qing huaren gaishuo 順德明清畫人概說,” *Lingnan wenshi* 嶺南文史, no. 1 (1996): 26-32.

⁴²³ Ye, *Fengmanlou shuhua lu*, 32: 461-2.

⁴²⁴ The painting is now in the collection of Seattle Art Museum (accession number: 97.81), see <https://art.seattleartmuseum.org/objects/24318/farewell-landscape-for-mr-wuweng?ctx=62d72452-7237-4353-a76c-c81e217f6174&idx=0>, accessed 01/24/2022. This work, however, was titled as *Xiashan yu yu juan* 夏山欲雨 (Summer Mountains and Coming Rains) in the catalogue of Ye Menglong, which was derived from the beginning phrase in the poem inscribed by Shitao on the painting, see Ye, *Fengmanlou shuhua lu*, 32: 420-1.

Menglong in Beijing, he brushed a colophon on the handscroll. The text describes a vision that Yi gained from this marvelous picture:

This handscroll is saturated with dense ink. However, the inscription [by Shitao] states, “The mountains, rocks, and pines are pale.” It must have been because Shitao was an extraordinary man, whose mind and eyes are different from others. His extraordinary talent is vastly overflowing, which perhaps could only be seen in every two hundred years. The scenery depicted in this painting is often seen in Fujian and Guangdong. One truly does not need to mention Jiaozhi (an area between present-day Yunnan and Vietnam) and Fuyu (Liaoning and Jilin) or go abroad to see it. In the last spring, when I passed by Hanshang (Yangzhou), the scroll was collected by Song Zhishan (Song Baochun, 1748–1818). When Yungu (Ye Menglong), the attendant at the Board of Revenue, went to the north (Beijing), the painting went to his collection. Now I am lodging at Yungu’s house and Zhishan (Song Baochun) came for a visit. We looked at this painting again and made inscriptions. On the twenty-eighth day of the second month in the *yichou* year (1805) of the Jiaqing Period (1796–1820), at the Huachan Studio in the Xuannan District, Yi Bingshou from Tingzhou.⁴²⁵

是卷濃墨淋漓，而題句乃云山澹石澹松澹，蓋石濤奇人也，其心眼與人異。故奇情橫溢，二百年如將見之。畫則閩粵間常有此境，正不必交趾扶餘，馳域外之觀耳。舊春余過邗上，此卷為宋芝山所收，嗣雲谷農部北上，以歸雲谷，今予館雲谷，芝山亦來，重觀題記。嘉慶乙丑歲二月廿又八日，宣南坊畫禪齋汀州伊秉綬。

In the colophon, Yi praised the compelling presentation of saturated ink on the surface of the scroll and briefly outlined the provenance of the object. Most important, Yi noted that he could relate this painted landscape to natural scenery in Fujian and Guangdong. Because Yi and Ye Menglong were natives from these two provinces, their perceptions of the image must have been filtered through their memories about their hometowns. This painting, filled with percussive dripping of inked dots and wet brushstrokes, perhaps resonates with the humid tropical weather in Fujian and Guangdong, thereby generating a feeling of home for people from the south. In addition, his comment was also a direct response to an early colophon by Liu Daguan 劉大觀 (1753–1834), a man from Shandong who held several government positions across the Qing

⁴²⁵ The English translation is adapted from the translation in the digital project *Chinese Painting & Calligraphy* at the Seattle Art Museum, see <http://chinesepainting.seattleartmuseum.org/OSCI/>, accessed 01/24/2022.

empire.⁴²⁶ Liu's colophon in 1804 captures his excitement in viewing this fabulous work for the first time:

In this painting, I cannot tell what mountains are, what rivers are, what forested hills are, and what houses are. I also cannot tell what these brushstrokes and ink are. At fifty-two, I have traveled more than ten thousand miles. *I marched with the military to Jiaozhi and rode my fleet horse to Fuyu.* My eyes have truly seen these mountains, truly seen these rivers, truly seen these houses and forested hills, and truly seen the mists and clouds, but the only thing which I have not seen anywhere within the Nine Divisions (all of China) is this use of brush and ink. Today and finally, I see it for the first time—how rare and extraordinary!⁴²⁷

此畫吾不知何者為山，何者為水，何者為林麓屋宇。更不知何者為筆墨。吾年五十有二，足跡萬里有奇，交祉行軍，扶餘驟馬。吾目中者，見實有此山，實有此水，實有此林麓屋宇，實有此煙雲，獨未見九州之內，有此筆墨，乃今之天見之，奇哉！奇哉！

Relying on his extensive travel experience, Liu suggested that the astounding landscape in this painting might be observed in distant and remote regions such as Fuyu and Jiaozhi. Moreover, he argued that the use of brush and ink was unique to Shitao and could never be found in works by other artists. Reading these two colophons together, one could perhaps better recognize the sense of pride behind the words of Yi. Unlike Liu, Yi believed that this depicted landscape was ubiquitous in Fujian and Guangdong. As a result, painters of these two regions could be easily inspired by extraordinary sceneries in their immediate surroundings and became capable of carrying on the stylistic manner of Shitao. This line of implication promotes Fujian and Guangdong as cultured locales and positions Ye Menglong, the owner of the scroll, as a learnt gentleman who was capable of inheriting the legacy of Shitao. Projecting his contemporary experience into the painting, Yi saw this inked landscape not as an abstract representation but a meaningful locality which he felt belonged to and prided himself on.

⁴²⁶ For a modern biography of Liu Dagan, see Lu Zenghan, "Liu Dagan ji qi shige yanjiu 劉大觀及其詩歌研究" (MA Thesis, Guangxi University, 2011), 3-8.

⁴²⁷ The English translation is adapted from the translation in the digital project *Chinese Painting & Calligraphy* at the Seattle Art Museum, see <http://chinesepainting.seattleartmuseum.org/OSCI/>, accessed 01/24/2022.

Conclusion

With the amplification of *kaozheng* in the second half of the eighteenth century, scholars made use of transmitted texts and stone inscriptions to verify and reconstruct episodes of the past which they believed to be politically significant, culturally authentic, and personally meaningful. Such methodology fueled a burgeoning antiquarian culture in which bibliophile, epigraphists, antique aficionados not only collected and exchanged early manuscripts and ink rubbings, but also produced new calligraphic works and painted images that were inspired by those antique objects. Yi Bingshou operated within this intellectual climate where ideas of “tradition,” “legacy,” and “heritage” were constantly defined, updated, or even re-invented. His engagement with noted scholars, tastemakers, and collectors of his day helped Yi develop an expert knowledge in epigraphy. He participated in the birthday celebrations of historical figures, including Su Shi and Li Dongyang, during his time in Beijing. Yi also became closely associated with wealthy maritime merchants when he served in Guangdong. His ability to produce archaic styles of calligraphy made him a valued member in this expansive antiquarian community across the Qing empire.

Modern scholars have long recognized the *Zhang Qian Stele* as an important source for the development of Yi’s calligraphic style. Yet little do we know why Yi repeatedly copied this inscription throughout his life. In Chapter Two, my analyses on the contested opinions about the authenticity of the *Zhang Qian Stele* indicate that Yi chose the inscription as a stylistic model with his own intellectual and personal agendas. In the seventeenth century, Gu Yanwu and several others criticized the inscription as a fake for its unconventional use of Chinese characters. During the late eighteenth century, Weng Fanggang and his close associates identified those “mistakes” as symbols of historicity, arguing that such textual errors were authentic signs of the

transmedia process –from a brush-written text to a stone-carved inscription – during the production of a memorial stele. Weng further connected the *Zhang Qian Stele* with the origin myth of the clerical script and appropriated the idea “substantial and blunt” to promote the plain and angular brushstroke of this stele as an unadorned expression of the writer. Yi’s innovative transcriptions of the *Zhang Qian Stele* spoke about his support for the research outcome of evidential scholars. He also practiced the style of inscription to commemorate his ancestry, because the *Zhang Qian Stele* showcases strong stylistic affinity with the *Heng Fang Stele*, a monument that for the artist represented the origins of his clan.

The objects and sites that Yi discovered and restored in Huizhou demonstrate how he employed methods of *kaozheng* to claim his political and cultural achievements as the local prefect. The “Su Shi” inkstone Yi unearthed at the White Crane Peak evoked important moral lessons because many of Su Shi’s inkstone inscriptions had been interpreted by painters to illustrate important episodes of Su’s life. In Chapter Three, I argue that Yi used Song-dynasty texts and recent paintings to establish the authenticity of this excavated inkstone and promoted it as a didactic object. Moreover, compared with the lavishly decorated “Su Shi” inkstones at Qianlong’s court, this plain object in Huizhou highlights Confucian ideas of simplicity and plainness. In Chapter Four, I examine how male scholars appropriated the images of Wang Zhaoyun to express their own contemporary concerns. Painters in the seventeenth century used Zhaoyun as a symbol of loyalty because Su had portrayed her as a faithful companion in his writings. In the eighteenth century, her image resonated with the contemporary promotion of “martyred women” and “faithful maiden.” The less known aspect of Zhaoyun’s life – her post-mortem manifestation as a lingering ghost – intrigued scholars in Yi’s circle. Yue Jun, the author of an anthology of ghost stories, was one of the first who advised Yi to restore the tomb. Such

fanciful imagination offered additional allure to Zhaoyun and her burial space, which made the site a celebrated tourist attraction in the late nineteenth century.

The final chapter offers a glimpse into the social life of Yi in Qing Guangzhou. I begin this chapter with two modest questions: why did Yi offer so many works to the Ye family and what did these works mean to their recipients? I have reconstructed the specific contexts in which Yi offered his literary service and calligraphic works to the Ye Family. Their close relationship enabled Yi to tailor his works for the living environment of the Ye family. On special occasions, the calligrapher also carefully selected textual content and calligraphic style to convey his emotions, such as gratitude and sympathy, in his dedicatory works. His colophons on the paintings in the Ye family collection carry important commemorative functions. These texts memorialized local poets and painters and celebrated the regional topography and climate. Calligraphic inscriptions of this kind not only underscore Guangzhou as a cultured locale but also promoted the Ye family as devoted patrons of the thriving regional literary culture.

Throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to portray Yi as a scholar-official who consciously used his calligraphy to produce and contest knowledge about the distant and immediate past. The construction of memories therefore serves as an overarching theme of my project. The chapter on Yi's calligraphic copies of the *Zhang Qian Stele* prompts a reconsideration of the expansion of artistic canons in late imperial China. Antiquarians of the period established a variety of new artistic monuments and promoted their embodied aesthetic experience, which eventually led to the formation of "the stele tradition." The chapters on the performative use of Su Shi and Zhaoyun tell of how educated elites appropriated historic figures to speak about their contemporaneous concerns. The celebration of cultural luminaries played a significant role in the production of social and political identities in Qing China. Chapter Five

delved into how Yi's dedicatory works contributed to the cultural images of the Ye Family in Guangzhou. The close engagement between scholars, officials, and merchants revealed the importance of art collecting and patronage in building a sense of belonging and pride in the early nineteenth century. These episodes of Yi's life and art foreground the memorial function of his calligraphy in promoting new aesthetic beliefs, identifying cultural values, and forging social memories.

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Appendix I: Copies of the *Zhang Qian Stele* by Yi Bingshou

Content	Date	Provenance	Size	Illustration
Copy of the <i>Zhang Qian Stele</i> 臨張遷碑	1783	Beijing Palace Museum	N/A	N/A
Copy of the <i>Zhang Qian Stele</i> 臨張遷碑	1788	Fujian Museum	101.7×31.5 cm	Figure 2.15
Copies of Calligraphies by Han and Tang People 臨漢唐人書 (<i>Zhang Qian Stele</i> and <i>Letter on the Controversy over Seating Protocol</i>)	1811	Fukuyama Shodō Bijutsukan	59.5×119 cm	Figure 2.21
Copy of the <i>Zhang Qian Stele</i> 臨張遷碑	1813	Collection of Yang Shanshen (1913–2004) 楊善深藏	unknown	Figure 2.24
Copy of the <i>Zhang Qian Stele</i> 臨張遷碑	1813	Guangdong Museum	117×67 cm×4	Figure 2.25
Han Clerical Script and Tang Seal Script 漢隸唐篆 (<i>Zhang Qian Stele</i> and <i>Record of Three Burials</i>)	undated	Beijing Palace Museum	105×29.5 cm	Figure 2.23
Copy of the <i>Zhang Qian Stele</i> 臨張遷碑	undated	Sichuan Museum	138.9×38.1 cm	Figure 2.26

Appendix II: List of Works Dedicated to the Ye Family

In the list, I have excluded colophons that Yi brushed on works in the Ye Family collection for two reasons. First, a limited number of these colophons survive today in reproductions, whereas most of them are only available via textual records. For a brief survey of these colophons, see the section “Painting Colophons.” Second, in most cases, these colophons present a subordinating relationship to their associated paintings. I thus believe that they should be carefully examined in relation to the artifacts that carry those texts. Unless otherwise noted, works in the table come from the following four publications:

1. Xiling yinshe, ed. *Yi Bingshou shufa jingping xuan* 伊秉綬書法精品選. Hangzhou: Xiling yinshe chubanshe, 2013.
2. Lian Xinfu, ed., *Yi Bingshou fashu daguan* 伊秉綬法書大觀. Fuzhou: Haichao sheying yishu chubanshe, 2009.
3. *Zhonghua shuhua jia* 中華書畫家, No. 96 (Oct. 2017).
4. Kuo, Jason C., and Peter Sturman, eds., *Double Beauty: Qing Dynasty Couplets from the Lechangzai Xuan Collection*. Hong Kong: Art Museum, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2003.

Title	Date	Format	Recipient	Collection/Publication
Poems in the Clerical Script	1803	Fan Leaf	Ye Tingxun	<i>Yi Bingshou shufa jingping xuan</i> , p. 45 <i>Yi Bingshou fashu daguan</i> , p. 126
Epitaph for Ye Tingxun	1811	Stone Engraving	Ye Tingxun	<i>Yi Bingshou fashu daguan</i> , p. 136
Thatched Hall of Plum Blossom (<i>Meihua caotang</i> 梅花草堂)	n/a	Placard	Ye Menglin	<i>Yi Bingshou shufa jingping xuan</i> , p. 17
Copy of the <i>Pei Cen Stele</i>	1803	Hanging Scroll	Ye Menglin	<i>Yi Bingshou shufa jingping xuan</i> , p. 21

Poem in the Running Script	1811	n/a	Ye Menglin	<i>Yi Bingshou shufa jingping xuan</i> , p. 60 <i>Yi Bingshou fashu daguan</i> , p. 169
Running-script Calligraphy	n/a	n/a	Ye Menglin	<i>Yi Bingshou shufa jingping xuan</i> , p. 134
Running-script Calligraphy	1803	Fan Leaf	Ye Menglin	Hong Kong Museum of Art FA1991.0094
Studio of Well-Informed Friends (<i>Youduowen zhai</i> 友多聞齋)	1804	Placard	Ye Menglong	Asian Art Museum, San Francisco 2007.102
Poem in the Running Script	n/a	n/a	Ye Menglong	<i>Yi Bingshou shufa jingping xuan</i> , p. 61
Running-script Calligraphy	n/a	n/a	Ye Menglong	<i>Yi Bingshou shufa jingping xuan</i> , p. 78
Poems in the Running Script	n/a	n/a	Ye Menglong	<i>Yi Bingshou shufa jingping xuan</i> , p. 110
Running-script Calligraphy	1801	Fan Leaf	Ye Menglong	<i>Yi Bingshou shufa jingping xuan</i> , p. 145 <i>Yi Bingshou fashu daguan</i> , p. 235
Couplet in the Clerical Script	1811	Couplet	Ye Menglong	<i>Double Beauty</i> , p. 73.
Running-script Calligraphy	1804	n/a	Ye Menglong	<i>Yi Bingshou fashu daguan</i> , p. 203
Poems in the Running Script	1813	Handscroll	Ye Menglong	<i>Yi Bingshou fashu daguan</i> , p. 210
Poem in the Running Script	1803	Hanging scroll	Ye Menglong	Guangdong Museum <i>Zhonghua shuhua jia</i> , p. 25
Running-script Calligraphy	n/a	Fan Leaf	Ye Menglong	Guangdong Museum <i>Zhonghua shuhua jia</i> , p. 49

Couplet in the Clerical Script	1805	Couplet	Ye Mengkun	<i>Yi Bingshou shufa jingping xuan</i> , p. 24 <i>Yi Bingshou fashu daguan</i> , p. 16
Fragrance of Antiquity	1811	Placard	Ye Mengkun	Princeton University Art Museum y1976-46

Appendix III: The Tomb Stele of Ye Tingxun

The Tomb Stele of Ye Tingxun was erected in 1811 at the White Cloud Mountain (Baiyun shan 白雲山) in Guangzhou, where the family patriarch was originally buried. The text was brushed by Yi Bingshou and engraved in stone by a certain Li Yaozhou (c. nineteenth century). However, the monument went through significant damages in the twentieth century. In 1983, surviving fragments were pieced together and the reconstructed epitaph was re-established at its initial location. For information about this monument, see Yan Xiaoqing, “Ye Tingxun de shehui jiaowang ji qi shizuo—Ye shi mubiao bei kaozheng 葉廷勳的社會交往及其詩作--葉氏墓表碑考證,” *Guangzhou wenbo* 廣州文博 (December 2007): 109–120 (available at the CNKI database). For a recent ink rubbing image of this fragmented monument, see Lian Xinfu, ed., *Yi Bingshou fashu daguan* 伊秉綬法書大觀 (Fuzhou: Haichao sheying yishu chubanshe, 2009), 136. My translation of the epitaph is based upon the research by Yan Xiaoqing and the available ink rubbing in *Yi Bingshou fashu daguan*.

The Great Qing Conferred «Grand Master for Assisting Toward Good Governance», with the «Salt Distribution Commissioner» Rank, the Gentleman Ye’s Tomb Stele⁴²⁸

The Grand Master for Assisting Toward Good Governance, the revered Mr. Ye, was illustrious and honorable because of his learning and deeds. At the beginning, his grandmother was known for her painstaking frugality, and his father pulled carriages to make a difficult living. The man, in his youth, devoted himself to the study and came to realize that “the purpose of studying is to support the family.” He therefore gave up on essays and proses, [becoming] an itinerant merchant who valued his promises. His credibility and trustworthiness reached people living far away, and he had built great wealth. When the state was in emergency, [he] donated tens of thousands to food supplies for the military campaigns of Taiwan and Gorkha, and to the masonry works at the Yongding River and Nan River. The Son of Heaven (the emperor) commended him,

⁴²⁸ Here I translate *mubiao* 墓表 as “tomb stele” to distinguish it from “epitaph (*muzhiming* 墓志銘).” In the second section of the text, Yi Bingshou mentioned that Ye Tingxun had a more detailed epitaph written by Li Zonghan (1770–1832). The “tomb stele” was erected above the ground to serve its memorial function, where as the “epitaph” was likely buried underground.

raised his title to the Salt Distribution Commissioner, and conferred him the Second Rank of Official Elite, an honor to be inherited for three generations. When his sons were raised up to become young talents, his mother had reached a high age. He therefore abandoned the business to fulfill his filial duties, accompanying [his mother] throughout the day and night. In his spare time, he devoted himself to the study. His poetry possesses a clear breeze. Li Erqiao (Li Jian, 1748–1799) from Shunde, and Feng Yushan (Feng Minchang, 1741–1806) from Qinzhou all admired him and befriended with him. He once edited the *Anthology of Ancient Poems* by Wang Wenjian (Wang Shizhen, 1634–1711). Weng Fanggang from Daxing (near present-day Beijing), the Minister of State Ceremonial, praised this edition [by Ye Tingxun] and offered to have it printed in conjunction with his edited version [of Wang's *Anthology*]. The literary circles treasured their collaboration. He is the author of *Collected Poems from the Plum Blossom Library*, which consists of several volumes. Yet, as his body was bound with illness, he died on the sixth day of the ninth month in the fourteenth year of the Jiaqing Period (1809), at the age of fifty-seven. [People from] far and near grieved for him.

The revered [Mr. Ye's] name is Tingxun, whose style names are Guangchang and Huaxi. His wife, née Yan, was awarded the Grand Mistress. Prioritizing the idea [of his parents] and following the will [of his parents], [Ye Tingxun] took good care of his parents who passed away three years earlier than his [own death]. His three sons: Menglin, the Expectant Court Gentleman; Menglong, the Assistant Director of the Board of Revenue; Mengkun, the Office Director of the Court of Imperial Entertainments. His nine grandchildren are detailed in his epitaph by the Chamberlain for the Imperial Study Li Zonghan (1770–1832). [Yi] Bingshou is indebted to the revered [Mr. Ye] for his appreciation and care in the past decade. Today [I, Yi Bingshou] visit his tomb. The revered [Mr. Ye] is filial to his family, diligent to his state, trustworthy to his friends. In his life, the situations in which he showed empathy and generosity toward others were beyond countable. Originally from Fuqing (in present-day Fujian Province), he was a decedent of the Ming (1368–1644) Grand Councilor, the Duke Ye Wenzhong (Ye Xianggao, 1559–1627). He was later relocated from Tongan (in present-day Fujian Province) to Nanhai (near present-day Guangzhou). *Zuozhuan* (Zuo Tradition, or the Zuo Commentary) says, “the descendants of the prince are sure to return to their origin.”⁴²⁹ Respectfully I record the origin of the Ye Clan's grandeur, which is because the revered [Ye Tingxun] built self-restraint in his private conducts, leaving a legacy to later generations. [I had this text] engraved in stone at the new cemetery on the White Cloud [Mountain], thereby telling on those who are about to come.

Grand Master for Assisting Toward Good Governance, Former Prefect of Yangzhou, Acting Salt Commissioner of Lianghuai, Vice Director of the Board of Justice, Provincial Examiner of Hunan in the *Wuwu* Year (1798), your humble nephew, Yi Bingshou from Ninghua, respectfully offered my composition and calligraphy.

⁴²⁹ Stephen W. Durrant and Wai-ye Li, Trans., *Zuo Tradition/Zuozhuan: Commentary on the “Spring and Autumn Annals,”* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), 233.

Grand Master for Court Discussion, Prefect of Lianzhou, Acting Intendant of the Grain Tax Circuit of Guangdong, your humble brother-in-law, Li Wei (*jins* degree in 1778) from Longxi respectfully inscribed the [seal-script] title.

On the first *bingwu* day of the tenth month in the *xinwei* year (1811), the sixteenth year of the Jiaqing Period, which is twenty-one months away from the day of the burial, the stone is set up. Li Yaozhou (c. 19th century) traced and engraved [the text] onto the stone.

皇清晉封資政大夫鹽運使司銜葉先生墓表

資政大夫葉公，以學行顯榮。初，公祖母苦節獲旌，父牽車艱於養。公少勵學，作而曰："學在克家。"遂棄章句，諾重商旅，信孚遠人，積貲既豐。值國家有急，歷輸臺灣、廓爾喀軍糧，永定河、南河石工計累巨萬。天子褒之，加至鹽運使司銜，錫封二品，榮及三世。迨訓子成才，母壽益高，則輟業孝養，日夕依依，暇仍勵學，詩含清風。順德黎二樵、欽州馮魚山鹹折節與交。曾校王文簡公《古詩選》，大興翁鴻胥方綱一見稱善，出所校本與合刻，藝林珍之。著《梅花書屋詩集》若干卷。顧體羸病，以嘉慶十四年九月六日卒，年五十有七，遠迹惜焉。

公諱廷勳，字光常，號花溪，配顏氏，封太夫人。先意承志，善養其姑，前公三年卒。子三人：夢麟，候選郎中；夢龍，戶部員外郎；夢鯤，光祿寺署正。孫九人，諸詳李太僕宗瀚所作墓誌銘。秉綬辱公知愛十餘年，今重來登墳。惟公孝於家，勤於國，信於友，生平任恤解推，不可枚舉。籍本福清，明宰相葉文忠公之裔，由同安再遷南海。傳曰，公侯之子孫，必復其始。謹表葉氏光大所由，寔緣公內行克修，垂袞后昆，刻石白雲新阡，以告來者。

資政大夫、前揚州府知府、署兩淮鹽運使、刑部員外郎、戊午科湖南主考官，愚侄寧化伊秉綬頓首奉撰並書。

朝議大夫、廉州府知府、署廣東糧儲道，姻愚弟龍溪李威頓首拜題額。

嘉慶十六年辛未歲十月丙午朔距既葬二十有一月立石，李藥州摹勒上石。