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ABSTRACT

In addition to writing with the brush and ink, scholars in late imperial China engraved their words onto cups and chairs, exotic animal horns and walking sticks, ink-cakes, slabs of stone, and finely crafted musical instruments. When they did so, they turned to a literary form named the “inscription” (*ming*): often an epigram in free verse, unbound by rules of prosody or meter. This dissertation develops a method for reading the literary inscription in the late imperial period, parsing its distinctive approach to the imbrication of human and inanimate object, yet it also serves as an extended reflection on the question of why this unique practice has so often been overlooked.

My study focuses specifically on transformations in the literary inscription of things during the sixteenth century, a moment when the relationship between the written character and its physical substrates was at once disturbed and creatively remodeled. I trace these perturbations through an extensive collection of inscriptions and extant inscribed artifacts attributed to Wang Daokun (1525–1593) – the scion of a Huizhou merchant lineage, Vice Minister of War, and a leading proponent of literary archaism. Through Wang’s wide-ranging collaborations with pawnbrokers, carvers, and entrepreneurial manufacturers, the inscriptive epigram was repurposed as a mechanism for sophisticated forms of branding. My project measures the impact of these developments on approaches to the ethics of writing, recovering an extended competition between scholars and artisans over the authority to mark durable surfaces with script.

Attending to a diverse set of material substrates – from lacquered ink tablets to imported rhinoceros horns – I move beyond the pages of the book to show how small and often trivial decorative objects participated in the making and remaking of literature. In examining the interplay between a poet’s inscriptions and other sets of artisanal markings, I explore how

physical practices of engraving objects redefined the parameters of the “literary” as a field of activity in late imperial China. Following the trajectories of marked artifacts as they usurp and artfully manipulate human personae, I read the inscription as a medium through which things gain a voice.

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INTRODUCTION

The Inscription is broad yet concise, gentle and smooth.
銘博約而溫潤。

Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303)

In addition to writing with the brush and ink, scholars in late imperial China engraved their words onto cups and ladles, exotic animal horns, walking sticks, spoon-head daggers, and finely crafted musical instruments. Authors could even etch and mold their compositions onto the implements with which they ordinarily wrote on paper. When they did so, they turned to a literary genre named the “inscription” (*ming* 銘) that developed during the Eastern Han (25–220) and conventionally took the form of what we might call an epigram: a lapidary composition in free verse – blurring the boundary between poetry and prose – unbound by rules of prosody and meter.¹ Not all inscriptions were engraved onto hard surfaces and there were many other types of graphic markings that were incised onto artifacts, yet the *ming* epigram served as a unique nexus between the domain of literary writing on things and physical practices of writing *on* things.

Unlike other works of poetry and prose dedicated to objects, inscriptions claimed an indexical connection to the things they named. Even when a *ming* epigram was not engraved, it asked to be read from the perspective of its designated artifact, as if it were a part of its object. In this sense, the *ming* inscription – more so than any other form of Chinese literature – explicitly

¹ David Knechtges, “From the Eastern Han through the Western Jin (AD 25–317),” *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, ed. Kang-I Sun Chang, Stephen Owen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 138. I cover the complex development of the inscription as a literary form (and definitions of *ming*) in the first chapter. Throughout the dissertation I translate *ming* as inscription, yet also use “epigram” to describe literary compositions named *ming*. This is to emphasize the roots of the *ming* genre in short aphoristic compositions such as Tang’s washbasin inscription and King Wu’s monitory markings for his furniture (again, discussed in chapter one). The Han object inscription, the model for the texts at the center of this study, bears striking formal and rhetorical similarities to Greek epigram. Derived from the preposition ἐπί (“on” or “upon”) and the verb γράφω (“to write”) *epigramma* in Greek literally means “inscription.” See Ivan Drpic, *Epigram, Art, and Devotion in Later Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 4.

thematized the interplay between words and things in the creation of meaning. The influential early genre theorist, Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303), captures this codependence of message and material substrate, succinctly describing a disjunctive simultaneity that characterizes the inscribed epigram: “the inscription is broad yet concise, gentle and smooth” (銘博約而溫潤。).² The first part of Lu’s line suggests that the material conditions of the form determined its stylistic conventions: “concise” – due to the small surfaces upon which it was etched – yet capable of encompassing a broad range of matters: the quality of *multum in parvo*.³ “Gentle and smooth” – archetypal qualities of jade – meanwhile, describes the character of a refined gentleman, invoking the “softness” and “compliance” associated with the Confucian ideal of “humaneness” (*ren* 仁) or “fellow feeling.”⁴ Lu’s phrasing suggests that even in its constricted format, the inscription fosters ethical precepts for human behavior, models calibrated to the anthropomorphic virtues of materials. In this study, I proceed from Lu Ji’s two pithy, yet richly suggestive points: first, that the inscription allowed small and apparently trivial objects – whether walking sticks or rhinoceros horn cups – to participate in the making of literature; and second, that the miniature form of the *ming* epigram became a privileged venue in pre-modern China for thinking of the human in terms of the properties of things.

Despite the breadth of this miniature form and its distinctive approach to the imbrication of human and inanimate object, scholars of Chinese literature have largely overlooked the history of the *ming* epigram. While my project responds to this oversight by developing a method for reading inscriptions from late imperial China, it is also intended to serve as an extended

² Lu Ji 陸機, *Lu Ji ji* 陸機集, ed. Jin Taosheng 金濤聲 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 2.

³ See Knechtges: “Li Shan explains that the “matters” treated in the inscription are broad, but the writing is concise. The conciseness of the inscription was determined by the medium on which it was written: a small object such as a vessel, fan, sword, or mirror.” David Knechtges trans., *Wenxuan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 3: 218.

⁴ See Owen: “Warm and gentle describes the quality of personality appropriate to a gentleman.” Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 132.

reflection on why the literary inscription has been critically neglected or treated as a largely marginal pursuit. To be sure, epigraphic research on early engraved writing (“bronze characters” *jinwen* 金文; “the writing on bells and cauldrons” *zhongding wen* 鐘鼎文) and antiquarian investments in documenting script from metal and stone substrates have shaped the modern study of ancient Chinese textual culture both in East Asia and the West, yet the evolution of the inscribed epigram (*ming*) – a comparatively younger cousin of these practices – has consistently eluded sustained investigation. Collectors from the Qing dynasty onwards collated and published the literary epigrams engraved onto choice items of studio paraphernalia, yet these writings have rarely been included in surveys of Chinese belles-lettres.⁵ Such elisions bespeak an uncertainty in to how to understand the word *ming* as it came to be applied to a distinctive mode of literary writing on things, one pursued by poets into the twentieth century. Why was a genre that projected a nominal affiliation with ancient practices of engraving ritual media taken up as a form for writing on household furniture and desktop stationery? Why was a genre that claimed descent from the earliest traces of Chinese script on metal and stone, later grouped with other slight monitory pieces in the back pages of literary anthologies and compendia?⁶ Although the character for inscription (*ming*) would be applied to compositions engraved on stone stelae, mountain cliffs, studio walls, and epitaphs, pre-modern genre theorists invariably traced the roots of these practices back to a spurious nine-character admonition on a washbasin and a set of

⁵ See, for example, the commentaries on various *ming* inscriptions in Xu Chengyao 許承堯, *Sheshi xiantan* 歙事閑譚 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2001); and Deng Zhicheng 鄧之誠, *Gudong suoji* 古董瑣記 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2012). Both Xu (1874–1946) and Deng (1887–1960) possessed marked artifacts from, or collated inscriptions by Wang Daokun. For a recent introduction to the making and anthologizing of *ming* epigrams on inkstones, see Dorothy Ko, *Social Life of Inkstones* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), 189–203.

⁶ Chinese scholars of literature have recently started to pose similar questions, see Ge Huafei 葛華飛, “Ming, mingwen yu mingti jianlun” 銘, 銘文與銘體簡論, *Wenxue pinglun* 文學評論 8:1 (2016): 69–75; Zhang Yingjie 張應杰, *Tang dai mingwen gailun* 唐代銘文概論 (Beijing: Zhongguo shuji chubanshe, 2012), 1–8; Wang Jian, “Mingwen jianlun” 銘文簡論, *Guizhou jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao* 貴州教育學院學報 3 (1993): 21–26.

prosaic aphorisms on a walking stick and a pair of clogs. What should we make of such incongruous genealogies?

Literary historians seem similarly unsure of what to do with lapidary free verse that lacks any formal conventions.⁷ When reading an epigram in a printed book it seems too short, too bereft of context, to merit serious consideration; viewing an epigram on the surface of an inkstone, meanwhile, demands a response that pulls the reader beyond what conventionally counts as “reading.” In late imperial literary historiography, the *ming* epigram stood in an awkward relation to mainstream definitions of “poetry”: as Bruce Rusk has noted, admonitory *ming* inscriptions – which he compares to “motivational posters and bumper stickers” – were categorized by editors under the rubric of *shi* 詩 and, by the Ming dynasty, simultaneously appeared in verse and prose collections, at times assuming an archaic tetrasyllabic meter, while in other instances eschewing the constraints of prosody altogether.⁸ Rhyming inscriptions might variously draw from certain conventions of the *yongwu* 詠物 (“praise of things”) subgenre – whether the epideictic display of *yongwu* rhapsodies or the allusive wordplay of *yongwu* lyrics – yet *ming* epigrams distinguished themselves from this dominant apparatus for intoning things in poetic discourse by presenting their titular objects as supports.⁹ Poems in the *yongwu* mode tend to conceive of the “thing” (*wu*) as a kind, a relational category, or class (*lei* 類) of phenomenon, while *ming* epigrams squarely address the functions of man-made containers, implements, utensils, or instruments (*qi* 器). The problem of reference, prevalent as a concern in other forms

⁷ See James R. Hightower’s comments: “Only confusion results from its [*ming*] use as the name of a literary genre.” James R. Hightower, “The *Wen Hsüan* and Genre Theory,” *Studies in Chinese Literature*, ed. John L. Bishop (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 523.

⁸ Bruce Rusk, *Critics and Commentators: The Book of Poems as Classic and Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 77; 84.

⁹ For an introduction to the *yongwu* mode, see Zhao Hongju 趙紅菊, *Nanchao yongwushi yanjiu* 南朝詠物詩研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2009).

of poetry and prose dealing with materiality, was in the case of the *ming* inscription inflected by an underlying concern with the durability of script itself.

In this account, I take up questions that have so far remained tangential to the study of traditional Chinese literature: why were *ming* epigrams engraved onto quotidian things throughout the later imperial period? What purposes did the literary inscription serve and how was it read? Lu Ji identified a productive disjunction between the concision and capacity of this form, yet the history of the inscription is also riven by anachronism, formal plasticity, and inconsistent accounts of its own objectivity. It is precisely this sense of contradiction that has made the inscription an awkward artifact for anthologists, yet might make it a particularly compelling form with which to explore the often incoherent ways in which humans turn to things to represent or to remake themselves. Despite its peripheral place within existing histories of late imperial Chinese poetry and prose, the *ming* inscription foregrounds critical issues in thinking about the shifting boundaries of the “literary” more generally: how, for instance, we might parse the intersections and ruptures between what Jurij Tynjanov calls the material history of belles-lettres, the history of verbal art, and the history of writing in general.¹⁰ Inscriptive epigrams often appear at the margins – whether of verse and prose anthologies, woodblock illustrations of things, ink-squeeze rubbings, or physical artifacts – and yet in their contact with, and exposure to other technologies and surfaces, they uniquely elucidate the mutations of the late imperial literary system as a whole.¹¹ From another perspective, returning to the history of the *ming* inscription ultimately allows us to pose the basic question – one that still retains contemporary theoretical

¹⁰ Jurij Tynjanov, “On Literary Evolution,” in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed. Ladislav Matejka (Chicago: Dalkey Archive Press, 2002), 66.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

salience – of when writing becomes something called literature, as opposed to any other set of marks etched onto an object.¹²

Sixteenth Century Worlds of Words and Things

Rather than write a synthetic genre study, this dissertation focuses on the transformations of the inscription in mid- to late sixteenth century China. I choose to focus on this period not simply because well-documented upheavals in the structure of the marketplace redefined the stakes of incising epigrams onto things, but also because Ming dynasty inscriptions shed new light on how humans engraved words to cope with a profoundly unstable and increasingly overwhelming material culture. During this period – defined by the spread of South American silver, the expansion of transregional commodity markets, and the ascendancy of the xylograph as a dominant technology of textual transmission – the quaint question of how to inscribe an artifact with literary writing assumed new valence. This study is not intended to rehearse what has already been said about the late Ming – that it was a moment of flux in inherited systems of signification, whether clothing or coinage – but to show how new forms of social role-playing and concerns with determining value were channeled through what has been a curiously neglected question: namely, what it actually meant to write on an object. As the conceptual bonds between words, images, and things were stretched and interrogated, how did authors of literary inscriptions respond? How might an object inscription insist on its singularity or assert its cultural clout amid a proliferation of prints? Could an inscribed epigram redress anxieties of impermanence and retrieve some sense of durability?

¹² In speaking of the “literary inscription of things,” my aim is not to define the literary as a stable category, but rather to attend to acts of boundary-making or -breaking, responding to a question posed elsewhere by Rusk: “how did *literature* come to serve as the name for a domain comprising certain kinds of texts and certain ways of reading them?” Rusk, *Critics and Commentators*, 8.

My study identifies a moment of pronounced perturbation where the relationship between the written character and its physical substrates was at once disturbed and remodeled. I argue that these reformulations are made distinctly legible in the succinct form of the *ming* epigram. Following an introduction to inscription as a conceptual problem in the study of Chinese literature, I begin by demonstrating how the broader relationship between writing with a brush and writing with a knife was rethought in the late Ming, creating new role types for the scholar (as an artisan), the artisan (as a scholar), and the merchant (as both scholar and artisan). I use this framework to approach the adaptation of the inscription for sophisticated forms of branding, practices that eventually yoked the persona and words of the scholar to the trajectories of commercial trademarks. In this case, we begin to see how the efficacy and distinction of literary writing on things was reimagined amid the proliferation of a new class of name brands. Towards the end of the dissertation, I demonstrate how scholars sought to respond to this rupture by embracing anachronism and treating recent things as antiques. Qing antiquarianism, in this account, represents a belated political response from groups of leading classicists to a material culture in which their words no longer mattered. Taken as a whole, this study sketches the faint outlines of a graphic landscape that we may still find familiar today: where it has become difficult to distinguish the poetry of an inscription from the saturated ambience of a commercial label; where we no longer seem able to control the words we have given to things or the strange power they have over us. I argue that the literary inscription participated in the invention of this graphic landscape, yet that it still remained, in late imperial China, a resource with which to inhabit and creatively refabricate its terrain.

Sources: Wang Daokun's Collection of Inscriptions

Throughout this dissertation, I focus on the inscriptions attributed to a single writer named Wang Daokun 汪道昆 (1525–1593), to offer a thick description of a life lived with, and through things. In order to demonstrate how marked objects manipulate human personae, I begin by charting the profound impact of inscriptive acts on the career of a single historical personage: this initially anthropocentric approach is provisional and designed to thread together a series of inscriptions and inscribed artifacts that ultimately challenge the coherence of categories like “biography.” Despite a range of studies attending to the effects of upheavals in Ming material culture on the self-fashioning of male literati, there is still no full-length account of a collector’s relationships to decorative objects from this transformative period. My aim in this study is not to simply narrate the life of a collector, but to follow the rhythms of gathering and dispersal that animate a collection of inscribed artifacts, highlighting how such pursuits were mediated through the act of writing words on things. Craig Clunas has drawn from Marilyn Strathearn’s notion of the “dividual person” to rethink the Ming artist as the “plural and composite site of the relationships that produced them...[the singular person] as a social microcosm.”¹³ In this work, I invoke and extend the category of the “dividual” to account for the roles of inscribed decorative artifacts in the constitution and distribution of Wang Daokun’s personhood. While historians have examined the role-type and rhetoric of the collector as strategies for protecting besieged conceptions of elite male sociability, biographical objects remain largely mute in these accounts.¹⁴ We are left with narratives that tend to center around what privileged men had to say about themselves and

¹³ Craig Clunas, *Elegant Debts: The Social Art of Wen Zhengming* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 11.

¹⁴ For historical studies, see Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004); Wu Renshu 巫仁恕 [Wu Jen-shu], *Pinwei shehua: wan Ming de xiaofei shehui yu shidafu* 品味奢華：晚明的消費社會與士大夫 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan, Lianjing chubanshe, 2007). Literary scholarship has followed Wai-yee Li, “The Collector, the Connoisseur, and Late-Ming Sensibility,” *T'oung Pao* 81.4 (1995): 276.

each other: discussions of materialism without matter, or narcissistic ventriloquism. This project is intended as a corrective to such approaches, advancing a methodological fetishism to show how inscribed things participate in the making and remaking of human subjects.¹⁵ Wang may have intended for his inscriptions to curate a messy array of object attachments, yet he had no control over what marked things-in-motion did to his words, his name, or the social relations through which he sought to secure a sense of self.

The dissertation can be read as an extended exegesis of Wang's inscriptions, a selection of texts included in an appendix. My readings move between four sets of materials: first, a series of epigrams in Wang Daokun's collected works *Taihan ji* 太函集;¹⁶ second, an array of his inscriptions not included in *Taihan ji*, yet discussed in other sixteenth century sources and anthologized in Ming catalogues; third, surviving artifacts in public and private collections from around the world; and fourth, inscriptions and inscribed artifacts attributed to members of Wang Daokun's two select poetry societies "Fenggan" (Fenggan she 豐干社) and "White Elm" (Baiyu

¹⁵ On methodological fetishism, see Arjun Appadurai: "even though from a *theoretical* point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context." Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 5. Bill Brown's "Thing Theory" proceeds from Appadurai: "methodological fetishism, then, is not an error so much as it is a condition for thought, new thoughts about how inanimate objects constitute human subjects, how they move them, how they threaten them, how they facilitate or threaten their relation to other subjects." Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," in *Things*, ed. Bill Brown (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 11.

¹⁶ *Taihan ji*, with a self-preface dated to 1591, is a 120 *juan* edition of Wang's prose and poetry printed in Nanjing. First editions are preserved in the National Library of China and Historical Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences among other locations (this text has also been widely distributed by microfilm). This edition has been reprinted in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 續修四庫全書 and *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書. There is a later 1624 (4th year of Tianqi) edition of *Taihan ji* carved by Su Wenhan 蘇文韓 in 32 *juan* stored in Renmin University Library. Finally, there is an edition carved by Li Weizhen stored in the Historical Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. A collated edition of *Taihan ji* was printed in 2004, see Wang, *Taihan ji*, ed. Hu Yimin 胡益民 and Yu Guoqing 余國慶 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2004). Wang's inscriptions are in *juan* 78.

Wang's poetry and prose also appeared in another shorter compilation named *Fumo* 副墨 that was printed at least as early as 1574 after his retirement from official service. The primary edition is stored in Anhui Provincial Library in 4 *juan*; a second edition in 5 *juan* dated to 1574 is stored in Peking University Library; a third edition in 7 *juan* dated to 1597 is stored in Zhejiang Provincial Library. A "greatest hits" edition of the best work from *Taihan ji* and *Fumo* was printed in 22 *juan* by Wang's grandson Wang Yaoguang in 1633 under the title *Taihan fumo* 太函副墨 (See appendix 1). Undated Qing manuscripts of Wang's poetry and prose – *Xuanhu lou ji* 玄扈樓集 and *Xuanhu lou xuji* 玄扈樓續集 – are held in Taiwan University Library.

she 白榆社), men with whom he closely collaborated in his engagement with the market for things.¹⁷ The histories of these texts variously gesture back to the literary achievements of the Eastern Han and the Northern Song, while reaching outwards to the collections of Edo period Japanese connoisseurs, to the customs ports and traders of the Southeast China coast, and forward in time to antiquarian circles of the High Qing and the diaries of Republican era antique dealers. Taken together, I claim that they illuminate renovations in the practice of literary inscription, the consequences of which reverberated throughout the late imperial period. More generally, these cases – ranging from mundane acts of shopping and debt repayment, to collective political protests and lyrical meditations on the boundaries of the self – elucidate the deep-seated contradictions and pronounced instability of object culture in sixteenth century China, establishing a horizon against which renowned scholars like Wang Daokun labored to assert some sense of dominion through writing on the surfaces of things.

Self-Inscription: Poems for Wang Daokun's Sword

The notion that acts of inscription (*ming*) served to shape Wang Daokun's public persona can be read as a response to a recurring theme in his own poetry. It is possible, for instance, to reconstruct the details of Wang's official career by attending to the fate of a single inscription on a sword that was allegedly wrought for him by the renowned Ming General Qi Jiguang 戚繼光 (1528–1588), an acclaimed tactician and proponent of technological innovation who has been promoted as a national military hero into the twentieth century. This case demonstrates the extent to which the act of making a mark on an object proved critical to Wang's attempts to outline the contours of his subject-hood across the course of his life; indeed, Wang's extended poetic

¹⁷ For an introduction to these societies, see Geng Chuanyou 耿傳友, "Baiyu she shulüe" 白榆社述略, *Huangshan xueyuan xuebao* 黃山學院學報 Vol 1.9 (2007) 1: 29–33.

ruminations on the biography of this inscribed sword are as close as he comes to offering a coherent account of himself.

After achieving the *jinshi* degree in 1547, Wang was subsequently posted to serve as the magistrate of Yiwu 義烏 in Zhejiang. He developed a strong interest in military tactics and began to organize a local militia that became known as the Yiwu Battalion (Yiwu bing 義烏兵), a unit that would later form the nucleus of Qi Jiguang's legendary army. Following a succession of official positions in the Ming bureaucracy, Wang was posted to serve as Surveillance Vice Commissioner (Fujian ancha fushi 福建按察副使) in Fujian in 1561.¹⁸ During the 1560s, south-east China was subject to repeated raids from the *wokou* 倭寇 or “dwarf pirates,” a multinational conglomeration of Japanese, Portuguese, and ethnically Chinese crewmen famed in Ming reports for their brutality.¹⁹ As the *wokou* terrorized settlements along the Fujianese coast, Wang solicited reinforcements from Hu Zongxian 胡宗憲 (1511–1565), supreme commander of Zhejiang, Nan-Zhili 南直隸, Fujian, and Jiangxi. Hu dispatched a relief mission under the command of Qi Jiguang, an officer from a hereditary military family in Shandong who had made a name for his tactical innovations working with the same Yiwu Battalion that Wang Daokun had helped train in his first stint as magistrate.²⁰ Qi and Wang forged a close bond and by early

¹⁸ Wang served in the Jiangxi Bureau in the Ministry of Revenue (Hubu Jiangxi si zhushi 戶部江西司主事) (1551), the Bureau of Operations in the Ministry of War (Bingbu zhi fang si zhushi 兵部職方司主事) (1553), as Vice Director of the Bureau of Provisions (Bingbu wuku siyuan wailang 兵部武庫司員外郎) (1554), as Director of the Bureau of Personnel (Shulang zhongshi yuan wailang 署郎中事員外郎) (1557), and as prefect of Xiangyang 襄陽 in Huguang (1558).

¹⁹ The *wokou* penetrated deep into the Yangzi river delta reaching the walls of Nanjing in 1555–56. Cai Jiude 采九德 in his *Brief Account of the Upheavals of Piracy* (*Wobian shilüe* 倭變事略) records how raiders decapitated the heads of dead soldiers and strung them up on bridges to instill fear among civilians. For a recent introduction, see Wang Hongtai [Wang Hung-tai 王鴻泰], “Wodao yu xiashi – Mingdai woluan chongji xia Jiangnan shiren de wuxia fengshang” 倭刀與俠士—明代倭亂衝擊下江南士人的武俠風尚, *Hanxue yanjiu* 漢學研究 30: 3 (2012): 63–97.

²⁰ Qi, who was born into a hereditary military family – his sixth generation ancestor, Qi Xiang 戚詳, had fought alongside Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 to establish the dynasty – had earlier experiences of fighting the *wokou*.

1563, their forces had recovered the cities of Pinghai 平海 and the prefectural city of Xinghua 興華 from Japanese *wokou* recruits.²¹

Multiple sources suggest that Wang and Qi made a blood oath in 1562 to protect the people of Fujian in their fight against the *wokou*.²² To commemorate this pact, a symbolic union of martial (*wu* 武) and civil (*wen* 文) virtues, Qi Jiguang allegedly cast two iron swords and Wang Daokun inscribed them.²³ Just as Qi most likely did not personally smelt the metal for the weapons, Wang appears to have been more concerned with how his act of inscription was perceived, rather than recording the details of the actual engraving. This staged coupling of Wang and Qi's two "treasure swords" (*baojian* 寶劍) was framed in terms of the legend of Gan Jiang 干將 and Mo Ye 莫邪, two ancient sword-smiths from the Spring and Autumn period who

He had served in missions in 1556 as assistant commander, defending the area east of the Qiantang River; in 1558, when he had been involved in an unsuccessful campaign against pirates on the Zhoushan archipelago; and in 1560, when he had led a succession of nine victorious engagements in a single month on the Taizhou coast. Following his earlier setbacks fighting pirates on the islands of Zhoushan, Qi had worked closely with three thousand volunteers, from the militia in Yiwu that Wang Daokun had helped train, to develop innovative military strategies such as the "mandarin ducks" tactical formation (*yuanyang zhen* 鴛鴦陣) – a method of grouping twelve troops with one leader, based on the premise that if the leader was killed in battle, any remaining survivors from the unit would be executed as punishment.

²¹ Wang commemorated Qi's victories in a series of poems, see Wang, "Qi Jiangjun ru Min pozei fu shi jueju" 戚將軍入閩破賊賦十絕句, *Taihan ji*, 120: 2754. During their fight against the pirates, Wang was commissioned to write a series of official memorials in the genres of the biography and the stone inscription: Wang, "Taizhou ping yi zhuan" 台州平夷傳, *Taihan ji*, 27: 581; Wang, "Pingyuan tai legong ming" 平遠台勒功銘, *Taihan ji*, 78: 1594. Late Ming commentators celebrated this decisive string of victories, claiming the locals now spoke of "Wang Daokun's writings, Qi Jiguang's army, and the scenery of the Wuyi Mountains as the 'three triumphs' of Fujian" (閩人嗚咽以汪中丞文, 戚繼光用兵, 及武夷山水為閩中三絕). A number of commentators from the late Ming discussed Wang's close relationship to Qi, see, for instance, Shen Defu 沈德符, "Qi shuai junei" 戚帥懼內, in *Wanli yehuo bian buyi* 萬曆野獲編補遺 in *Mingdai biji xiaoshuo daguan* 明代筆記小說大觀, ed. Yang Wanli 楊萬里 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005), vol. 3, 2815.

²² For an early study of Wang's relationship to Qi, see Zhu Ze 朱澤, "Shi jian zhi jiao – ji Wang Daokun, Qi Jiguang de youyi pianduan" 詩劍之交 – 記汪道昆, 戚繼光的友誼片斷, *Anhui shixue* 安徽史學 5 (1984): 32–38. There are, however, a number of inaccuracies in this short piece, some of which have been corrected in a more detailed study by Jiang Weitang 姜緯堂, "Qi Nantang yu Wang Taihan" 戚南塘與汪太函, in *Qi Jiguang yanji lunji* 戚繼光研究論集, ed. Yan Chongnian 閻崇年 (Beijing: Zhishi chubanshe, 1990), 318–351.

²³ A more detailed version of the pact is offered in Wang, "Ming tejin guanlu dafu Shaobao jian Taizi Taibao zhongjun dudu zuo fu zuo dudu Mengzhu Gu gong Jiguang muzhi ming" 明故特進光祿大夫少保兼太子太保中軍都督府左都督孟諸戚公繼光墓志銘, *Taihan ji*, 59: 1227. It was later suggested that Qi found the material for the swords in preternatural circumstances: while sailing to Fujian, he spotted an uncanny red light emanating from the waves at midnight and sent divers to explore its source whereupon they discovered an ancient iron anchor. See Wang Daokun's later essay, Wang, "Cangzhou san hui ji" 滄洲三會記, *Taihan ji*, 76: 1552.

smelted a pair of blades – one gendered male, the other gendered female – that later bore their names.²⁴ Versions of the tale record how Mo Ye sacrificed herself by leaping into the flames in order to melt the metal, a scene that served as an allegory for the human bodily investments needed to produce numinous objects. The feminine Mo Ye sword was presented to the sovereign King Helü of Wu 吳王闔閭 (537–498 BCE), while the male Gan Jiang sword – the true regal palladium – was taken into hiding. In his later poems, Wang assumes for himself the feminine role of Mo Ye – the plaintive victim for sacrifice, the one offered up for service – while presenting Qi as a concealed incarnation of righteous martial power: Qi by contrast altogether ignores the treasure swords in his writings.²⁵ From Wang’s perspective, his weapon represents his loyal service for the state, yet it also – left in the shadow of its lost, dominant counterpart – evokes an enduring sense of lack that he struggles in his lyrics to fully redress.

Wang’s first remarks on his sword can be dated to the event of his impeachment in 1566 when a soldier under his command attacked a Hanlin academician. As he was dismissed from office, Wang depicted the incident as a fire that burned down his official residence, destroying all of his possessions except for the sword. Following its rebirth amid the flames, the object became a new symbol of the wrongs Wang had suffered and his underlying desire to be “used” again.²⁶ In a sequence of three poems that he composed as meditations on the body of the

²⁴ Lionello Lanciotti, “Notes on Ancient Chinese Metallurgy: Sword Casting and Related Legends in China,” *East and West* 6: 2 (1955): 109.

²⁵ See lines like: “The masculine soared, while the feminine was pliant” (其一雄飛一雌伏。); “I held the feminine, he took the masculine” (我但守雌君當雄。) Wang, “Baojian pian” 寶劍篇, *Taihan ji*, 108: 2289–2290.

Wang would also repeatedly refer to a related legend of how Gan Jiang and Mo Ye’s treasure swords reappeared in the Jin dynasty. The *Jinshu* 晉書 records how an official named Zhang Hua 張華 met a diviner named Lei Kongzhang 雷孔章 who had spotted the heaven-bound emanation of a jeweled sword hidden on earth, creating a strange aura around the Dou constellation. Zhang consequently discovered two buried treasure swords. One day, Zhang was at the Yan Ford 延津 and his sword leapt out of its scabbard and into the water where it became a pair of dragons. The sword’s metamorphosis suggests that things that are meant to be together will be reunited in the end.

²⁶ The claim that the rebirth of the sword is somehow contingent on Wang’s own personal loss resonates with Lionello Lanciotti’s widely cited observation that in sword casting legends a sacrifice was needed to obtain a melting. In more general terms, the image of Wang’s burning residence tacitly registers the violence and destruction

scarred weapon, he ends by comparing the sword's gleaming light, as it is left resting against the head of his bed, with his own suspended agency, no longer sure what his real purpose is:

General Qi cast two swords and asked me to inscribe them. He committed the sword to his old friend's care, so I took one. There was a fire in the government offices and almost everything was destroyed, yet a servant in the residence brought out the sword and so it survived. I brought it back to show to my cousin, we both rejoiced that it possesses a numinous spirit, so I slapped the sword-hilt and sang, composing three poems:

Word arrives of the men from the Eastern State,
The journey for the guests towards the Yan Ford is long.
As the sword left the turf packed with ramparts,
To enter the stage of youth.
Beyond the dipper, with the hue of a thousand autumns,
In front of my bed, its light shines for a hundred paces.
I don't know if I'm made of martial bones,
How could I go back to handling military affairs?

戚將軍鑄良劍二，謁予銘之，托以久要，遂分其一。省署火，故物悉亡，獨舍中兒抱劍出火中，賴得脫。歸示家弟，相與幸其有靈，為之彈鋏而歌，作詩三首。

...

東國人言至，延津客路長。
一辭多壘地，更入少年場。
斗外千秋色，牀頭百步光。
自知非俠骨，寧復事戎行。²⁷

Poems written by Wang Daokun's contemporaries to honor him at the unjust event of his dismissal segue from the withdrawal of the animate sword to claims for its latent potency, its will to once again return to service:

Assistant Commissioner Wang's terrace went up in flames and this was the only thing rescued from the fire, so slapping the sword-hilt I composed a matching song to extend my condolences:

resulting from the war against pirates in Fujian and the sword's survival comes to emblemize his own escape from harm.

²⁷ Wang, "Qi jiangjun zhu liangjian er, ye yu ming zhi, tuo yijiu yao, sui fen qi yi. Shengshu huo, guwu xiwang, du shezhong er bao jian chu huozhong, lai de tuo. Guishi jiadi, xiang yu xing qi you long, weizhi tanjia er ge, zuoshi sanshou" 戚將軍鑄良劍二，謁予銘之，托以久要，遂分其一。省署火，故物悉亡，獨舍中兒抱劍出火中，賴得脫。歸示家弟，相與幸其有靈，為之彈鋏而歌，作詩三首, *Taihan ji*, 109: 2302.

When the Assistant Commissioner's estrade went up in flames, it illuminated Min.
There was a single sword, worth a thousand in gold, lodging as a guest.
It must have flown up at once as a dragon,
Suddenly hiding away amid wind and rain.
Concealing its form as it enters the waters of the Yan Ford,
Its shadow still retains the light of the Northern Dipper.
A patriotic heart still resides within,
Just look at the scales that shake the icy frost.

汪中丞臺火救者獨以劍出彈鋏而歌和以相吊

中丞臺火照閩方，客有千金劍一裝。
賴是龍蛇先自起，忽然風雨為深藏。
逃形疑入延津水，厭影猶含北斗光。
報國片心還獨在，逾看鱗甲動冰霜。²⁸

As it transforms into a dragon and goes into hiding, the sword emblemizes Wang's forced, yet defiant release from office: in its metamorphosis, the charred sword's spirit comes to embody his "patriotic heart."

The symbol of the inscribed sword reappears in Wang's reflections on the vicissitudes of his official career over the next three decades. When in 1567, Wang wrote of how he built a new "square foot" studio (*zhangshi* 丈室) in his hometown, the "Chamber of Tranquil Simplicity" (Xuyu shi 徐于室), he starts and concludes his account with references to the inscribed sword: the object – still left leaning against his couch-bed – points beyond an otherwise reclusive vision of privacy to index his deep-seated political frustrations.²⁹ The sword accompanied him in 1568

²⁸ Li Panlong 李攀龍, *Cangming xiansheng ji* 滄溟先生集, ed. Bao Jingdi 包敬第 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2014), 326.

²⁹ See lines: "To the left of the couch-bed stands a double-edged sword, cast by the General, that I have inscribed." (榻之左樹佩劍一，蓋大將軍所鑄，余為之銘。); "Feeling idle, I strike the stone chime several times, or lean against the wood with my legs stretched out on the floor, or wash the head of my sword. Feeling indulgent, I then doze off in a deep slumber." (怠則擊磬什數聲，倚木箕踞，澤劍首，甚則齁齁睡矣。). Wang, "Xuyu ji" 徐于記, *Taihan ji*, 71: 1472.

In 1567 (the first year of the Longqing 隆慶 reign), Wang returned to She County and took a new studio name (*zhai ming* 齋名), "The Chamber of Tranquil Simplicity" (Xuyu shi 徐于室). The name was adapted from a passage in the "Sovereign Responses for Ruling Powers" (Ying diwang 應帝王) chapter of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子.

to a famed meeting with Qi Jiguang and the eminent Suzhou scholar – Daokun’s fellow *jinshi* graduate – Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526–1590), at the latter’s newly renovated estate in Taicang 太倉: during the trip, Qi presented their host with a third sword, a gift that helped incite a friendly rivalry between Wang Daokun (a hitherto more successful official) and Wang Shizhen (a hitherto more respected literary figure), which in turn defined the careers of both men and broader cultural contests between Huizhou and Suzhou in the late Ming.³⁰ By 1572, Wang had returned to the bureaucracy and was promoted to Right Vice Minister of War (Bingbu you dailang 兵部右侍郎). In one of his subsequent appointments, he was instructed to inspect frontier garrisons under Qi Jiguang’s command at Jimen 薊門, a tour he presented as a reunion of the two treasure swords and one of his final acts in office before heading back into retirement in 1575 to attend to his ailing parents.³¹ In 1585, Qi Jiguang travelled to Wang Daokun’s hometown in She County and participated in a gathering of his poetry society and Chan meditation group.³² Finally in 1592, Wang composed a lengthy poem, “A Tract on Treasure Swords” (Baojian pian 寶劍篇), that can be read not just as a eulogy to the recently deceased Qi,

“Tranquil Simplicity” evokes the carefree lifestyle of the retired scholar sleeping (臥) in his chamber, yet it also hints at Wang’s own defense of his untrammelled virtue in light of his dismissal: the *Zhuangzi* passage praises the line of Tai (泰氏) over the line of Youyu (有虞氏), yoking the meaning of Wang’s citation to his own cognomen “Master of Taihan” (Taihan shi 太函氏) and pseudonym “Master Taimao” (Taimao shi 泰茅氏) – *tai* 太 and *tai* 泰 were variants. If “Tranquil Simplicity” outwardly suggests peace and contentment, it also, through an implicit claim for the moral superiority of Tai, registers a protest against his recent treatment by the court.

³⁰ For a discussion of the meeting in 1568 see Tang Yuxing 湯宇星, *Yanshan zhi shi: Wang Shizhen yu Suzhou wentan de yishu jiaoyou* 弁山之石: 王世貞與蘇州文壇的藝術交遊 (Hangzhou: Zhongguo meishu xueyuan chubanshe, 2015), 72–74. In his later poems, Wang downplays this event in favor of another meeting to discuss strategy between himself and Qi that he dates to the same year in the Tiger Forest 虎林 of Hangzhou, see for instance the preface to “Baojian pian.” Shizhen and Daokun were later paired as the “Two Simas” (Liang Sima 兩司馬) of the Wanli era, both because their official ranks were deemed to be as high as the ancient Sima civilian military officers and because their literary talents were deemed comparable to Sima Qian 司馬遷 and Sima Xiangru 司馬相如.

³¹ Wang, “Saishang shang zhengfu” 塞上上政府, *Taihan ji*, 98: 2003; Wang, “Jimen hui yue” 薊門會閱, *Taihan ji*, 113: 2500.

³² Wang, “Dao zhong yu Shaobao jishi” 道中遇少保即事, *Taihan ji*, 117: 2636; Wang, “Tong Shaobao su Zhaolin” 同少保宿肇林, *Taihan ji*, 117: 2637. See also Xu, “Qi Jiguang zhi Qianqiu li hui yin” 戚繼光至千秋里會飲, *Sheshi xiantan*, 174.

whom he again objectifies as a weapon, but – appearing just one year before his death – as his own autobiography in verse.³³

Despite writing a series of lengthy poems on the sword, Wang never divulged what he actually inscribed (*ming*) onto the weapon in his published works: whether it was his name, Qi's name, the name of the sword, a date, or a *ming* epigram. In his poetic responses, he repeatedly refers to the performance of inscription (*ming* as a verb: to engrave; carve, incise) without once mentioning what the inscribed text (*ming* as a noun) might have said. It is unclear why Wang withheld the content of this particular inscription, on what was by far his most personally significant possession, yet the absence establishes an intriguing tension between a willingness to publicly avow the act of making a mark, while concealing that same mark from view. This tension ultimately allows Wang to reimagine the significance of his inscription at different points in his career, redefining his relationship to the symbol of the marked sword in his poetry: as a pact between the values of *wen* and *wu*, an oath to protect the people of Fujian, a scar of suffered wrongs, a testament to one's loyalty, and a steadfast reminder of one's possible use. The tension similarly suggests a recurring desire to affirm a permanent, durable trace of one's self, while avoiding the constrictions of becoming fixed in time or place. Wang repeatedly looks to assert his mastery over the object – as the one who can write upon its surface; the one who can fully possess its meaning through poetry – without letting the inscribed weapon take on its own proper name or individuated biography: by remaining nameless in this way, the sword becomes a more pliant synecdoche, a less detached prosthesis for Wang himself. And yet, the very repetition that emerges in Wang's poems on the marked sword perhaps also registers the challenges he faced in trying to sustain this pretense of control over the object, a prop that as we have seen was taken up as a proxy in his struggle for self-mastery.

³³ Wang, "Baojian pian," *Taihan ji*, 108: 2289–2290.

Wang Daokun's reflections on his sword are conducted in poetry and suppress the text of the inscription. In the remainder of this study, I move from poems about objects to surviving *ming* inscriptions and inscribed artifacts to examine how such texts variously retuned Wang's efforts at self-definition: to explore how actual inscribed objects from the sixteenth century punctured human pretensions to speak on their behalf.

Wang Daokun's Poetics of Inscription

Wang Daokun was regarded by many of his contemporaries as a preeminent connoisseur of art and antiquities, yet he also redefined the parameters of such a role.³⁴ He inscribed a range of

³⁴ The scholarship on Wang Daokun in Chinese is voluminous, in part due to the recent efforts of scholars and university committees from Wang's locality of Anhui. Much of this work has been inspired by a desire to promote "Huizhou Studies" (Huixue 徽學) as an academic subfield in China (often branded as a rival to the study of Dunhuang). This field has been shaped both by an interest in mercantile practice in pre-modern East Asia (often a return to the "sprouts of capitalism" hypothesis or an attempt to find a Chinese equivalent to Weber's "spirit of capitalism" – both concerns that inevitably take a chauvinistic bent) and by the fortuitous survival of the so-called "Huizhou sources" (Huizhou wenshu 徽州文書), an array of documents, manuscripts, and rare imprints that were passed down in private collections and have transformed the study of local lineage culture in late imperial China. For an introduction to these materials, see Yan Guifu 嚴桂夫, *Huizhou lishi dang'an zongmu tiyao* 徽州歷史檔案總目提要 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1996); Yan Guifu and Wang Guojian 王國鍵, *Huizhou wenshu dang'an* 徽州文書檔案 (Hefei: Anhui renmin chubanshe, 2005).

For a recent critical biography of Wang, see Zhang Jian 張健, *Huizhou hongru Wang Daokun yanjiu* 徽州鴻儒汪道昆研究 (Anhui shifan daxue chubanshe, 2014). A critical chronology of Wang's life can be found in Xu Shuofang 徐朔方, "Wang Daokun nianpu" 汪道昆年譜, *Wan Ming qujia nianpu* 晚明曲家年譜, ed. Xu (Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1983), vol. 3. Critical adjustments to Xu's chronology have been made by Wang Chaohong 汪超宏, "Wang Daokun si ti" 汪道昆四題; "Wang Daokun nianpu buzheng" 汪道昆年譜補正, *Ming Qing qujia kao* 明清曲家考, ed. Wang (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2006), 128–237. Scholarship on Wang in Chinese tends to fall into four categories: 1) his (fairly light) contributions to vernacular literature (as the author of four dramas, an outlying suspect for the authorship of *Jinping mei* 金瓶梅, and a preface for *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳); 2) his lifelong friendship with the General Qi Jiguang; 3) his tomb epitaphs and biographies of Huizhou merchants; 4) his role in the art market and Ming material culture.

Wang was an influential literary figure and has conventionally been approached as an honorary affiliate of the Latter Seven Masters (Hou qizi 後七子) of Ming literary archaism (*fugu*), see Liao Kebin 廖可斌, *Fugu pai yu Mingdai wenzue sichao* 復古派與明代文學思潮 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1994), 476–479. For recent work on Wang's contributions to late Ming prose, see the scholarship of Qiao Gen 喬根, "Mingdai Huizhou zuojia Wang Daokun sanwen neihan lun" 明代徽州作家汪道昆散文內涵論, *Huainan shifan xueyuan xuebao* 5 (2010). On poetry, see Geng Chuanyou, "Wang Daokun yu Mingdai Longqing, Wanli jian de shitan" 汪道昆與明代隆慶, 萬曆間的詩壇, *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu* 4 (2006). For an introduction to his role in shaping the category of the "Huizhou merchant" (Huishang), see Zhao Kesheng, "Wang Daokun yu Huishang" 汪道昆與徽商, *Huizhou shehui kexue* 2 (1997). I will introduce other important work on Wang's relation to the art market and Ming material culture throughout the dissertation. Given the sheer breadth of his pursuits – from writing a preface for *Shuihu zhuan*, to his

objects that had not previously been treated as tokens of male sociability: a four-stringed lute or *pipa*, floral cups possibly crafted in Fujian from Sumatran (or Indian) imported rhinoceros horns, and charismatic brand names for commercial lines of ink. His collection of epigrams allows us to glimpse the heterogeneity of a Ming object culture increasingly enmeshed in networks of global trade, revealing how writers worked to awkwardly incorporate novel artifacts into existing tropological systems, using an ancient vocabulary to contain the otherness of contemporary things. In these engagements, Wang personally sponsored pawnbrokers, tea merchants, amateur Chan artists, and carvers of seal stamps, while using his inscriptions to promote itinerant musicians and entrepreneurial manufacturers of stationery. From this perspective, Wang's *ming* epigrams turn to objects to justify and promote new human role types: the merchant inkmaker, the gallant male lutenist, or the refined dealer of writing materials. In his approach to inscription, the problem of how a person should treat things becomes inextricably entwined with the question of how persons might treat other persons differently.

Today Wang is often cited by Chinese historians for his unorthodox remarks on the role of merchants in Ming society.³⁵ He heralded from Xiuning 休寧 county in the prefecture of

romance with the legendary courtesan Xu Pianpian 徐翩翩; from his efforts fighting pirates and his popular boxing manual to his numerous epitaphs for Huizhou residents – he clearly merits a full-length study in English. This dissertation does not aspire to offer such an overview, instead using his writing – and artifacts attributed to him – as a case study through which to explore the critical topic of literary inscription.

³⁵ See Guo Qitao: “In sixteenth century Huizhou, the most prominent spokesman for commerce and the converged gentry-merchant identities was Wang Daokun... The main theme running through Wang’s writings is the convergence of commerce and gentility. For all his sensitivity, Wang Daokun drew upon neo-Confucian traditions as well as Huizhou merchant culture.” Guo Qitao, *Ritual Opera and Mercantile Lineage: The Confucian Transformation of Popular Culture in Late Imperial Huizhou* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 60. Guo’s reading of Wang is often indebted to Yu Ying-shih’s 余英時 use of Wang’s words in his Weberian search for a Chinese equivalent to the Protestant work ethic, see Yu, *Zhongguo jinshi zongjiao lunli yu shangren jingshen* 中國近時宗教倫理與商人精神 (Taipei: Lianjing chubanshiye gongsi, 1987), 109. These approaches tend to divorce Wang’s remarks from the contexts in which he made them – usually in the prefaces to eulogistic biographies or epitaphs for deceased merchants (texts he was probably paid to write). It would be a mistake to suggest Wang had a coherent philosophy concerning the “merchant” that he promoted in a systematic fashion. Often unorthodox flattery for the families of tradesmen exists side-by-side with an inculcated Confucian prejudice towards commerce (and vice versa). It is better to characterize Wang’s approach as one of incipient negotiation, paradox, and provisionality, where he has not quite worked out what he wants to say about the Ming economy.

Huizhou 徽州, located in the remote mountains of southern Anhui province. The geography and ecology of this area contributed to the development of a distinctive mercantile culture in the late Ming. Pressure on forested mountain land prompted lineages to develop trusts for the sale of timber, aiding the emergence of a local futures market in the late fifteenth century. Huizhou lineages, in turn, repurposed the institution of the ancestral hall as a credit association and proto-bank, financing members to move into markets and pawnshop businesses throughout the lower Yangzi delta.³⁶ With the transition from a grain-salt exchange system to a new policy of “paying silver for salt,” institutionalized in 1491, Huizhou merchants replaced their counterparts in Shanxi and Shaanxi as the dominant power bloc in the highly lucrative salt business.³⁷

Wang Daokun was the scion of a wealthy salt merchant lineage, yet achieved empire-wide renown and respectability for his family by obtaining the *jinshi* degree in 1547. Throughout his official career, he wavered between simply embracing the conventional role of the *shi* 士 or *ru* 儒 Confucian scholar-gentleman and striving to lend legitimacy to the *shang* 商 or *gu* 賈 merchant, at times inverting the hierarchy of the four occupations (*simin* 四民) at the heart of Confucian social theory. Merchants were traditionally placed at the bottom of the four social classes for their non-productive labor, yet Wang coined new metaphors with which to unsettle the self-evidence of this scheme:

³⁶ Joseph P. McDermott, *The Making of a New Rural Order in Southern China: I. Village, Land, and Lineage in Huizhou 900–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

³⁷ In the grain-salt exchange system, salt merchants transported grain to the military posts on the frontier in exchange for government-issued tickets to sell salt. The central government controlled salt production and operated as a “wholesaler of salt,” while merchants were “confined to retailing.” In the new system, merchants no longer had to bring grain to the frontier to obtain salt licenses; instead, they could simply pay silver to the office of the salt commissioner to obtain a salt license to conduct their salt business. This new policy caused “the migration of richer merchants to the inland provinces.” Huizhou merchants were now closer to the most profitable salt regions, such as Yangzhou and Hangzhou (Shanxi and Shaanxi merchants had been closer to the northern frontier), see Wu Yulian, *Luxurious Networks: Salt Merchants, Status, and Statecraft in Eighteenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 31–47.

The capital of Xin'an, with one scholar for every three merchants, is indeed a land rich in the contribution of writing for the state. Just as merchants seek handsome profits, scholars strive for high honor. Only after one has exhausted his effort on behalf of Confucian learning with no result, does he loosen study and tighten trade. Now that he has joined those who enjoy high profits, he prefers his descendants, for the sake of their future, to loosen trade and tighten study. This loosening and tightening alternate with each other so that one can likely enjoy either an income of ten thousand bushels of grain or the prestige of a retinue of a thousand horse-carriages. This can be likened to the revolution of the wheel, with its spokes touching the ground in turn.

新都三賈一儒，要之文獻國也。夫賈為厚利，儒為名高。夫人畢事儒不效，則弛儒而張賈。既則身饗其利矣，及為子孫計，寧弛賈而張儒。一弛一張，迭相為用，不萬鍾而千駟，猶之轉轂相巡。³⁸

In antiquity, the scholar took the side of honor and the merchant was inferior, yet in my prefecture this has been reversed. For the obtuse, lacking the ability to be merchants, leave to become scholars, while those who thrive, yet lack the talent to be scholars, leave and go back to being merchants.

古者右儒而左賈，吾郡或右賈而左儒，蓋拙者力不足賈，去而為儒，贏者才不足於儒，則反而歸賈。³⁹

Rather than present examples of Wang's "economic thought" – an anachronistic contemporary rubric – as background context to his career as a collector, this dissertation demonstrates how his re-negotiation of fixed social roles emerged through his writing on things. Instead of attributing Wang's thinking on the ethics of human economic behavior to high-minded intellectual disputes between the inheritors of Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130–1200) Neo-Confucianism and Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139–1193) or Wang Yangming's 王陽明 (1472–1529) intuitive philosophy, I approach these disruptive moments in Wang's prose through the lens of his experience of the material everyday: how he judged an inkstone, tested an inkcake, or responded to the music of the *pipa*.⁴⁰

³⁸ Wang, "Haiyang chushi Jin Zhongweng pei Dai shi hezang muzhi ming" 海陽處士金仲翁配戴氏合葬墓誌銘, *Taihan ji*, 52: 1099. [Translation adapted from Guo, *Ritual Opera*, 67].

³⁹ Wang, "Ming gu chushi Xiyang Wu changong muzhiming" 明故處士谿陽吳長公墓誌銘, *Taihan ji*, 54: 1142.

⁴⁰ See Guo: "But rather than rely exclusively on the elitist neo-Confucianism of Zhu Xi, who approached moral cultivation through book learning (although he also emphasized family rituals), Wang Daokun admired the

Tentatively seeking new ways of imagining value, Wang's inscriptions creatively mediate between the mannered austerity of the classicist and the entrepreneurial ambitions of a Huizhou salesman. As both a leading figure in Ming literary archaism and a powerful sponsor of local businessmen, Wang's gnomic epigrams encapsulate a changing object culture *and* a changing language for talking about things, returning to the skeleton of a Han dynasty form in an attempt to creatively reorganize his own material world.⁴¹

Distribution of Chapters

The first chapter serves as an extended introduction to the topic of inscription and the methodology of the dissertation. I ask what the word *ming* means and reflect on when it started to refer to a literary genre. Returning to early models of the form, I show how the inscription encoded a vision of the human as the prosthetic extension of an artifact, before attending to the adaptation of the form for the practice of connoisseurship in the Northern Song. This chapter situates my project in relation to recent scholarship on writing and materiality in late imperial China. I also expand upon the question of how my study departs from earlier work on the significance of the figure of the collector in late Ming literature. To establish some of the principal tenets of Wang's inscriptive art, I conclude this chapter with a close reading of his resonant epigrams for luxury musical instruments. In the course of this preliminary overview of the dissertation, I reflect on what it might mean to speak of the inscription as a medium through which a thing "talks back."

intuitive philosophy of Wang Yangming (1472–1528) and his Song-dynasty forerunner Lu Xiangshan, who appealed directly to the innate knowledge of people (especially the common folk) and appreciated the social values of each vocation." Guo, *Ritual Opera*, 60.

⁴¹ Wang was not only associated with the values of the Ming "Return to Antiquity" literary movement, his name was assigned to a ten *juan* Wanli era anthology of classical prose, *Qin Han Liuchao wen* 秦漢六朝文, preserved in Tsinghua University Library and the Zhejiang Provincial Library.

If the introductory chapter develops a method for reading the literary inscription, the second chapter, “Writing Materials in Sixteenth Century Huizhou,” turns to the transactions behind the production of a marked artifact, reconstructing the networks of shopkeepers and craftsmen that shaped the social lives of things in Ming China. Working with a recently discovered cache of handwritten letters addressed to a pawnbroker named Fang Yongbin 方用彬 (1542–1608), I trace the emergence of a new figure, the Huizhou dealer, examining how they creatively synthesized strategies of connoisseurship and salesmanship, while remodeling the relationship between artisanal knife-work and calligraphy. If Ming scholars sought to suture and control the gap between the calligraphic sign and its substrates, treating a graven mark as the indexical extension of a single refined hand, the entrepreneurial Huizhou artisan opened up and indulged the spaces between writing and its material supports, using these interstitial nodes for the production of composite assemblages that link together, and in doing so transform the social relations between different bodies and selves. I present these developments as a backdrop against which to examine the adaptation of inscriptions for advertising.

The third chapter “Black Mist” examines how Wang Daokun and his associates repurposed the literary inscription for sophisticated forms of branding. Following his relationship to the manufacturer Fang Yulu 方于魯 (1541–1608), I trace the development of name brands for commercial lines of ink, titles formed through the innovative misuse of poetic imagery. As these brands became increasingly unstable semiotic products, I show how a scholar’s words might be turned into supplements for allusive commercial labels. Working with surviving inkcakes, I claim that competitions to distinguish and advertise the novelty of standardized, serially produced commodities threatened the sanction of literary inscription itself.

The final chapter examines how writers strove to propagate the inscription as a mode of political remonstrance. Moving from Wang to the work of his close collaborators and contemporaries, I use the unlikely biography of an inscribed sixteenth century rhinoceros horn cup to explore a set of questions that emerge from the previous chapters: in the face of serial replication, how do you inscribe a singular, inalienable artifact? Could an inscription still sustain meaningful relations to and through a vessel? In what ways might an epigram redeem an artifact from commodification? In posing these questions, the chapter proceeds from the late Ming to the beginning of the nineteenth century, following the efforts of a group of renowned antiquarians as they try to grasp through techniques of reproduction, yet repeatedly fail to domesticate the elusive character of the inscribed thing.

CHAPTER ONE

ON INSCRIPTION

“Someone asked me about inscription.
“Inscriptions! Inscriptions! They would have us be vigilant!””

或問「銘」。曰：「銘哉！銘哉！有意於慎也。」

Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE)

Among the thousands of literary compositions attributed to the Ming Vice Minister of War, Wang Daokun, two terse inscriptions on a pair of goosefoot and bamboo walking sticks appear comparatively insignificant. Preserved alongside similar epigrams for a curved decorative scepter, a mushroom shaped beaker, and a calabash ladle, Wang’s assortment of object-based aphorisms seems tangential to the discursive genres in which the Neo-Confucian project of moral self-cultivation was propagated.¹ The lapidary form of the epigram appears, at first, too slight and closed off to merit serious consideration: despite claims to inscriptional permanence, its compression suggests improvisation, even an “elegant waste of time.”² The very feature of the inscription that may render it appropriate for monumental or epitaphic purposes – its sense of definite closure, its “point” – also makes it easy to discard once its proverbial trick has been mastered.³ Such ostensibly trivial compositions nevertheless start to disclose a distinctive mechanism of personification, one that warps pronominal structure, raising a series of more consequential questions around the imbrication of human subject and inanimate object. While supposedly etched, both epigrams affect an almost conversational demeanor, nudging readers to

¹ For a similar point on the related genre of the *zan* 贊 “encomium,” see Hajime Nakatani, “Body, Sentiment, and Voice in Ming Self-Encomia (Zizan),” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 32 (December 2010): 74.

² William Fitzgerald, *Martial: The World of the Epigram* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 3.

³ *Ibid.*

query what Wang hoped to say to these quotidian things and what his appellative gestures say about how he saw himself. Why might one of the most renowned civil servants of his generation – a thinker famed for promoting a new mercantile ethic and a dominant figure in the “Return to Antiquity” literary movement – pretend to talk to a wooden stick?

As a prosthetic support for a frail body, the walking stick insinuated an aged masculinity, affording Ming writers an apt metaphor for reflection on their service to the state.⁴ The staff was also a well-established signifier for “roaming” (*you* 遊) – an ideal of non-purposeful action or “spiritually ennobling” rather than self-seeking travel – and as such served as an emblem of privileged autonomy. We are reminded at the outset that far from incapacitating the subject, rhetorical self-objectification might be construed as a form of power. Invoking longstanding equivalences between the material of bamboo (or other hard woods) and the “upstanding” character of a distinguished gentleman, Wang’s epigrams harness the objecthood of the stick to comment on an implied human subject: himself, his reader, or an archetypal male scholar.⁵ These two short texts, however, are not simply “troping” on the properties of the artifacts, but on “situations or circuits of communication.”⁶ In both instances, the subject of enunciation (*wo* 我)

⁴ Craig Clunas, *Empire of Great Brightness: Visual and Material Cultures of Ming China, 1368–1644* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 196–7.

⁵ Wang Daokun would reflect at greater length on the parallels between wooden sticks and the moral virtues of the gentleman in a tetra-syllabic eulogy to bamboo (Zhu song 竹頌) and in a colophon for one of his prized collectibles, the Yuan painter Zhao Mengfu’s 趙孟頫 (1254–1322) calligraphic work *Scroll for a Song on Holding the Staff by the Monk of Snowy Crag* (Xueyan heshang zhu zhang ge juan 雪岩和尚拄杖歌卷). See Wang, “Zhu song” 竹頌, *Taihan ji*, 79: 1631; Wang, “Zhao Wenmin gong shu zhuzhang ge ba” 趙文敏公書拄杖歌跋, *Taihan ji*, 86: 1786. Wang briefly mentions a bamboo staff in two exchanges with his peer Wang Shizhen, perhaps the dominant literary figure in late sixteenth century China, while alluding to a goosefoot stick in a letter to another acquaintance and in a sequence of somber poems that he wrote upon being dismissed from office. See Wang Daokun, “Gu Shengshao” 顧聖少, in *Taihan ji*, 97: 1987; Wang, “Dongri shancun shi shou” 冬日山村十首, *Taihan ji*, 109: 2301.

⁶ Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 135.

delivers an apostrophe to an object as if it were a person (*er* 爾; *zi* 子), transforming an “I–it” relation into an “I–thou” relation:⁷

An Inscription on a Goosefoot Staff

You are too great to eat, standing straight for “the upholder of what’s right.”
Would that I took you for my body, I would then never be weary.

藜杖銘

爾碩不食，亭亭乎司直。我躬爾，我則無射。⁸

An Inscription on a Bamboo Staff

Someone offered me sandals; someone gave me a small table. And yet, with such
spruced charm, I could only take you.

竹杖銘

或賜我履，或授我几，猗與有斐，唯子是以。⁹

In both of his apostrophes, Wang toys with the identities of “I” and “you.” A line like “you are too great to eat” points to the goosefoot shrub (edible before it grows too thick), yet also invokes an image in the *Book of Changes* of an “uneaten great fruit,” a metaphor for the “True Gentleman” who has “preserved himself in his integrity and acquired fresh vigor.”¹⁰ “Spruced charm,” meanwhile, conflates a description of kitesfoot – a reed-like cousin of bamboo – with the desirable qualities of a sovereign lord.¹¹ In lines like “would that I took you for my body” or “I could only take you,” the positions of “I” and “you” seem altogether interchangeable: is this

⁷ Barbara Johnson, *Persons and Things* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 9.

⁸ Wang, “Lizhang ming” 藜杖銘, *Taihan ji*, 78: 1616.

⁹ Wang, “Zhuzhang ming” 竹杖銘, *Taihan ji*, 78: 1616.

¹⁰ An allusion to the 剝 Bo hexagram from the *Book of Changes*: “The great fruit is left uneaten. The True Gentleman has a carriage. The small man’s house is pulled apart” (碩果不食，君子得輿，小人剝廬。). The uneaten fruit is the “hard kernel,” the seed of new Yang life. Cheng Yi claimed that it represented the gentleman who had preserved himself in his integrity (from the small men or plotters) and acquired fresh vigor.

¹¹ The line refers to the poem “Little Bay of the Qi” (Qi Yu 淇奧) in the *Airs of Wei* (Weifeng 衛風) from the *Book of Songs*: “Look at that little bay of the Qi, its kitesfoot so delicately waving. Delicately fashioned is my lord” (瞻彼淇奧，綠竹猗猗。有匪君子) – Wang conflates the descriptions of human and plant.

still a human “I” talking to an object as his friend, or an auto-deictic “I,” etched onto the staff, speaking back to (and through) its reader?¹² Who is the “subject of enunciation” and who is the “subject of speech”?¹³

Such questions invite reflection on the status of the first-person pronoun as a “shifter” that sutures the inside and outside of a text. We might assume the “I” brings together a human reader and a named human subject within the poem (*wo*), yet if we were to presume an “I” etched onto the hard surface of an artifact it is less clear whether it would name the writer, the reader, or the object as it comes to life through the human recitation of its inscription. Ascertaining whether the represented “I” (or “ego”) of the inscription is a man or the stick – the question of when anthropomorphism slips into *prosopopoeia* – depends upon how we envisage the engraved character of Wang’s words. Other Ming epigrams succinctly capture this dislocation and substitution of “I” and “you” – of ego-centric object and human sounding device – as in the following eight-character piece for a burst-pattern zither, which performs the conceit of the “knower of tones” (*zhiyin* 知音), a euphemism for a bosom friend: “I speak to you and you respond to me” (吾與爾言，爾亦予諾。)¹⁴ “You” and “I”, person and thing, enter into a feedback loop opened up and sustained by this gnomic prose form. As we shall soon see, a rhetorical convention in the classical literary inscription was that its address be interpreted as delivered back from the thing towards an often awestruck human. In any event, Wang’s two

¹² As Jesper Svenbro suggests: “writing makes it possible for inscribed objects to refer to themselves in the first person despite their being just objects, not living, thinking beings endowed with the power of speech.” Jesper Svenbro, *Phrasikleia: An Anthropology of Reading in Ancient Greece* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 30. Svenbro demonstrates how archaic Greek inscriptions force the reader to become their speaking subject and play with the identity forced upon them by reading an inscription. I see a similar dynamic at play in classical Chinese epigrams.

¹³ As Hajime Nakatani noted, the subject of enunciation (*énonciation*) refers to the subject to whom the actual act of speaking can be attributed, whereas the subject of speech (*énoncé*) refers to the subject represented within the text of the speech. Nakatani, “Body, Sentiment, and Voice,” 75.

¹⁴ Zhang Dai 張岱, *Langhuan wenji* 琅嬛文集, ed. Yun Gaodian 雲告點 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1985), 235.

epigrams serve to introduce and frame one of the primary observations of this study: that the inscription was an apparatus for projecting conceptions of personhood onto material artifacts, yet that it was also a channel through which things might usurp or requisition a human persona and voice. The inscription was a medium, in other words, through which things might begin to talk back.

Overview

This extended introduction is divided into three sections that serve to elucidate three distinct frameworks for examining the topic of inscription: the literary, the material, and the historical. For the purpose of this introduction I discuss these three formations discretely, yet they are inextricably intertwined and reading an inscription necessarily demands moving between these interpretative perspectives, accounting for the ways in which they are mutually constituted. It is precisely at the interstices of the literary, the material, and the historical – intersections made legible in the form of the object inscription – that we can rethink what these designations mean respectively and how they relate to each other more broadly. Rather than simply reflect on how literature *represents* the material world, we can gauge the extent to which material practices of marking objects redefined the parameters and specificity of the “literary” as a concept and a field of activity. Rather than use literary texts as supplementary historical sources for studying objects, we might consider how epigrams transformed the biographical trajectories of artifacts, while lending expression to the less tangible values invested in things. Rather than historicize the production of an inscription to assess its significance, we can see how inscriptions intervened in the structure of the event (political or otherwise) and were used to retroactively engineer narratives of the past. Reading an inscription, in this sense, becomes its own historiographical

operation. An overriding methodological aim of this project is to disturb both the coherence of, and the existing disciplinary boundaries between these analytics: to productively unsettle distinctions between the domains of human experience that words like “literature” and “materiality” are often used to circumscribe, forcing the historian of material culture to think with puns and personification, while inviting the reader of poetry to assess the lip of a horn cup or the worn base of an ink-cake.

First, I trace the meaning of the word “inscription” (*ming*) and the related development of the inscriptive epigram (*ming*) as a literary practice from the Han dynasty onwards, demonstrating how this genre encodes a particular relationship between person and thing, where the human is rendered subservient to the command of an object. I show how the classical epigram was adapted in the Northern Song for the performance of connoisseurship: as a tactic for asserting ideals of “uselessness,” while functioning as a calculated promotional strategy for endorsing the appurtenances of a scholar’s studio. Even if the epigram was repurposed as a critical instrument for stitching together the guise of the refined connoisseur, it threatened to pick apart this image by yoking delicately crafted personae to the social lives of marked artifacts. This first section is not intended as a comprehensive overview of the inscription as a genre, but as an account of critical possibilities for examining the relationship between person and thing latent within the literary form of the epigram. My account is designed to offer a picture of the conventions and models of the inscription available to Wang Daokun when he turned to the form in the mid- to late sixteenth century.

The second section of this chapter situates my project in relation to recent work on questions of writing and materiality. In this section, I examine how engraved epigrams relate to other graphic media, particularly the xylograph – while reflecting on how inscriptions

productively reformulate existing critical idioms for approaching textual materialism. Rather than focus on the question of *what* an object inscription is, I move to the question of *when* the materiality of an inscription matters (and to whom). This section of the chapter also introduces a central theme that recurs throughout the study: the shifting relation between the literary inscription (*ming*) and other species of graphic markings (*kuanzhi* 款識).

Finally, I return to Wang Daokun, the owner of the walking sticks with whom we began, to clarify why I feel he serves as an especially illuminating case to explore changing practices of engraving words onto objects in early modern China. Rather than offer a preliminary biography of Wang and proceed to examples of his work, I demonstrate how his reputation and his career were predicated upon and redefined by acts of writing on things. The chapter concludes with a reading of an early epigram on a *pipa* – a four stringed-lute – a textual artifact that suggestively encompasses the critical tenets of Wang’s inscriptive project.

Throughout this extended introduction, I return to the trope of the inscribed thing talking back, offering a more nuanced account of what might at first seem to be a counterintuitive proposition. To speak of a loquacious object is first to pursue a rhetorical conceit that emerges in the classical epigram, accounting for the impact of this mode of address on our expectations as readers of literature. It is also an effort to grasp the defamiliarizing experience of handling and repeating the words etched onto artifacts of the past, where the object itself seems to dictate the terms of our engagement. As a guiding metaphor, the talking thing finally directs us to moments where an inscribed artifact no longer serves as a human puppet or ventriloquist’s dummy, and starts instead to unsettle our views about the nature of both talk and things.¹⁵

¹⁵ See Daston: “Even if they do not literally whisper and shout, these things press their messages on attentive auditors – many messages, delicately adjusted to context, revelatory, and right on target. Skeptics will insist that all this talk of talk with respect to things is at best metaphoric and at worst a childish fantasy about tongues in trees and books in brooks. Accept these doubts for the sake of argument: there is still the puzzle of the

Part 1: Inscription

Naming Names

The earliest definition of “inscription” (*ming*) in transmitted texts appears in a discussion of engraved bronze ritual vessels. While such artifacts and the words they bear have long been a focus of antiquarian research, there are scant references to, or explanations for the rationale behind bronze inscription in received literature from early China. Vessels are depicted in textual sources as emblems of ritual efficacy and political power, yet the purpose of engraving script onto durable metallic surfaces is almost entirely overlooked by classical commentators. The earliest and lengthiest discussion of *ming* appears in an undated ritual text, “Protocols of Sacrifice” (Jitong 祭統), now included in the *Record of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), possibly from pre-imperial or Han times, yet surviving in an extant recension that dates to the Six Dynasties or later.¹⁶ As Martin Kern has remarked, while this account has been cited by later scholars as the *locus classicus* for the word *ming*, it is retrospectively rationalizing a practice – Western Zhou bronze inscription – that had by the time of the composition of the *Record of Rites* largely ceased to exist.¹⁷ We should read these early definitions of *ming* not as contemporary descriptions of actual bronze inscriptions, but as later efforts to explain why it was necessary to engrave words onto metal, answering an implicit question that was probably only posed when the logic of the

stubborn persistence of the illusion, if illusion it be. If we humans do all the talking, why do we need things not only to talk about but to talk with?” Lorraine Daston, “Introduction: Speechless,” *Things That Talk: Object Lessons from Art and Science*, ed. Lorraine Daston (New York: Zone Books), 12.

For Bruno Latour, listening to the “voice of nonhumans” – “adding a series of new voices to the discussion, voices that have been inaudible up to now” – is the precondition for a new democracy of people and things, a way of constructing new forms of ethical responsibility and agency beyond the human-unhuman, animate-inanimate distinctions of Western modernity. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 63–86; 54.

¹⁶ For a discussion and translation of the “Protocols of Sacrifice,” see Paul Goldin, “The Legacy of Bronzes and Bronze Inscriptions in Early Chinese Literature,” in *A Sourcebook of Ancient Chinese Bronze Inscriptions*, ed. Constance A. Cook et al. (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China, 2016), lv–lxiv.

¹⁷ Martin Kern, “The Performance of Writing in Western Zhou China,” in *The Poetics of Grammar and the Metaphysics of Sound and Sign*, ed. Sergio La Porta et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 114.

practice was no longer self-evident. Such anachronism raises an interpretative problem concerning a central tenet in the account from the “Protocols of Sacrifice,” the relationship of *ming* (inscription) to *ming* 名 (name): is this link, to cite Kern, a “genuine reflection on an early etymological figure,” or a “mere paronomastic pun”?¹⁸

The definition of inscription provided in the “Protocols” can be divided into three subsections: first, an opening account of the general relationship between inscription and naming;¹⁹ second, guidelines for the composition of an inscription (what it should do; whom it should be addressed to);²⁰ third, guidelines for reading an inscription.²¹ “Inscribing a cauldron,” the passage begins, “is to name oneself” (夫鼎有銘，銘者，自名也。). This act of “naming oneself” – *of making oneself known* – is premised on recognizing the virtues of one’s ancestors and seeking to selectively display their moral accomplishments (“achievements and brilliance, efforts and toils, honors and distinctions, fame and name”) for later generations. In this account, inscription – tied to the protection of patrilineal prerogative and the preservation of a clan’s property – delimits an authoritative version of a lineage’s history (“name”) that can be

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ “With regard to cauldrons with inscriptions: in the “inscription” (*ming* 銘), one “names” (*ming* 名) oneself. One names oneself in order to cite and extol what is beautiful in one’s ancestors, and clearly exhibit it for later generations. Among one’s ancestors, there are none without something beautiful and none without something ugly. The principle of a bronze inscription is to cite what is beautiful and not what is ugly. This is the heart of filial sons and grandsons; only a worthy can do it.” [Translation adapted from Goldin] (夫鼎有銘，銘者，自名也。自名以稱揚其先祖之美，而明著之後世者也。為先祖者，莫不有美焉，莫不有惡焉，銘之義，稱美而不稱惡，此孝子孝孫之心也。唯賢者能之。) Sun Xidan 孫希旦 ed., *Liji jijie* 禮記集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989), 1250.

²⁰ “An inscription arranges and compiles the virtue and good of one’s ancestors, so that their merit, glory, rewards, and reputation are displayed throughout the world, and in feasting them with sacrificial vessels, one attains one’s name; in this way, one makes offerings to one’s ancestors. One does honor to filial piety by displaying and extolling one’s ancestors. Juxtaposing oneself to them is condescension; clearly showing [these things] to later generations is instruction.” (銘者，論譏其先祖之有德善，功烈勳勞慶賞聲名列於天下，而酌之祭器；自成其名焉，以祀其先祖者也。顯揚先祖，所以崇孝也。身比焉，順也。明示後世，教也。) Ibid.

²¹ “In an inscription, above and below [i.e. ancestors and descendants] all attain [their place] with a single reference. Thus when a noble man inspects an inscription, having praised those who are cited in it, he also praises whoever made it. Because the maker had sufficient insight to discern their [achievements], sufficient humanity to partake of them, and sufficient wisdom to profit from them, he can be called worthy. One who is worthy without boasting can be called reverent.” (夫銘者，壹稱而上下皆得焉耳矣。是故君子之觀於銘也，既美其所稱，又美其所為。為之者，明足以見之，仁足以與之，知足以利之，可謂賢矣。賢而勿伐，可謂恭矣。) Ibid.

transmitted into the future. The account encourages those who approach inscriptions to “model their bodies [on the vessel], in compliance” (身比焉，順也。) as a way of submitting to the examples of ancestral worthies: an injunction that begins to suggest how the functions encoded in inscribed objects program the behavior of their users.²²

The definition of inscription in the *Record of Rites* not only tied the practice of engraving script on vessels to a broader philosophical discourse on names and naming, it also yoked definitions of the word “name” to accounts of inscription. Liu Xie’s 劉勰 (465–520) chapter on *ming* in his comprehensive survey of classical literary thought, *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (*Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍), invokes the *Record of Rites* in defining the practice: “The term *inscription* means to name; to distinguish an article necessarily means *rectifying its name*” (故銘者，名也，觀器必也正名。)²³ Liu Xie ties inscription to naming and by extension to the Confucian doctrine of the “rectification of names” (*zhengming* 正名): the ethos that the correct use of names is directly related to the ethical-political activity of “correcting the self” (*zheng shen* 正身).²⁴ Definitions of inscription as naming, with the purpose of “self-admonishment”

²² There is another early definition of *ming* also included in the *Record of Rites* which links the word to a funerary banner bearing the name of the deceased: “Inscription is a brilliant banner. Because (the person of) the deceased, can no longer be distinguished, therefore (the son) by this flag maintains the remembrance of him.” (銘，明旌也，以死者為不可別已，故以其旗識之。). Zheng Xuan glosses this: “*ming* means to write the dead person’s name (*ming*) on the banner” (銘，書死者名于旌). This definition may have influenced later applications of the word *ming* to epitaphic and funerary commemorative genres (*muzhi ming* etc.), yet it was rarely cited by late imperial genre theorists in definitions of the *ming* literary genre, the focus of this study.

²³ “The term *ming* means to name; to distinguish an article necessarily entails calling it by name. To make this appellation correct and assay its connotation, great moral development is essential.” [Translation adapted from Liu Hsieh, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, trans. Vincent Yu-chung Shih (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2015), 78.] (故銘者，名也，觀器必也正名，審用貴乎慎德。) Liu Xie 劉勰, *Wenxin diaolong jiaozhu shiyi* 文心雕龍校注拾遺, ed. Yang Mingzhao 楊明照 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), 92. See Shih’s gloss: “The name, as here used, must not only denote the article to which it is given but also connote a virtue which the name of the article suggests. Hence, “to name” actually means to suggest a moral exhortation in an inscribed appellation. For these moral achievements are what the name connotes. Without these connotative contents the name cannot be considered as correct.” Liu, *The Literary Mind*, 82.

²⁴ Makeham provides an overview of the “name and actuality” (*ming shi* 名實) duality in early Chinese thought. He conceives of Confucius’ approach to *zheng ming* doctrine as a “philosophical vision of social

(*zijing* 自警), remained dominant in Ming dynasty genre theory.²⁵ The Qing philologist Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735–1815), meanwhile, suggested that the definition of “name” in the earliest surviving comprehensive dictionary of Chinese characters, Xu Shen’s 許慎 (c.55–c.149) *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 – “name is self-designation” (名，自命也。) – was actually based on the definition of inscription in the *Record of Rites* (銘者，自名也.).²⁶

These etymological circuits were made possible and sustained – in both Liu Xie and Duan Yucai’s accounts – through paranomastic glossing, or definition through punning: name means inscription, which means name, which means inscription. Homophones gloss homophones in a mode of explication that descends into tautology. And yet, we should not be too hasty to dismiss the etymological relationship between *name* and *inscription* as a “mere” pun. Punning might be construed as a productive process that forges “unexpected connections, whose suggestiveness shimmers on the borders of concepts, threatening to transform them.”²⁷ We might follow the example of the pun to gauge how concerns with naming and inscription spill over into, disrupt, and qualify one another. An overarching assumption of this study is that while the prescriptive doctrine of the “rectification of names” was deployed – reflectively and rhetorically – to sanction the prestige of the inscription as a literary genre, the fate of inscribed objects in sixteenth century China challenged how the purpose of naming and the activity of “correcting the self” (*zheng shen*) were construed. We will see this dynamic play out in examples as diverse as

engineering based on nominalist principles of naming.” The value of names is that they prescribe social-political distinctions, as Makeham puts it: “the primary arena for the application of Confucius’ doctrine of “correction of names” was socio-political rank and class differentiation... the names of various social, political, and ethical institutions were rectified so as to accord or conform with certain immutable standards inherited from tradition.” John Makeham, *Name and Actuality in Early Chinese Thought* (Albany: State University of New York, 1994), 42–44.

²⁵ Xu Shizeng 徐師曾, *Wenti mingbian* 文體明辨, in SKQSCMCS, jibu, vol. 312, 113.

²⁶ Anthony Yu, “Cratylus and the *Xunzi* on Names,” in *Comparative Journeys: Essays on Literature and Religion East and West*, ed. Anthony Yu (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 242.

²⁷ Jonathan Culler, “Call of the Phoneme: Introduction,” in *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters*, ed. Jonathan Culler (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 2.

the public backlash against an official's inscribed endorsement of a counterfeit ink-cake, or in the attempts of court academicians to use the inscription of a rhinoceros horn cup to clear the name of a punished political protestor. As Hajime Nakatani has noted, the “rectification of names” eventually became central to a Confucian ethical program preoccupied with the “regulation of one's *attitude* toward fame (e.g., when to pursue fame and when to relinquish it, the proper ratio of interest and disinterest).”²⁸ In reading inscriptions, we can begin to see how intersecting concerns with the project of “correcting names” and determining the proper bases of a reputation, were perturbed, as in a pun, by practices of engraving epigrams onto things.

King Wu's Walking Stick: The “Literary” Inscription

By the Han dynasty, *ming* or “inscription” had come to designate a genre of belles-lettres, examples of which were both incised on artifacts and circulated on bamboo and silk. Mark Csikszentmihalyi has suggested that this “literary” inscription was an offshoot of the “many masters and hundred experts” (*zhuzi baijia* 諸子百家) genre of political-philosophical writing.²⁹ A text labeled *ming* departed from other *zhuzi baijia* compositions, however, for the way it self-referentially identifies a medium. Whether or not the *ming* was ever actually engraved with a hard implement (rather than a brush and ink) the *claim* of a connection with a particular material substrate played an important authorizing role, binding the message of a text to the imputed properties of an object. Take, for instance, one of the two titles listed in the “Monograph on Arts and Letters” (*Yiwen zhi* 藝文志) from Ban Gu's 班固 (32–92) *History of the Han* (*Hanshu* 漢

²⁸ Hajime Nakatani, “The Empire of Fame: Writing and the Voice in Early Medieval China,” *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 14: 3 (2006): 542. The conflation of “name” with “fame” in Confucian *zhengming* doctrine is usually traced to early medieval authors like Xu Gan 徐幹 (170–217), Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249), Liu Zhou 劉晔 (514–565), Liu Shao 劉邵 (c.170–c.240).

²⁹ Mark Csikszentmihalyi, “Reimagining the Yellow Emperor's Four Faces,” in *Text and Ritual in Early China*, ed. Martin Kern (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 226–248.

書), “The Pan and Yu Vessel Warnings” (Panyu jie 盤盂戒): a composition that while purportedly engraved (*ming*) onto a water basin, was documented as surviving on bamboo strips (26 *pian* 篇).³⁰ According to the “Great Learning” (*Daxue* 大學) chapter of the *Record of Rites*, this basin was said to have been inscribed with an aphorism (later deployed by Ezra Pound as a modernist credo):

Tang’s washbasin was engraved with the words: “If you can one day renovate yourself, do so from day to day. Yea, let there be daily renovation.”

湯之盤銘曰：苟日新，日日新，又日新。³¹

As Edward Shaughnessy has noted, Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978) made the revisionist (and still contentious) claim that this was actually a pastiche wrought from ancestor dedications on Shang dynasty bronze vessels;³² nevertheless, the editors of the *Record of Rites* and commentators throughout the imperial period interpreted the text as an admonition that simply thematized the function of a washbasin: just as you use a washbasin to rinse your body, so you should follow this guiding analogy to cleanse your mind and refine your behavior. The nominally “inscribed” aphorism invokes its bond with the vessel to produce a moral mnemonic, to encode a rudimentary object lesson. Late imperial genre theorists took heed and promoted these nine characters as the primary model for the literary inscription.³³

In this rhetorical overlay of message and medium, Csikszentmihalyi infers the lasting influence of archaic bronze inscriptions – where the assertion of a link between a text and a ritual

³⁰ Ibid., 229.

³¹ *Liji zhengyi*, 60.3 a.

³² Shaughnessy: “[Guo] suggests that the words transcribed as *ri xin* 日新 (daily renew) must originally have read *ri xin* 日辛, in which *xin* is one of the ten “heavenly stems” (*tiangan* 天干) routinely used in the temple names of Shang ancestors. [Guo] further suggests plausible derivations for the other three words that begin the phrases: *xiong* 兄 (brother) for *gou* 苟, *zu* 祖 (grandfather) for *ri* 日, and *fu* 父 (father) for *you* 又. Thus, the phrase would seem to reflect three different ancestor dedications, one to an “Elder Brother Day Xin,” one to a “Grandfather Day Xin,” and one to a “Father Day Xin.” Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Sources of Western Zhou History: Inscribed Bronze Vessels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 3.

³³ Xu, *Wenti mingbian*, in SKQSCMCS, jibu, vol. 312, 113.

vessel served to valorize or sanctify engraved writing – and monumental stone inscriptions of the type described by Martin Kern in his study of the steles of Qin Shihuang 秦始皇 (259–210 BCE), where “[their] very meaning and efficacy rests on their physical adhesion to [these] places... and these sites, geographically real and cosmologically meaningful, are literally inscribed within the texts.”³⁴ This is to say that the messages of ritual bronze engravings and stone carvings – as forms of public display – communicate through their physical connection to, and the sheer presence of, monumental material substrates. Literary inscriptions can be seen to inherit and articulate this stance even in the absence of links to imposing, durable carriers. With Han epigrams preserved on bamboo, Csikszentmihalyi argues that meaning rests not in a site “inscribed within the text,” but rather in a rhetorical (often imagined) connection to a ritually significant vessel or figure.³⁵ Reading a literary inscription necessarily involves parsing this indexical posture, weighing connotative meaning against the inferred social authority of the “thing” the text names.

Early examples of literary inscriptions tend to promote a connection between an object and former rulers and sages. As Csikszentmihalyi and Yuri Pines have noted, one of the central figures associated with the literary inscriptions recorded in Han sources was King Wu 武王, the founder of the Zhou dynasty and a cultural paragon of the *Ru* 儒 tradition. Shortly after King Wu ascended the throne, it was said that he received the esoteric “treasured essentials” of the Yellow

³⁴ Martin Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-Huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation* (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 2000), 57. It is imperative, here, to underscore the point that epigrammatic inscriptions documented in Han sources (admonitory texts like Tang's basin inscription), bear little in common with the formal structures of actual Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, which as Shaughnessy has suggested are conventionally divided into four components: 1) date and place notation; 2) event notation; 3) the gift list; and 4) the dedication. Shaughnessy, *Sources of Western Zhou History*, 73–85.

³⁵ Csikszentmihalyi consequently suggests that this rhetorical posture extends to a range of other texts (de-contextualized or pseudepigraphic “uninscribed- inscriptions”), citing passage from the *Laozi* and an early Han manuscript excavated at Mawangdui 馬王堆 in the 1970s named “Establishing the Mandate” (Liming 立命) as examples of writings that claim sacrality from a link, either historical or imagined, to a ritually significant medium. In the latter case, the text's evocation of the medium of a vessel with four faces – a vessel that possibly depicted the Yellow Emperor as having four faces – coincides with a message that orders ministers to govern the four directions.

Emperor from books written in cinnabar ink: “impressed to the point of abject terror, he immediately withdrew and began to inscribe admonitory writings... on the four corners of his mat, his table, his mirror, his washbasin, the pillar, his staff, his sash, his shoes, his cups and food vessels, the door, the southern windowsill, his sword, his bow, and his halberd.”³⁶ Pines sees this “explosion of inscription-making” – a scene recorded in the Han compendium *Elder Dai’s Record of Ritual* (*Da Dai liji* 大戴禮記)³⁷ – as intentionally comic: an “ironic interpretation” of the *topos* of making inscriptions on durable artifacts. He points to the improbable scenario of this sage monarch, a figure on a par with early Thearchs, sitting in a room surrounded by his own incised maxims: admonitions that rehearse trite platitudes culled from other works, often simply stating the properties of everyday objects:³⁸

The staff inscription reads: How does danger arise? From becoming angry. How does one lose the way? Through attractions and desires. How does one forget this? Through riches and nobility.

杖之銘曰：「惡乎危？於忿寔。惡乎失道？於嗜慾。惡乎相忘？於富貴。」³⁹

³⁶ “Wu Wang jianzuo” 武王踐阼, *Da Dai liji huijiao jizhu* 大戴禮記彙校集注, ed. Huang Huaixin 黃懷信 et al. (Xi’an: Sanqin chubanshe, 2005), 659.

³⁷ Yuri Pines, “Confucian Irony? King Wu’s Enthronement Reconsidered,” in *At Home in Many Worlds Reading, Writing and Translating from Chinese and Jewish Cultures: Essays in Honour of Irene Eber* ed. Raoul D. Findeisen et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 55–68. *Elder Dai’s Record of Ritual* is a “quasi-canonical” early Han collection of heterogeneous texts, collected by Dai De in the first century BCE, that deal either with Confucius and his disciples or with the deeds and words of paragon rulers and ministers of high antiquity. Yuri Pines provides a detailed overview of the “King Wu’s Enthronement” (Wu Wang jianzuo 武王踐阼) chapter and the recent rediscovery of an early version of the text that has been published as part of the Shanghai Museum collection of bamboo manuscripts. For this text, transcribed and annotated by Chen Peifen 陳佩芬, see Ma Chengyuan 馬承源, *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu* 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008) 7: 147–168.

³⁸ Pines compares the scene to the TV-walls in Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*. Most of the maxims are, as he notes, stock phrases that appear in various contemporaneous texts: “in all likelihood, the similarities reflect the fact that the cited phrases belong to what might have been a set of ancient proverbs, a kind of a common denomination of basic political wisdom... inflated expectations are crushed by a series of banal and intellectually uninspiring sayings. The contrast between the efforts invested by King Wu in preparing his “interactive room” and the dullness of his self-admonitions could not be more striking.” Pines, “Confucian Irony,” 2510.

³⁹ “Wu Wang jianzuo,” 659.

A commentator named Lu Bian 盧辯 from the mid-sixth century noted that this pithy aphorism makes a point about cultivating oneself to pursue the Way (Dao 道) by invoking the reliable use of the staff for walking along a path (*dao* 道): the medium, again, is the message.⁴⁰ The inscription is a truism, the only question is whether the reader is supposed to unwittingly follow or discern the banality of such an assertion.⁴¹ Proceeding in this fashion, the forgetful sage reorients himself through the correct use of household things, through becoming a machine-like extension of his tools:

The inscription on the mirror read: Look at what is in front, think of what is behind.

鑑之銘曰：「見爾前，慮爾後。」

The inscription on the bow read: In the appropriateness of bending and stretching, in the conduct of fading and prospering – never forget your mistakes!”

弓之銘曰：「屈伸之義，廢興之行，無忘自過。」⁴²

We are left with the puzzle of a sage who gives his words to a thing so the thing can reinstruct him how to be a sage: a king who is at once master and slave of his possessions.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ My interest (and Pines’s work on irony) addresses the transmitted text of these inscriptions. Zhou Boqun has recently translated and reinterpreted the excavated Shanghai Museum Manuscript. He suggests that the reader is supposed to “take the unimpressive Cinnabar Document seriously” precisely because it was a truism. He also claims there is a symbolic logic to the order of artifacts (moving from those props closest to the king, outwards), yet such observations have not informed the late imperial reception of the *Wu wang jian zuo* transmitted text. Boqun Zhou, “A Translation and Analysis of the Shanghai Museum Manuscript *Wu Wang Jian Zuo*” (Unpublished manuscript), 26.

⁴² Ibid., 657; 665.

The Sealed Mouth of the Metal Man

In each of his maxims, King Wu gives his words to an object so that it can speak them back to him: his acts of inscription staging a form of narcissistic ventriloquism. This trope of the inscribed object addressing its admonition to an often awestruck spectator is more fully developed in another early literary inscription on the statue of a “Metal Man” (*jinren ming* 金人銘), recorded in Liu Xiang’s 劉向 (79–8 BCE) *Garden of Discourse* (*Shuoyuan* 說苑).⁴³ In this case, Confucius inspects a Zhou ancestral temple and finds a metallic figure with a covered mouth and an inscription on its back. This physical detail – that the statue’s mouth is “sealed three times” (*sanjian qi kou* 三緘其口) – again proves to be critical to the message the object imparts:

I am a man of antiquity, cautious with my words. Take warning! Take warning!
Do not speak too much; as the more one opens one’s mouth, the more one courts failure. Do not become involved in too many matters; as the more one acts, the more one invites calamity... Men hurry all over, yet I alone remain here. The masses are deluded, yet I do not follow. I store my knowledge inside myself; I do not discuss my technique with others... Take warning! Take warning!

古之慎言人也，戒之哉！戒之哉！無多言，多口多敗；無多事，多事多患...
人皆趨彼，我獨守此。眾人惑惑，我獨不從。內藏我知，不與人論技... 戒之哉！戒之哉！⁴⁴

In Liu Xiang’s account, Confucius takes heed of the statue’s admonition and declares to his disciples: “If one were to deport oneself like this, how could one court disaster by opening one’s mouth?” (行身如此，豈以口遇禍哉！).⁴⁵ Like King Wu’s staff, the inscribed metal man serves as an ethical model worthy of human imitation: Confucius’s injunction to mimic the durable,

⁴³ A version of the “metal man” inscription – with variant expressions – is preserved in the “Guan Zhou” 觀周, chapter 11 in Wang Su 王肅, *Kongzi jiyu* 孔子家語, in *Kongzi jiyu shuzheng* 孔子家語疏證, in CSJCCB, vol. 507, 72.

⁴⁴ *Shuoyuan*, ed. Liu Xiang, 20 vols., in *Shuoyuan jiaozheng* 說苑校證, ed. Xiang Zonglu 向宗魯 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 10: 258.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

static, silent “body” of the statue resonates with how the basic functions of the staff, the mirror, or the washbasin in King Wu’s admonitions encode precepts for human action. Here, however, the thing is no longer a prosthetic extension of man, but an anthropomorphic image that commands his submission.⁴⁶ At the heart of this encounter lies the curious relationship between the statue’s silence (or “sealed” mouth) and his words: the statue “speaks,” paradoxically, only to urge its audience (Confucius) to refrain from speaking. In Liu Xiang’s narrative, the inscription on the back of the statue reads as if it were a performed speech replete with first-person pronouns and exclamative particles: there are no references to any author or authority behind the production of the statue’s engraved text, which adds to a sense that it is an impromptu, auto-deictic address, delivered by the metal man himself.⁴⁷ Or, conversely, that Confucius has been coerced into voicing the will of the statue.

The example shows how an admonitory inscription subjugates its reader, forcing the human to surrender their mastery of speech to the command of the inanimate object. The initially silent thing speaks through its human audience with the aim of eventually rendering them mute. Consigned to the peripheries of pre-modern literary thought, the inscription encoded a speech-act that negated the sovereignty of its speaker (King Wu or Confucius) and called into question the very purpose of speech: using words to stage a parable of “transitive silence,” a silence of concentration, anticipation, event resilient protest,⁴⁸ a motivated silence that unsettles the words

⁴⁶ There are competing interpretations of whom the “bronze man” statue depicts: since Confucius finds the figure at a Zhou ancestral temple, it is possible the figure was King Wu. Another tradition – associated with the Qing scholar Yan Kejun 嚴可均 (1762–1843) – claims that the statue was made by the Yellow Emperor or by Shangfu 尚父 based on the Yellow Emperor’s admonition. Csikszentmihalyi identifies parallels between the content of the inscription and that of the *Laozi*, leading to a supposition that the figure is Laozi. It is also possible that the statue represents no individual in particular.

⁴⁷ The length of the pronouncement similarly seems at odds with the short aphorisms on King Wu’s furniture.

⁴⁸ See Kenneth Gross: “To probe the fantasy of... silence in stone would become an occasion to reflect on what it means to speak within or against other silences, to speak within or against a language that inhabits such silences. It may teach us what our own need or fear of silence may amount to. That probing may help reactivate our

we “already seem to know,” providing an occasion to rethink the “possibilities of speech.”⁴⁹ If the inscription allows a thing to talk back, it does so at first by challenging us to suspend our assumptions about what we think “talking” entails. The admonition to be “cautious in speaking” (*shenyan* 慎言) pervades later approaches to inscription, yet it would become a guiding precept in a particular sub-genre named the “Inscription Placed to the Right of My Seat” (*Zuo you ming* 座右銘), a designation that has passed into vernacular usage as a synonym for “motto.”⁵⁰ The prime model for this branch of epigram has conventionally been attributed to the Later Han writer Cui Yuan 崔瑗 (78–143), and clearly draws from the injunctions of the Metal Man:

Do not discuss the shortcomings of others. Do not speak of one’s own excellence...
Be cautious when you speak. Be restrained when you eat and drink. Recognizing
sufficiency is better than being struck by ill fortune. If you can constantly be
circumspect in how you proceed, then you will thrive forever and ever.

無道人之短，無說己之長... 慎言节饮食，知足胜不祥。行之苟有恒，久久
自芬芳。⁵¹

Wang Daokun, the owner of the two walking sticks with which we began, was one of the leading writers to take up this model in the late imperial period. The celebrated Edo connoisseur Ichikawa Beian 市河米庵 (1779–1858), for instance, included Wang’s contribution alongside Cui Yuan’s text and an attempt by the Qianlong 乾隆 emperor (r. 1735–1796) as exemplary right-seat maxims. Wang’s deictic injunctions appear to ask the reader – appropriately given the

hardened ears as well as our jaded eyes.” Kenneth Gross, *The Dream of the Moving Statue* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 148.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ See Yang Xiong’s 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE) chapter “Cultivating One’s Person” (*Xiushen* 修身) from *Exemplary Figures* (Yangzi fayán 揚子法言): “Someone asked me about inscription. “Inscriptions! Inscriptions! They would have us be vigilant!”” (或問「銘」。曰：「銘哉！銘哉！有意於慎也。」). Yang Xiong, *Exemplary Figures*, trans. Michael Nylan (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 40–41.

⁵¹ Cui Yuan, “Zuoyou ming” in *Quan shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 ed. Yan Kejun (Taipei: Hongye shuju, 1975), 45: 718. For an introduction to the sub-genre see Li Nailong 李乃龍, “Cui Yuan ‘Zuo you ming’ rensheng guan de lilun diise – jian xi zuo you ming de wenti yiyi” 崔瑗《座右銘》人生觀的理論底色—兼析座右銘的文體意義, *Henan daxue xuebao* (Shehui kexue ban) 46. 2 (2006): 79–81.

early example of the “metal man” – to reflect on the fate of a bronze container in order to cultivate their behavior.⁵² Amid his creative adaptations of the epigram, Wang still sought to renew the appellative gestures of some of its earliest rhetorical figures.

On Pointless Inscriptions

For Yuri Pines, King Wu’s inscribed admonitions can be read as a satirical treatment of the *Ru* 儒 obsession with the “sacred legacy” of former monarchs and the predominant trend of making written records of ideologically important statements: the maxims, he claims, are an extension of an “increasingly critical mood toward the fabrication of the past and the proliferation of faked textual authorities.”⁵³ And yet, despite this specter of irony, these inscriptions would be cited as an important model for the *ming* 銘 genre in canonical medieval treatises, notably in Cai Yong’s 蔡邕 (132–192) fragment *Disquisition on Inscription* (Ming lun 銘論) preserved in Li Shan’s 李善 (ca. 630–689) commentary to Xiao Tong’s 蕭統 (501–531) *Selections of Refined Literature* (*Wenxuan* 文選) and in the chapter on inscription in Liu Xie’s *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*. We encounter a set of paradoxes, then, in approaching the inscription as a newly emergent literary genre in the Han dynasty: these are texts that claim a connection to the sages of antiquity, yet are often simple aphorisms supposedly etched onto everyday objects; these are texts that invoke an affiliation with ancient practices of engraving ritual media, yet as widely cited proverbs bear no resemblance to what we now know of ceremonial bronze inscriptions.

⁵² Wang, “Zuoyou ming” 座右銘, *Taihan ji*, 78: 1617. See appendix 1 for translation. Wang’s opening injunction seems to suggest the “grand” appearance (相彼章相) of a bronze container, a point developed through allusions to the use of a vessel by sages as opposed to the use of a vessel as a trinket by merchants (古昔先王，爾烝爾嘗。升賈之堂，見屈于牆。) and his final references to the use of a vessel at a banquet (琢彼珪璋，藐茲琥璜。樂酒作狂，燕朋作荒。). Ichikawa Beian included Wang’s *zuoyou ming* in a selection alongside the examples of Cui Yuan, Bai Juyi, Mi Fu, and the Qianlong Emperor. See Ichikawa Beian, *Bokujō Hikkei* 墨場必携 (Ōsaka: Ōen Shoin, 1880), 1: 4a.

⁵³ Pines, “Confucian Irony,” 2513.

Scholars of Greek and Roman epigram have long noted the contradictory, almost dialectical character of the form, oscillating between the panegyric and the scopic: between a “definitive and unmodifiable rightness,” and an occasionally facetious wit.⁵⁴ Lawrence Manley has aptly summarized this sense of disjunctive simultaneity in his suggestion that, “the impulse to immortalize by inscription could just as well become the satiric impulse to fix a neat, indelible image in a last, unanswerable word.”⁵⁵ With early Chinese literary inscriptions we can begin to detect similar slippages between making and manipulating a worthy point.

A Fish Cauldron Ladle; A Bird-Script Belt-Hook

There are several surviving artifacts – tentatively dated to the Warring States period – that preserve admonitory inscriptions based upon the properties of the object, texts that display rhetorical similarities with the epigrams for Tang’s washbasin or King Wu’s walking stick. If the literary inscription, as we have seen, bears a tenuous connection to early practices of engraving ritual bronze vessels, it assumed a dynamic relation with the material culture of the late Warring States and the Qin-Han period. One of the most widely discussed examples is an inscribed spoon, the “Fish Cauldron Ladle” (Yuding bi 魚鼎匕), excavated in the 1920s, once owned by the influential antiquarian Luo Zhenyu 羅振玉 (1866–1940), and now preserved in the Liaoning Museum (Figure 1.1).⁵⁶ As Li Ling has demonstrated, this enigmatic text urges its reader to follow the example of the spoon as it enters the boiling fish soup in the cauldron:

⁵⁴ Fitzgerald, *Martial*, 3.

⁵⁵ Lawrence Manley, “Proverbs, Epigrams, and Urbanity in Renaissance London,” *English Literary Renaissance* 15 (1985): 259.

⁵⁶ This object has been discussed by a range of scholars, for an overview and introduction to the inscription see Zang Kehe 臧克和, ““Yuding bi” mingwen youguan qiming xingzhi xinshi” 《魚鼎匕》銘文有關器名性質新釋, *Kaogu yu wenwu* 考古與文物 5 (2004): 93–94; Zhan Yinxin 詹鄞鑫, ““Yuding bi” kaoshi” 《魚鼎匕》考釋, *Zhongguo wenzi yanjiu* 中國文字研究 (2001): 175–179. For an image and rubbing of the spoon in Luo Zhenyu’s collection, see Luo Zhenyu, *Zhensong tang ji jintu* 貞松堂吉金圖 (Dalian: Moyuang tang, 1935), 2: 42–43. A color

It reads: be careful! When you set out to swim with watery beasts! Ordinary people don't understand; take heed of the fate of Chiyou! If you're assigned to the thick soup, leaping in and out, who knows where you will meet your end.

曰：钦哉，出游水蟲，下民无智（知），参蚩（尤）命，帛（薄）命入羹，忽入忽出，毋处其所。⁵⁷

Li Ling has perceptively demonstrated that the inscription references the Yellow Emperor's slaughter of the rebel tyrant Chi You 蚩尤: the way he peeled off his skin, stuffed his stomach to make a ball, fermented his bones and flesh, and threw them into a bitter broth for people to drink. The gathering of graphs on the cup-shaped bowl of the ladle perhaps suggests the admonition not only commands the reader – a monarch – to carefully place the spoon in the cauldron, but also cautions them against hastily transferring the boiling soup from the pot to their mouths. The exhortation not to follow Chi You links the inscription to the contemporary propagation of Huang-Lao 黃老 doctrine, a movement that inspired many early literary inscriptions recorded in Han sources:⁵⁸ unlike Tang's basin, which is attributed to the Yellow Emperor's disciple, this spoon treats a popular Yellow Emperor legend as scaffolding for a set of trite aphorisms concerning the function of the object. The connection to the sage is no longer a matter of genealogy, but allegory.

image is included in *Zhongguo meishu quanji: Gongyi meishu bian: Qingtong qi* 中國美術全集：工藝美術編：青銅器, ed. Li Xueqin 李學勤 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1985), 65.

In 2010 another “fish cauldron ladle” bearing a similar inscription in the same format and calligraphic style was discovered in Shanxi, suggesting the spoon and its epigram may have been serially produced from a mold. See Wu Zhenfeng 吳鎮烽, ““Yuding bi” xinshi” 魚鼎匕新釋, *Kaogu yu wenwu* 考古與文物 2 (2015): 54–57.

⁵⁷ I have followed Li Ling's interpretation and transcription (see the articles listed above for an introduction to variants), Li Ling 李零, “Yuding bi xinzheng: “Shiliu jing” zhong de “chiyou hai”” 魚鼎匕新證：〈十六經〉中的蚩尤醢, *Li Ling zixuan ji* 李零自選集, ed. Li Ling 李零 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 1998), 76–83.

⁵⁸ Csikszentmihalyi, “Reimagining the Yellow Emperor's Four Faces,” 228–229.



Figure 1.1: Warring States Fish Cauldron Ladle
Source: Liaoning Museum.

By the Qin-Han period, we find evidence of epigrammatic admonitions that yoke their claims, exclusively, to the function of an object, shedding ties to the sages of antiquity altogether. Some of these texts are of spurious authenticity, yet they would still be collected and studied by antiquarians in dynastic China. A particularly striking example is an inscription on a belt-hook, again provisionally dated to the Warring States, written in bird script (*niao shu* 鳥書) and preserved in Wang Qiu's 王侏 (fl. twelfth century) *Record of Collected Antiquities from Whistlehall* (*Xiaotang jigu lu* 嘯堂集古錄) (the belt-hook itself has not survived) (Figure 1.2). Li Ling, again, has transcribed the inscription:

[Head of the belt-hook] This thing can compromise,

[Midriff of the belt-hook] Do not overreach or pull back, do not feel ashamed, do not regret, and do not be greedy. Respect the people's livelihood; do not distinguish between the noble and the lowly. Bend when it is appropriate to bend; yet be sturdy when it is fitting.

[Tail of the belt-hook] Faithfully.

[鉤首] 勿（物）可慙（折）冬（中）

[鉤腹] 冊復毋反，毋𠄎（作）毋懋（悔），不汲於利。

民產（生）有苟（敬），不擇貴𠄎（賤）。宜曲則曲，宜植（直）則直。

[鉤尾]允。⁵⁹

As Li notes, each line of this text uses a property of the belt-hook to promote an ethical precept: the coming together of the belt-hook teaches compromise; the hook itself is used to invoke greed (from which the gentleman ought to restrain himself); the bending of the belt-hook denotes pliancy. Here, the moral message is no longer linked to a figure of the past, but is encoded in the mechanism of the artifact. And yet, the calligraphy – an elaborate derivative of seal script with convoluted pictographic radicals imitating birds, surviving on insignia from the southern states of the Eastern Zhou period – suggests that investments in the graphic surface of the inscription as a visual ornament, in this case, may have matched or exceeded concerns with whatever the admonition actually said. Li Ling’s transcription renders the interplay between message and imputed substrate eminently legible, yet the transmission of the text by Wang Qiu suggests it captivated its later readers precisely in its enigmatic guise as a multisensible, almost talismanic riddle: at issue is not what the object says, but *how* it seems to say it, simultaneously illuminating and obscuring, divulging and retracting a point.

⁵⁹ Transcription taken from Li Ling, “Zhanguo niaoshu xianming daigou kaoshi” 戰國鳥書箴銘帶鉤考釋, *Li Ling zixuan ji*, 273–277.

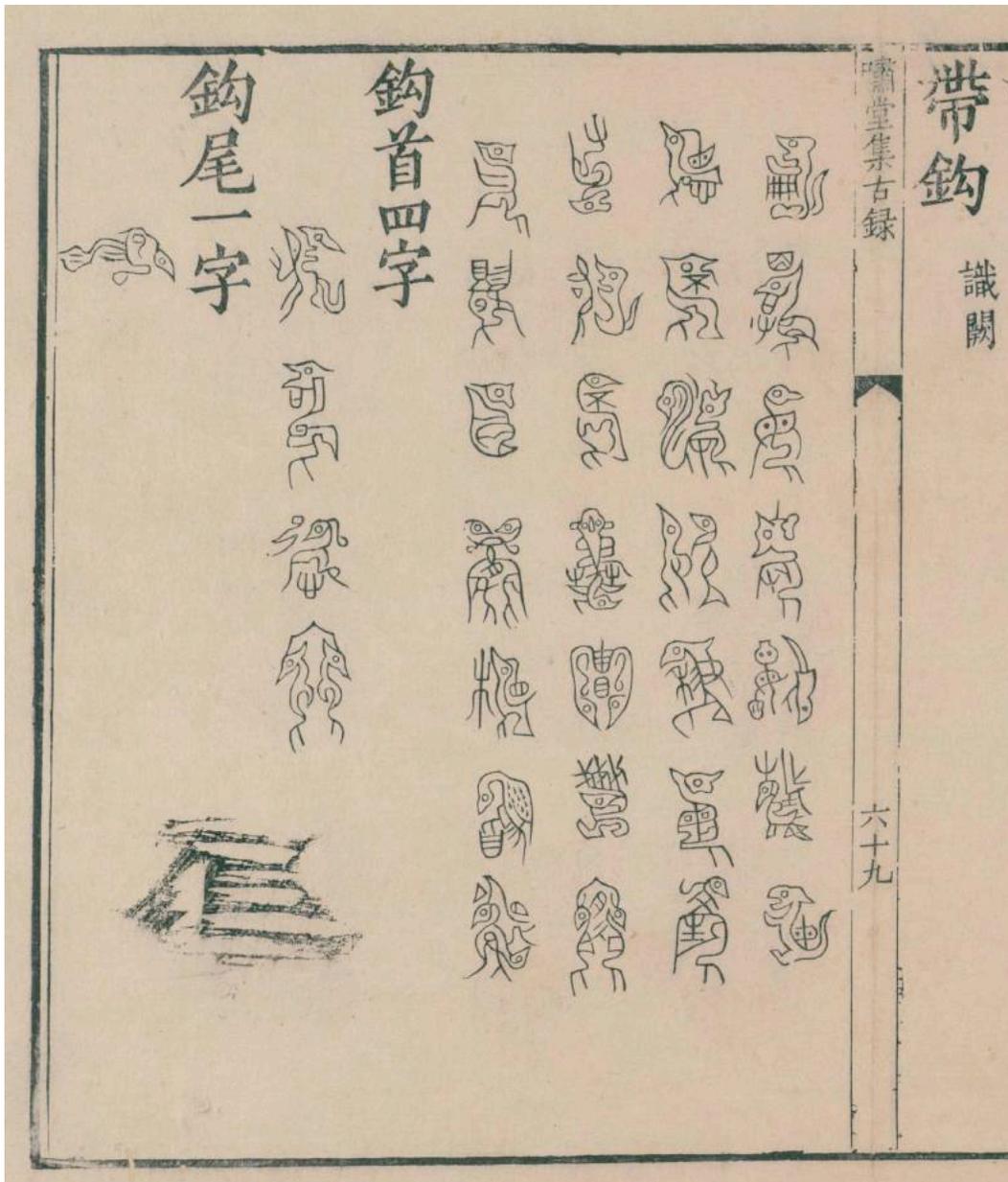


Figure 1.2: Belt Hook Inscription in Bird Script
 Source: Wang Qiu, *Xiaotang jigu lu* (Ming Reprint of Song Edition), 69b.

The increasingly tenuous associations of the literary inscription to rituals and sages became particularly apparent in the reception of the work of the prolific Eastern Han writer Li

You 李尤 (44–126).⁶⁰ Li allegedly wrote 120 inscriptions for Emperor He 和帝 (88–106), predominantly in tetra-syllabic form, on objects ranging from a walking stick, to a flute, a zither, a water clock, a screen, a sambar-tail chowry, boat and oars, slippers, a chariot, a winnowing sieve, a chess set, and a scale.⁶¹ With this sequence, Li You drastically escalates the scenario of King Wu engraving his furniture with admonitions. Like the bird-script belt-hook, Li's inscribed maxims lack any connection to the authorizing figure of a sage: it is consequently unclear what moral sanction or illocutionary force his words might claim for themselves. Liu Xie later reflects on this shift in approaches to inscription in a chapter on the genre from his synthetic overview of classical literary thought, *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*:

Li You's writings are limited in ideas and lacking in rhetorical organization; he mixed inscriptions on the divine milfoil plants and tortoise shells with those on games and chess, and placed those on balance and bushel, important in measurement, after those on mortars and pestles. Since he did not even take time to distinguish the proper categories and relative importance of the articles he treated, how can we expect him to have paid attention to the inner structure [or moral connotations] of these things?

李尤積篇，義儉辭碎。著龜神物，而居博奕之中；衡斛嘉量，而在臼杵之末。曾名品之未暇，何事理之能閑哉。⁶²

What starts as a critique of Li You's choice of objects – his oscillation between divinatory and ritual vessels on the one hand, and everyday utensils on the other – leads to a more serious issue: that by neglecting nominal categories and grades of distinction he failed to ascertain the underlying principles behind things. Liu Xie identifies a breakdown in the rhetorical self-validation of the inscription: no longer linked exclusively to sages or ritual media, what was the point of an engraving on something as quotidian as a walking stick or a belt-hook? How might

⁶⁰ Yu Guangrong 庾光蓉, "Li You shiji kaozheng" 李尤事跡考證, *Sichuan shifan daxue xuebao* 四川師範大學學報 24.3 (1997): 124–27; David R. Knechtges in *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, Volume 1, 138–39.

⁶¹ Yan Kejun collected 86 inscriptions by Li You in his "Quan Hou Han wen" – although many are fragments, see Yan, *Quan shanggu*, 746–753.

⁶² Liu, *Wenxin diaolong*, 95. Translation adapted from Shih.

such an inscription authorize an admonition? This was as much a concern with the ethics of using “things” as it was a concern with the efficacy of inscribed words themselves.⁶³

Liu’s criticism of Li You can be read as a belated acknowledgment of a seam of irony in admonitory inscriptions from Han sources, or as wistful resignation to the fact that former instruments of sacred communication had become thoroughly imbricated in a secular world of superfluous things. I see in his remarks, however, an early articulation of a wider concern with the problem of “finding a point” or a legitimating source to sanction an inscription.⁶⁴

Epigrammatic closure depends, to borrow John Mackay’s words, on some kind of “legitimizing machinery” in order to take place confidently: “some sense of order, of what is worthy... a horizon of propriety that enables the point to be put in its place.”⁶⁵ What happens when this legitimating machinery is disassembled? What happens when writers purposefully embrace pointless relationships with things? Liu Xie’s judgment of Li You articulates a lasting ambivalence concerning the epigram’s indexical posture: the question of whether (and how) an inscribed appellation could generate a convincing moral exhortation. And yet, perhaps Liu Xie himself misses the point. He tries, as a consummate genre theorist, to justify the practice of

⁶³ Criticisms of Li You were not simply based on his choice of objects, but addressed the way he compromised the definite miniature form of the epigram (missing its *point*): the genre theorist, Zhi Yu 摯虞 (d. ca. 312), for instance, condemned Li You for the “flaw of prolixity” (而文多穢病。). Zhi begins his comments on the inscription with the observation that “ancient inscriptions were extremely concise, whereas today’s inscriptions are verbose” (夫古之銘至約, 今之銘至煩), a claim that sets up Li You not only as the embodiment of contemporary decadence in epigrammatic composition, but as representative of a broader decline in literary standards from the plain style (*zhi* 質) of antiquity to the ornamented style (*wen* 文) of the present. Deng Guoguang 鄧國光, *Zhi Yu yanjiu* 摯虞研究 (Hong Kong: Xueheng chubanshe, 1990), 182–92. Stephen Owen sees this comment on Li You’s inscriptions as indicative of “the ideological disposition to describe literary change in terms of a process moving from the plain to the ornamented,” see Stephen Owen, “Periodization and Major Inflection Points,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Classical Chinese Literature (1000 BCE–900 CE)*, ed. Wiebke Denecke, Wai-yee Li, Xiaofei Tian (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 19

⁶⁴ The problem, for Liu, extends beyond Li You. He complains that Cui Yin’s 崔駰 (30?–92) inscriptions are “mostly laudatory; only a few are admonitory” (崔駰品物, 贊多戒少), while Cao Pi’s 曹丕 (187–226) inscriptions are “blunt” (魏文九寶, 器利辭鈍。). Ibid.

⁶⁵ John Kenneth Mackay, *Inscription and Modernity* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 6.

inscription in terms of how humans *should* use things, yet as we have seen, early epigrammatists already appear to have been more interested in the question of how things use us. The classical Chinese inscription constituted a distinctive mode of thinking about the human as the prosthetic extension of an artifact, envisioning human character – whether with moral seriousness or for literary play – in terms of materials and mechanisms. Its real ethical lesson was inadvertent humility: repeatedly puncturing human pretensions of self-mastery by foregrounding our subservience to the artifacts we surround ourselves with.

The Evolution of the Inscription

From the Han dynasty onwards, authors would compose “inscriptions” for an increasingly heterogeneous range of phenomena, including mountains and rivers (*shanchuan ming* 山川銘), buildings of various sizes (*gongshi ming* 宮室銘), and gates and wells (*menjing ming* 門井銘).⁶⁶ The designation “inscription” was also incorporated into the titles of what became altogether distinct literary genres: the tomb epitaph (*muzhiming* 墓誌銘; *mubeiming* 墓碑銘) and the stone stele (*beiming* 碑銘; *beiwen* 碑文).⁶⁷ As the word inscription was linked to eulogies for public

⁶⁶ See Xu: “Only Tang’s basin found in the *Great Learning* and King Wu’s inscriptions in *Elder Dai’s Rites* had the method that was taken up by later people. Later on, practices of writing inscriptions gradually became more complex with compositions for mountains and rivers, palaces and studios, gates and wells, the word for inscription could no longer be restricted to artifacts alone” (獨湯盤見于大學，而大戴禮備載武王諸銘，使後人有所取法。是以其後作者寢繁凡山川宮室門井之類，皆有銘詞蓋不但施之器物而已。) Xu, *Wenti mingbian*, in SKQSCMCS, jibu, vol. 312, 113. These wide-ranging uses of the word “inscription” are generally intended to identify commemorative or memorializing functions (perhaps invoking the use of *ming* as a verb in the *Record of Rites*): *ming* compositions for rivers and mountains etc., are formally much more closely related to the elegy (*lei* 誄). Liu Xie had already started to discuss the word *ming* outside of his chapter on the genre in his subsequent entry on “elegy and stone memorial” (*lei bei* 誄碑), which opens: “The Zhou was a dynasty of great virtues, and inscriptions and elegies were written to commemorate them. Those who can write an elegy on the occasion of death are capable of being ministers. To write an elegy is to sum up, that is, to sum up the virtuous conduct of the deceased and immortalize it.” (周世盛德，有銘誄之文。大夫之材，臨喪能誄。誄者，累也，累其德行，旌之不朽也。) Liu, *The Literary Mind*, 85.

⁶⁷ On the distinction between *ming* and *beiming*, *mubeiming*, and *muzhiming*, see Xu, *Wenti mingbian*, in SKQSCMCS, jibu, vol. 312, 113. On *muzhiming* and the category of “entombed epigraphy” see Timothy M. Davis, *Entombed Epigraphy and Commemorative Culture in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1–8. There is a

monuments and the durable medium of stone, the epigram was also taken up as a mannered game, a venue for play with paradox and puzzles. Prince Xiao Ziliang 蕭子良 (464–494) wrote inscriptions for “empty” voids (*xu ming* 虛銘): ears, mouths, and eyes; while other aristocrats of the Xiao Court – in refined garden gatherings – returned to the plastic possibilities of graphic surface, adapting palindromic forms like the “reversible poem” (*huiwen shi* 回文詩) to compose back-to-front epigrams for inkstones, wine trays, round fans, and mirrors.⁶⁸

Despite a degree of semiotic drift, pre-modern genre theorists still presented these widely diverse and contradictory uses of the inscription as derivations from the single root form of the classical epigram engraved onto an artifact (*qiwu ming* 器物銘) – invariably, the models of Tang’s washbasin and King Wu’s marked furniture: models that, as we have seen, are already somewhat contradictory.⁶⁹ Later inscriptions were seen by commentators to have inherited two principles from the classical epigram: 1) admonition (*jingjie* 警戒), and 2) eulogy (*zhusong* 祝頌), yet these texts – whether on rivers or western studio walls, an ear or an inkstone – also strive to sustain an indexical posture, attempting to convince their readers that the meaning of any message was contingent on the assumed properties of an underlying medium.⁷⁰

In this study, I am especially interested in how writers from the late imperial period turned to the classical epigram as a vehicle for judging, ranking, gifting, and asserting ownership

voluminous literature on the “stele inscription” (*beiwén* 碑文), which was already treated in the Han as a separate literary genre from the *ming* inscription (despite occasionally incorporating the word *ming* into its title), for an overview and critical bibliography see David R. Knechtges, *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), vol. 1: 41–44.

⁶⁸ On “empty inscriptions,” see Ge Huafei, “Ming, mingwen yu mingti jianlun,” 71. For examples of palindromic inscriptions (composed in circles that can be read back to front beginning at any character), see Michèle Métail, *Wild Geese Returning: Chinese Reversible Poems*, trans. Jody Gladding (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2017), 89–98. The palindromic inscription remained popular and members of Wang Daokun’s circle composed pieces in this vein, see Pan Zhiheng, “Huiwen jing ming” 迴文鏡銘, “Jingjing ming” 鏡鏡銘, *Luanxiao xiaopin* 鸞嘯小品 (Shanghai Library: 1626 edition), 10: 10b.

⁶⁹ Xu, *Wenti mingbian*, in SKQSCMCS, jibu, vol. 312, 113.

⁷⁰ These two terms for admonition and eulogy are from Xu Shizeng. He divides his anthology of representative earlier inscriptions into these two categories, *ibid.*

over the appurtenances of a scholar's studio. From the Northern Song dynasty onwards, we see many of the rhetorical strategies outlined above – play with pronominal structure and personification, moral admonishment and eulogy, and the submission of a human subject to the command of an object – merge with discursive practices of connoisseurship.

Due to increased competition for positions in the civil service and the rise of new social groups attempting to take on the trappings of the gentry, the tasteful appreciation of luxury artifacts – in social gatherings and literary writing – became increasingly central to elite male self-definition, particularly from the eleventh century onwards. As Ronald Egan has noted, the field of connoisseurship was not only a forum for establishing shared standards of beauty and taste, it was also a central discursive venue in the Northern Song for wide-ranging contests over the boundaries to social classes, the role of the market, and constructions of gender.⁷¹ Literary historians have tended to approach the discourse of connoisseurship by studying two groups of texts: informal jottings (*biji* 筆記) and specialized manuals or practical guides (texts that are commonly titled “canon” (*jing* 經), “history” (*shi* 史), “catalogue” (*pu* 譜), “record” (*lu* 錄), or “treatise” (*zhi* 志)).⁷² The inscription has been largely overlooked in these accounts, yet it served as a critical instrument for stitching together the guise of the connoisseur: for promoting normative judgments, while valorizing defiance from commonplace attitudes; for saying the right thing about an object to claim identity in a privileged group of “refined” friends, while using an object to articulate one's individuality.⁷³ More so than any other textual practice, however, inscription threatened to thwart this delicate negotiation by yoking the reputation of the connoisseur to the social life of a marked artifact. Scholarship on late imperial literary

⁷¹ Ronald C. Egan, *The Problem of Beauty: Aesthetic Thought and Pursuits in Northern Song Dynasty China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁷² Wai-yee Li, “The Collector, the Connoisseur, and Late-Ming Sensibility,” 276.

⁷³ Li: “the object becomes the agent for both the assertion of individuality and integration into the elite culture.” *Ibid.*, 279.

representations of material culture has tended to focus on the figure of the obsessive collector who animates his consonant possessions through the cathectic force of his sentiment, while historical studies of the discourse on objects have approached the character of the connoisseur as a mechanism for preserving social distinction in the face of an erosion of traditional bases of economic power.⁷⁴ Both narratives proceed from a concern with how humans use decorative objects for their own self-definition, often ignoring the paths taken by biographical objects themselves. Inscribed artifacts body forth the words of the connoisseur, yet also possess the capacity to redefine how such claims are apprehended or trusted, intervening in the collector's performance of expertise for unforeseen ends. This model of the inscribed epigram as an apparatus of connoisseurial arbitration can be traced to the totemic figure of Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), a calligrapher, painter, art collector, poet, gastronome, alchemist, and hydraulic specialist, whose achievements laid the foundations for late Ming approaches to objects and writing stationery.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Literary approaches have followed Zeitlin, see Judith Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 61–74. For historical studies, see Clunas, *Superfluous Things*; Wu, *Pinwei shehua*.

⁷⁵ And members of the so-called “Su’s Gate” (Su men 蘇門) group – Su Shi and his followers Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045–1105), Qin Guan 秦觀 (1049–1100) and Chao Buzhi 晁補之 (1053–1110). To gauge the extent of this Northern Song shift in attention back to the literary inscription, it is instructive to contrast the cases of Su Shi and Huang Tingjian with their Tang dynasty forbears, the iconic founders of what later literary historians call the Ancient Prose Movement, Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) and Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819). While Han and Liu had only two and eight inscriptions included in their collected works, seventy inscriptions were attributed to Su Shi and one hundred and four were attributed to Huang. Su Shi and Huang Tingjian not only wrote considerably more inscriptions than their predecessors, they composed more inscriptions for the same types of objects: Han Yu composed a single inkstone inscription; Su Shi wrote at least 28 inscriptions for various inkstones.

For more on the influence of Su Shi and Huang Tingjian on Song dynasty literary inscription, see Xu Waifang 許外芳, “Liang Song mingwen xiaopin chuyi” 兩宋銘文小品芻議, *Wenxue pinglun* 文學評論 4 (2011): 30–39. For an overview of Huang Tingjian’s inscriptions, see Xu Jianping 徐建平, “Lun Huang Tingjian ming de tese” 論黃庭堅銘的特色, *Shanghai Shifan daxue xuebao* 上海師範大學學報 5: 37.3 (2008): 90–95.

Inscribing the Connoisseur: Su Shi's Dragon Tail

To begin to gauge how Su Shi repurposed the classical epigram, binding tactics of admonition and eulogy to the aesthetic judgment of luxury artifacts, it is instructive to turn to one of his most influential inkstone inscriptions, an epigram on a “Dragon Tail” rock from 1082–83 for the collector Kong Pingzhong 孔平仲 (1044–1111).⁷⁶ The inkstone – a “slab grinder” used to rub and mix solid cakes of ink with water – became the most commonly inscribed species of artifact in a late imperial scholar’s studio. By the early Qing, inkstone collectors anthologized selections of epigrams in lavish albums of rubbings and painted reproductions, using their prefaces to justify the literary form of the inkstone inscription as a miniature monument – this was the culmination of a tendency that can again be traced back to Su Shi.⁷⁷ Unlike other early inkstone connoisseurs – Su Yijian 蘇易簡 (958–996), Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072), and Mi Fu 米芾 (1051–1107) – Su Shi did not write a treatise on the inkstone, but presented his judgments in inscriptions for clients and other collectors.⁷⁸ Rather than offer a practical manual for aspiring

⁷⁶ For an overview of Su Shi’s inkstone inscriptions, see Andrew Lo: Lu Qingbin 盧慶濱, “Su Shi yu yan wenhua” 蘇軾與硯文化, *Songdai wenxue yanjiu congkan* 宋代文學研究叢刊 8 (2002): 471–493. Lo has also written on the inkstone inscriptions of Su Shi’s followers: Lu Qingbin, “Su men xueshi yanming chutan” 蘇門學士硯銘初探, *Dierjie Songdai wenxue guoji yantaohui lunwenji* 第二屆宋代文學國際研討會論文集, ed. Mo Lifeng 莫礪鋒 (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2003), 739–768.

⁷⁷ For an influential example of an effort to theorize the *ming* inscription as a practice of writing on inkstones, see Jin Nong 金農, *Dongxin xiansheng ji* 冬心先生集 (Hangzhou: Xiling yinshe chubanshe, 2012), 160–161. See also Dorothy Ko’s recent discussion of Xie Gumei’s 謝古梅 preface in the *Inkstone Chronicle*, Dorothy Ko, *Social Life of Inkstones* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), 189.

⁷⁸ Following Su Yijian’s 蘇易簡 (958–996) landmark *Four Registers of Studio Paraphernalia* (*Wenfang sipu* 文房四譜), there was a surge in manuals and casual prose on the judgment of inkstones, with ranking contests eventually coalescing around the binary of Duan or She. The other two materials most valued by Song connoisseurs were the “Fine Clay Inkslab” (*chengni yan* 澄泥硯) and the “Red Thread Inkstone” (*hongsi shiyan* 紅絲石硯) – the former was prized by Ouyang Xiu and was regarded as a superior inkslab in the Tang dynasty, while the latter was praised by critics like Tang Xun 唐詢 (1005–64) and Cai Xiang 蔡襄 (1012–67) as the superlative inkstone in the Song, even though (or perhaps because) the material had been exhausted. Along with Duan and She, these rock-types are sometimes classed as the “Four Great Inkstones” (*sida mingyan* 四大名硯). For an overview of all the major quarries/rocks, see Zhang Yuanqing 張元慶, *Gudai shiren yu yan zhi yanjiu* 古代士人與硯之研究 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 2005), 50–54. On the genesis of inkstone collecting in the Northern Song, see Dorothy Ko, *The Social Life of Inkstones*, 160–164. For the classic study of Mi Fu’s treatise, see R. H. Van Gulik, *Mi Fu on Inkstones*, trans. R. H. Van Gulik (Beijing: Henri Vetch, 1938).

consumers, Su Shi's attitudes towards the inkstone as a category of object are encoded in his endorsements of particular specimens, his epigrams mediating between the exemplary and the normative. In this respect, he opened up a new avenue for the written practice of connoisseurship, an approach that bound the renown of a connoisseur to the objects of his adjudication, his epigrams demonstrating how a judgment claims mastery over an object while using that same object to authorize its own claims to legitimacy.⁷⁹

The “Dragon Tail” – the name of a local mountain in Wuyuan 婺源 – was an epithet for She rock (She shi 歙石), or slabs harvested in She County (Shexian 歙縣), at the border of contemporary Jiangxi and Anhui Provinces.⁸⁰ In the wake of Su Shi's inscriptive project, the Dragon Tail was widely promoted by later scholars, including Wang Daokun, as one of the two superlative species of inkstone, fighting against its rival the Duan rock from Guangdong. The

⁷⁹ That is to say an inscribed judgment justifies the value of an object, yet uses the object to prove the value of its judgment. Michael Silverstein has written at length on this dynamic in his work on wine connoisseurship: “The important fact, then, is that “I” *am* to a certain extent what “I” say about “what” “I” drink as much as what “I” say about “it” reflects what “I” can discern “what” “it” *is*... this semiotic consubstantiality facilitates the transduction of value across the realms of commodity/experience and commodity-experiencer, in a moment of reversible fetishization.” Michael Silverstein, “Old Wine, New Ethnographic Lexicography,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 35 (2006): 485.

⁸⁰ Some claim, as He Yanchuan has recently, that the designation “She inkstone” (Sheyan 歙硯) only appeared in the period 1034–1067; before this, “Dragon Tail Inkstone” (Longwei shiyan 龍尾石硯) was more commonly used, Yanchuan He, “The Materiality, Style, and Culture of Calligraphy in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127)” (PhD diss., Boston University, 2013), 208.

There was also debate between Song dynasty collectors about whether Dragon Tail stone was mined in the mountains or whether it came from rivers: Su Yijian was a proponent of the first theory: “A type of stone called Longwei *shi* is presently mined in the mountains of Shezhou. Inkstone makers carve them into inkstones. The stones are black and inferior to Duan stones” (今歙州之山有石，俗謂之龍尾石。匠鑄之硯，其石黑，亞于端。). Ouyang Xiu was a proponent of the latter theory: “The stones of Longwei River are hard and make ink easily, so previous generations loved them” (出於龍尾溪，其石堅勁，大抵多發墨，故前世多用之。). Tang Ji eventually travelled to Mount Dragon Tail and found no inkstones – he corrected Su Yijian and argued that the name Dragon Tail was chosen primarily for its elegance.

It was claimed that after the fall of the Southern Tang regime, Dragon Tail stones ceased to be mined although some were still passed down. During the Jingyou 景祐 era (1034–1037), Qian Xianzhi 錢仙芝 who served as mayor of Shezhou discovered the location where Emperor Li mined the stones. The location was under a large river so the stones could not be mined – this led Qian to change the course of the river. For an introduction to the subsequent reception of the Dragon Tail, see Wu Guoshui 吳國水, “Ken yao Qin ren shiwu cheng: Tang Song She zhi Longwei yan zhengui zhi you” 肯要秦人十五城—唐宋歙之龍尾硯珍貴之由, *Meishu jiaoyu yanjiu* 美術教育研究 3 (2010), 27.

fame of the Dragon Tail decisively contributed to the development of the reputation of Huizhou – Wang Daokun’s hometown – as a center for the production of refined stationery, a regional specialty that was also predicated on developments at the core of this study: the rise of Huizhou seal-carving (examined in the second chapter), and the development of commercial ink manufacturing (examined in the third chapter). With Su Shi’s epigram for Kong we can observe the formation of an early template that later writers returned to in their varied responses to the rocks of She County:

An Inscription for a Dragon Tail owned by Kong Yifu

Coarse, without thwarting the brush; sleek, without repelling the ink-cake.
Clawed skin and the texture of crepe-gauze: a metallic chime and the virtue of jade.

Substantive and firm: watching over the people of the past and the present.
Unaffected and weighty: unable to follow a man from south to north.

孔毅甫龍尾硯銘

澀不留筆，滑不拒墨。爪膚而毅理，金聲而玉德。厚而堅，足以閱人於古今；朴而重，不能隨人以南北。⁸¹

Su Shi adheres to the admonitory and eulogistic conventions of the inscription by identifying moral values encoded in the inkstone: “jade virtue” is a metonym for a refined gentleman, while “metallic chime” or “golden repute” signifies human fame.⁸² As Yang Zhiyi and Zhang Yuanqing have suggested, the reader of the inscription is invited to copy the inkstone in studying moral exemplars of the past and present, assuming a recessive agency by refusing indiscriminate

⁸¹ Su Shi, *Su Shi quanji jiao zhu* 蘇軾全集校注 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chuban she, 2010), 12: 2064.

⁸² Su Shi had already started to invest inkstones with the moral qualities of a gentleman in earlier inscriptions: he began an epigram dated to 1070 for Wang Anguo 王安國 (1028–1074) with the line, “jade-like virtue and golden reputation, both reside within it” (玉德金聲，而寓於斯), see Su Shi, *Su Shi quanji*, 2060. He returns to the phrase in his “Song for the Dragon Tail” (玉德金聲寓於石) and a 1082 inscription for another Luowen Dragon Tail, “golden repute and the luster of jade” (金聲而玉色也), see “Fuyan ming” 黼硯銘, in *Su Shi quanji*, 2074. The jade and chimestone alluded to in Wang Daokun’s inscription on the Capital Museum Dragon Tail discussed in chapter two loosely resonate with such tropes.

service.⁸³ If King Wu instructed himself to learn from the correct “use” of his walking stick, Su Shi foregrounds the “uses of uselessness” (*wu yong zhi yong* 無用之用; *wuyi* 無益) or the inkstone’s spontaneous “non-intentionality.”⁸⁴ This anthropomorphized stone allows the author, the patron, or the reader to recognize projected images of themselves and each other in the same surface, facilitating and fixing an aesthetic communion in stone. We saw how the classical epigram treated an object as a model for the behavior of a sage; Su Shi refabricates this framework to present the thing as an ethical model for the refined gentleman, the figure of the true connoisseur: a portrait of himself.

Later writers continued to identify with Su Shi’s Dragon Tail recluse, including Wang Daokun, who composed an epigram for a Song Dynasty She Inkstone that takes up the persona of the firm, unadorned, stubbornly reticent slab from She County. Wang Daokun is not only speaking to or as the stone, but speaking through the stone with the words of Su Shi:

Inscription on a Song Dynasty She Inkstone

And you’re timeworn: are you made of horn?
 And you’re solid, yet are you unadorned?
 And if I employ you would I be mistaken?⁸⁵

宋歙硯銘

而羸而，角乎而，而敦而，朴乎而，吾庸而，錯乎而。⁸⁶

Wang’s account of the object, like Su Shi’s inscription, finds human merit in rock – “And you’re solid, yet are you unadorned?” – his opening allusion to the *Book of Changes*, meanwhile, evokes firmity of resolve, while implicitly cautioning the character of the “noble man” against

⁸³ Yang Zhiyi, “Dialectics of Spontaneity: Art, Nature, and Persona in the Life and Works of Su Shi (1037-1101)” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2013), 185; Zhang, *Gudai shiren yu yan zhi yanjiu*, 132.

⁸⁴ On tropes of “uselessness” and the Zhuangzian “uses of uselessness” (*wuyong zhi yong* 無用之用) in the rhetoric of the connoisseur – a means of constructing non-commodified systems of value – see Li, “The Collector, the Connoisseur, and Late-Ming Sensibility,” 269.

⁸⁵ The character *cuo* 錯 could also be read as “adorn,” “embellish,” “grind.”

⁸⁶ Wang, “Song She yan ming” 宋歙硯銘, *Taihan ji*, 78: 1612.

“entanglement.”⁸⁷ The pronominal shifter in the final line – “I” (*wu* 吾) – again precludes consensus on the identities of addresser and addressee, an uncertainty compounded by the stilted repetition of the empty verb-phrase conjunction *er* 而 (and, but, yet, then, you). Like Su Shi, Wang Daokun figures the “employment” of the inkstone as an open question: “*should* I use you?”

Su Shi’s personification of the Dragon Tail as a recluse was actually part of a calculated strategy to redeem his own standing among fellow connoisseurs following his controversial endorsement of an otherwise obscure rock from Fujian, the so-called “Phoenix Beak” (Fengzhou yan 鳳喙硯). In an earlier inscription he had playfully dismissed the inkstones of She County to promote his new favorite rock: “Master Su, upon one single glance, named it “Phoenix Beak”; it makes the Dragon Tail feel itself inferior to the rear of a bull” (蘇子一見名鳳喙，坐令龍尾羞牛後).⁸⁸ Su Shi had angered the locals of She and needed to win back their favor both to reassert his standing as a renowned judge of inkstones (the Phoenix Beak was widely disregarded) and to acquire a new precious Dragon Tail for his own collection.⁸⁹ He sought to deflect from the

⁸⁷ See for instance the “third nine” gloss of *Dazhuang* 大壯 from the *Book of Changes*: “The petty man considers this an opportunity for his strength, yet the noble man considers it a trap, for even with constancy there would be danger, *as when a ram butts a hedge and finds its horns deprived of power/entangled*” (羝羊觸藩，羸其角。).

⁸⁸ For more on the “Phoenix Beak” see Lu, “Su Shi *yu yan wenhua*,” 486–7. Su Shi’s attempts to elevate the Phoenix Beak ultimately proved unsuccessful: the rock was rarely mentioned by later connoisseurs and the Southern Song writer Hu Zi 胡仔 (1095–1170) concluded, following a trip to Mt Phoenix, that no such rock was to be found at the site and that Su Shi had in fact been conned. On the failure of the Phoenix Beak, see Yang, “Dialectics of Spontaneity,” 199.

⁸⁹ In the fifth year of Xining (1073), Wang Yi, a Scholar of the National Academy, started to make it into an inkstone and approached me to name it. I named it the “Phoenix Beak” and playfully inscribed its underside: “It reduces the Dragon’s Tail to the shameful rear of a bull.” The people of She were furious at this line. I later sent someone to acquire an inkstone in She and the locals said: “don’t you only send for the Phoenix Beak rock?” In the end, I was unable to acquire the stone I wanted. And so, I realized the burden of naming things and where envy can arise. Some say: “the stone doesn’t know how to feel envy.” I said: “if it doesn’t know how to feel envy, then it also doesn’t know how to appreciate a fine name.”

熙寧五年，國子博士王頤始知以為硯，而求名於余。余名之曰鳳喙，且又戲銘其底云：「坐令龍尾羞牛後。」歙人甚病此言。余嘗使人求硯於歙，歙人云：「何不只使鳳喙石？」卒不得善硯。乃知名者物之累，爭媚之所從出也。或曰：「石不知惡爭媚也」余曰：「既不知惡爭媚，則亦不知好美名矣。」 Su Shi, *Dongpo tiba jiaozhu* 東坡題跋校注, ed. Tu Youxiang 屠友祥 (Shanghai: Shanghai yuandong chubanshe, 2011), 305.

criticisms he had received by imagining the rock's defense of his actions, using the inkstone as a ventriloquist's dummy with which to declare an indifference to fame and self-interest, a strategy that not only informs his personification of the Dragon Tail for Kong Pingzhong, but led to a full-length biography of the Dragon Tail as a political recluse, "The Biography of Luowen," and an extended prosopopoeia in his later poem, "The Song for the Dragon Tail."⁹⁰ In each instance, the personified inkstone speaks as a friend to clear Su Shi's name. This rhetoric of self-containment also deflects from Su Shi's effort to promote a new repeatable formula for the judgment not just of Dragon Tails, but of inkstones in general. The opening line of Su Shi's inscription for Kong Pingzhong – "coarse, without thwarting the brush; sleek, without repelling the ink-cake" – was not intended as an ekphrasis of a particular specimen, but was conceived as a "famous saying" (*mingyan* 名言) that he repeatedly cited in correspondence with other collectors.⁹¹ Despite his professed indifference to questions of "use" and fame, Su Shi's inscription serves as a mechanism for publicizing the reputation of a local product and for formalizing, in a pithy phrase, a method of discernment that could be widely replicated. In as

⁹⁰ The prosopopoeia reads: "I was born as an idle thing between the heavens and earth;/ Master Su is also an odd deformity./Neither of us will choose between vulgar sayings or refined words,/ As spring earthworms and autumn snakes are drawn with abandon./ I want to follow Master Su to grow old on the Eastern Slope./ Benevolent one, do not make distinctions!" (我生天地一閑物, 蘇子亦是支離人。麤言細語都不擇, 春蚓秋蛇隨意畫。願從蘇子老東坡, 仁者不用生分別。)。For a full translation and discussion of this poem, see Xiaoshan Yang, *Metamorphosis of the Private Sphere: Gardens and Objects in Tang-Song Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 172–3. For a translation and discussion of the biography of Luowen (Wanshi jun Luowen zhuan 萬石君羅文傳), see Yang, *Dialectics of Spontaneity*, 204–220.

⁹¹ *A Note on an Inkstone* (For Duan Yu): "The fine points of an inkstone lie only in its smoothness and capacity to produce ink. Everything else is superfluous. Nevertheless, these two qualities can sometimes impair each other, so that the smoothness of an inkstone can make the ink-cake slip. I wrote an inscription for Kong Yifu that said: "Coarse, without thwarting the brush; sleek, without repelling the ink-cake." Yifu thought that this would be a famous saying."

(書硯(贈段璵): 硯之美, 止於滑而發墨, 其他皆餘事也。然此兩者常相害, 滑者輒褪墨。余作孔毅夫硯銘云: 「澀不留筆, 滑不拒墨。」毅夫甚以為名言。) Su, *Dongpo tiba jiaozhu*, 307.

A Note on Tan Qiu's Dragon Tail Inkstone: "Tan Qiu possesses a Dragon Tail Inkstone, it's like what I said: "Coarse, without thwarting the brush; sleek, without repelling the ink-cake." Made like a large jade *bi* with a pool in the shape of a half-moon. It is said that it was formerly a possession of Jiang Xilu."

(書曇秀龍尾硯: 曇秀畜龍尾石硯, 仆所謂「澀不留筆、滑不拒墨」者也。制以拱璧, 而以缺月為池, 雲是蔣希魯舊物。) *Ibid.*, 313.

much as it defends and asserts Su Shi's authority as a tastemaker, the epigram weds a performance of selflessness to a calculated logic of promotion. Su Shi's accession to signature values – of individuality and spontaneity – at the same time unspools into a pursuit of genericity and repetition.

Despite its brevity, Su Shi's epigram stages a multi-layered negotiation between literary investments in the object as a model for human behavior (an inheritance from the rhetoric of the classical inscription), a concern with the criteria and bases of aesthetic judgment, and an incipient commitment to promotional endorsements. In the gap between a deflective rhetoric of personification and Su's publicity of a new mnemonic slogan, the piece provides a framework for approaching the competing impulses behind the inscription in late imperial China. It also divulges a dynamic that becomes central to the historical argument of this study: while Su Shi uses the epigram to project an image of the male scholar as an untrammelled recluse, free from the stigma of self-interest and coercive employment, it simultaneously unveils the early emergence of a strategy of promotion that would be adapted in the late imperial period for sophisticated forms of marketing. The inscription projects a persona, the distinction and coherence of which were eventually negated by the selfsame epigram's promotional ambitions. This particular historical tension between the use of an inscription to assert an individuated image of oneself as a connoisseur, and the rise of brand inscriptions characterizes the work of Wang Daokun.

Su Shi's "famous saying" took on a life of its own in the centuries following the inscription of Kong Pingzhong's inkstone. Su Shi's epigram for Kong was, for instance, copied and carved onto a Chaoshou She inkstone with an "eyebrow grain" (She shi meizi chaoshou yan 歙石眉子抄手硯) and the seal "Zizhan" 子瞻, dated to the Ming dynasty and now held in the

Palace Museum in Beijing (Figure 1.3).⁹² In the late 1770s, the Qianlong Emperor commissioned a comprehensive illustrated compendium of inkstones in the imperial collections, *The Inkstone Catalogue of Western Purity* (*Xiqing yanpu* 西清硯譜), which features six artifacts attributed to Su Shi (the largest number for any single figure from the Song dynasty) – all of which are still of uncertain provenance.⁹³ One of these inkstones, named the “Dragon Pearl” (Longzhu yan 龍珠硯), bears on its back the single character “Shi” 軾 in running script alongside an inscribed comment by the court official Zhang Zhao 張照 (1691–1745) (Figure 1.4 and 1.5):

Comment by Courtier Zhang Zhao

*Coarse, without thwarting the brush; sleek, without repelling the ink-cake.
Clawed skin and the texture of crepe-gauze: a metallic chime and the virtue of jade.*

This was Su Dongpo’s inscription of a Dragon Tail Inkstone. The Purplish Liver of the Duan Brook was already rare in the Northern Song and so She stone was subsequently favored. One like this is also truly difficult to acquire.

臣張照識語

澁不留筆，滑不拒墨。爪膚而穀理，金聲而玉德，東坡龍尾硯銘也。端溪紫肝，北宋已罕，遂尚歛石，今若此者，亦不易致矣。⁹⁴

If this overview began with King Wu it seems appropriate to end with Qianlong, a ruler who harnessed the powerful resources of the imperial workshops and teams of ghost-writers to scrawl his words across his palatial furnishings: the act of self-admonition through inscription as state

⁹² Inkstones bearing inscriptions attributed to Su Shi were prized by collectors in the Ming and Qing dynasties: Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558–1639), to take a prominent case, records how Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470–1559) acquired an old Duan rock decorated with the “Five Planets lodging in the Kui” constellation and an inscribed epigram by Su Shi (a text that was not included in his collected writings); the renowned art collector, Xiang Yuanbian 項元汴 (1525–90) also owned an inscribed inkstone named the “Eastern Well” (Dongjing yan 東井硯), attributed to Su Shi, that eventually entered the collection of the Qianlong Emperor. In both cases, it seems unlikely that these inscribed artifacts were actually owned by Su Shi. See also Lu, “Su Shi yu yan wenhua,” 488.

⁹³ Zheng Jiaye 鄭家璉, “Xiqing yanpu guyan” 西清硯譜古硯, *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 故宮文物月刊 167. 14:11 (1997): 22–32.

⁹⁴ Lu, “Su Shi yu yan wenhua,” 488.

supervised line production. In Zhang Zhao's comment, Su Shi's "famous saying" is paradoxically taken up in praise for the very rival of the Dragon Tail: a Song Dynasty Duan rock.⁹⁵ With these two examples we see Su Shi's words shed their affiliation to any single author, patron, or object, assuming an autonomous agency to confer value in an expanding empire of things. Whether repurposed as a new calligraphic program on a Ming slab or as an obedient minister's endorsement for an emperor's plaything, the "famous saying" had become a script that any artifact might reenact in its own distinctive idiom.

⁹⁵ The piece also serves as a model for another "Dragon Pearl" Chengni inkstone in the palace collections.



Figure 1.3: Ming Dynasty Chaoshou She Inkstone with Eyebrow Grain
Source: Beijing Palace Museum.

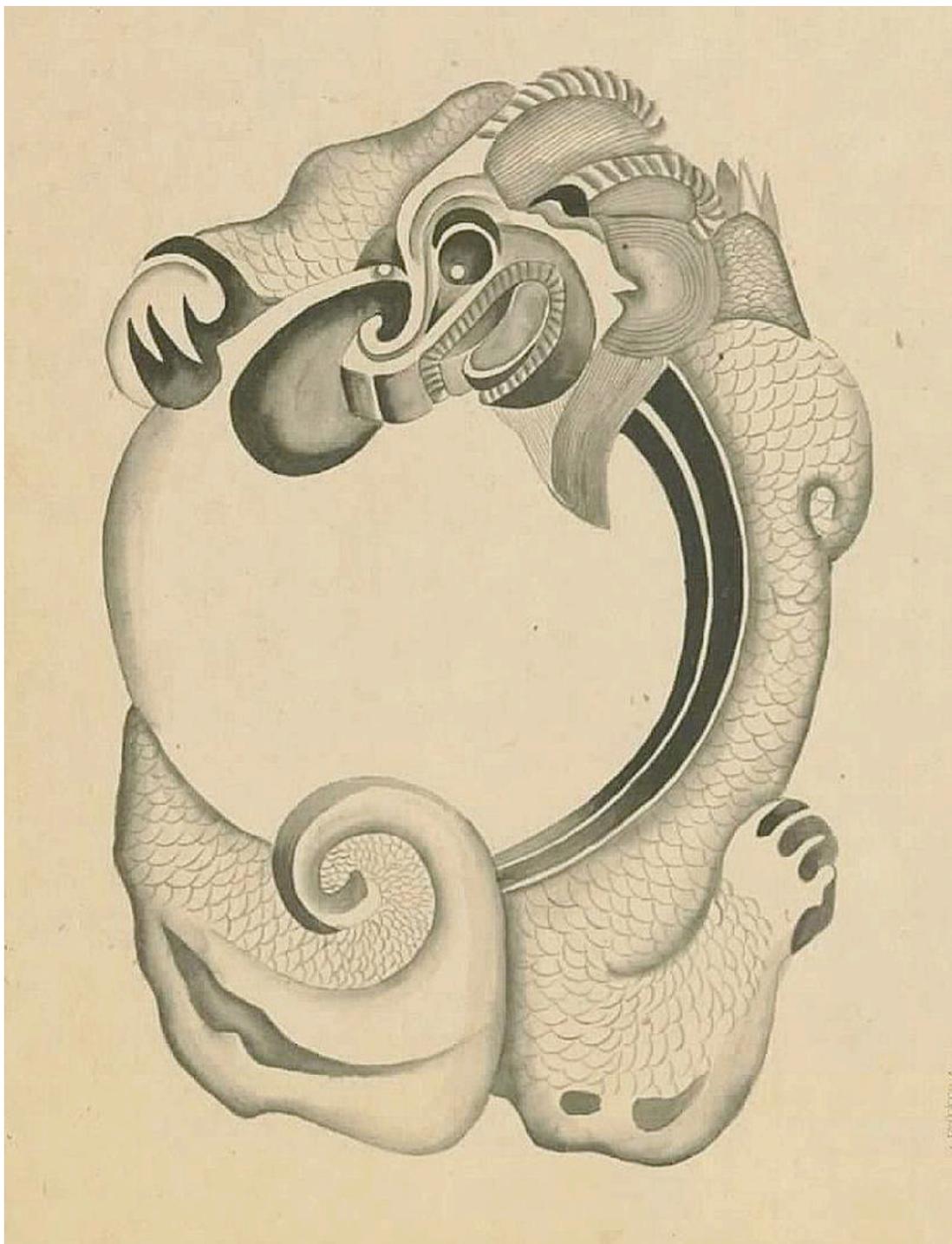


Figure 1.4: Recto Illustration of Dragon Pearl Inkstone
Source: Yu Minzhong ed., *The Inkstone Catalogue of Western Purity* (c. 1778).

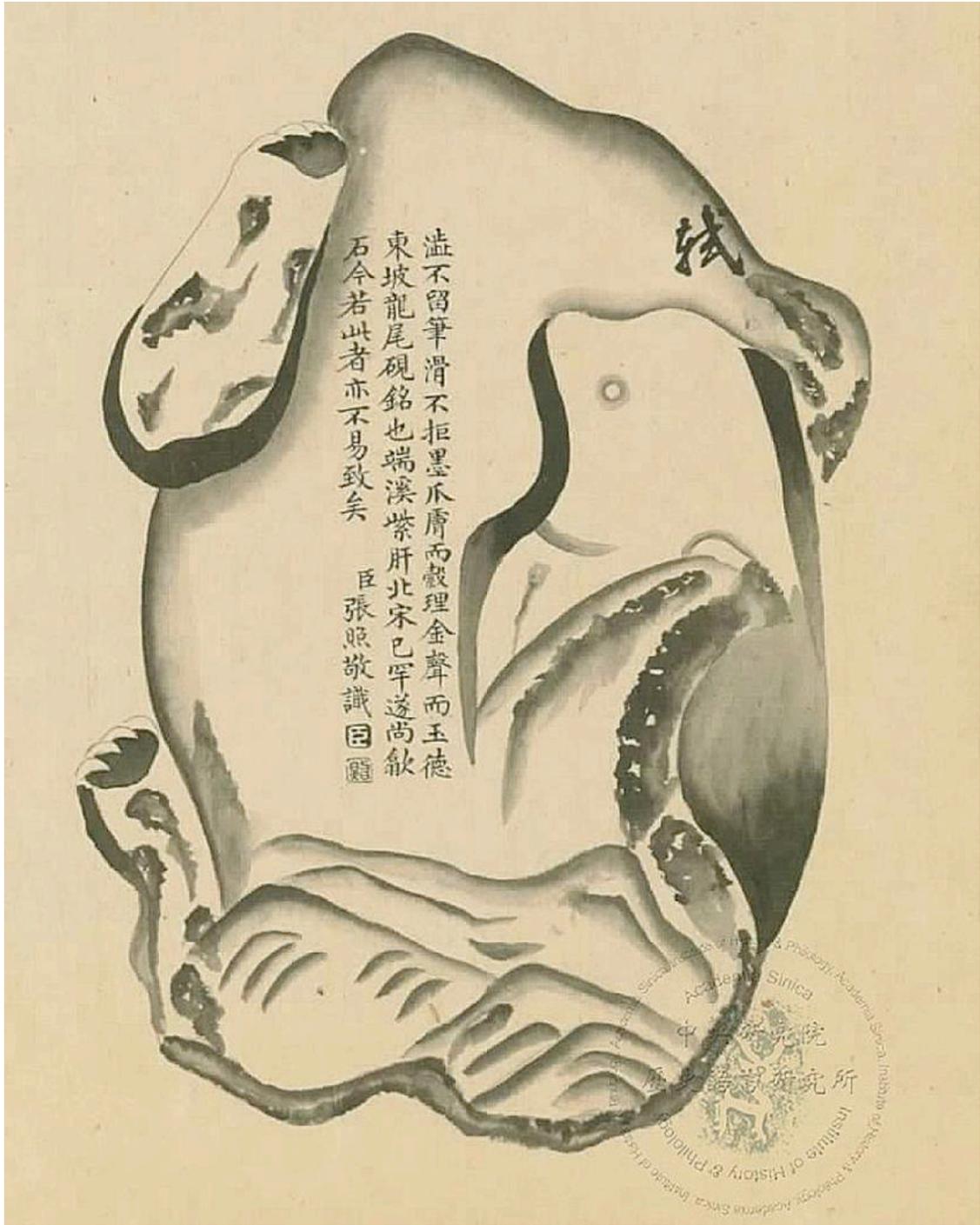


Figure 1.5: Verso Illustration of Dragon Pearl Inkstone
Source: Yu Minzhong ed., *The Inkstone Catalogue of Western Purity* (c. 1778).

Part 2: Writing and Materiality

Textual Matters

Men Yingzhao's painting of Qianlong's Dragon Pearl calls our attention to the many material afterlives of a single epigram. To a certain extent, it poses the question of whether Su Shi's "famous saying" is even a single text (an allographic notational scheme) or a network of what are actually different (autographic) works.⁹⁶ Inscriptions on objects were reproduced in ink-squeeze rubbings, in wooden or stone carvings that served as models for future ink-squeeze rubbings, in painted silk albums, on scrolls, in hand-written manuscripts, in xylographic books, and in photographs. It consequently makes little sense to speak of a painted inscription as a "de-materialized" copy, or as any less of an "object" than a carved inkstone or a woodblock print. Instead, we might work to grasp the historical conditions under which an epigram was translated in different material formats, asking what motivated a given adaptation, while seeking to account for what (if anything) was lost or gained.

The multiple afterlives of an inscription – on an inkstone, as a rubbing, in painted albums – make it a particularly instructive lens through which to survey the media ecology of late imperial China. In the past two decades, scholars have devoted considerable energy to examining the ascendancy of the imprint and its relationship to manuscript, yet have still largely overlooked the persistence of textual media and technologies of writing that cannot be fully subsumed within the history of the book: monumental stone stelae, epitaphs, monetary inscriptions and object markings, commercial packaging, and shop signage.⁹⁷ The artifacts I examine in this study

⁹⁶ For Goodman, the allographic names a notational scheme that essentially remains the same across different mediations, while the autographic refers to the size/style/shape/color/depth/texture of a particular set of marks. Drawing from Goodman, Genette distinguishes between "works of ideal immanence" (the allographic) and "works of physical immanence" (the autographic): the former, he claims, constituting the particular "mode of existence" of the "literary work." See Bill Brown, "[Concept/Object][Text/Event]," *ELH* 81.2 (2014): 527.

⁹⁷ Cynthia Brokaw, "On the History of the Book in China," in *Printing and Book Culture in Late-Imperial China*, ed. Cynthia Brokaw et al, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 3–54; Joseph McDermott, *A*

emerged at a time when commercial woodblock printing – a thriving local industry in Wang Daokun’s Huizhou – was the dominant means of textual production: the multiplicity of copies that printing made possible now ensured textual survival over a manuscript or the inscription of a hard surface.⁹⁸ One way of approaching inscriptive artifacts would be to emphasize their tangential relationship to the history of the book, demonstrating how practices of engraving words onto things constitute “idiosyncratic disruptions in the economy of discourse,” expanding our own understandings of the artifactuality of text, while offering new ways of “locating physical detail in a sign system, which is how we make matter mean.”⁹⁹ An inscribed object – such as the Eyebrow Grain She Inkstone or Qianlong’s Dragon Pearl – challenges our assumptions about what reading entailed in the late imperial period, while dislodging conceptions of authorship or expectations of circulation derived from the conventions of the book.¹⁰⁰ More generally, I read a range of materials – lacquered ink, horn, jade – that have not been conventionally treated as textual supports, opening up ways of thinking about the substrate as a field of potentiality beyond the paradigm of paper.¹⁰¹

Social History of The Chinese Book (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006). A notable exception to concerns with the book is Clunas, drawing from Irene Bierman, on “public text” in *Empire of Great Brightness*, 84–111.

⁹⁸ On print in Huizhou, see Michela Bussotti [Migaila 米盖拉], and Zhu Wanshu 朱萬曙, eds, *Huizhou: shuye yu diyu wenhua* 徽州：書業與地域文化 (Faguo Hanxue Vol. 13; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010).

⁹⁹ Bill Brown, “Introduction: Textual Materialism,” *PMLA* 125.1 (2010): 24.

¹⁰⁰ Historians of print culture – drawing from the work of D. F. McKenzie and Roger Chartier – tend to return to a model in which “form” (format and technical medium) determines meaning. Inscriptions perturb this analytic both because they rhetorically thematize (and seek to manipulate) a relationship to their substrates (offering their own lessons in how to *read* the artifact, investing matter with significance), and because the act of engraving an epigram – as the Eyebrow Grain and Dragon Pearl attest – transforms both the biography and corporeality of its medium. With epigrams molded onto ancient ladles or sixteenth century ink-cakes, words are not anterior to a substrate, but an integral and constitutive element in its design. An engraved epigram holds within it the potential to unsettle coherent distinctions between meaning and medium, the transparency of the concept and the opacity of matter, cognitive transport and physical support.

¹⁰¹ Jonathan Hay has begun to sketch out a vocabulary for this: “the effect of adding the inscription was to transform the material surface into a more generalized field of potentiality out of which the inscription emerged, and within which it danced.” Jonathan Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces: The Decorative Object in Early Modern China* (London: Reaktion, 2009), 207.

Nevertheless, many inscribed objects also bear a less adversarial or comparatively nuanced relationship to the fate of the imprint: Wang Daokun's client, the pawnbroker Fang Yongbin – whose various enterprises serve as the subject of chapter two – sold decorative objects and carved seal script in a range of materials (ivory, jade, bronze), while also preparing manuscripts of seal designs and xylographs; Wang Daokun's ink-cake inscriptions were simultaneously stamped onto commercial wares *and* preserved in Fang Yulu's *Master Fang's Catalogue of Inks*, a superlative achievement in late Ming woodblock illustration. Xylography entailed carving the characters from a manuscript onto a wooden block, and printed or handwritten texts were similarly used as templates for carving inscriptions onto an artifact's surface. Carving a woodblock, a seal, or an inscription on any other hard surface (ivory, rhinoceros horn, bamboo) often drew from the same artisanal skill set.

Rather than insist on any strict formal divisions between writing on things and printed matter, I am interested in parsing the syntactic relations between diverse textual media, attending to patterns of interaction and translation between material formats. A comparative approach, in turn, allows us to better grasp the production of difference and the retroactive creation of media hierarchies. Was a printed drawing of an ink-cake inscription deemed more reliable as a guarantor of quality than a stamped version of the same inscription on a commercial ink-cake? How, for instance, did the printing of seal impressions in woodblock catalogues relate to the “signature” values of authenticity and spontaneity attributed to new carved inscriptions (*biankuan* 邊款) on the sides of soft-stone seal stamps? How does materiality occur? Under what circumstances do we learn to ignore it? Rather than rehearse a scenario in which print “continually absorbs” alternative modes of writing, my work looks at how practices of marking

decorative artifacts both defined and disrupted the ascendancy of the xylograph, stubbornly contesting claims to the dominion and reliability of this particular medium.¹⁰²

In line with this comparative approach to textual media, I conceive of the “materiality” of an inscription as relational: my aim is to move away from the question of *what* an object inscription is, to the question of *when* the materiality of the inscription matters (and to whom). Under what circumstances – or to draw from Nelson Goodman: under what “attentional conditions,” – is the physicality of an inscription, its “thingness,” deemed significant (or problematic)?¹⁰³ A motivating assumption is that materiality becomes meaningful in moments of disruption, abrasion, or in the suspension of habitual interactions with the object world. So too, the materiality of an inscription *matters* when a marked artifact challenges expectations of use, insists on its illegibility, diverges from planned paths of circulation, or resists established frameworks for attribution and valuation. Focusing on the sixteenth century, we see how new sets of object inscriptions *matter* precisely by disturbing and reconfiguring extant models of the relationship between the written sign and its substrates.

Inscriptions and Markings

The painted image of the Dragon Pearl reminds us that multiple inscriptions and other sets of markings might interact with each other on a single surface. This particular inkstone not only bears an inscription by Zhang Zhao, it also features two seals for Zhang (minister (*chen* 臣) and Zhao 照), a single graph in running script for Su Shi’s signature (Shi 軾), and another dated

¹⁰² See Zeitlin and Liu: “Thus although engraved inscriptions, rubbings, writings on walls, and occasional verse are all practices that predate the dominance of print in Chinese society, these contributors demonstrate that once publishing becomes the norm, even though alternative modes of writing continue to circulate outside print, they are continually absorbed into it.” Judith T. Zeitlin and Lydia H. Liu eds, *Writing and Materiality in China: Essays in Honor of Patrick Hanan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 13.

¹⁰³ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976), 210.

poem (*yuti shi* 御題詩) by the Qianlong Emperor. The compilers of *The Inkstone Catalogue of Western Purity*, were keen to fix a hierarchy of marks in their colophon for the painted image, with the Qianlong poem and seals placed at the top, followed by Su Shi's signature mark, Zhang Zhao's 46 character epigram, and his two small square seals at the bottom. The editors clearly envisioned a situation in which Qianlong "owned" the Su Shi mark and ordered his minister Zhao Zhao to praise the emperor's possession. We may, however, detect other possible relations between these markings, with Zhang Zhao, the minister, perhaps conferring legitimacy on the Qianlong emperor's image as a Han literatus through coded citation of Su Shi. In any event, the Dragon Pearl demonstrates the extent to which an inscription signifies through its paratactic relations with a family of other markings: what in Chinese are often grouped as *kuanzhi*.

The focus of this study is the literary inscription (*ming*), yet it is impossible to understand the fate of this practice in late imperial China without attending to its interaction with *kuanzhi*, or the semiotic galaxy of other marks this designation strives to circumscribe. The compound *kuanzhi* initially referred to the marks cast onto ancient bronze vessels: the commentator Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (1360–1368) suggested *kuan* designated intaglio marks (*yinzi* 陰字) and *zhi* specified cameo marks (*yangzi* 陽字), while other philologists have claimed that *kuan* referred to marks on the outside of a vessel and *zhi* referred to marks cast on the inside.¹⁰⁴ A further theory held that *kuan* pointed to cast decorative patterns (*huawen* 花紋) and *zhi* identified carved seal script (*zhuanke* 篆刻).¹⁰⁵ The compound (and variants: *tikuan* 題款; *luokuan* 落款) had, by the Ming, also come to refer to the signatures, dates, locations, and dedicatory offerings written on paintings and calligraphy. Scholars of porcelain and lacquerware have consequently adapted the

¹⁰⁴ Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀, "Gutong qi" 古銅器, *Chuogeng lu* 輟耕錄, in CSJCCB, vol. 219, 245–248.

¹⁰⁵ Deng, *Gudong suoji*, 86.

category to refer to the diverse range of markings that appear engraved, scratched, stamped, or written with a brush on those surfaces, creating new subdivisions between reign period marks (*jinian kuan* 紀年款), studio marks (*tangming kuan* 堂名款), personal marks (*renming kuan* 人名款), auspicious phrases (*jiyan kuan* 吉言款), short eulogistic marks (*zansong kuan* 讚頌款), decorative pattern marks (*huaya kuan* 花押款),¹⁰⁶ and the dubious category of “forged marks” (*weituo kuan* 偽托款).¹⁰⁷ There has, of course, also been a degree of exchange between inscriptive practices in these different media and even an initial survey of such outwardly divergent usages of the term suggests a recurring focus on documenting processes of making. Despite generic distinctions, we might productively follow the historian of porcelain, Xiao Feng, in loosely conceiving of *kuanzhi* as an umbrella term for functional markings that record details pertaining to the production of an artifact, such as the names of a maker, commissioner, owner or the date, and site of manufacture.¹⁰⁸

The *inscription*, as I have outlined, is a literary practice that conventionally takes the form of an epigram dedicated to an object in rhymed verse or unrhymed prose. I take *markings* (an approximation of *kuanzhi*), by contrast, to designate a broad family of graphic devices for documenting product-related information: how, why, when a thing was made; by whom, for whom; and with what resources.¹⁰⁹ In this study, I distinguish the seal (*yin* 印) from inscriptions and markings as an independent graphic technology (it is sometimes subsumed by scholars under

¹⁰⁶ To designate a mark like the *hulu* gourd often reproduced on porcelain vessels from Jingdezhen.

¹⁰⁷ Xiao Feng 蕭豐, *Qixing, wenshi yu wan-Ming shehui shenghuo: yi Jingdezhen ciqi wei zhongxin de kaocha* 器刑, 紋飾與晚明社會生活: 以景德鎮瓷器為中心的考察 (Wuhan: Huazhong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2010), 263.

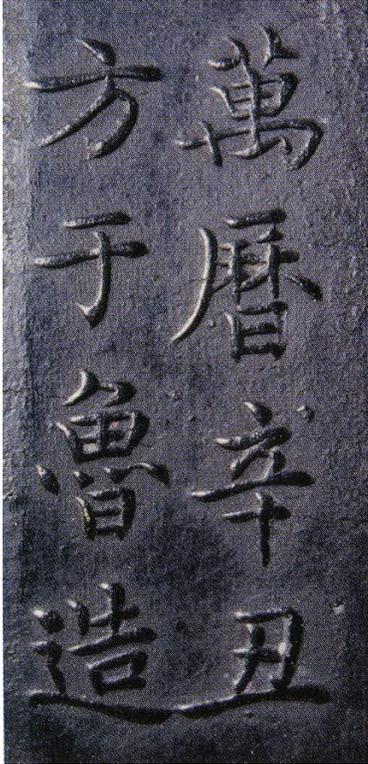
¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 235.

¹⁰⁹ Dorothy Ko has recently deployed a similar distinction: “The Chinese use two terms to describe words carved or written on a vessel. *Mingwen*, usually translated “colophons” or “inscriptions,” refers to such textual messages as poems and auspicious sayings on the body of the vessel. *Kuanshi* has a more specific meaning tied to the processes of making and circulation, including such marks as reign mark, signature mark of the artisan, and sometimes (confusingly) the signature of the owner or user of the vessel.” Ko, *Social Life of Inkstones*, 253.

taxonomies of *kuanzhi*), although it clearly retains an intimate relation with both sets of practices: the author of an inscription might use seal script (*zhuanshu*) and sign his epigram with a seal (epigraphic research on ancient *ming* – like the bird script belt-hook – was also a model for the production of new seal stamps); while artisans could adapt the rectilinear form of the seal and seal script to advertise their own studio marks (*tangming kuan*).¹¹⁰ Again, it is not my aim to construct a rigid taxonomy for the numerous approaches to engraving marks onto things in late imperial China, but rather to parse the paratactic interplay between a conventional literary practice of writing on artifacts and other frameworks for using script in the workshop and the marketplace. As Dagmar Schäfer has suggested, during the late Ming, reign marks and artisanal markings (signatures and seals for personal and studio names) – both of which originated in a tradition of imperial quality control, of “carving the craftsman’s name” (*wule gongming* 物勒工名) – were adapted as innovative instruments of commercial proprietorship and increasingly promoted as “signals of luxury.”¹¹¹ The markings of the inkmaker Fang Yulu were, for instance, among the most sought after and widely discussed artisanal labels in the Wanli period (Figure 1.6 and 1.7).

¹¹⁰ Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces*, 55–59.

¹¹¹ Dagmar Schäfer, “Inscribing the Artifact and Inspiring Trust: The Changing Role of Markings in the Ming Era,” *East Asian Science, Technology and Society: An International Journal* 5 (2011), 239–265; Schäfer, “Peripheral Matters: Selvage/Chef-de-piece Inscriptions on Chinese Silk Textiles,” *UC Davis Law Review* 47.2 (2013): 705–733. Schäfer does not mention how Ming markings relate to or interact with the inscription (*ming*).



(L) Figure 1.6: Detail of Ink-cake marking, “1601 [xinchou] made by Fang Yulu”
Source: Beijing Palace Museum



(R) Figure 1.7: Detail of Ink-cake marking, “Made by Fang Yulu”
Source: Beijing Palace Museum

During the late Ming, we see authors like Wang Daokun start to compose epigrams intended as promotional endorsements for artisanal markings. Fraught negotiations between the professed values of a literary culture and new instruments for the assertion of production rights consequently animate the same material surfaces. Few literary historians have deemed the interplay between an inscription and a production mark on a sixteenth century ink-cake to be a “text” worthy of serious reflection, yet it is precisely in the juxtaposition of these graphic schemes that we bear witness to a high-stakes contest over how to map the boundaries to, and define the specificity of the “literary.” We can begin to approach these negotiations by turning to a printed design from *Master Fang’s Catalogue of Inks* with an accompanying inscription by

Wang Daokun (Figure 1.8). The objecthood of this design is itself indeterminate: it is unclear to begin with whether it was a model for serial replication on the surfaces of ink-cakes or whether it was intended as a one-off promotional insert or “mock-up” for the woodblock catalogue. Wang’s inscription is actually recycled from another of his prefaces and takes up the relationship between the inkmaker Fang Yulu’s personal name and the labels on ceramics: “With the fine ceramics of our Ming, nothing can match Xuande. As far as ink is concerned, it is only “Yulu” that is sufficient to face them.” (我明陶氏之良，莫如宣德，其在于墨，則于魯足以當之。).¹¹² The Xuanzong 玄宗 emperor’s (r. 1426–1435) standardized reign mark “Daming Xuande nianzhi” (大明宣德年製) commonly transcribed in regular script (*kaishu* 楷書), had by the late sixteenth century evolved from an instrument of state supervised quality control to a marketable symbol of luxury on porcelain, enamel, bronze, and lacquer (Figure 1.9).¹¹³ Wang’s words try to craft a new equivalence between the sponsored inkmaker and the prestige of the reign mark, mediating between the categories of an imperial regulation and the self-designation of an entrepreneurial Huizhou artisan, promoting Fang’s personal name as a preeminent commercial label. He aspires for his endorsement to shape the reception of these markings, asserting mastery through prose over the packaging of Ming material culture, while implicitly contesting the boundaries between the prerogatives of the state and the market in production. And yet, Wang’s words are themselves presented as a promotional supplement to a new label on the recto image of the ink-cake: “Nine Mysteries and Three Absolutes” (*Jiuxuan sanji* 九玄三極), the title of a line of ink formed, as chapter three will demonstrate, through the creative misuse of a Daoist poetic idiom. His words are incorporated into a mode of visual display that

¹¹² For the preface, see Fang Yulu 方于魯, *Fangshi mopu* 方氏墨譜, in SKQSCMCS, zibu, vol. 79, 305.

¹¹³ For a history of the Xuande mark, see Wang Cheng-hua, “Material Culture and Emperors: The Shaping of Imperial Roles at the Court of Xuanzong (r. 1426–35)” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1998), 288–307.

effectively advertises a novel artisanal trademark. The question becomes whether his endorsement uses, or is being used by the commercial label: does he manipulate or is he manipulated by the mark? Where does the authority of Wang's prose, or the dominion of the literary, begin and end? From this perspective, the interplay between the *ming* inscription and *kuanzhi* markings offers a key to examining difference *within* writing, or a means of illuminating contradictions and social struggles *within* the late imperial graphic landscape.

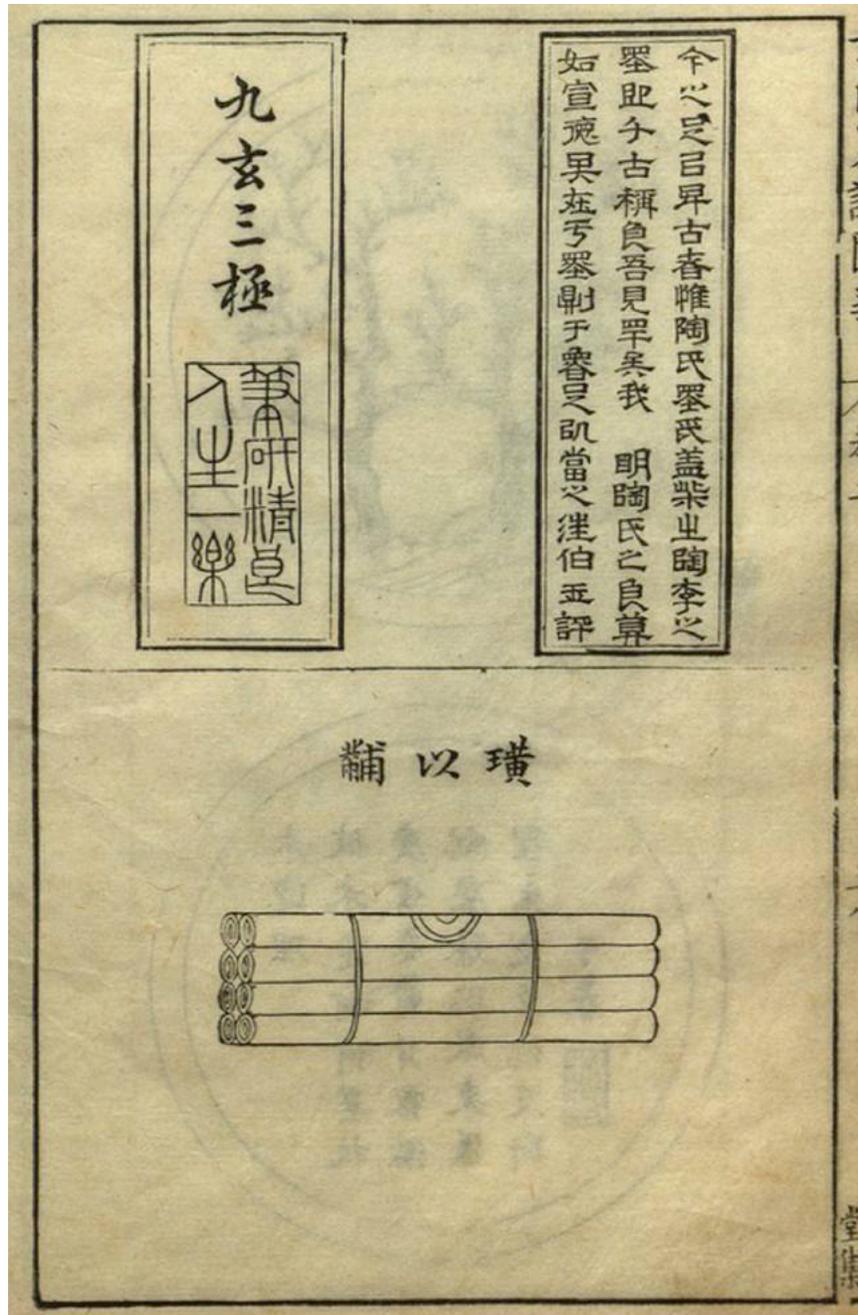


Figure 1.8: “Nine Mysteries and Three Absolutes” Ink-stick Design
 Source: Fang Yulu, *Master Fang’s Catalogue of Inks* (1588), 2:38a.



Figure 1.9: Small stem Jingdezhen porcelain cup with Xuande Reign Mark
Source: British Museum.

Part 3: The Resonant Thing: Wang Daokun's Musical Instruments

Breaking Strings: Zha Bashi's Pipa

Throughout his career, Wang Daokun wrote *ming* epigrams for species of objects that had not previously been inscribed, or for which inscriptions had not hitherto been preserved and handed down. One of the earliest examples of this tendency is an inscription for a *pipa* 琵琶 – a four-stringed Chinese lute – that he dedicated to a musician named Zha Bashi 查八十. Beyond

demonstrating Wang’s willingness to adapt the conventions of the classical epigram to celebrate novel artifacts, this composition ties together several themes that animate his approach to inscription in general: an investment in promoting the reputation of his locality, Huizhou; a commitment to endorsing cultural actors from non-gentry backgrounds – in this case an itinerant musician born of a “magic turtle” and raised in a merchant family; and a concern with yoking the name of an artist to the life of their signature tool. Wang’s epigram for this *pipa* was later anthologized as an exemplary model for the inscription as a literary genre in Ming China. This case study also demonstrates how an epigram might elicit and tie together a series of other literary documents – biographies, letters, poems, – as the nodal point in a sprawling web of texts. These preoccupations are nevertheless refracted through Wang’s attachment to the particular thingness of the *pipa*, the sense in which its rounded wooden form comes to life through human touch, evoking a plangent aura of memory and longing:

An Inscription for Zha Bashi’s Pipa

What fine wood! A raccoon-dog’s mottled head.
What a fine melody! Strumming of Wusun.
A thousand autumns of countless blessings!
Suffused with music.

查八十琵琶銘

何哉木， 狸首斑。 何哉曲， 烏孫彈。 千秋萬歲， 樂以盤。¹¹⁴

As Judith Zeitlin has suggested, a musical instrument can assume a dual identity, possessing both the visual form of an objet d’art and the function of a sound-producing device, straddling the boundary between exhibition and performance.¹¹⁵ Wang makes this point succinctly by matching his praise for the material of the *pipa* (“What wood!”) – or at least the substrate upon which his

¹¹⁴ Wang, “Zha Bashi pipa ming” 查八十琵琶銘, *Taihan ji*, 78: 1610.

¹¹⁵ Zeitlin cites the Tang-dynasty poet Gao Cheng 高逞 (740–811), “a musical instrument is something that has visual form as well as sound.” Judith Zeitlin, “The Cultural Biography of a Musical Instrument: Little Hulei as Sounding Object, Antique, Prop, and Relic,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 69 (2009): 395.

words would most likely have been etched – with the music it offers when played (“What melody!”). He opens with words sung by Yuan Rang 原壤, an acquaintance of Confucius, as he touched the hard shell of his mother’s coffin: “Yuan Rang climbed up on the wood and said, “It is a long time since I sang to anything” and so he sang [to the wood], “It is marked like a raccoon dog’s head, smooth as a young lady’s hand, which you can hold”.¹¹⁶ The markings of the “raccoon dog’s head” became an epithet for the finely grained patterning of a wooden surface, yet was also the name of an archaic piece of music recorded in the *Record of Rites* played by string musicians (*xian zhe* 弦者).¹¹⁷ Wang’s turn to Confucius and the *Rites* conforms to an expectation that in composing an epigram he *should* be looking for a moral lesson in the classics, yet Yuan Rang’s address is tailored, here, to capture the affect and resonance of the instrument’s exquisite body: the emotion of Yuan’s apostrophe, the musical overtones of the “raccoon-dog” epithet, and the palpable invitation to touch. The citation captures a principle of inscriptive art: to suggest as much you can with as few characters as possible.

Wang Daokun then turns to the music of the *pipa* by invoking the romantic associations of the instrument with the Central Asian frontier. The Han princess Liu Xijun 劉細君 (fl. 110–105 BCE) was sent to be married to the khan of the Wusun 烏孫 around 108 BCE and was supposedly accompanied by musicians who played the *pipa* to soothe her in her grief. This tale in turn informed the more famous story of Wang Zhaojun 王昭君 (fl. 48–33 BCE) who was sent to the Xiongnu 匈奴 and came to personify the intimate relationship of the *pipa* with the dejected figure of a princess given away to a foreign ruler in later literary and visual representations. While the *pipa* originated in Central Asia, early Chinese ethnography inverted the direction of

¹¹⁶ Sun, *Liji jijie*, 303.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1389.

influence by claiming these princesses brought the instrument with them to states like Wusun and that it was then re-introduced back into China from non-Han regions in later periods. In the poetic imagination, references to playing the *pipa* on the way to Wusun became signifiers for music suffused with a sense of sorrowful longing and Wang's romantic allusion invests Zha Bashi's playing with similarly exotic and melancholic connotations.¹¹⁸ It also implicitly opens up the problem of gender in the inscription. While men had long studied the *pipa*, the instrument retained – unlike the austere, masculine form of the zither – a strong symbolic connection to courtesan performance and feminine musical expression. Wang's epigram is the earliest documented attempt to inscribe a *pipa* and can be read as an effort to transform the object into a token of male sociability. It would certainly be difficult to imagine a contemporaneous inscription on a female performer's instrument: in the popular biography of the famous courtesan *pipa* player Jia Koudu 賈扣度, for instance, she smashes her anonymous lute in an act of selfless devotion to her deceased lover, the romantic poet Xie Zhen 謝榛 (1495–1575).¹¹⁹ Even as Wang deems the instrument worthy of masculine identification, Zha Bashi's guise as a male performer remains faintly inflected by the poetic cliché of the disconsolate princess. This instability suggests Wang's own uncertainty about how to approach the object before him: working between established poetic codes and an ambition to write on the instrument in a new way, he

¹¹⁸ See the Song dynasty poet Wu Yan 武衍: “On horseback, sand blown up by the wind, her cicada tresses disheveled. / To the land of the Xiongnu, the same stretch of earth, but under different skies. / What use for the *pipa*, strumming with deep grief, / Leaving to be betrothed to Wusun increases the sorrow.” (馬上風沙亂鬢蟬，羶鄉同地不同天。琵琶何用彈深怨，出降烏孫更可憐。)

¹¹⁹ The story taken from Pan Zhiheng's *Genshi* 互史 centers upon the relationship between the famous poet Xie Zhen and Jia Koudu, a concubine at the court of the Ming royal prince, Zhao Kang wang 趙康王. Xie witnesses Jia play a set of lyrics, *zhuchi ci*, that he had written and is immediately drawn to her. He then writes a new set of lyrics for Jia to play before the king. The king then offers Jia as a gift to Xie Zhen. In Xie's response to the king he emphasizes her role in providing musical accompaniment. They then travel and perform together. Eventually, when Xie dies, Jie smashes her *pipa*– the instrument becomes a material symbol of their bonds with each other. Jia's grief at Xie's death is registered in its broken material form. See Zhuang Yongping 庄永平, *Pipa shouce* 琵琶手冊 (Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue chubanshe, 2001), 496–97.

has still not fully worked out what he wants to say, or what it is this particular object wants him to say.

While Wang's epigram asks whether an instrument is principally an object or a sonorous event, a tactile surface or an experience of listening, his title binds the artifact to the name of a particular performer. Other sources from the late Ming suggest that a "Zha Bashi *pipa*" was not simply the name of a *pipa* played or owned by a musician with the surname Zha, but a tailor-made instrument with its own distinctive qualities: not Zha Bashi's *pipa* but the "Zha Bashi *pipa*." Yao Lü records Wang Daokun's close associate, Li Weizhen's 李維禎 (1547–1626) remarks on viewing a representative specimen: "*pipa* all have a long neck, Master Li says he saw Zha Bashi's *pipa* and it resembled a *qin* zither but was smaller. Its four strings presumably were also based on this [the *qin*]" (琵琶皆長柄, 李本寧先生云見查八十琵琶, 似琴而小, 亦四絃想必有所本也。).¹²⁰ An anecdote recorded in *Extraneous Chatter from the Seat of the Guest* (*Kezuo zhuiyu* 客座贅語) tells of Zha visiting a brothel in Nanjing and meeting an old blind lady, his true *zhiyin*: Zha boasts that he if he plays a courtesan's *pipa* he will destroy its strings in one stroke and when he starts to play the lady recognizes at once that this "official's *pipa* is out of the ordinary" (此官人琵琶與尋常不同), ordering the courtesan offering accompaniment on clappers to cease.¹²¹ The title of this episode, "Zha Bashi's *pipa*," can refer either to a distinctive object or his virtuoso style of playing and the old blind lady seems to suggest that the two are mutually constitutive. From this perspective, we can read Wang's epigram as more than a comment on one man's possession: as an effort to lay claim to the idea of the "Zha Bashi *pipa*," an endeavor to endorse a signature hybrid of person and thing.

¹²⁰ Yao Lü 姚旅, *Lushu* 露書, in SKQSCMCS, zibu, vol. 111, 683.

¹²¹ Gu Qiyuan 顧起元, *Kezuo zhuiyu* 客座贅語, ed. Kong Yi 孔一 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012). 93

Wang would return to this promotional model throughout his career whether in his inscriptions for the signature inkstone of the influential Huizhou painter Ding Yunpeng 丁雲鵬 (1547–1628), or his inscriptions for the signature ink of the Huizhou inkmaker Fang Yulu.¹²² Wang more explicitly drew from his formative “Zha Bashi *pipa*” template in a later epigram for the vertical flute (*xiao* 簫) of Wu Zuogan 吳左干 – another Huizhou local who studied painting with Ding Yunpeng, drew illustrations for Fang Yulu’s ink catalogue, made his own ink, yet was most acclaimed for his talents as an amateur flutist:¹²³

An Inscription for Zuogan’s Endblown Flute

Like whirling wind; like catenating clouds.
 If one listens intently, one “discerns clarity,”¹²⁴
 Ridden of acute sense, one “holds the covenant.”¹²⁵

左干簫銘

如風寥寥，如雲裔裔。傾耳司徹，黜聰司契。¹²⁶

Wang’s mellifluous epigram overlooks the body of the instrument to focus instead on the effect of the air that fluctuates through it, with onomatopoeic reduplicative binomes approximating

¹²² On the inscription for Ding Yunpeng, see Wang, “Jieyuan yan ming you xu” 結緣硯銘有序, *Taihan ji*, 78: 1611. I address Wang’s relationship to Ding, one of the main illustrators of Fang Yulu’s catalogue of inks, in chapter three. This particular “signature inkstone” was also “inscribed” by the Chan monk Zibai zhenke 紫柏真可 (1543–1603) an influence of Ding’s arhat paintings.

¹²³ For a series of critical comments on Wu’s superlative talents as a flutist, see the writings of Wang Daokun’s disciple (almost his adopted son), the late Ming music aficionado and drama critic, Pan Zhiheng 潘之恆 (1556–1621): Pan Zhiheng, “Chuyin” 初音, *Luanxiao xiaopin*, 2: 11a–12a; and Wang Xiaoyi 汪效漪, *Pan Zhiheng quhua* 潘之恆曲話 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1988), 77–78. On Wu’s career as a painter, see Cai Xinquan 蔡鑫泉, “Ming Huizhou zhuming huajia Wu Tingyu Zuogan shilue” 明徽州著名畫家吳廷羽左干事略, *Huizhou shehui kexue* 5 (2011): 44–48.

¹²⁴ From Laozi, the man who works “pursuing claims” (*siche* 司徹) is “lacking virtue” (*wude* 無德), while the man who holds the “tally pledge” (*siqu* 司契) or “covenant” is the man of virtue (*youde* 有德).

¹²⁵ *Siqu* is from Laozi (see above), yet *qi* also carries connotations of inscription: to inscribe with a knife on tortoiseshell or bone; to carve, engrave, or notch; a written agreement, contract, pact. The man of virtue might also be the man who wields the knife or carves the inscription, namely Wang.

¹²⁶ Wang, “Zuogan xiao ming” 左干簫銘, *Taihan ji*, 78: 1610.

patterned sound. If Wang’s inscription for the *pipa* wavers between the tangible and intangible, Zuogan’s endblown flute becomes its own acousmatic occasion.¹²⁷

A Musical Mercenary: Zha Bashi’s Biography

Zha Bashi (personal name Nai 鼐) was a musician from Wang Daokun’s hometown of Xiuning 休寧 who became a celebrity for his performances in the Jiajing 嘉靖 reign.¹²⁸ In the early Qing, the eminent historian Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–1695) claimed that such cultural luminaries as Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470–1559) – the predominant art connoisseur in the early sixteenth century – and Tang Yin 唐寅 (1470–1524), an acclaimed Ming painter from Suzhou, witnessed Zha’s performances and wrote biographies to commemorate his achievements.¹²⁹ Neither of these texts has survived and most of what we now know of Zha’s life comes instead from a biography written by Wang Daokun, tentatively dated to 1553 and possibly authored concurrently with his inscription.¹³⁰

Wang’s biography of Zha has often been grouped together with later tales of musicians from the seventeenth century, yet it actually emerged as part of a broader (and life-long) effort to

¹²⁷ Wang did not write an inscription for a *qin* zither, yet he composed lyrical poems on his experiences listening to Xu Taichu 許太初 a local Huizhou zither player and relative of Xu Guo the author of the rhinoceros horn cup inscription discussed in chapter four. See Wang, “Bing qi ting Xu Taichu tan qin” 病起聽許太初彈琴, *Taihan ji*, 107: 2258; Wang, “Zeng guren zi Xu Taichu neng qin” 贈故人子許太初能琴, *Taihan ji*, 115: 2567. Wang appears to have regularly invited Xu to perform at his estate on the Yellow Mountains, see Wang, “You Huangshan ji” 遊黃山記, *Taihan ji*, 75: 1541. Like Zuogan, Xu Taichu appears to have also been an amateur painter, see Wang, “Wei Xu Taichu ti Hanlin Gaoshi tu” 為許太初題寒林高士圖, *Taihan ji*, 120: 2775.

¹²⁸ For a brief introduction, see Wang Chaohong 汪超宏, *Ming Qing qujia kao* 明清曲家考 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2006), 449–457.

¹²⁹ Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲, *Jinshi yaoli* 金石要例, in WYGSKQS, jibu, vol. 1483, 839.

¹³⁰ Wang’s biography for Zha was widely disseminated. The text was included in a range of late imperial anthologies of classical prose and compendia: Liu Shilin 劉士麟, *Gujin wenzhi* 古今文致, in SKQSCMCS, jibu, vol. 373: 557–558; Huang Zongxi, *Ming wenhai* 明文海, in WYGSKQS, jibu, vol. 1458, 55–56; He Fuzheng 賀復徵, *Wenzhang bianti huixuan* 文章辨體匯選, in WYGSKQS, jibu, vol. 1408, 570–571. Wang’s text also provided the basis for the biography in *Daoguang Huizhou fuzhi* 道光徽州府志, in *Zhongguo difangzhi jicheng: Anhui fu xianzhi ji* 中國地方志集成: 安徽府縣志輯 (Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1998), 50: 453.

re-envision the agency of Huizhou merchants as cultural producers.¹³¹ Due to its local mountain ecology and a distinctive lineage system that transformed ancestral halls into financial partnerships (or proto-banks), Huizhou had developed a thriving mercantile culture by the late Ming. Given the predominance of Suzhou landowners (men like Wen Zhengming) in Jiangnan cultural affairs and a deep-seated hostility to commercial enterprise in Confucian social thought, Huizhou merchant lineages came under sustained pressure in the sixteenth century to justify any claims to gentry-status. Economic historians have tended to treat Wang Daokun as a commentator on the convergence of scholar and merchant identities, finding in his epitaphs for Huizhou residents a tentative Neo-Confucian re-evaluation of mercantile ethics. There is, however, no stable category of the “merchant biography” in Wang’s own literary project, only scattered reflections on mercantile activities in a sprawling web of dedications to Huizhou classicists, chaste widows, errant sellswords, artists and collectors, doctors, and recluses. Wang Daokun was the scion of a Huizhou merchant lineage and his biography for Zha Bashi represents one of his earliest attempts to promote a Huizhou artist.¹³² The text can be read as an implicit riposte to an elder generation of Suzhou arbiters of taste – Wen Zhengming, Tang Yin – as Wang seeks to write a biography of a man from Xiuning from the perspective of a man from Xiuning. Against this backdrop, the fluid identity of the *pipa* – the way it traverses boundaries between spaces usually segregated along lines of class and gender – becomes intertwined with the way a

¹³¹ For other biographies of *pipa* artists from the late Ming, see Eric C. Lai, “Pipa Artists and Their Music in Late Ming China,” *Ming Studies* 43 (2008): 43–71; on the place of the *pipa* in Ming musical culture more broadly, see Joseph Lam, “Ming Music and Music History,” *Ming Studies* 38 (1997): 21–62.

¹³² For an overview, see Geng Chuanyou, “Wang Daokun shangren zhuanji” 汪道昆商人傳記 (PhD diss., Anhui University, 2002). Wang Daokun was renowned as an author of biographies of famous merchants from the Huizhou region. His collected writings contain two hundred and thirty-five biographies of which seventy-seven concern merchants. The biography for Zha falls under this category and displays structural and thematic similarities with Wang’s other biographies of merchants. Concurrently with his biography for Zha, Wang wrote other biographies of Huizhou luminaries, see Wang, “Wang Chushi zhuan” 汪處士, *Taihan ji*, 28: 598.

man from a merchant background might renegotiate the strictures of established social codes, improvising with different guises in sixteenth century China.

Wang's biography begins with the uncanny event of Zha Nai's birth, claiming that his mother dreamt of a "divine turtle" (*linggui* 靈龜) that entered her bedroom and delivered a son. Nai's birth propitiously coincided with his grandfather's eightieth birthday, which led to the boy being given the name "Eighty" (*bashi* 八十). Zha Nai's father and grandfather were both merchants and he initially follows them into business. Much of the biography is taken up with Wang's attempts to distinguish Zha from courtesan performers. His formative experience in attempting to master the *pipa* occurs in a courtesan house in Changzhou, where a woman treats him dismissively (because he is a merchant):

...Nai was furious and spilled wine on the floor [as if] making a libation, he told the courtesan: "If one day I don't dominate the stage [playing *pipa*] then I will be like this wine."

竦怒，祭酒謂倡：“他日不以此擅場，有如酒！”¹³³

Later, having studied with and surpassed his eminent teachers, he returns to the same courtesan house and leaves the woman awestruck, not "daring to face him" through her tears and prostrations. To underscore Zha's "broad" (*bo* 博) talents as a male performer, Wang writes of how he followed the leading figures in martial arts (*jiji* 技擊), horse-riding and archery (*qishe* 騎射), football (*cuju* 蹴鞠), the flute (*xiao* 簫), and the zither (*qin* 琴) – a list of activities that places the *pipa* among other more suitably masculine pursuits. At recurring intervals, Wang attempts to absolve Zha of the perceived stigma of his merchant past: we learn that he refuses, for instance, to teach a wealthy businessman from Yangzhou to play the *pipa*, despite the offer of a large sum of money. As in the inscription, Zha's chauvinism is both vigorously asserted and

¹³³ Wang, "Zha Bashi zhuan" 查八十傳, *Taihan ji*, 28: 601.

repeatedly tempered in Wang's biography: Zha has an extended private affair with the favored concubine of the Prince of Yanling, yet refuses to take her as his wife despite her offer of a dowry; he also refuses to have children, ending his family line. Wang Daokun concludes by reflecting once more on the ambivalent social status of the *pipa*:

The Unofficial Historian says: "there is a common saying that the *pipa* is music of the Barbarians... [yet] the ancestral clans relished the barnyard millet and cockspur, and found worthiness in gambling with board games, and there is a reason to it. In ancient times, Gao Jianli changed his clothes [to enter the service of the Qin state] and startled his audience with the quality of his playing. Watching Nai bend before the old courtesan, what difference is there? My hometown has a number of steadfast gallants, surely Nai is one?"

野史氏曰：世俗言琵琶，夷部樂耳。...先民或以蕘稗爲美，博奕爲賢，有以也。昔高漸離易衣而驚坐客，視竄誦故倡，何異焉！...吾鄉故多節俠，則竄其人乎。¹³⁴

Wang justifies Zha's career as a performer and his use of the *pipa* as if he were a mercenary like the famous assassin zither player Gao Jianli 高漸離.¹³⁵ Accordingly, Zha can enter into a local Huizhou fellowship of "steadfast gallants" (*jiexia* 節俠) as Wang's inscription of the *pipa* is rendered equivalent to his other epigrams, paired by editors with his dedication for a dagger.¹³⁶ During the same period in which he wrote his biography of Zha Bashi, Wang Daokun was working on what would become a collection of four Northern miscellaneous dramas (*zaju* 雜劇).¹³⁷ There are few records of how Wang composed his lyrics or whether he collaborated with other musicians and actors in staging his scripts, yet we might infer behind his praise of the *pipa*

¹³⁴ Ibid., 602.

¹³⁵ Gao Jianli was a lute player who worked as an assistant in a wine shop to avoid being identified as a co-conspirator to assassinate Qin Shihuang. He eventually used his skills in performance to get close enough to try to assassinate Qin Shihuang.

¹³⁶ The epigram for Zha Bashi's *pipa* was anthologized along with Wang epigram for Wang Yuanli's 汪元蠡 dagger in He Fuzheng, *Wenzhang bianti huixuan*, in WYGSKQS, jibu, vol. 1407, 557. For the epigram, see Wang, "Wang Yuanli bishou ming" 汪元蠡匕首, *Taihan ji*, 28: 1610.

¹³⁷ For an overview of the latest work on these plays, see Wang, *Ming Qing qujia*, 143–153.

player as a Huizhou mercenary, an incipient concern with defending his own engagements in the culture of musical entertainment.

There is one final text that frames Wang Daokun's epigram for Zha's *pipa*, a short letter that he addressed to the musician as an invitation to come to his residence.

I have been staying at Master Floating Hill's place as a guest for a long time, without hearing your rare tones. So I especially dispatched this servant, to proceed across the counties and welcome you. The roads are filled with the warmth of spring, I hope you will be willing to come, and I shall accompany Master Floating Hills to wait for you at the "All-Encompassing Pool."

查八十

僕客浮丘翁所久矣，不聞希音，專遣與人，越邑往逆。陽春載道，願惠然肯來，僕侍浮丘翁相待咸池之上耳。¹³⁸

Wang's terse locution and affection for role-playing raise more questions than they answer: to whom does "Master of Floating Hills" refer? Why (and where) is Wang staying with him? Where is the "All-Encompassing Pool" – the name of a mythological watering hole in the east where the sun bathes, yet also the title of an ancient musical suite from the time of Yao 堯 – and what is going to happen there? Even in its obfuscation, the letter still offers the reader lyrical tropes of transcendence, the faint intimation of Zha's music (Laozi's "rare tones" (*xiyin* 希音)); a possible allusion to the pool suite), and the desire of a powerful official (Wang sends his servant) for the embodied presence of the musician. We do not know if Wang was paid to write his memorials for Zha or if Zha offered his performance as recompense, yet the short letter suggests Zha's subservience to Wang's brush was counteracted by Wang's own attachments to Zha's music. We have seen how Wang's investment in Zha's reputation bears the imprint of his concerns with Huizhou cultural production, the vicissitudes of a merchant's character, and his personal involvement with musical drama, yet these impulses are sutured and sustained by an

¹³⁸ Wang, "Zha Bashi" 查八十, *Taihan ji*, 97: 1986.

underlying desire to hear Zha bring the *pipa* to life. The final words of the epigram speak of a “suffusion of music” (or its homophonic equivalent, “pleasure”), a line that names the captivating power of the object in Zha’s hands, the very “thing” that resists inscription.

The *pipa* straddles and blurs boundaries between kinds: person and object, ownership and dispossession, proximity and distance, self-projection and an irruptive desire for the touch and presence of another. It is in this gap between Wang’s attempt to use Zha’s *pipa* to speak of himself and his inability to fully possess the source of the object’s allure – the gap between a claim to mastery and an incapacity to circumscribe the music (or pleasure) that enchants him – that the thing begins to talk back. It speaks not as a puppet or a friend, but to insist on its resistance to the constraints of our words.

CHAPTER TWO

WRITING MATERIALS IN SIXTEENTH CENTURY HUIZHOU

One of the longest surviving inscriptions for a late imperial inkstone is a two hundred-character text attributed to Wang Daokun on a “Dragon Tail” rock now held in the collection of the Beijing Capital Museum (Figure 2.1).¹ This celebrated stone, signed “Wang Boyu” 汪伯玉 and marked with Wang’s seals, “Wang Daokun” and “Wang shi Boyu” 汪氏伯玉, bears both an engraved preface and an epigram dated to the autumn of 1583 (Wanli guimo qiu 萬曆癸未秋) (Figure 2.2). The slab is comparatively large, measuring 22.3 cm in length, 14.8 cm in width, and 2.7 cm in depth, its shallow “ink pool” (*yan chi* 硯池) enclosed on three sides by a slender protruding border (*yanbian* 硯邊; or “inkstone lip” *yanchun* 硯唇), embellished with an archaic dragon pattern (*longwen* 龍紋).² The “inkstone chamber” (*yantang* 硯堂; or “inkstone heart” *yanxin* 硯心), the smooth surface of the slate used for grinding ink, reveals an iridescent “silver halo” (*yinyun* 銀暈), a style of veining or found patterning caused by mineral imperfections and praised as a distinctive attribute of rocks from the Wuyuan area.³ With its cumbersome size and understated carving, the Dragon Trail is representative of what are now taken to be period conventions in Ming inkstone design, a distinctive “Great Ming Ware” (Da Ming zuo 大明作).⁴

Such details are largely overlooked, however, when the viewer is invited to flip the artifact to read Wang’s sprawling inscription, rendered in an elegant running script. Wang

¹ Rong Dawei 榮大為, ed., *Shoudu bowuguan guancang mingyan* 首都博物館館藏名硯 (Beijing: Gongyi meishu chubanshe, 1997), 16.

² An increasingly common ornamental feature of Ming and Qing “She inkstones” (She yan 歙硯), see Zhang Fangtong 章放童, *Sheyan wengu* 歙硯溫故 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2007), 109–111.

³ *Ibid.*, 51–56.

⁴ Ko, *Social Life*, 176.

Daokun's words physically transform the Dragon Tail into a sheet of stone paper that aspires to simulate, in miniature, the durability of more monumental forms like the epitaphic stele. The inkstone becomes a "biographical object" – both in the sense that Wang's preface endows the object with a biography, narrating its passage into and out of the market over the course of twenty years, and in the sense that the object is invested through its dating with critical events in his own biography (1563; the spring and autumn of 1583).⁵ In the previous chapter, we saw how Wang took up the persona of Su Shi's Dragon Tail in his short epigram for a now lost Song She slab, using the stone as an agent for both the assertion of individuality and prospective integration into a community of refined friends. With the Capital Museum inkstone, this negotiation is extended, the discrepancies between these two ambitions more explicitly marked.

Wang oscillates throughout between articulating his own affective response to his consonant possession – an artifact he insinuates *sought* him out – and performing expertise through competent citation of established distinctions. This tension between singularization and repetition is captured in Wang's transition from poetic images of the "Abstruse Precinct" and "Shades of the Xiang" to his interpolation, in the epigram, of Su Shi's so-called "famous saying" (*mingyan*), describing an archetypal She slab's engagements with brush and ink:

An Inscription for an Old She Stone Inkslab with a Preface

What makes both She and Duan stones valuable is the harvest from the old pits. And yet, She is actually superior to Duan. Nowadays, they are both comparatively rare and yet those who believe whatever they hear seem inclined to treasure Duan stones and denigrate those from She. Why would this be the case? Duan stones are easy to counterfeit, whereas the old She rocks are not.

I remember when this stone was first brought to me – I took one glance and knew straight away it was an old Dragon Tail. I was delighted with it, yet I couldn't match its price – this was persistently nagging my mind.

⁵ Janet Hoskins, "Agency, Biography and Objects," in *The Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. Christopher Tilley (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 74; Hoskins adapts the term "biographical object" from sociologist Violette Morin.

Twenty years have now passed and at the beginning of spring I spoke with my younger brother Weiyuan about it – he immediately got me the stone. What happiness could compare to this?

This single stone that I first glimpsed twenty years ago and had to wait two decades to obtain – the mechanism of fate that brought this about is indescribable. Before, I was crestfallen and now I am overjoyed – so I inscribed it:

Jade of the Abstruse Precinct?
Stone chime of the Xiang Shades?
When ink makes contact, it loses all rigidity.
When the brush makes contact, it maintains its point.
The Master of the Slope thought these two merits were difficult to combine,
And this stone alone holds first place for this essence.
How could I commend myna eyes or golden stars, and not regard this as the most excellent!

Autumn 1583,
Signed: Wang Boyu.

舊歛石硯銘并序

歛與端之貴，貴舊坑也，而歛實出端之上，今皆絕少矣，乃世之耳食者頗竇端而賤歛者，何哉？蓋端易贗，舊歛則不然耳。憶昔有持此石來者，予一見知為舊龍尾也，心賞焉，購之弗得，心輒怏怏焉。而今二十季矣。春初偶對維元弟話此，遂為立致之，喜何如耶？夫一石耳，見之二十年前，得之二十年後，其間機緣不可知也，則前何必怏怏，而後亦何以喜？為銘曰：

玄都之玉耶？湘陰之磬耶？墨遇之失其堅，筆遇之全其銳。兩者坡公以為難兼，維茲獨擅其粹。吾何取鷓鴣，金星，而不以此稱最。

萬曆癸未秋汪伯玉識。⁶

Wang narrates a twenty-year relationship to the stone, from an initial encounter in 1563 to a full reunion in the spring and autumn of 1583. Both of these dates map onto decisive moments in Wang's own career: in the first instance, he was serving as an official in the staff of Qi Jiguang's army fighting Japanese pirates in Fujian.⁷ His professed inability to purchase the object at this

⁶ *Shoudu bowuguan*, 17.

⁷ The producers of a recent television documentary for the series "National Treasure Files" devoted to the Capital Museum inkstone use these dates to turn the object into a material analogue of Wang's firmity of resolve and

point in his life speaks to his diligence and frugality as a public servant. By 1583, Wang had left office and withdrawn to his hometown, a period during which he became increasingly involved in sponsoring the production of local stationery. It is at this point that the inkstone fortuitously returned to him as a companion and a prize for his earlier selflessness. Wang's relationship with the rock reads as a tale of de-commodification, with the object moving through and taking on the guises of a singular find, a memento, and a pure gift.⁸ As the inscription progresses, however, Wang drifts from using his biography to enliven the stone, to using the stone to certify his own refinement: ranking and authentication – weighing myna eyes (green colored inclusions in the Duan stone matrix) and golden stars (yellowish specks from the stone of a famous She quarry), for instance – have less to do with any attachments to a particular rock than with justifying Wang's claims for the perspicacity of his eyes and the felicity of his words.⁹ We are left with the question of whom Wang is talking to: is he reassuring himself of his own entitlement to a singular possession, or is he simply trying to convince his readers that he knows what he is talking about?

uprightness as an official – as if it/he embodies (an anachronistic) anti-Japanese patriotism. CCTV Guobao dangan 國寶檔案, broadcast: 2011/09/13.

⁸ While a commodity, as Igor Kopytoff has suggested, is defined in the context of a situation in which its “exchangeability (past, present, or future) for some other thing is its socially relevant feature,” singularization – the manipulation of ethical, cognitive, or aesthetic processes of valuation – works to draw an object out of this state. These alternative modes of valuation feed into what Appadurai identifies as a “perennial and universal tug-of-war between the tendency of all economies to expand the jurisdiction of commoditization and of all cultures to restrict it.” Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” 28. This diversion from the commodity phase can also lead to a potential intensification of commodification by an enhancement of value attendant upon the diversion and we see that Wang's name, as its own mark of prestige, had become an effective device for raising the worth of an inkstone by the late Ming.

⁹ Due to an expanding market and a concomitant demand for more finely calibrated distinctions, connoisseurs praised the particular qualities of rocks from different quarries at both sites, devising epithets for the veining or texture of representative stones: the “Fine-Tissue Pattern” (Luowen keng 羅紋坑), with criss-cross lines like the threads in *crêpe*, was often regarded as the superlative quarry from She County, followed by the “Brushed-Thread Tissue Pattern” (Shuasi keng 刷絲坑/Shuasi luowen 刷絲羅紋), the “Eyebrow” (Meizi keng 眉子坑), and the “Golden Star” (Jinxing keng 金星坑). For a Jiaqing era 嘉慶 (1796–1820) overview of the different quarries/rocks at the main inkstone producing sites in China, see Zhu Dong 朱棟, *Yan xiaoshi* 硯小史 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji shudian, 1979). For a more recent survey of the contest between She and Duan, see Wu Ligu 吳笠谷, *Mingyan bian* 名硯辨 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2012), 317–350.

This balancing act is sustained by the presence of a third character who remains an enigma: Wang's "younger brother" Wei Yuan. Wei's appearance in the plot deflects attention from the details of Wang Daokun's own acquisition of the inkstone. Through the services he renders no mention need be made of transactions, sums of money, or markets. It was not enough for Wang to simply elide such concerns: he needed to tacitly identify someone else to address them so as to affirm his own release from the stigma of commoditization.¹⁰ In receiving the object from Wei Yuan, projective judgment is masked as recognition: Wang is able to deflect from any imputation of acquisitive desire and extol a fated bond with the artifact, writing as if his prized possession found him. Wei Yuan's identity nevertheless remains a mystery: no one in Wang Daokun's extensive network of contacts had this cognomen and I have been unable to find any other traces of this character in his writings. By contrast, there is voluminous evidence from the late Ming to suggest that Wang's brother, Wang Daoguan 汪道貫 (1543–1591) (courtesy name: Zhongyan 仲淹), and his cousin Wang Daohui 汪道會 (1544–1613) (courtesy name: Zhongjia 仲嘉), were involved in the business of buying and selling inkstones and a wide range of other writing materials. Through tracing records of their activities in the market for art and antiques we can apprehend a role that Wei Yuan implicitly enacts in Wang Daokun's account of the Dragon Tail, a role that underpins the story of his inscription and negatively defines the persona he uses his inkstone to project.

¹⁰ Such gestures were not uncommon in other writings on inkstones: in a preface to a widely re-printed inscription on a Dragon Tail, Xu Wei writes of how he acquired an inkstone on his travels through the Yellow Mountains for two-hundred and fifty cash, yet when he invited Wang Yin, a close associate of Wang Daokun, to appraise the object he was informed he could sell it for one-thousand five hundred. Lu Yunlong 陸雲龍, *Huangming shiliu jia xiaopin* 皇明十六家小品 (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 1997), vol. 1. 387.

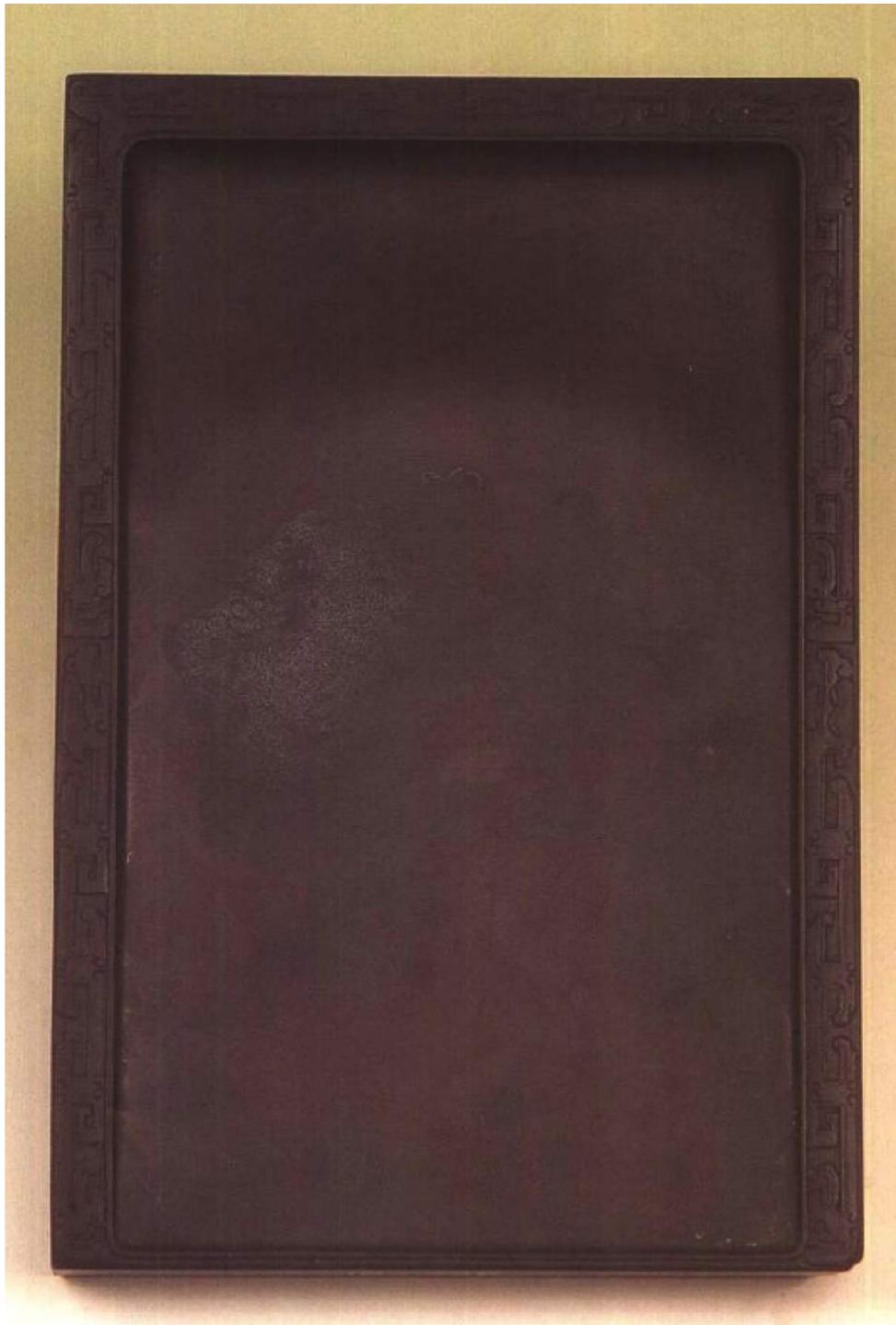


Figure 2.1: Ming Dynasty Dragon Tail She Inkstone
Source: Beijing Capital Museum.

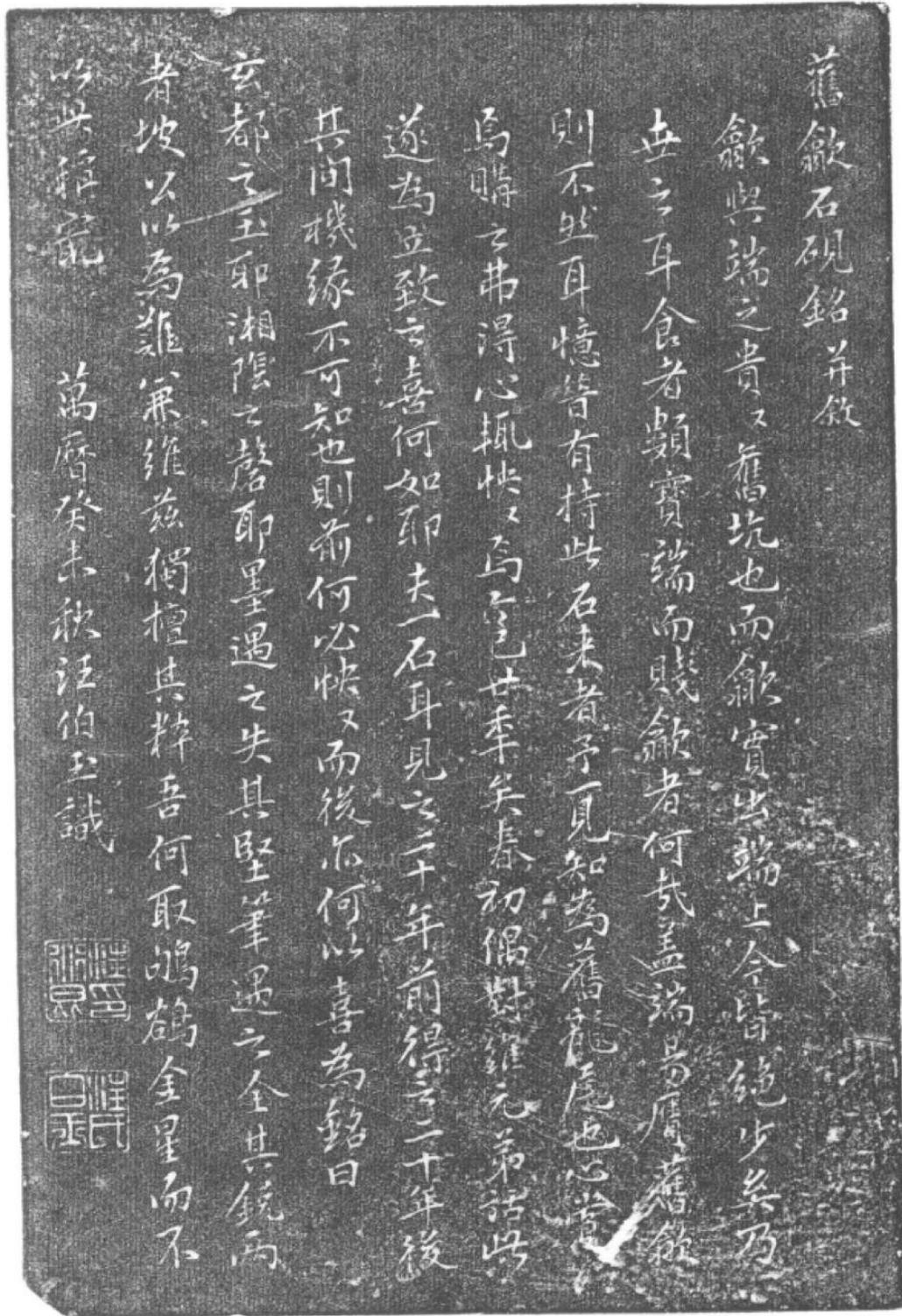


Figure 2.2: Rubbing of Wang Daokun’s “Inscription, with a Preface, for an Old She Stone Inkslab”
 Source: Beijing Capital Museum.

Overview

If the first chapter of this dissertation was concerned with the question of how to read an inscription, I now move to the social world of transactions that lay behind (and were constitutive of) the marked artifact: who, in the first place, had the authority to compose an epigram for a luxury object? Who was hired to actually carve script with a knife? How did a figure like Wei Yuan participate in shaping the trajectories of decorative objects in sixteenth century China? In posing these questions, the chapter can be approached as an extended response to the Capital Museum Dragon Tail, teasing out the contradictions of the persona its inscription presents, asking what made Wang's name and seals emblems of prestige in the first place, while pursuing pointers to the careers of the actors who brokered such developments. If the chapter begins with Wang Daokun's textual self-portrait carved onto the surface of the Dragon Tail, it charts the journey of a shadowy figure like "Wei Yuan" from an object of representation – a supplement to the "elegant" (*ya* 雅) connoisseur – to the position of an author capable of modeling the literary representation of serially produced commodities.

This chapter has two principal objectives: first, I trace a historical shift whereby the mercurial and historically maligned figure of the Huizhou dealer – a salesman, shopkeeper, pawnbroker, and procurer of decorative objects – might start to compose his own inscriptions. In this process, we see the distinctions between the role-types of the connoisseur and the salesman that have been taken to frame the dynamics of the Ming art market dissolve. This is not to reiterate a well-established point – made by Craig Clunas, Wang Cheng-hua, and Wang Hung-tai – that late Ming merchants took on the trappings of the gentry by mimicking art connoisseurs, but rather, engaging with recent scholarship by Zhang Changhong, Xu Min and others, to suggest that Huizhou dealers actively redefined how connoisseurship was both practiced and

conceived.¹¹ The diaries of renowned Jiangnan collectors like Li Rihua 李日華 (1565–1635), sources often cited by historians in their attempts to reconstruct attitudes towards art connoisseurship in the late Ming, make frequent references to “Dealers from She County” (She gu 歙賈), largely anonymous men who serve as supply lines and unrefined foils for the gentleman recluse. In this chapter, I recover the careers of these salesmen and measure their impact on the extension of new avenues for talking about things.¹² The practice of the Huizhou dealer provocatively makes a point that while seemingly self-evident is repeatedly suppressed in the late Ming discourse on objects: to be a truly successful salesman, one had to have already mastered the rules of judgment propounded by one’s customers.

Second, I show how this shift relates to the broader question of who can wield the knife in carving script. During the mid- to late sixteenth century, we see the rising trend of scholars taking up the knife to carve their own calligraphy in stone. In this chapter, I show how this development was predicated on another, less discussed break, whereby artisanal carvers from Huizhou stopped simply carving script for clients and solicited others to engrave script for their

¹¹ Wang Hongtai, “Ya su de bianzheng – Mingdai shangwan wenhua de liuxing yu shishang guanxi de jiaocuo” 雅俗的辯證－明代賞玩文化的流行與士商關係的交錯, *Xinshi xue* 新史學 17: 4 (2006): 73–143.

¹² Li’s candid account of his day-to-day experiences as a consumer in the art market over the course of eight years from 1609 to 1616, *Diary from the Water Tasting Studio (Weishuixuan riji 味水軒日記)*, has been used by historians to frame the interactions between “cultural brokers,” the men who set the normative terms of taste, and the largely anonymous merchants who supplied decorative objects to them. Li’s diary frequently refers to men like “Dealer Xia” (Xia gu 夏賈), “Dealer Gao” (Gao gu 高賈), “Master Yu” (Yu sheng 余生), or sometimes simply the “Dealer from She” (She gu 歙賈) – figures lacking personal or courtesy names (*ming* 名 or *zi* 字) suggesting their comparatively low social standing – who travelled to his residence in Jiaying 嘉興 to present him with their wares. It was common for Li to use these visits as a chance to display his own superior connoisseurial skills, outwitting the salesman by identifying fakes and correcting erroneous attributions. Across the pages of the diary, Li repeatedly affirms the salesman’s subservience to the elite connoisseur: the merchant, bound to the pecuniary logic of the marketplace, does not understand the real value of the things he sells and hence requires Li’s instruction and approval. And yet, the terms of this unequal relationship are predicated on a set of evasions on Li’s behalf: he never discloses whether he was paid by salesmen to evaluate a work and hence raise its price; he never reflects on the role of his “authoritative” judgments in generating a demand for fakes. He tries to efface, in effect, his participation in the market he sustains. For an overview, see Craig Clunas, “The Art Market in 17th Century China: The Evidence of the Li Rihua Diary,” *History of Art and History of Ideas: Meishushi yu guannian shi* 美術史與觀念史 eds. Fan Jingzhong 范景中, Cao Yiqiang 曹意強 (Nanjing: Nanjing shifan daxue chubanshe, 2003) 1: 201–224.

own projects. The subsequent scholarly fetishization of carving one's own calligraphy in stone – and the signature values of authenticity and spontaneity that were now seen to inhere in this act – can be read as a defensive reaction to the entrepreneurial artisan's embrace of writing as a mode of collaboration and networking. If the scholar sought to suture and control the gap between the calligraphic sign and its substrates, treating the graven mark as an indexical extension of a single refined hand, the artisan opened up and indulged the gaps between writing and its material supports: using these interstitial spaces for the production of composite assemblages that link together, and in doing so transform the social relations between different bodies and selves.

These two developments converge at the end of the chapter in the physical form of an advertising handbill, a document that heralds a new function for the literary inscription as the endorsement of a commercial trademark. Speaking of writing materials in sixteenth century Huizhou is not only a way of drawing attention to the development of new industries and strategies for marketing writing stationery – schemes in which Wang Daokun, his relatives, and his collaborators were deeply imbricated – it is also intended to suggest how dealers from Huizhou remodeled existing frameworks for conceptualizing the relationship between writing and materiality in late imperial China. Seemingly inconsequential concerns with writing paraphernalia – inkstones, seals, paper, brushes, ink – were, I claim, at the center of profound contests over who could mark material surfaces with script.

Part 1: Inkstone Dealer

Eyes of Xin'an: The Invention of the Huizhou Art Collector

During the late sixteenth century, Wang Daokun gradually emerged as a leading collector and connoisseur of art in the wider Jiangnan region. Writing in 1639, the commentator Wu Qizhen

吳其貞 (1607–1677) went so far as to claim that the “fashion” (*feng* 風) for art collecting among Huizhou families actually began with Wang Daokun and his brothers:¹³

There were no better places that exemplified the prosperity of Huizhou than She County and Xiuning. The possession of antiquities determined whether one was cultivated or vulgar. Therefore, people contended for acquisition at all costs. Hearing that, antique dealers from everywhere came to Huizhou, and the merchants traveling in other cities searched for and brought back antiques. Consequently, acquisition increased greatly. *This trend began with the vice-minister of war Wang Daokun and his brothers*, and then was continued by the Wu family from the village of Jinan and the Wang family from the village of Congmu fang. My fellow village folk from Shangshan, the Wu family; the Chu family from the city of Xiuning; the Huang family from the village of Juan; and the Cheng family from the village of Yucun – their collections contain pieces that are famous all over the country.”

憶昔我徽之盛，莫如休，歙二縣，而雅俗之分，在於古玩之有無，故不惜重值爭而收入。時四方貨玩者，聞風奔至，行商于外者，搜尋而歸，因此所得甚多。其風始開於汪司馬兄弟。行於溪南吳氏，叢睦坊汪氏繼之。余鄉商山吳氏，休邑朱氏，居安黃氏，榆村程氏，所得皆為海內名器。¹⁴

This passage has often been used as evidence for the “gentrification” of Huizhou merchants during the Wanli era. With the transition from a grain-salt exchange system to a new policy of “paying silver for salt,” institutionalized in 1491, Huizhou merchants gradually replaced their counterparts in Shanxi and Shaanxi as the dominant power bloc in the highly lucrative salt business. The rise of art collecting in late sixteenth century Huizhou, a trend traced to Wang Daokun, the scion of a salt-merchant family, has been largely understood in this light as an extended effort to convert new economic capital into cultural capital through “social emulation.”¹⁵ In Wu Qizhen’s overview, this transfer of forms of “cultural valuation” is

¹³ Wang’s collection included pieces by Xia Gui 夏珪 (1195–1224) and Li Cheng 李成 (919–967), Yan Liben’s 閻立本 (601–673) “Sweeping the Elephant” (*saoxiang tu* 掃象圖) and Zhao Qianli’s 趙千里 (1127–1162) “Wenhuang’s Flight to Shu” (*Wenhuang xing Shu tu* 文皇幸蜀圖).

¹⁴ Wu Qizhen 吳其貞, *Shuhua ji* 書畫記 (Shanghai: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1963), 160–61.

¹⁵ For a brief introduction to art collecting in sixteenth and seventeenth Huizhou, see Jason Chi-sheng Kuo, “Hui-chou Merchants as Art Patrons in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries,” *Artists and Patrons: Some Social and Economic Aspects of Chinese Painting* ed. Chu-ting Li (Lawrence, KS: Kress Foundation Dept. of Art History in association with University of Washington Press, 1989), 177–188.

“personalized in the extreme,” yet is still seen as indicative of the extension of the “trappings of gentility” from the bureaucratic elite to the “merely rich.”¹⁶

The notion that Huizhou collectors simply copied their counterparts in Suzhou was also advanced by Wang’s fellow *jinshi*, the eminent Suzhou scholar Wang Shizhen: “In general, these trends [for collecting paintings and ceramics] originated with the people of Suzhou and have been followed by those from Huizhou, it is truly odd” (大抵吳人濫觴，而徽人遵之，俱可怪也).¹⁷ Certain objects in Wang Daokun’s collection reflect his status as a follower rather than a leader of fashion: to take one example, he professes to a personal interest in the art of Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254–1322) and claims to have acquired one of the legendary Yuan dynasty painter’s inkstones, a round piece bearing the *Plans of the True Forms of the Five Marchmounts* (*Wuyue zhenxing tu* 五嶽真形圖).¹⁸ Not incidentally, the appreciation of Zhao Mengfu’s work had become a particularly popular sixteenth century trend led by Wang Shizhen (who owned at least 26 pieces of Zhao’s calligraphy, nine rubbings, and around seventeen other paintings and scrolls).¹⁹ Similarly, as Flora Li-tsui Fu has demonstrated, an “obsession” with possessing

¹⁶ Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, 163.

¹⁷ Wang Shizhen 王世貞, *Gu bu gu lu* 觚不觚錄, in CSJCCB, vol. 2811, 17.

¹⁸ Wang, “Zhao Wenmin yuanyan tu ba” 趙文敏圓研圖跋, *Taihan ji*, 86: 1779. Wang Daokun had a broader interest in works of art attributed to Zhao Mengfu. He also wrote a colophon on a scroll painting of Mahāmāyā (Fomu tu 佛母圖), supposedly by Zhao, which belonged to Mo Shilong. The colophon recounts how he displayed the painting at a gathering of his Chan meditation society with a small altar set up for offerings before the image, see Wang, “Zhao Wenmin fomu tu ba” 趙文敏佛母圖跋, *Taihan ji*, 86: 1779–1780. As we have already noted, Wang also composed a colophon for a calligraphic scroll of Zhao Mengfu’s song in praise of a staff, see Wang, “Zhao Wenmin gong shu zhuzhang ge ba,” 1786–1787. Wang Daokun’s younger brother, Wang Daoguan, also acquired Zhao Mengfu’s “In the Shade of Summer Trees” (*Xiamu chuiyin tu* 夏木垂陰圖), see Xu, *Sheshi xiantan*, 1093.

¹⁹ Shi Guowei 施囹玮, “Wang Shizhen cang Zhao Mengfu xingshu er zan er shi yanjiu” 王世貞藏趙孟頫行書《二贊二詩》研究, *Rongbao zhai* 榮寶齋 4 (2012). For an introduction to Wang Shizhen’s wider contributions to art collecting in English, see Louise Yuhas, “Wang Shih-chen as Patron,” *Artists and Patrons*, ed. Li, 139–154.

miniature representations of the Five Marchmounts can be traced to the late Ming.²⁰ It is questionable then whether an object that so effectively synthesizes ascendant fashions in the late sixteenth century was actually produced before the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, Wang Daokun commissioned a painted reproduction of the decorated surface of the inkstone and composed a colophon that he proudly displayed for approval from Wang Shizhen and his brother.²¹ This case suggests that Wang Daokun turned to Wang Shizhen for both validation and self-aggrandizement and their relationship became defined by a degree of friendly rivalry, a competitiveness that is encapsulated in later reports of a potlatch style gathering on the Yellow Mountains hosted by the two men. One hundred amateur specialists were invited from Suzhou and paired with counterparts from Huizhou in a “tournament of value”: a periodic event removed from the routines of economic life, where the “rank, fame, or reputation of actors” was reconstituted through contests to determine tokens of value in Ming society.²² We do not know if this event ever actually occurred, yet it serves as an apposite heuristic for understanding the contests between Huizhou and Suzhou in the late Ming, where personal prestige or *mana* became invested in “arresting or diverting the passage of highly valued items.” This tournament of value

²⁰ The earliest recorded paintings of these sacred peaks from the Ming were a set of five large hanging scrolls attributed to Ye Cheng to commemorate the grand tours of his patron Qiao Yu 喬宇 (1457–1524), and many leading collectors from the Wanli era onwards followed Qiao in commissioning pictorial reproductions of the “Marchmounts.” In this process, as Fu has suggested, we can observe a dynamic of gradual miniaturization whereby images of the Five Marchmounts became smaller in scale and were increasingly tied to the private space of the scholar’s studio – consequently losing the function of anticipating or commemorating actual journeys to the sites. Much of the evidence for the renewed interest in the *Plans of the True Forms of the Five Marchmounts* involves Wang Daokun’s close circle of friends and collaborators, see Flora Li-tsui Fu, *Framing Famous Mountains: Grand Tour and Mingshan Paintings in Sixteenth-century China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2009), 154–159.

²¹ Wang Shimao 王世懋 (1536–1588).

²² See Xu, “Wang Yanzhou zhuren you She” 王弇州諸人游歙, *Sheshi xiantan*, 413. On “tournaments of value,” see Appadurai: “Tournaments of value are complex periodic events that are removed in some culturally well-defined way from the routines of economic life. Participation in them is likely to be both a privilege of those in power and an instrument of status contest between them. The currency of such tournaments is also likely to be set apart through well understood cultural diacritics. Finally, what is at issue in such tournaments is not just status, rank, fame, or reputation of actors, but the disposition of the central tokens of value in the society in question.” Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” 21.

– one that frames many of the developments discussed in this dissertation, from seal carving to ink making – is exemplified in Wang Daokun’s relationship to Wang Shizhen and plays out in their efforts to shape the prestige of an artifact like the inkstone through the skilled use of cultural diacritics.

Smelly Mutton

Although Huizhou merchants were roundly denigrated by outside observers as imposters for copying the tastes of art collectors from Suzhou, certain sources from the late Ming started to satirize the increasingly symbiotic relationship between these two constituencies. One of the most widely cited accounts of the co-dependence of merchants and literati at this time is a dialogue, recorded in the compendium *Trivia from Jinling* (*Er Xu Jinling suoshi* 二續金陵瑣事), between Wang Shizhen and the Huizhou scholar, Zhan Jingfeng 詹景鳳 (1532–1602):

Wang Shizhen and Zhan Jingfeng were together in the Temple of the Tile Market. Wang then remarked: “merchants of Xin’an approach the literati of Suzhou like flies gathering around smelly mutton.” Zhan replied: “the literati of Suzhou also approach the merchants of Xin’an like flies gathering around smelly mutton.” Wang smiled and did not say anything.

鳳州公同詹東圖在瓦官寺中。鳳州公偶云：新安賈人見蘇州文人，如蠅聚一羶。東圖曰：蘇州文人見新安賈人，亦如蠅聚一羶。鳳洲公笑而不語。²³

Wang Shizhen’s silent smirk has been seen by historians to encapsulate the contradictions of Jiangnan society in the late Ming: Suzhou literati might ridicule the obsequiousness of Huizhou merchants, yet had come to depend on their economic capital without ever openly acknowledging the existence of such debts. This widely cited episode neatly reduces Wang and Zhan to mouthpieces for their respective communities and in doing so sustains a dichotomy between merchant and scholar. And yet, the backdrop to this exchange in a famous Nanjing

²³ Zhou Hui 周暉, “Ying ju yi shan” 蠅聚一羶, *Er Xu Jinling suoshi* 二續金陵瑣事, 51 a-b.

temple and curio market, an intermediary zone for both men, is often overlooked: what brought them together? What was the nature of their relationship?

Zhan Jingfeng was not just any merchant acquaintance, he was a prominent collector in his own right, who brazenly sought to “downgrade Suzhou while honoring Huizhou” (chong Hui bian Wu 崇徽貶吳) and who was seen as an advocate for the slogan, “equipped with the eyes of Xin’an” (Xin’an ju yan 新安具眼), suggesting the ascendancy of Huizhou connoisseurs over rivals from the Wu area.²⁴ The “Xin’an eyes” slogan can be traced to another meeting between Zhan Jingfeng and Wang Shizhen at the Wagan Temple in Nanjing: on this occasion, Zhan had correctly dated a rubbing of a stone engraving to the Five Dynasties solely on stylistic grounds, an attribution that was later confirmed by a reign mark, causing a mutual acquaintance to remark “although in the past the men of Wu were commended for “possessing eyes,” now it seems as if those “with the eyes” are the men of my home, Xin’an” (曩者昔但稱吳人具眼, 今具眼非吾新安人耶?) – and Wang Shizhen is left standing, again, in silence (弇山公默然).²⁵ As Liu Hsin-ju has recently argued, in the period between the death of Wen Zhengming in 1559 and the rise of Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636), Jiangnan lacked a pre-eminent connoisseur with the power to decisively authenticate artworks, creating a vacuum that gave rise to an unprecedented degree of regional competition between different factions trying to promote the collections and collectors of their hometowns.²⁶ Zhan Jingfeng was at the center of these struggles in advancing

²⁴ Liu Xinru 劉心如 [Liu Hsin-ju], “Xin’an juyan: Zhan Jingfeng yu wan Ming jianshang jia de diyu jingzheng” 新安具眼：詹景鳳與晚明鑑賞家的地域競爭, *Mingdai yanjiu* 明代研究 18. 6 (2012): 83-104.

²⁵ Zhan Jingfeng 詹景鳳, *Zhanshi xuanlan bian* 詹氏玄覽編 (Taipei: Guoli zhongyang tushuguan chubanshe, 1970), 246.

²⁶ Wen Peng 文彭 (1497–1573) and Wen Jia 文嘉 (1501–1583) were unable to extend the legacy of their father. Other connoisseurs acquired widespread fame, yet no single figure could claim Wen Zhengming’s mantle. The key contenders from Wen’s circle were: Hua Xia 華夏 and Hua Yun 華雲 (1488–1560) from Wuxi 無錫; He Liangjun 何良俊 (1506–1573), Gu Congde 顧從德 and Gu Congyi 顧從義 (1523–1588) from Songjiang 松江; and Xiang Yuanbian 向元賓 from Jiaying 嘉興. Further afield, the leading collectors of the period were: Hu Rujia 胡汝嘉, Yao

a favorable view of regional diversity and the cultural relativism of connoisseurial expertise, points he makes in his own version of the temple encounter with Wang Shizhen:

Wang once remarked: “The wealthy merchants of Xin’an approach the literati of Gusu like flies around stinky mutton.” I smiled and replied: “When the literati of Gusu approach the wealthy merchants of Xin’an, they, too, are like flies drawn to stinky mutton, no?” Wang smiled and did not respond. Each of the five directions has its distinctive characteristics. Each differs in terms of what is valued and esteemed and each has its own fineries and flaws so that it is hard to compare them together as one.

王司寇嘗云：「新安富賈見姑蘇文人，如蠅之聚一臚。」予咲而應之曰：「姑蘇文人見新安富賈，亦如蠅之聚一臚，何也？」公咲而不答。夫方性殊，好尚各異，互有嫩疵，類難相一。²⁷

The rivalry between Huizhou and Suzhou informed Zhan Jingfeng’s own practice as a collector: as, for instance, when he commissioned a new box for a legendary antique Duan rock²⁸

Master Nanfeng of Lu’s inkstone is a Duan rock: it had large eyes, yet in the act of carving, the eyes have been lost. It has been rounded into a circular design. On the underside of the stone, there are three legs as if it were a *ding* vessel. In the middle of these three legs there are small clouds and a sun. Some said its name was, “Three Stars Holding the Sun.” On top it has a slightly raised rim to help with gathering the collected ink. It is truly exquisite and so I cherished it.

I heard of this inkstone when I first arrived in Nanfeng. After Zeng Gong passed away it fell into the hands of the Imperial Historian Cheng Xuelou. Xuelou’s descendants still live in Nanfeng and so when I passed through I took a chance to observe Xuelou’s characters on the bottom of the stone. The characters had an archaic vigor. His grandson saw a Lotus Leaf Dragon Tail Inkstone on my table and was taken with it so he asked to swap this inkstone and let me have the other one. I then made a square box to store the inkstone along with an encrusted piece of antique jade and invited Wang Daokun and Wang Shizhen to inscribe it.

魯南豐先生硯是端石，有大眼在中而琢者不存眼，規而為圓，下作三足如鼎狀，三足之中作一小雲日，或曰此名三星捧日，其上邊圍微取貯墨之意，極精而渾古可愛，予始至南豐即聞有此硯，子固歿後，歸程御史雪樓，雪樓子孫亦

Zhi 姚淞, and Yao Ruxun 姚汝循 (1535–1597) from Nanjing; Yan Song 嚴嵩 and Yan Shifan 嚴世蕃 (1513–1565), Zhu Xizhong 朱希忠 (1516–1573) and Zhu Xixiao 朱希孝, Zhang Juzheng 張居正 (1525–1582), and Han Shineng 韓世能 (1528–1598) in Beijing; and Wang Shizhen and his brother Wang Shimao in Suzhou, see Liu, “Xin’an juyan,” 87.

²⁷ Zhan Jingfeng 詹景鳳, *Zhanshi xingli xiaobian* 詹氏性理小辨, in SKQSCMCS, zibu, vol. 112. 38: 12b.

²⁸ Formerly a possession of the Song dynasty historian Zeng Gong 曾鞏 (1019–1083) and the Yuan dynasty censor-in-chief Cheng Jufu 程鉅夫 (1249–1318).

世家南豐，因泛借觀底有雪樓題字，字亦古健，其孫見予几上龍尾荷葉硯，絕愛之，請以此硯易硯遂歸予，予乃為製方函以古玉相函而請伯玉元美二先生銘之。²⁹

This episode displays Zhan Jingfeng's sharp skills as a connoisseur, or his "eyes of Xin'an," in action – he hears about the inkstone and recognizes Cheng Jufu's mark, before Cheng's descendant almost unwittingly agrees to exchange it for Zhan's Dragon Tail (an object that hints at Zhan's own influence as a representative of the products of his hometown). Zhan Jingfeng's subsequent request for Wang Daokun and Wang Shizhen to inscribe his tailor-made jade inkstone box tries to project an equivalence between the two men: as a curator of the largest art collection in Huizhou, Wang Daokun's markings had, in Zhan's eyes, earned parity with those of Wang Shizhen. With both Zhao Mengfu's *Five Marchmount* slab and Zeng Gong's Duan rock, the antique inkstone, a fetishized supplement for the reputation of the painter or calligrapher, allowed Wang to consolidate his own reputation as a connoisseur of "Art," in a more general sense. At the same time, these cases demonstrate that the local allegiances and standing of such a role-type – particularly in its fraught relationship to conceptions of merchant identity – were, in Wang's hands, becoming increasingly malleable.

Dorothy Ko has written of a weak sense of the integrity or discreteness of the inkstone as a thing in itself, and these examples display similar instabilities as the slab becomes caught up in a tangle of materials and texts: engraved boxes, painted reproductions, literary dedications.³⁰ There is a further discrepancy between these late Ming records of Wang's inscription of inkstones and an artifact like the Capital Museum Dragon Tail with which we began. When Wang chose to commemorate his own favored slabs he sought out eulogies from renowned friends (just as Zhan Jingfeng did with his new box), treating the packaging of the object as an

²⁹ Zhan, *Zhan shi xuanlan bian*, 308.

³⁰ Dorothy Ko, *Social Life*, 184.

apparatus for the affirmation of privileged relationships. Wang's inscriptions for inkstones owned by artists like Ding Yunpeng similarly appear to have been part of a web of other dedicatory compositions. By contrast, the Capital Museum Dragon Tail inscription appears starkly solipsistic, as if its author were uninterested in talking openly with or to any fellow collector. This incongruity may point to a possible distinction between inkstones that Wang actually wrote dedications for, and inkstones that were marked with Wang's name and seals by others to raise their worth, a category that continues to expand as new inkstones with Wang's markings (Wang Daokun, Wang Boyu, Taihan shi) enter into and out of the contemporary market for antiques.³¹ In either case, we can say that by the late sixteenth century, Wang Daokun's name functioned as an effective mechanism for endorsing the value of an inkstone.

Obsessing with Playthings: The "Two Zhongs"

Despite Wang Daokun's extensive engagement with the world of things, there are few instances in his writings where he divulges his own experiences as a collector: visiting shops, consulting with dealers, or haggling a price. Much of this work seems to have fallen to his younger brother and cousin, collectively known as the "Two Zhongs" (Er zhong 二仲): Wang Daoguan and Wang Daohui. The two men certainly assisted with the preparations for a "Wang Daokun inscription": we learn from Wang's correspondence, for instance, that when he was asked to compose a set of epigrams on six rocks for the obsessive stone collector, Chen Wenzhu 陳文燭

³¹ Inkstones with Wang Daokun's markings, objects that are otherwise unattested to in his writings, have continued to enter into and out of the market, whether that be a Xuanhe Red Thread Inkstone (Xuanhe hongsi yan 宣和紅絲硯) acquired by the collector Deng Zhicheng in 1935 with an inscription signed "Wang Boyu," or a Ming dynasty "Eyebrow" She Inkstone (Sheyan meizi taishi yan 歙硯眉子太史硯) that was put up for auction in Japan in 2015 bearing an epigram accompanied by Wang's mark "Historian of Taihan" (Taihan shi 太函史). In the autumn of 2016, another She inkstone (Tai Hanshi zhi shouchao Sheyan 太函氏識手抄歙硯) dated to the Qing dynasty (clearly a fake) was auctioned by Fujian Southeast Auction Company. This specimen also bears an epigram and Wang's mark "Historian of Taihan." See: Appendix 2.

(1525–1609), Wang Daohui served as their go-between.³² Elsewhere Wang Daokun at once encourages, yet bemoans their increased involvement in the art world: he continually reproached his younger brother and cousin for an “obsession with playthings” (*wanwu zhi pi* 玩物之癖), urging them to refrain from frequenting the brothels of the capital and “reflect on the scholars of antiquity and not seek fame in drinking wine.”³³ In a memorial for his deceased father Wang Liangbin 汪良彬, an exemplar of Confucian restraint, Wang Daokun digressed to admonish his siblings:

Daoguan is obsessively fond of antiques – he purchased artifacts of the “past two dynasties,” like the calligraphy of the different schools. My father urged him: “how can you take sustenance from your ears and eyes... can the Lanting calligraphy be compared to the tracks of birds, or the great bronze *ding* vessel of Gao to an earthenware jar – you prize strange things and disdain useful things, this is not the way of the Sage Kings.”

道貫好古而癖，重購二代遺器，若諸家法書。家大人亟屏之：「胡為乎以耳視為口實，即襖書孰若鳥跡，郜鼎孰若汙尊，貴異物而賤用物，非先王法。」³⁴

While he had achieved exam success and brought glory to his lineage as Minister of War, Wang Daokun’s young relatives had given up on pursuing official careers and had devoted their energies to the frivolous acquisition of “playthings” – a critique that rehashes the orthodox injunction against “servitude to ears and eyes” (*buyi ermu* 不役耳目) and the fear that, “taking pleasure in things undermines the will” (*wanwu sangzhi* 玩物喪志). The “Two Zhongs” had started to use Wang Daokun’s reputation and contacts to acquire artworks for the larger family

³² Wang Daokun, “Chen Yushu” 陳玉叔, *Taihan ji*, 104: 2171. For the inscriptions see Wang, “Chen Yushu Wu shi ming” 陳玉叔吳石銘, *Taihan ji*, 78: 1609. On Chen’s obsessive stone collecting habits, see Gu, *Kezuo zhuiyu*, 131.

³³ 因思千古士，不必酒為名。Wang Daokun, “Shedi kun zhusheng, gu you shijiu fangyan, wanwu zhi pi, zuoshi feng zhi” 舍弟困諸生，顧有嗜酒放言，玩物之癖，作詩諷之, *Taihan ji*, 109: 2339–2340.

³⁴ Wang Daokun, “Xianfu jun zhuang” 先府君狀, *Taihan ji*, 44: 935–951.

collection in Qianqiu 千秋, and would make names for themselves buying and selling things throughout the empire.

Shopping in Late Ming Huizhou: Fang Yongbin's Treasure Store

We can begin to observe the multi-faceted roles of Wang Daoguan and Wang Daohui in the late Ming market for art and antiques by attending to their close relationship with the local Huizhou businessman Fang Yongbin. In 1998, the historian Chen Zhichao re-discovered a cache of 733 letters and 190 name cards compiled by Fang, all dating from the period 1564–1598, in the Harvard-Yenching Library.³⁵ Divided into seven volumes (sun, moon, metal, wood, water, fire, and earth), the collection contains handwritten letters addressed to Fang by some of the leading celebrities of the sixteenth century, alongside countless requests from lesser-known aspirants in Huizhou.³⁶ From the surviving evidence, it appears that Fang's main backer was Wang Daokun, a patron who sponsored his travels to Beijing in 1573 and 1575 to study in the Imperial Academy (Guozijian 國子監), and to form contacts with sojourners from across the empire.³⁷ It was

³⁵ The letters, purchased in Japan after the Second World War, have been annotated and reprinted in Chen Zhichao 陳智超, *Meiguo Hafo daxue Hafo Yanching tushuguan cang Mingdai Huizhou Fang shi qinyou shouzha qi bai tong kaoshi* 美國哈佛大學哈佛燕京圖書館藏明代徽州方氏親友手札七百通考釋 (Hefei: Anhui daxue chubanshe, 2001). There has been a flurry of interest in the significance of these letters in recent Chinese scholarship, yet no discussion of the collection in English. For a survey of the letters and a biography of Fang Yongbin in light of the relation of merchant identity to literati culture in the late Ming, see Zhu Wanshu, *Huishang yu Ming Qing wenxue* 徽商與明清文學 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2014), 50–59. For a brief study of the letters and the light they shed on changing practices of art connoisseurship and patronage in late Ming Huizhou, see Zhang Changhong 張長虹, *Pinjian yu jingying: Mingmo Qingchu Huishang yishu zanzhu yanjiu* 品鑒與經營：明末清初徽商藝術贊助研究 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2010), 73–95. See also Xu Min 許敏, “Shixi Mingdai houqi Jiangnan shanggu jiqi zidi de wenrenhua xianxiang – cong Fang Yongbin tanqi” 試析明代後期江南商賈及其子弟的文人化現象 – 從方用彬談起, *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中國史研究 3 (2005): 157–172.

³⁶ Luminaries include the general Qi Jiguang, the Ming Prince Zhu Duo Zheng 朱多炆 (1541–1589), the Grand Secretary Shen Li 沈鯉 (1531–1615), President of the Board of Rites Li Weizhen, the leader of the “Latter Seven Masters” of the Ming literary field (Hou Qizi 後七子), Wang Shizhen. Most of these contacts seem to have been solicited through Wang Daokun.

³⁷ Chen shows that after his failures on the pathway to officialdom (he settled for purchasing the honorary degree “Imperial Student” (Guoxuesheng 國學生)), Fang travelled extensively throughout China, meeting with cultural celebrities like the courtesan Ma Xianglan 馬湘蘭 (1548–1604) in Nanjing (1579, 1585) and scholars and

Daoguan and Daohui who initially introduced Fang Yongbin to Wang Daokun. Letters to Fang touch on joint publishing ventures, local politics, the weather, and ancestral rites, yet the predominant concern in the correspondence is the purchase and sale of the appurtenances of a scholar's studio: inkstones, seals, incense burners, porcelain, mirrors, paintings, calligraphy, books, fans, hats, brushes, inkcakes, paper, plants, and tea. Several writers address Fang as the proprietor of a business named the "Treasure Store" (variously transcribed as: Baodian 寶店; Baosi 寶肆; Baopu 寶鋪), yet it is unclear where in the Huizhou area this shop was located (it seems likely that at least one branch was in Yanzhen 巖鎮) or whether it was in fact a clan-owned chain of outlets. In any event, Fang's renown among his formidable network of contacts appears to have been entwined with the fate of this enterprise. The Wangs not only helped Fang establish his reputation, they also became closely involved in his operations as both a dealer and a moneylender.

A Pawnbroker's Invoice

Nestled among the letters collected in the fire folio is an invoice sent from Fang to a customer named Wu Shouhuai 吳守淮 that gives a better sense of how he made a living. Drafted on an elegant sheet of decorative paper with an illustrated border of the "four gentlemen" (plum blossom, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum), Fang's bill lists the sums of silver that Wu owed from earlier loans (Figures 2.3 and 2.4):

Invoice for Wu Shouhuai:

I have set out below the numbers and dates for the amounts of silver and artifacts taken out.

officials in Guangdong (1582), Nanchang (1588), Macheng (1596), and a string of other towns and cities. Wang Daokun also wrote a dedicatory essay to Fang Yongbin, see Wang, "Zeng Fang sheng xu" 贈方生序, *Taihan ji*, 3: 72.

- 1) Third Year of Wanli, 14th of the First Month: 10 taels of silver taken out.
- 2) Sixth Year of Wanli, 13th of the First Month: 5 taels of silver taken out.
- 3) Sixth Year of Wanli, 24th of the Third Month: 3 taels of silver taken out.

Total = 18 taels

- 1) Fifth Year of Wanli, 19th of the Eighth Month: 5 artifacts taken out, priced at 10 taels and 5 mace.
- 2) Fifth Year of Wanli, 22nd of the Twelfth Month: 31 paintings and artifacts taken out, priced at 27 taels and 5 mace. Also: Sixth Year of Wanli, 2nd of Eleventh Month – a single white porcelain vase.

Total = 38 taels

Combined Total of Silver and Artifacts = 56 taels

吳守淮兄帳。

今將吳守淮兄那銀日期併去玩器數目開列于後：

- 一，萬曆三年正月十四日去本文銀拾兩。
- 一，萬曆六年正月十三日又去文銀伍兩。
- 一，萬曆六年三月廿四日又去文銀叁兩。

三共本銀一十八兩。

- 一，萬曆五年八月十九日去玩器五件，該價銀一十兩五錢。
 - 一，萬曆五年十二月廿二日又去畫，玩等物三十一件，該價銀二十七兩伍錢。
- 又萬曆六年十一月初二日又去白瓷觚一個。

古玩共該價銀三十八兩。

銀，玩總共五十六兩。³⁸

The invoice reveals how Wu availed himself of Fang's services as a pawnbroker over a four-year period, drawing both silver and decorative objects or "playthings" (*wanqi* 玩器) from his shop.

The terse format of the bill, however, partly obscures the background to Fang and Wu's relationship. Both individuals were select members of Wang Daokun's seven-man coterie, the

³⁸ Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 1008.

Fenggan Society, and Wu was the author of the single largest number of letters to Fang in the Harvard cache.³⁹ Twelve of the letters collected in the moon, metal, wood, and water folios reveal a casual friendship between the two men, with Wu addressing Fang in an informal manner through use of his courtesy name.⁴⁰ Wu alludes to the acquisition of pots of sweet flag (*changcao pen* 菖艸盆), new brush washers (*xin bixi* 新筆洗), and orchid fragrance incense (*lanxiang* 蘭香), yet much of the discussion – befitting their acquaintance as fellow members of Wang Daokun’s literary society – concerns the convivial exchange of poetry and calligraphy: in one instance, Wu even shared what appears to have been a manuscript of his poems (“clumsy drafts” 拙稿) with a provisional title “Warm Spring Pavilion” (Yangchun ge 陽春閣).⁴¹

The tone and content of the correspondence changes markedly, however, in the letters from the fire folio. From this point onwards, Fang appears increasingly impatient in trying to get Wu to repay his debts. There are several references to a *ding*-shaped inkstone made from green jade (*luyan yu* 綠研玉) that Wu borrowed and had neither returned nor paid for.⁴² Fang sent representatives to try and extract payments for this artifact (and other outstanding sums) as Wu became increasingly resentful, venting that “your barbaric lackeys had come for this matter” (候胡奴至了此前件) and challenging him, “why create such vulgar airs?” (作此里中俗態何也).⁴³ It seems unlikely that Fang Yongbin was ever repaid in full, as biographies of Wu Shouhuai all claim he died in poverty. Nevertheless, Fang still benefitted from artifacts that Wu had turned in

³⁹ On the Fenggan Society, see Wang, “Fenggan she ji” 豐干社記, *Taihan ji*, 72: 1481.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Wu Shouhuai [Metal: 72]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 605. Wu also refers to Fang as “Society Senior” (社長) and himself as “Society Brother” (社弟), invoking their fellowship in Wang Daokun’s Fenggan Society.

⁴¹ On the flowers and plants (所諾菖艸盆并小新筆洗, 幸檢發, 令蒼頭持來), see Wu Shouhuai [Metal: 87]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 626. For references to the incense and manuscript (拙稿并陽春閣, 并乞發下), see Wu Shouhuai [Metal: 86]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 625–6.

⁴² Wu Shouhuai [Fire: 25]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 895; Wu Shouhuai [Fire: 119]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 1012.

⁴³ Wu Shouhuai [Fire: 28]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 898.

as pledges for loans and repayments for earlier debts: to take one example, he acquired a “Huangting Classic” calligraphic model (*Huangting jing tie* 黃庭經帖) from Wu Shouhuai, once owned by Wu’s uncle, that he then lent out to another close associate, Wang Daoguan.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Wang Daoguan [Metal: 146]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 712.

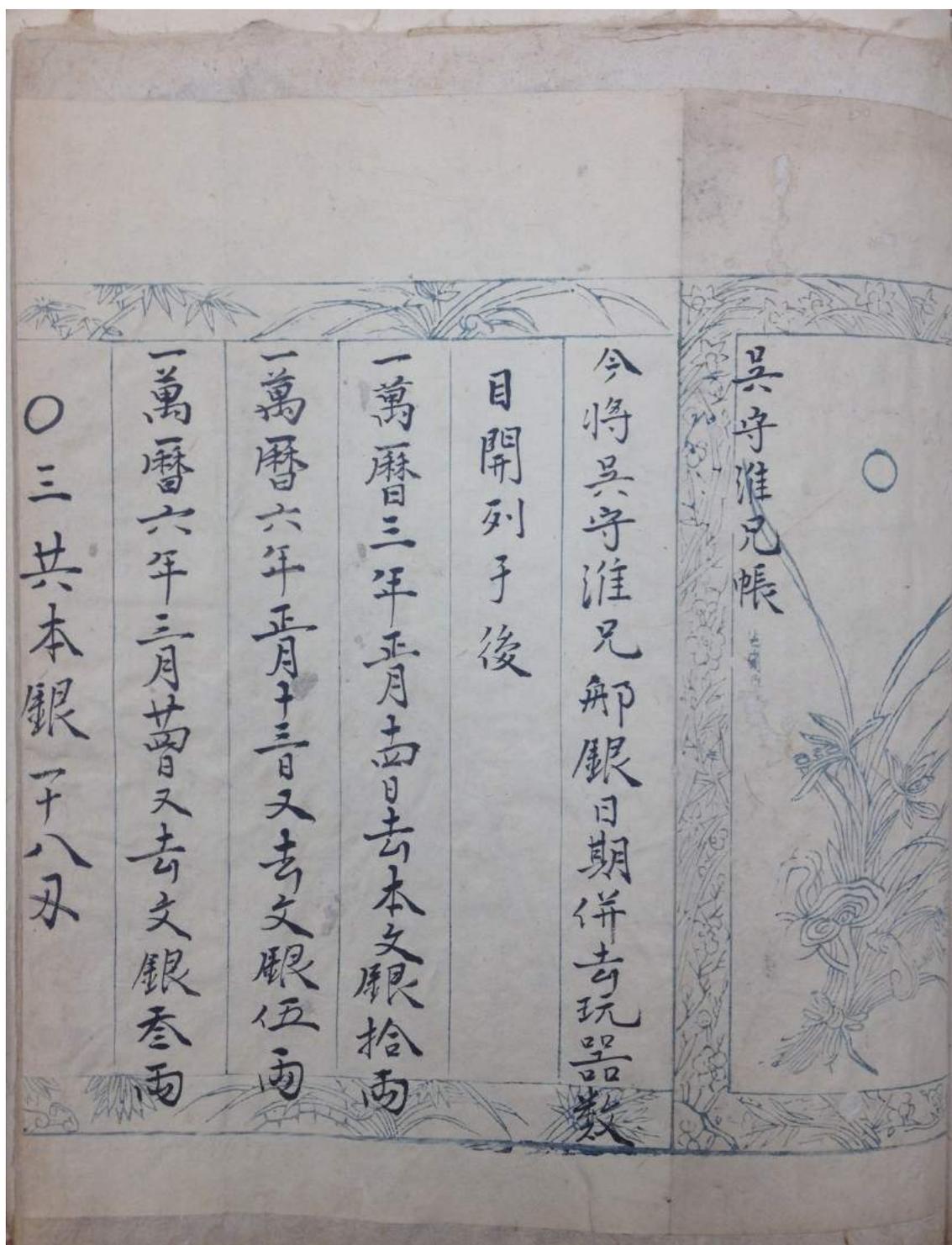


Figure 2.3: Invoice for Wu Shouhuai
 Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Fire: 114.

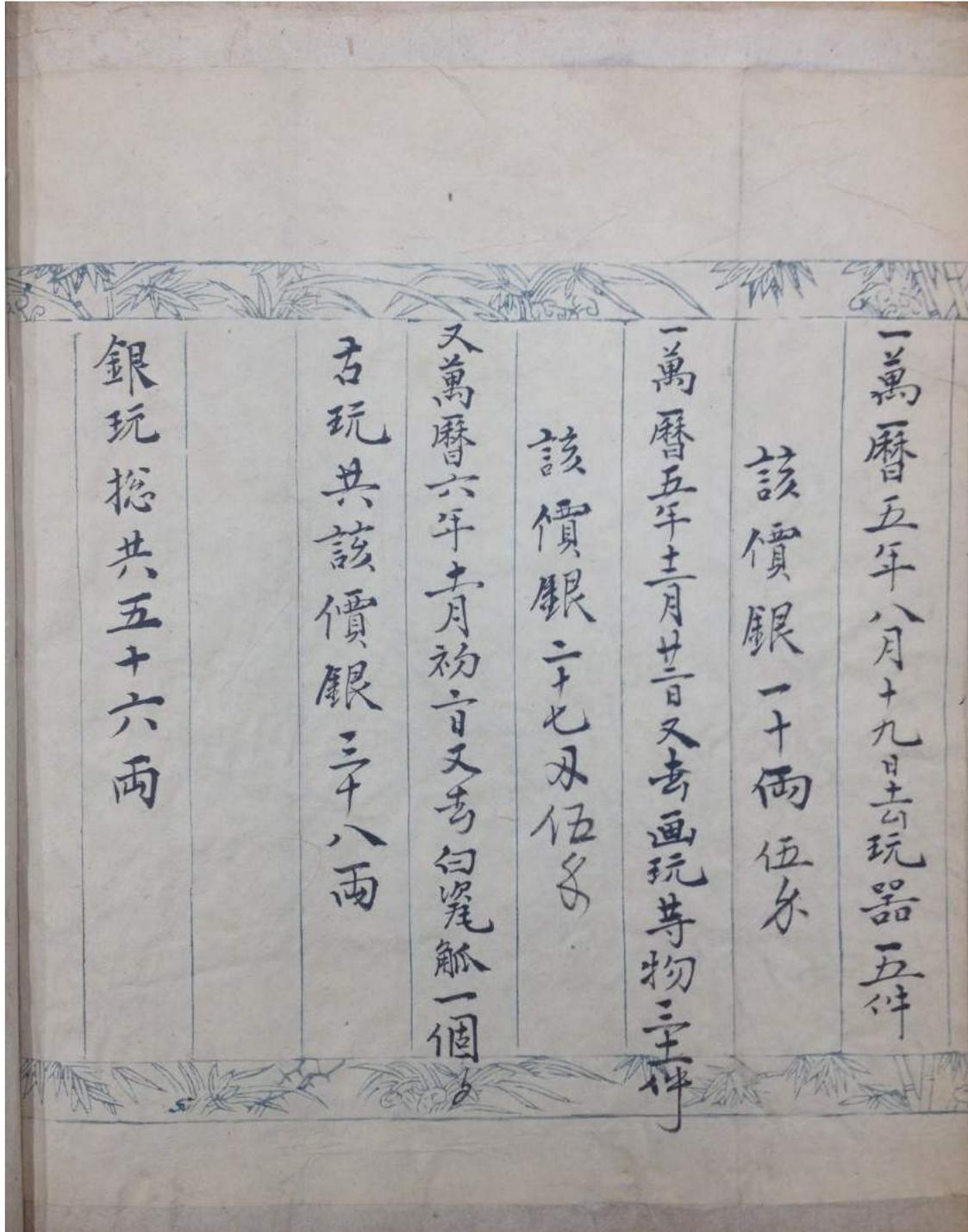


Figure 2.4: Invoice for Wu Shouhuai
Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Fire: 114.

As Ann Jones and Peter Stallybrass have argued in their work on the livery system of seventeenth century England, the pawnbroker assumes a particularly influential role in settings where the neutral exchange of money and commodities develops alongside networks of obligation and personal connection in which material is “richly absorbent” of memory.⁴⁵ We encounter a similar situation in mid-Ming Huizhou where an expanding money economy began to destabilize and reconfigure the paternalistic order of the agnatic community and gentry-dominated lineage institutions. Under these circumstances, a given luxury object – a green jade inkstone, say – oscillates between its guise as a commodity with a calculated cash value and its life as a “material mnemonic” of status, of momentous occasions, of kinship ties. In the absence of a widespread network of deposit banks,⁴⁶ consumers sought to convert their money into social credit through conspicuous consumption – rather than hoarding it, which might bring social discredit and be construed as miserly.⁴⁷ For Jones and Stallybrass, the pawnbroker lived on the “social cusp” between an intermittent yet persistent need for cash and this world of “material

⁴⁵ Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Evidence of pawnbroking in China dates back to the fifth century and Chinese pawnshops appear to have originated in Buddhist monasteries – the concept of a loan against a pledge may have originated in India. Few business records from China survive from before the nineteenth century except for a seventh century account book from a pawnshop discussed by Valerie Hansen, “Records from a Seventh Century Pawnshop in China,” William N. Goetzmann ed. *The Origins of Value: The Financial Innovations That Created Capital Markets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 54–59.

⁴⁶ We do see evidence of the emergence of credit unions and financial trusts through ancestral halls in sixteenth century Huizhou, yet pawnshops were still central to the operation of providing credit, see L. S. Yang’s comments in his classic study: “In the middle of the eighteenth century, pawnshops almost functioned as commercial banks because they made loans on commodities like grain, silk, and cotton.” Yang Liansheng, *Money and Credit in China: A Short History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952), 95.

⁴⁷ To begin to parse the significance of practices of pawnbroking across the early modern world, it is first necessary to suspend anachronistic assumptions that only the poor turn to moneylenders for financial assistance. In Renaissance Florence, borrowers included patricians, notaries, bakers, weavers, and second dealers – the important point is the wide variety of the pawnbrokers’ clientele, and the fact that it included the elite. Some of the wealthiest Jacobean merchants and financiers acted as pawnbrokers and also pawned good themselves. The economic historian Peng Xinwei famously speculated that there were 20,000 pawnshops in sixteenth century China (as opposed to only 7000 in the nineteenth century) and while it is impossible to verify the accuracy of these estimates, we do know that a number of such institutions specialized in high-value goods and art works, see Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, 15; 135. For an introduction to the distinctive attributes of pawnbroking in Huizhou in the Ming and Qing dynasties, see Wang Shihua 王世華, “Ming Qing Huizhou dianshang de shengshuai” 明清徽州典商的盛衰, *Qingshi yanjiu* 清史研究 2 (1999): 62–70.

memories.”⁴⁸ The paper trail of Fang Yongbin’s relationship to Wu Shouhuai divulges an analogous dynamic: Wu inherited wealth from his merchant father that he tried to convert into the trappings of gentility (or social credit) through the conspicuous consumption of decorative objects, a service provided by Fang Yongbin the salesman. Then, when he needed silver, he could return such objects to Fang, the moneylender, for hard cash. In the course of the correspondence, Fang Yongbin assumes an almost alchemical power to transmute silver into art and art back into silver: the sale of decorative objects and moneylending, to a degree that remains unrecognized in existing histories of late imperial China, were constituted as two sides of the same operation. From the pawnbroker’s perspective, such work drew from and synthesized strategies of discernment and dealership, simultaneously manipulating a customer’s tastes and debts. In this respect, the pawnbroker’s practice was characterized by a “leitmotif of mobility,” advancing an increasingly pluralistic approach to the art and business of culture that in turn fostered new models of entrepreneurship.⁴⁹

Selling Inkstones

Like their affiliate Wu Shouhuai, Wang Daoguan and Wang Daohui relied on Fang Yongbin’s pawnbroking operation to raise cash, and like Wu, their dependency on Fang’s services as a moneylender was concomitant with their frequent use of his shop to purchase and temporarily borrow artifacts.⁵⁰ The extensive correspondence between the Wangs and Fang Yongbin reveals

⁴⁸ Jones, *Renaissance Clothing*, 20.

⁴⁹ We can think, here, in Joseph Schumpeter’s terms, of the entrepreneur as someone who carries out a “new combination of means of production.” Christopher G. Rea and Nicolai Volland, *The Business of Culture: Cultural Entrepreneurs in China and Southeast Asia, 1900–65* (Vancouver, British Columbia: UBC Press, 2014), 15.

⁵⁰ Beyond managing his personal finances, Wang Daohui also helped others raise funds through Fang Yongbin’s services: several letters from Daohui to Fang Yongbin attest to his attempts to procure money for a character named Guan Shimen 管石門 operating between Beijing and She County (Wang underscores for Fang the interest (*lixī* 利息) that could be made off the loan); Wang Daohui also helped Wu Shouhuai (whose sizeable debts

a complex web of different modes of exchange and of different objects – porcelain, mirrors, paintings, calligraphy, books – that bound the two parties together, yet a persistent concern in many of these letters is the acquisition of inkstones. In several cases, we see the Wangs cast themselves as customers, writing simply to purchase artifacts from the “Treasure Store.” In the eighth letter in the metal volume, for instance, Wang Daohui identifies a blue and white porcelain “hanging vase” that he encountered on a visit to Fang and sends his younger brother back to buy:

I express my heartfelt thanks for yesterday. I am most grateful for you accompanying me for the whole day. As for the blue and white porcelain hanging-vase, would it be possible for me to entrust my younger brother to come and pay you? Your obedient servant, Wang Daohui.

昨拜謝，辱追陪竟日，感感。青花壁瓶，乞便付家弟，嗣當償償，如何？不孝汪道會稽類。⁵¹

Much of the correspondence, however, suggests a messy entanglement of purchases, pledges for loans, repayments for debts, gifts, and non-binding temporary exchanges of possessions for trials or tests. An illustrative example is a longer letter from Wang Daoguan, scrawled while he was suffering from an illness (Figures 2.5 and 2.6). The note begins with Wang returning to Fang Yongbin a set of five paintings that he had borrowed temporarily, before notifying him that he will be holding on to some of the other paintings and artifacts taken out on loan for longer than anticipated. Wang then names paintings that he says his “brother” (we can take to be Wang Daohui) will come and collect, although it is unclear whether he plans to purchase or simply borrow them. Wang proceeds to remind Fang how his associate Cheng Zhuchuang 程竹窗 had entrusted Wang Daohui to purchase an inkstone, while making enquires about the price. Along

we have already encountered) secure a further ten taels of silver as a loan from Fang. Wang Daohui [Fire: 94]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 981; Wang Daohui [Fire: 95]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 982.

⁵¹ Wang Daohui [Metal: 8]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 508.

with the letter, Wang Daoguan sends to Fang Yongbin a Duan inkstone (that he hopes to pawn for a five or six mace discount in the price for the inkstone Cheng wants Daohui to buy) and asks Fang to settle the remaining balance together with the money he owed for an earlier purchase of books. The letter concludes with Wang Daoguan writing of his cousin's intention to purchase a copy of the "Poems of Forty Tang Masters" (*Tang sishi jia shi* 唐四十家詩) and a painting by a Suzhou artist from Fang; Daoguan insists that before he sends the money he wants to view the items once more.⁵² Other notes in the cache show that Fang's shop sold inkstones and Wang Daoguan's letter suggests that some of this stock may have come from inkstones that clients had pawned to him.⁵³ Moving from lists of objects to sums of money, from debts repaid to purchases made, the letter approximates the format of a ledger, tracing the development of an open account with Fang's shop.

⁵² 久不面, 殊耿耿。爰創未平復, 頗覺體中不堪, 亦未能數遣人詣前。前見家兄人云, 數日內枉過, 卒不見至, 何耶? 畫五幅, 手卷一箇奉返, 乞先照入。仍畫并玩器, 他日再遣上也。祝沈冊葉, 今舍弟來取, 乞付下。程竹窗前令舍弟所買之研, 乞作實價幾何付下。今付去端研一方, 作銀六錢或五錢, 再憑兄判找多少, 并書價一起奉上。《唐四十家詩》并周東村學李唐長畫, 道擘家兄要買, 乞付下一觀。令叔, 令兄見中乞致意。病中殊不能一一也。弟貫頓首。允均足下。Wang Daoguan [Metal: 148]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 714.

⁵³ On the sale of inkstones, see Xu Gui 徐桂 [Sun: 41]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 142; Chang Zuo 長祚 [Moon: 93]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 439.

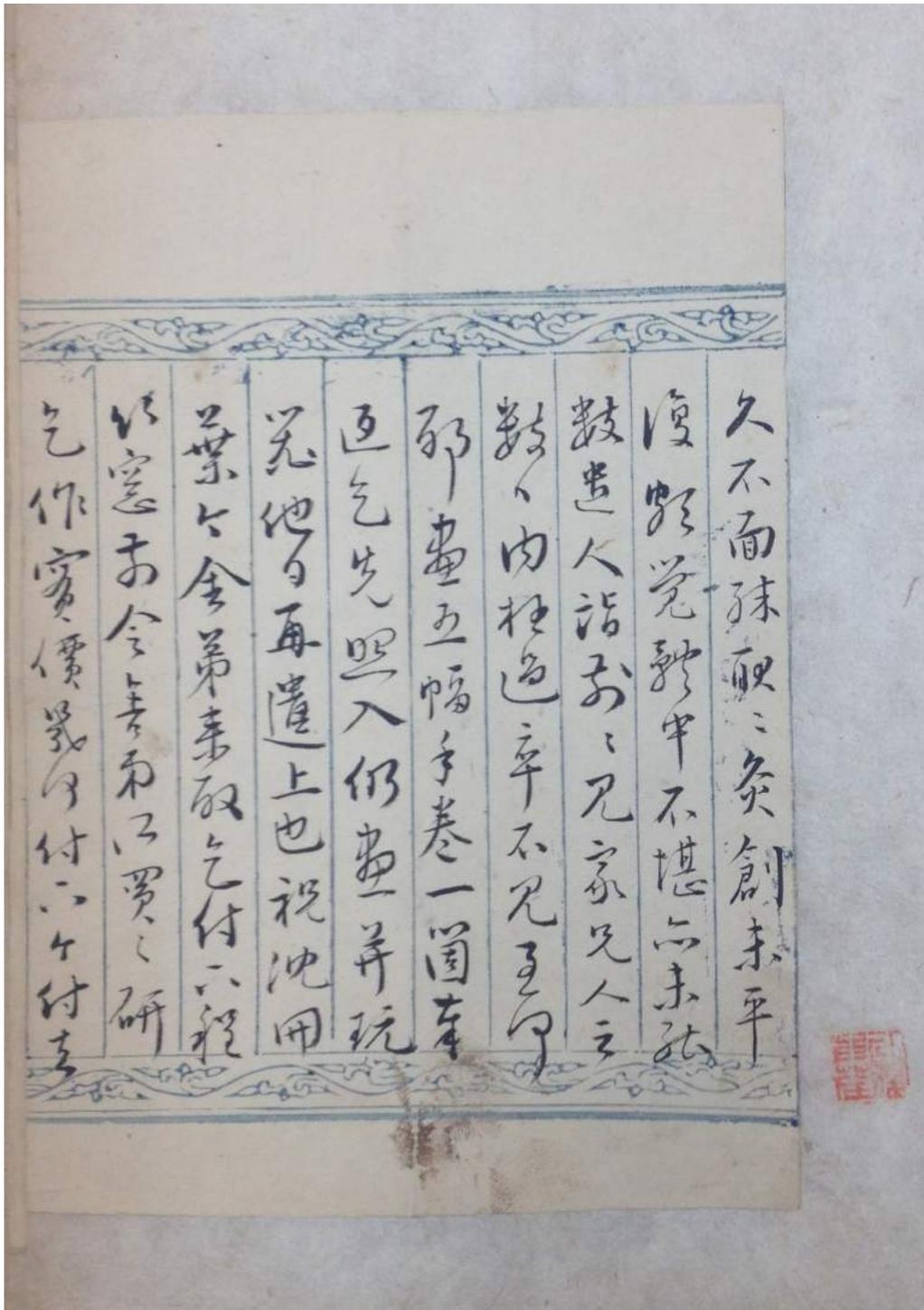


Figure 2.5: Letter from Wang Daoguan to Fang Yongbin
Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Metal: 148.

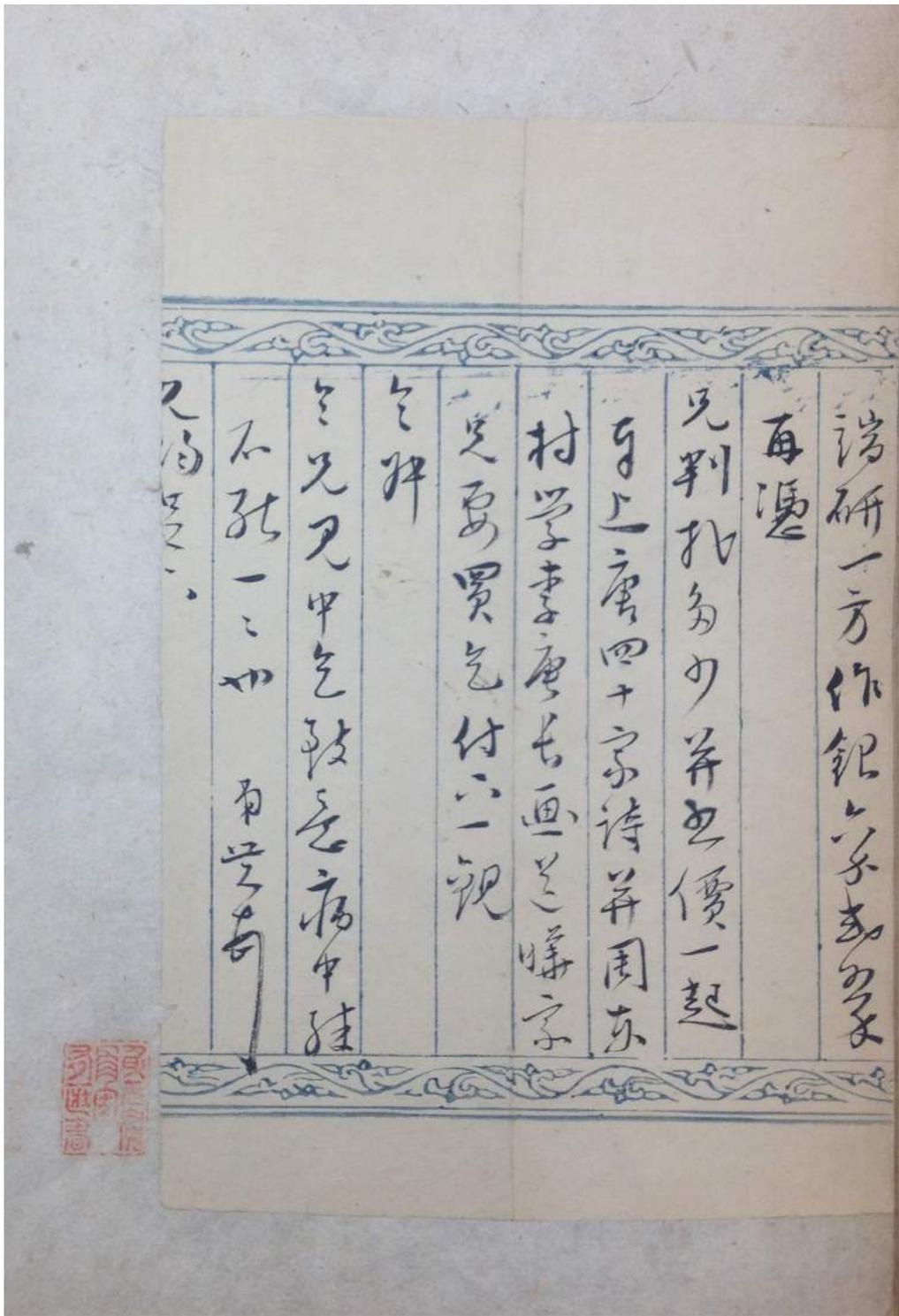


Figure 2.6: Letter from Wang Daoguan to Fang Yongbin
 Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Metal: 148.

Fang Yongbin's career as a pawnbroker and shopkeeper provided him with access to a wide range of artworks and in various letters we see how clients started to seek him out for his connoisseurial expertise. In one case, Wang Daohui begins by listing a set of items he hopes to exchange before inviting Fang Yongbin to judge a large and rare inkstone that he had recently acquired (Figure 2.7):

I've offered two bowls to swap for a caltrop mirror. If you want to use the porcelain cup, come and collect it at a later date. As for the matter from a few days ago, there have been a few setbacks but I'll wait until I see you to tell you in full. As for the peacock feathers you wish to send me, I'll get one of my lads to take them, how's that? I recently obtained an inkstone, it's an exceptional specimen; what day could you come to appraise it? Respectfully yours, Hui.

二碗持易菱鏡。磁杯如足下欲用，他日當取至。前日之事，就中多少周折，俟相見面盡之。足下瓶內所置孔雀尾數莖願與不佞，即令豎子持下如何？近得一研，大是世間希有之物，何日來一鑒賞也？弟會頓首。元素社長足下。

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It is significant that Wang uses the term *jian shang* 鑒賞 to call upon Fang to appraise the object.

This reversed form of the more conventional compound *shang jian* 賞鑒 – glossed as *shang* “to discriminate on the grounds of quality” and *jian* “to tell genuine from false” – was taken to denote “true” connoisseurship: “dependent on a combination of deep scholarship with lofty moral qualities” and was frequently contrasted with *hao shi* 好事 (fondness for things), a term for shallow dilettantism.⁵⁵ It is unclear from the letter what precisely Wang Daohui wanted from Fang Yongbin, whether a judgment on pricing, authentication of the object, or plain flattery for his skills as a collector – in any event, it is striking that a man with privileged access (through his cousin Wang Daokun) to both the largest art collection in Huizhou and to the famed collection of Wang Shizhen in Suzhou, should start to address a travelling businessman as if he possessed the “power of eyes” (*muli* 目力) or “power of mind” (*xinli* 心力) usually reserved for a cultivated

⁵⁴ Wang Daohui [Metal: 75]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 612.

⁵⁵ Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, 86.

scholar.⁵⁶ Wang's deference to Fang nevertheless makes a point that while never articulated in the diaries of self-proclaimed connoisseurs should be self-evident: to become a successful dealer, one had to master connoisseurial practices of authenticating and discriminating art in order to outsmart one's customers. The truly accomplished dealer was always already a connoisseur.

The case of the inkstone also draws our attention to a point of overlap between the careers of Wang Daohui and Fang Yongbin. Although certain letters in the Harvard Yenching cache might portray Fang as a shopkeeper and the Wangs as his customers, other sources from the late Ming suggest that Wang Daohui later became a dealer of inkstones much like Fang Yongbin, taking his stock with him on travels to other cities in Southern China. A short sequence of entries from the eleventh month of 1597 in the diary of the chancellor of the National University in Nanjing, Feng Mengzhen 馮夢禎 (1546–1605), record Wang Daohui making three visits with supplies of inkstones: in the first transaction, Wang offered a rare “water rhinoceros” slab that preoccupied Feng Mengzhen for a couple of days, consuming his thoughts while he procrastinated at work. The success of this sale opened up the possibility of two further exchanges: Wang Daohui met at Feng Mengzhen's residence together with his friend, a seal-carver from Huizhou named He Zhen 何震 (7th), an event for which they brought an inkstone as a gift; within a fortnight, he made another sale of a round inkstone to cover outstanding debts (28th):

21st: Overcast with rain: Wang Daohui came with a “water rhino” inkstone to show me. His asking price was thirty strings of cash.

二十一，陰，雨：... 汪仲嘉來。持水犀硯見示。索价三十緡。

⁵⁶ Wang's request for Fang to appraise the inkstone represents a reversal from other letters where Fang approached his contacts for assistance in authenticating works of painting or calligraphy: She Qi 佘祈 [Metal: 143]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 709; She Qi [Water: 13]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 817; She Qi [Wood: 47]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 773; Wang Rui 汪睿 [Water: 58]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 868.

23rd: The snow stopped and it was very cold, drops of water froze... Fang Bowen, with the proper name Chengyu, came to introduce himself. Together with Ji'er we talked about the inkstone matter.

二十三，雪霽，甚寒，滴水成凍...方孝廉伯文，名承郁，來謁。與驥兒共考硯事。

24th: Snowing, clear, but very cold: I went to the academy to attend to some affairs... I carefully read over some letters and thought about the inkstone matter. The “water rhino” inkstone was really a fine specimen and shouldn't be rejected. I'd already sent it away so I inquired about getting it back... Bowen brought back an old inkstone.

二十四，雪，晴，寒甚。入監視事... 細閱諸書，考研事，水犀研畢竟佳物，不可棄也，已遺去復索還... 伯文復致舊研一枚。

7th: Frost, clear: I went to the academy to attend to some affairs. Wang Daohui came together with He Zhen and Master Huang Lifan. Huang is Sima's son-in-law. He brought an old inkstone as a face-warming gift; I invited him to stay behind and chat.

初七，霜，晴。入監視事。汪仲嘉同何長卿，黃生立範來。黃即司馬之婿，以舊研一方為贄，留敘。

28th: Clear: At the fifth watch I went to the Chaotian Palace to practice rites. Wang Daohui came and pressured me about some outstanding debts. He brought a painting by Xu Youwen, *ding* ware, and a round inkstone that he wanted to sell. I emptied my purse and there were only ten pieces of gold, so we made the exchange.

二十八，晴。五更往朝天宮，習義。汪仲嘉來，以逼除欲償逋，持徐幼文畫，定器，圓研求售，余傾囊止十金，與之。⁵⁷

In this sequence, Wang Daohui takes over Fang Yongbin's role in becoming a Huizhou dealer, selling inkstones to renowned collectors in Nanjing.⁵⁸ These exchanges also capture the Ming inkstone in motion: as a gift, a pledge, and a commodity. If on the seventh, we see an inkstone

⁵⁷ Feng Mengzhen 馮夢禎, *Kuaixue tang riji* 快雪堂日記 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2010), 108–9. For an introduction to Feng's role in the late Ming art market, see chapter 2 of Wan Muchun 萬木春, *Weishui xuan li de xianju zhe: Wanli monian Jiaxing de shuhua shijie* 味水軒里的閑居者：萬曆末年嘉興的書畫世界 (Hangzhou: Zhongguo meishu xueyuan chubanshe, 2008).

⁵⁸ For a comparison, see Clunas, “The Art Market in 17th Century China.”

serve to instantiate sociality among a group of men in an event that merits commemoration in writing (*liu xu* 留敘); by the twenty-eighth, an inkstone reappears as coverage for a debt. These succinct juxtapositions indicate the instability and dispersal against which Ming writers struggled to conceptualize the inalienability of individual ownership. The “Wang Daokun” of the Capital Museum Dragon Tail presents his inscription as an act of possession, an effort to arrest the movement of the inkstone in the hands of dealers like “Wei Yuan.”⁵⁹ Feng’s diary, however, suggests that the Huizhou dealer – concerned not so much with arresting, but fostering the movement of the inkstone – may by now have attained the strategic skill required to either divert, or subvert, “culturally conventionalized paths for the flow of things.”⁶⁰

The enigmatic “Wei Yuan” remains a silent foil for Wang Daokun’s self-fashioning in his Dragon Tail inscription, yet Fang Yongbin and Wang Daohui started to broadcast their own expertise in dealership through a series of collaborative ventures: the first, a catalogue of headgear (*guanpu* 冠譜); and the second, a manuscript catalogue of seal-stamp impressions (*yingao* 印稿).⁶¹ In both instances, it is difficult to ascertain to what extent these publications were initiated by the Wangs seeking out Fang’s assistance as a shopkeeper to market the prestige of their family holdings, or by Fang soliciting help from the Wangs to promote the merchandise of the Treasure Store.

⁵⁹ Unfortunately, we do not know what happened to Feng’s newly acquired “Water Rhino Inkstone,” yet the acclaimed connoisseur Li Rihua composed an inscription for a “Reclining Rhinoceros Inkstone” (*fuxi yan* 伏犀硯) owned by Feng Mengzhen’s son Feng Yunjiang 馮雲將.

⁶⁰ Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” 21.

⁶¹ No copy of the catalogue of hats survives, yet we know from another letter written by Wang Yin to Fang that he manufactured (or could at least procure) tailored hats on request (Wang Yin asked Fang for a slightly larger hat made from *zitan* wood). Wang Yin 王寅 [Water: 62]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 871. Wang Daokun was also a connoisseur of headgear and his *Taihan ji* contains an essay on his eight favorite items (“A Record of Eight Hats”), a piece that likens the eight materials of these choice hats (iron gauze, jade, silk, bamboo, gourd, ceramic, horn, sandalwood) to the “eight timbres” (*bayin* 八音) to evoke the harmony of his collection. It is tempting to speculate, yet difficult to fully ascertain the extent to which Wang Daokun’s self-proclaimed authority as a hat collector, and this playful essay in particular, were features of the catalogue that Daoguan and Daohui compiled and sent to Fang Yongbin to edit, see Wang, “Baguan ji” 八冠記, *Taihan ji*, 76: 1570.

In this first section of the chapter, I have traced the emergence of the dealer as a cultural broker – a figure who drew from and ultimately negated distinctions between the practical connoisseurship of artifacts and expertise in shopkeeping, deconstructing the oppositions upon which the “I” persona of the Capital Museum Dragon Tail was predicated. Fang Yongbin not only threatened to pick apart the image of the refined connoisseur, he used his synthetic practice as a dealer to master the reproduction of a form of writing known as “seal script” (*zhuan*): a central philological problem in Ming intellectual culture and a threshold for new social contests between the scholar and the artisan. In parsing this contest we will continue to follow Fang Yongbin, but also return to another influential Huizhou artist, the seal-carver that accompanied Wang Daohui to meet with Feng Mengzhen in 1597: He Zhen. Thus far we have looked at writers who sought to lay claim to decorative objects and the dealers who sold them these things, yet the figure of the artisan has remained indistinct. In the following section, I show how Wang Daokun and his associates played a part in a radical redefinition of the artisanal craft of carving script with a knife in the late sixteenth century.

二碗指易菱鏡磁板如
 是二取用他日當取至而日之子於中
 多少用折候相見而盡之
 之六瓶內以置紅雀尾數菱鏡與
 印令望子持下第 近得一研
 大是在同希習之物印日來一
 也 弟之極了
 元未就長...

Figure 2.7: Letter from Wang Daohui to Fang Yongbin
 Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Metal: 75.

Part 2: Seal Carving and the Death of the Artisan

Seal carving was intimately related to the study of ancient script and during the late imperial period became the primary medium through which scholars personally engraved their own calligraphy in stone. The seal, a “mark of credence” (印者信也), can be traced back to bronze casting inscriptions with family crests enclosed in square frames from the Shang. Beyond new uses for imperial seals (*xi* 璽) as symbols of dynastic legitimacy during the Qin and Han, families below the imperial rank began to use private stamping seals or impressions (*yin* 印)⁶² – also referred to as emblems (*zhang* 章), signets (*ji* 記), and pictorial emblems (*tuzhang* 圖章) – as instruments of certification. The calligraphy for stamping seals is based on what is conventionally translated in English as “seal script”:⁶³ either “great seal script” (*dazhuan* 大篆) primarily from the mid-eighth century BCE set of “Stone Drums” and inscriptions on bronze ritual artifacts; or, more commonly, “small seal script” (*xiaozhuan* 小篆), an official script for the Qin court based on Li Si’s 李斯 (280 BCE–208 BCE) modifications of the regional scripts of the late Zhou.⁶⁴ During the Ming, scholars became increasingly concerned with recovering forms of *zhuan* that has existed prior to Li’s reforms, as a way of restoring the models of the sages in order to correct the debased conditions of the present. Wang Daokun and his collaborators appear to have been less invested in these paleographic debates than in the question of whom, in the present, could take advantage of artisanal skills in mastering the reproduction of *zhuan*.

⁶² The word *yin* in bronze script is composed of a hand holding a bamboo tube that is cut into two halves as a type of governmental credential or signet. Zeng Yuhe [Tseng Yuho], *A History of Chinese Calligraphy* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1993), 99.

⁶³ This translation of *zhuan* is the source of some confusion: stamping seals (*yin*) were based on seal script (*zhuan*) not the other way around.

⁶⁴ Decorative scripts with zoomorphic motifs were also commonly used, as were miscellaneous scripts with celestial and terrestrial symbols that were considered to have magical power. *Li* 隸, *kai* 楷, and *cao* 草 scripts were rarely used in seals. Zeng, *A History of Chinese Calligraphy*, 102–105.

During the late imperial period, approaches to studying and carving seal script exerted a profound influence on scholarly culture and the aesthetics of calligraphy.⁶⁵ A renewed fascination with the expressive possibilities of the seal as a medium is often attributed to the reintroduction of soft stone – pyrophyllite, a hydrous aluminum silicate resembling talc – as a primary material of choice.⁶⁶ Soft stones – notably Qingtian rock (*qingtian shi* 青田石) from Zhejiang and Shoushan rock (*shoushan shi* 壽山石) from Fujian – allowed scholars to carve their own calligraphy, fusing brush and knife-work into a synthetic written art-form. My aim in this section of the chapter is to read the narrative of the rise of the scholar seal carver working in soft stone – a narrative that Wang Daokun was deeply implicated in – against the practice of Fang Yongbin in the late sixteenth century. I show how Fang’s ability to work across a range of materials, while linking shop-keeping, carving, and collecting in a new constellation, threatens the coherence of the “scholar carver” archetype. Against the ideal of the soft stone seal stamp as a medium for the “authentic” expression of a scholar’s self, I try to recuperate an alternative late Ming vision of the seal as a productively composite assemblage: one that links together, and in doing so transforms the relations between different bodies and selves.

Wang Daokun and the Birth of Soft Stone Seal Carving

“Literati seal carving” (*wenren zhuanke* 文人篆刻), or the trend of scholars engraving their own seals, is conventionally dated to Wen Peng’s 文彭 (1498–1573) momentous discovery of a supply of soft stone in late Ming Nanjing – referred to in contemporary records as “jelly stone”

⁶⁵ To the extent that epigraphy on metal and stone was paired with calligraphy and painting as four related fields (*jin* 金, *shi* 石, *shu* 書, *hua* 畫) in the study of the visual arts.

⁶⁶ James C. Y. Watt, “The Literati Environment,” *The Chinese Scholar’s Studio: Artistic Life in the Late Ming Period*, ed. Chu-tsing Li and James C. Y. Watt (New York: Asia Society Galleries, 1987), 11.

(*dongshi* 凍石).⁶⁷ An account in the canonical early Qing collection, *Biographies of Seal Carvers* (*Yinren zhuan* 印人傳), begins by highlighting an opposition between Wen's acquisition of this material and the workings of the marketplace: Wen realizes the true value of the rock right after he witnesses a shopkeeper refuse to pay a haggard old man for retrieving the load.⁶⁸ The narrator proceeds to underscore the transformative impact of the discovery on Wen Peng's practice as a calligrapher: Wen had previously commissioned an artisan renowned for embellishing the sides of ornamental fans, to carve over the ink traces of his calligraphy in order to produce seals in ivory, yet now he could personally engrave his own writing in stone.⁶⁹ A seal was no longer a hybrid artifact, but the signature product of a single hand: the true "intent" behind the refined calligrapher's brush (*biyi* 筆意) was free from any association with the mimetic work of a paid

⁶⁷ For a study of other Suzhou literati engaged in seal carving activities around Wen Peng, see Huang Heng 黃惇, "Mingdai chu, zhongqi wenren yinzhang yishu diaoshen" 明代初, 中期文人印章藝術鈞沈, *Xiling yinshe guoji yinxue yantao hui lunwen ji* 西泠印社國際印學研討會論文集 (Hangzhou: Xiling yinshe chubanshe, 1998), 10. As Bai Qianshen notes, Wen was not necessarily the first scholar to use soft stone for seal carving, Bai (2003), 51. On earlier archaeological evidence of soft stone seal carving, see Sun Weizu 孫慰祖, *Sun Weizu linyin wen'gao* 孫慰祖論印文稿 (Shanghai, Shanghai shudian, 1999), 183–87. Some historians place the beginnings of literati seal carving as early as the Northern Song with Mi Fu, see Sha Menghai 沙孟海, *Sha Menghai lunshu conggao* 沙孟海論書叢稿 (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1987), 188. Scholars also claim that the Yuan dynasty painter Wang Mian 王冕 (d. 1359) may have engaged in the practice, Huang Dun 黃敦, *Zhongguo gudai yinlun shi* 中國古代印論史 (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1994), 28–32.

⁶⁸ Zhou Lianggong 周亮工 (1612–1672) was the author of the *Biographies of Seal Carvers*: "I heard that when Guobo [Wen Peng] was in the Southern Imperial Academy, he was taken on a small sedan over the Rainbow Bridge and saw a slow mule bearing on its back two baskets of stones. An old bearded man followed behind with two baskets, and they argued with the market stall. Wen inquired about the matter, and the old man said: "this stall hires me to buy the stones, the stones come from the river, the mule and the carrier only need a little payment, yet they won't give it to us. This startled Wen who looked askance for a while and then said: "don't fight, I can right away double the payment for you." Wen thus obtained four baskets of stones. He broke them and they are what is nowadays referred to as "lamp light..."

余聞國博在南監時, 肩一小輿過西虹橋。見一蹇衛駝兩筐石, 老髯複肩兩筐隨其後, 與市肆互話。公詢之, 曰: 此家允我買石, 石從江上來, 蹇衛與負者, 須少力資, 乃固勿與, 遂驚公。公睨視久之, 曰: 勿爭, 我與爾值且倍力資。公遂得四筐石。解之即今所謂燈光也。Zhou Lianggong 周亮工, *Yinren zhuan* 印人傳, ed. Wang Qishu 汪啓淑 (Yangzhou Shi: Jiangsu guanglin guji keyin she, 1998), 1:5a.

⁶⁹ The artisan was named Li Wenfu 李文甫: "Formerly, all of the seals made by Wen were ivory, he would write with ink and get Li Wenfu from Jinling to carve the characters. Li was talented at carving the sides of fans – his carving had a flowerlike quality, finely intricate with resonance. Wen relied on him for his seals, yet he never lost the intent behind Wen's brush strokes. Consequently with Wen's ivory seals, half came from Li's hand. Since obtaining the stones, he has not gone back to making ivory seals."

先是, 公所為印皆牙章, 自落墨, 而命金陵人李文甫鑄文。李善雕扇邊, 其鑄花卉, 皆玲瓏有致。公以印屬之, 輒能不失公筆意。故公牙章半出李手。自得石後, 乃不復作牙章。Zhou, *Yinren*, 1:5a.

craftsman. The story of Wen Peng was one in a series of other attempts by late Ming and early Qing writers to distinguish between, and prize the scholar's seal (*wenren yin* 文人印) over the artisan's seal (*gongren yin* 工人印):⁷⁰ professional carvers were denigrated for “relying on copies and being unable to approach the ancient” (依樣臨摹，靡不逼古), while artisans who carved jade (a material that was too hard for scholars to work with) were told they did not understand seal script and so lost the “intent of the brush as the methods of the ancients were abandoned” (玉人不識篆，往往不得筆意，古法頓亡).⁷¹ If elite calligraphers like Wen Peng were going to take up seal carving then it seems it was first necessary to vigorously reassert the differences between the scholar and the artisan and to explicitly demarcate what it was the artisan was incapable of doing.

Wang Daokun plays a critical role in the biography of Wen Peng. Having broken open his newly acquired batch of rocks to reveal their “lamplight” glow, Wen met with Wang Daokun whose delight verifies the significance of the purchase.⁷² Inspired by the encounter, Wang then procured a large quantity of the same stone, which he divided up between Wen Peng and a seal carver from Huizhou named He Zhen, the same figure who we have already seen accompany Wang Daohui on a visit to a client in Nanjing – a gift that contributed to the subsequent fame of the material throughout the Ming empire:

Wang Daokun sought out a large quantity of the stone and entrusted half to Wen Peng. The other half he requested for Wen to write the characters with ink and then got He Zhen to carve. As a result, the fame of jelly stone spread throughout the realm, and its beauty was transmitted to the four directions!

⁷⁰ 工人之印以法論，章字畢具，方入能品；文人之印以趣勝，天趣流動，超然上乘。Zhu Jian 朱簡, *Yin jing* 印經, *Lidai yinxue lun wenxuan* 歷代印學論文選, ed. Han Tianheng 韓天衡 (Hangzhou: Xiling yinshe chubanshe, 1999), 2: 141.

⁷¹ Zhou Yingyuan 周應願, “Cheng wen” 成文, *Yinshuo* 印說 (Wanli).

⁷² *Ibid.*

硃中乃索其石滿百去。半以屬公，半浼公落墨，而使何主臣鐫之。於是，凍石之名始見於世，艷傳四方矣!⁷³

This same anecdote is repeated in the record of He Zhen in *Biographies of Seal Carvers*. While in the biography of Wen Peng, He Zhen started by carving over the traces of the Suzhou scholar's ink, this second account describes his apprenticeship in more detail, with He diligently studying ancient scripts before following his master in fusing brush and knife-work:

He Zhen had been coming to Nanjing for a long time and he was student and acquaintance of Wen Peng. Wen devoted himself to the study of the six scripts and He followed him in these discussions day and night without rest. He often said: "As for the six scripts, I don't believe that it's possible to wield the knife like a brush if you can't enter into the spirit with intent." As such, He Zhen's seals are all without mistaken brushstrokes, likely because the majority were Wen Peng's. He Zhen's name rose because of Wen Peng, but really triumphed because of Wang Daokun. When Wang Daokun, the Minister of War, was residing in the capital he obtained for Wen Peng a large quantity of jelly stone, half of which he entrusted to Wen Peng, the other half of which he gave to He Zhen.

主臣往來白下最久，其與文國博蓋在師友間。國博究心六書，主臣從之討論，盡日夜不休，常曰：「六書不能精義入神，而能驅刀如筆，吾不信也。」以故，主臣印無一訛筆，蓋得之國博居多。主臣之名成於國博，而騰於硃中。司馬硃中在留都，從國博得凍石百，以半屬國博，以半倩主臣成之。⁷⁴

We know from surviving poems that Wang Daokun promoted He Zhen's work as a seal carver, eulogizing his distinctive "Ancient Seal-Script Seal" (古篆印章), repeatedly celebrating his attention to ancient sources, and sending him off to the northern frontier to make money carving for garrisons and military staff.⁷⁵ There are, however, no references in Wang Daokun's own collected writings to meetings with Wen Peng and it seems unlikely, given what we now know

⁷³ Zhou, *Yinren*, 1:5b.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:6b.

⁷⁵ There are four poems in *Taihan ji*: Wang, "Jingkou song He Zhuchen huan Haiyang wei mu chenru ren qishi shou" 京口送何主臣還海陽為母陳孺人七十壽, *Taihan ji*, 117: 2663; Wang, "Song He Zhuchen zhi Chu shi jueju" 送何主臣之楚十絕句, *Taihan ji*, 120: 2781; Wang, "Song He Zhuchen beiyong si jueju" 送何主臣北游四絕句, *Taihan ji*, 120: 2771; Wang, "He Changqing" 何長卿古篆印章, *Taihan ji*, 116: 2594 We have already seen that Wang Daohui escorted He Zhen to a meeting with Feng Mengzhen in 1597 and a seal attributed to He carved for Daohui from 1589 still survives.

of their biographies, that the two men ever actually crossed paths in Nanjing.⁷⁶ How, then, might we parse Wang Daokun's role as a link between Wen Peng and He Zhen? These two figures were later presented as founders of the "schools" of Suzhou and Huizhou seal carving and Wang's gift ties both of these lineages back to the same lump of rock. Wang's instruction that He study from and copy Wen's work, meanwhile, renders the nominal founder of Huizhou stone seal carving subordinate to the model of the Suzhou scholar. Wang Daokun effectively functions as a framing device for reading the achievements of reputable Huizhou seal carvers back through the path-breaking example of Wen Peng.⁷⁷

The Death of the Artisan: He Zhen's Corpse

Despite the popularity of the soft stone legend, much of the surviving material evidence for Wen Peng's seal art consists of impressions on the paintings of his close associates and printed seal catalogues from the late Ming and Qing.⁷⁸ As such, surviving soapstone seals attributed to He

⁷⁶ The earliest date Wang could have been posted to the Southern Capital was the fifth month of 1572 by which point Wen was already in Beijing. For a short study of Wen Peng's in Beijing and Nanjing in his later years, see Liu Dongqin 劉東芹, "Wen Peng wannian shufa zhuanke huodong ji liangjing xingji kaoshu" 文彭晚年書法篆刻活動及兩京行跡考述, *Shuhua yishu xuekan* 書畫藝術學刊 3 (2007): 431–438. There are other questions that have led scholars to doubt the reliability of Zhou Lianggong's biography of Wen Peng. As Wu Xiang 無相 has noted, the most famous surviving seal attributed to Wen Peng "Accompanying a Crane Beside Pines After Playing the Zither" (琴罷倚松玩鶴) is dated to 1547 and is made from soft stone. If Zhou is correct in claiming that Wen discovered soft stone in Nanjing in the 1570s then this specimen is a fake. If this specimen is authentic, then Zhou's account is off by a couple of decades, see Wu Xiang 無相, "Lun Wen Peng zai zhuanke shi shang de diwei he gongxian" 論文彭在篆刻史上的地位和貢獻, *Shufa yanjiu* 書法研究 (2005): 122.

⁷⁷ Even when praising He Zhen's legacy as the founder of seal-carving in Huizhou, Zhou reminds readers of his subservience to Wen Peng: "He Zhen rose up by following Wen Peng and the Way of Seal Carving subsequently headed back to the Yellow Mountains. For a long time in the Yellow Mountains, there were no seals; now it is not that there are no seals, but there are men who can make seals. For a long time there were no masters in the Yellow Mountains; now, it is not that there are no masters, but that there is a one who can become the Master [a play on He Zhen's cognomen, Zhuchen 主臣]." 自何主臣繼文國博起, 而印章一道遂歸黃山。久之而黃山無印, 非無印也, 夫人而能為印也。又久之而黃山無主臣, 非無主臣也, 夫人而能為主臣也。Zhou, *Yinren*, 2:5b.

⁷⁸ Notably Wang Zhideng 王穉登 (1535–1612) and Xiang Yuanbian. The authenticity of extant soapstone seals attributed to Wen, including his acclaimed "Accompanying a Crane Beside Pines After Playing the Zither" (琴罷倚松玩鶴), dated to 1547 and held in the collections of the famous Xiling Society (Xiling yinshe 西泠印社) in Hangzhou, meanwhile remains unclear.

Zhen have been taken to embody dominant aesthetic principles in late imperial literati seal carving, his work regarded as a fulfillment of the promise of his teacher's discovery. By the end of his life, He Zhen was so closely associated with the material of soft stone, a story circulated claiming that when he died the only possession in his personal sack was a lump of "strange rock" that was later returned to his coffin to expel anyone who refused to make an offering.⁷⁹ In this telling anecdote, the stone assumes its full power as a fetish through its juxtaposition with He Zhen's corpse.

He Zhen died at the age of seventy, while lodging at the Cheng'en Temple. They searched his sack and the only thing they found was a lump of strange stone. Friends pooled together money to reclaim it and return it to his coffin. Now it drives away anyone who refuses to make an offering of a slice of incense to He Zhen.

主臣去歲滿七十，客死承恩寺。搜其橐，惟奇石一座存焉。友人釀金斂之，歸其柩。今遂無祝瓣香於主臣者。

He Zhen's dead body assumes an apotropaic charm – as if evoking the talismanic potency of seal script – through its contact with the material of stone. In one sense, this anecdote represents the apotheosis of an extended process of trying to transform "He Zhen, the hired artisanal seal carver" into He Zhen the scholar seal carver of soft stone. At the same time, the fetishistic charge of the soft stone material – its newfound stature as a medium for authentic self-expression in the fusion of mind, eye, and hand – is indelibly marked by the symbolic death of the Huizhou artisan. For the scholar-gentleman to take up the activities of a craftsman, it was first necessary to rhetorically kill him off.

The fame of soft stone rose with He's iconic death and inspired a host of imitations: contemporary commentators were quick to point out that most of the stone seals attributed to his

⁷⁹ Feng Mengzhen, "Ti He Zhuchen fuzhang ce" 題何主臣符章冊, *Kuaixue tangji* 快雪堂集, in SKQSCMCS, jibu, vol. 164, 446.

hand in the early seventeenth century marketplace were actually carved by his students, such as “Mr Idle” (Wugong shi 無功氏) (Figures 2.8 and 2.9).⁸⁰ Six of the most highly prized He Zhen stamps are dated to 1604, the year of his death, and it is perhaps best to see such work as representative of the idea of a “He Zhen seal”: an extension of Wen Peng’s teaching, expressing the “intent of a brush” (*biyi*) in stone. Ironically our image of the archetypal scholar’s soft stone seal is often based on copies of work inspired by the idea of a dead Huizhou artisan.



Figure 2.8: He Zhen, “Mr Idle” Seal Impression
Source: *Ming Qing zhuanke liupai yinpu*, 5.



Figure 2.9: Liang Zhi, “Mr Idle” Seal Impression
Source: *Ming Qing zhuanke liupai yinpu*, 31.

Anatomy of a Scholar’s Soft Stone Seal: “Amid Laughter and Chatter, Ethers Spurt Forth a Rainbow”

⁸⁰ 「人人自以為得何氏心印，識者獨謂梁千秋」 Li Weizhen, “Yin jun xu” 印雋序, *Yin jun* 印雋, ed. Liang Zhi and Wang Daohui (Wanli 33), 3.

“Amid Laughter and Chatter, Ethers Spurt Forth a Rainbow” (*xiaotan jian qitu nihong* 笑譚間氣吐霓虹), dated to 1604 and held in the Shanghai Museum, has been taken by critics to encapsulate two representative trends in the rise of literati seal carving (Figure 2.10): first, a move from carving “name seals” (*mingzhang* 名章) to “leisure seals” (*xianzhang* 閒章),⁸¹ and second, the development of adding side markings (*biankuan* 邊款) to the stone. The fashion for engraving a resonant literary allusion or phrase rather than a personal or studio name has been seen to have further enhanced the expressive power of the seal as a medium, linking the practice of working with soft stone to poetry.⁸² The same “Amid Laughter...” line, for instance, also appears in an aria from the contemporary *chuanqi* drama, *Record of the Red Whisk* (*Hongfu ji* 紅拂記).⁸³ He Zhen’s knife-work highlights the generative energy latent in this phrase, by fusing the two characters “ether” (*qi* 氣) and “spurt” (*tu* 吐) into a single composite graph, with the wafting lines for *qi* now rising from the “ground” radical (*tu* 土) at the base of the seal, and a stretched “mouth” radical (*kou* 口) (Figure 2.11). In doing so, He places an odd number of characters (7) in an evenly balanced structure (6), reconciling instability to stability, a compositional principle affirmed through the central position of the character for “interval, in

⁸¹ The distinction between name and leisure seal is often invoked in scholarship on seals, yet it overly simplifies a wider range of categories for the engraved words on stamping seals, summarized by Tseng: stamps on pottery utensils, stamps on clay, pictorial stamps, imperial stamps, official seals, personal seals (formal names, surnames, pseudonyms, pen-names), private dwelling places, collectors’ seals (for private art collections or libraries), and leisure or “extraneous” seals (*xianzhang*). Zeng, *A History of Chinese Calligraphy*, 106.

⁸² Zhou Lianggong also comments on this development in his account of He Zhen’s student Liang Zhi 梁祿, “As for Wen Peng’s seals, they were mostly personal names and some studio names; with He Zhen, common sayings could be used for a seal and by Liang Zhi, there was no expression that could not be used!” 文國博為印，名字章居多，齋堂館閣有之；至何氏則以世說入印矣，至千秋則無語不可入矣。Zhou, *Yinren*, 1:8a.

⁸³ 「看你」儀容俊雅，笑譚間氣吐霓虹。Ling Mengchu 凌濛初, *Nanyin sanlai* 南音三賴 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji shudian yingyin, 1963), 3:29a.

between, amid” (*jian* 間) (Figure 2.12).⁸⁴ This design resonates with Jean François Billeter’s observation that in contrast to looser, unbound forms of brush writing, engraved seals provide access to a “primary realm” where the act of writing remains a concentrated, almost static nucleus of energy: a “matrix of all forms.”⁸⁵

On the side of the seal, He Zhen carved a short note commemorating the event of its composition much like a colophon on a painting (Figure 2.10):

In the *jiachen* year I obtained an antique *ding* vessel; that day, my spirit soared and I made this.

By He Zhen: for the inspection of Old Lanyu.

甲辰歲得古鼎一，是日心神舒暢，乃有此作，何震為蘭嶼老翁一覽。⁸⁶

A work of calligraphic art in and of itself, the side marking (*biankuan*) reveals that the seal engraving was watched over by an eminent late Ming painter.⁸⁷ Despite this commemoration of a social relationship, the central role of the signature is to foreground He Zhen’s individual authorship, transforming the whole stamp into a miniature stone monument.⁸⁸ Evoking a spatialized movement from inside to outside, latency to manifestation – a paradigmatic ideal in Chinese poetic creation – He Zhen’s note stages a two-part process of energy transfer: from the initial stimulation of an encounter with an ancient ritual vessel, to the spontaneous expression of

⁸⁴ This work resonates with Jason Kuo’s assertion that: “Like a painting or a piece of calligraphy, then, a seal as a two-dimensional composition must be approached in terms of the endless varieties and interactions of tension and resolution, symmetry and asymmetry, balance and instability...”. Jason C. Kuo, *Word as Image: The Art of Chinese Seal Engraving* (New York: Chinese House Gallery, 1992), 49.

⁸⁵ Jean Billeter, *The Chinese Art of Writing* (Zurich: Rizzoli International, 1990), 288.

⁸⁶ Fang Quji 方去疾, *Ming Qing zhuanke liupai yinpu* 明清篆刻流派印譜 (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1981), 5.

⁸⁷ Old Lanyu 蘭嶼老翁 is Zhu Zhifan 朱之蕃 (1546–1624).

⁸⁸ “The art of the seal is related to the art of the façade in classical Western architecture. By organizing the surface, it tries to create an effect of animated balance, and so an effect of depth *sui generis*. Despite the minute surfaces it occupies, it is a monumental art.” Billeter, *The Chinese Art*, 288.

mind and spirit.⁸⁹ If seal impressions aspire to seriality, He Zhen's embrace of the otherwise "useless" side of the stamp as a calligraphic surface tries to link knife-work to signature ideals of individuality and spontaneity. Like Su Shi's inscribed Dragon Tail, He embraces the corporeality of the stone seal as a model of disinterested non-functionality.

⁸⁹ We see similar attempts to use the side markings on a seal to link the creation of the engraved design to a stimulating encounter with ancient script, see Jin Nong's seal "I am thinking of the old master" (*wo si guren* 我思古人): "Mr Jiang showed me his father's collection of stamps at Mr Jiu's (residence. At the same time, he) served me fragrant tea [the quality of which] matched the wonderful collection. In return, I engraved this and signed my name [for him]. Guhang, Jin Nong." Cited in Zeng, *A History of Chinese Calligraphy*, 109.

For comparison see the definitive account of poetic creation in the "Great Preface" to the *Book of Songs*: "in the mind it is intent; emerging in words, it becomes a poem. When feelings are roused within, they acquire form in words." Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, 41.

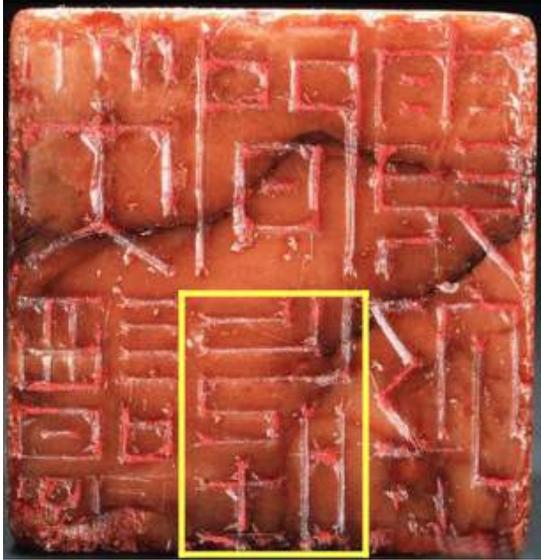


Figure 2.11: Detail of composite character for “Ether” and “Spurt” in “Amid Laughter and Chatter, Ethers Spurt Forth a Rainbow”
Source: Shanghai Museum.

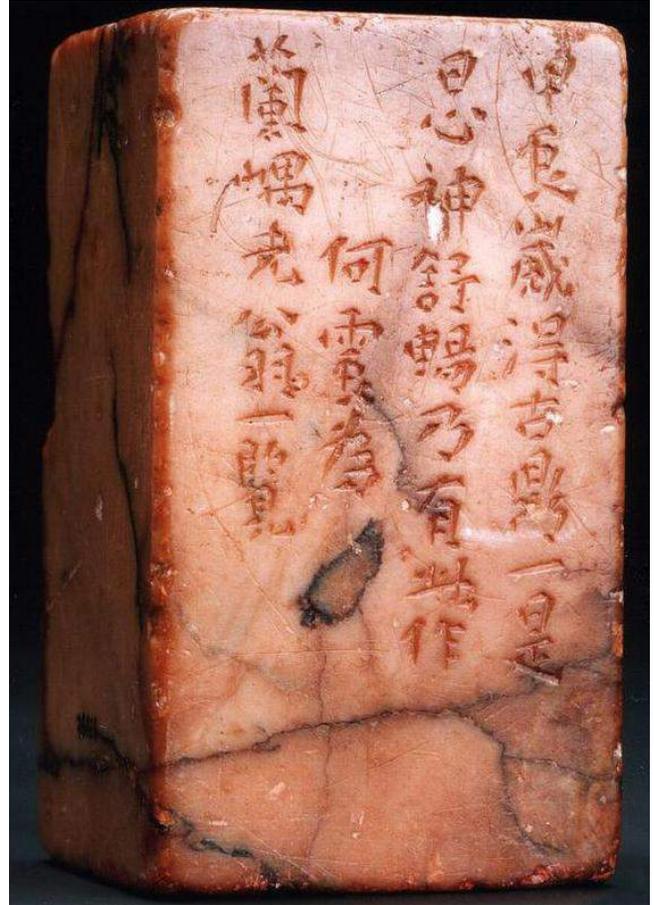


Figure 2.10: He Zhen, side marking and signature on “Amid Laughter and Chatter, Ethers Spurt Forth a Rainbow” Seal Stamp
Source: Shanghai Museum.

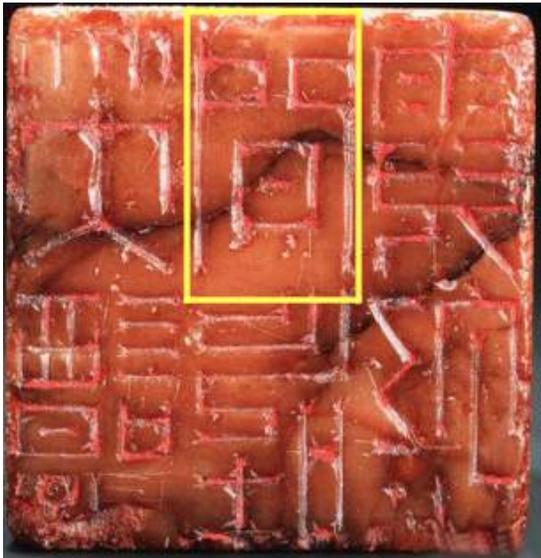


Figure 2.12: Detail of character for “Amid” in “Amid Laughter and Chatter, Ethers Spurt Forth a Rainbow”
Source: Shanghai Museum.

Fang Yongbin as a Seal Salesman

We have seen that the archetype of the scholar seal carver was, in part, predicated on Wen Peng's ability to bypass a hired engraver of ivory fans. The Harvard cache reveals that Fang Yongbin was also sought out by his clients to manufacture seals in a range of materials, predominantly bronze and ivory. In the following note, a fairly illustrative request from Fang's collection, a customer specifies his general preferences for four personal seals with an enclosed sum of one tael of silver as payment:

My humble self still lacks several seals of different kinds; I've attached another design and trouble you to find an opportunity in your spare time to complete it. Use ivory or use bronze, it's really up to you. If you use bronze, make it tall and slender. It's far better if you don't add a knob to it. I've also enclosed one tael of silver as remuneration, I respectfully request your aid in carving four copies and I'd be grateful for your examination of them. The name has been corrected. Respectfully Huang Xueceng, with haste. Enclosed please find one tael.

不佞尚乏數圖書各色，具別幅，煩公暇中一成之。或用牙，或用銅，俱隨便。然銅宜用高長，勿以鈕為之更妙。外具折儀壹兩，小刻四冊侑敬，幸檢入。名正具。侍生黃學曾拜。速。折儀壹兩。⁹⁰

Again, much like carver in the Wen Peng story, Fang Yongbin's skill in engraving seals seems to have been linked to his ability to carve other artifacts – including ivory and bamboo hairpins (*yazan* 牙簪; *zhuzan* 竹簪).⁹¹ A letter from the wood folio suggests that Fang not only sold bronze and ivory seals, but that his shop also peddled knives for cutting these materials: “I humbly request a knife to carve bronze and a knife to carve ivory, please don't be sparing, my sincere thanks” 鑄銅并鑄牙刀各丐一柄，幸勿悵，容面謝。)⁹² While not all of the requests explicitly indicate that Fang personally cut the seal (in some instances, he may have also

⁹⁰ Huang Xueceng 黃學曾 [Earth: 17]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 1036.

⁹¹ A letter from Fang Maoxue 方懋學 in the metal folio praises a bamboo hairpin (承賜竹簪併妙書，足感高情。) Fang Maoxue [Metal: 48]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 567.

⁹² Pan Wei [Wood: 24]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 753. See also Fang Weichong 方惟充 [Wood: 8]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 738.

procured the services of other artisans through his shop), he clearly earned renown for his talents as a carver among his customers:

This sobriquet I received from you is truly wonderful; I can't express my gratitude. The design of the "Fount of White Clouds" cannot surpass this. The poise of the calligraphy and the finesse of the engraving lie in the virtuosity of this refined hand's movements. It was certainly not the work of a lesser craftsman.

承贈賤字妙甚，感不可言。白雲源規模不過如此。其間字畫之均勻，鏤鏤之精絕，又在高手運移之巧，非區區所能盡也。⁹³

The author of this note celebrates Fang Yongbin's craft, claiming he bettered a rival with the popular title "Fount of White Clouds" (Baiyun yuan 白雲源) through his deft ability to synthesize calligraphy (字畫) and carving (鏤鏤). Some of Fang's customers went further by requesting that he share his seal designs as a method of instruction: "as for the art of engraving insects, could you please instruct us? It would be better, if possible, for you to show your designs – I would be awfully grateful."⁹⁴

Although Fang, like other hired artisans, seems to have primarily engraved seals for clients in ivory and bronze, there is also evidence in the Harvard cache that he started to carve in the softer stones supposedly popularized by Wen Peng. A letter in the water folio, for instance, records a request for Qingtian rock (承委青田石).⁹⁵ Wang Jun 汪濬, a kinsman of Wang Daokun, also sent a pair of letters asking Fang to carve a personal seal in "fieldstone" (粗石一方). These two notes are particularly striking for the pathos of Wang Jun's candid description of how he arrived at a phrase for his seal, recounting the process of devising an apt epithet to articulate his diminished physical state (Figure 2.13). Wang Jun died from his illnesses at the age

⁹³ Fang Dazhi [Metal: 105]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 659.

⁹⁴ 彫蟲之藝，已請教于大家，倘更示以矩模，不勝感德。Anonymous [probably written in Beijing] [Earth: 12]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 1031.

⁹⁵ She Qi [Water: 13]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 817.

of twenty-five (Wang Daokun commemorated a man “prone to sickness” 善病) and we see him search in his requests for lyrical redemption from his own convalescence, as if he still believed in the apotropaic powers of seal script:

For the past several days my illness has returned; that I still haven’t been able to heed your instruction only adds to my regrets. As for this block of fieldstone, I request that you carve the four characters: “Ailing Historian of Penglai Pond” as a way of diverting me from my sickness. I have my heart set on this seal; I’ve been dreaming of it. I’ve wanted to entrust you to do it, but haven’t dared to trouble you. I hope you’ll pay mind to this and my gratitude would be boundless. When I fully recover from my sickness, I’ll make sure to repay you in full,

連日病復，未獲走聆教益為恨。粗石一方，敢求足下為刻「蓬池病史」四字，以為病中消遣。此印乃心愛者，夢寐想之。欲托之而不敢相勞者，屢中止矣。幸即留心，感激無涯也。賤恙全療，自當圖報不盡。⁹⁶

Zhang Pingzi’s *Rhapsody on Returning to the Fields* has a line that reads: “Moved by the warning left by Laozi, I shall turn my carriage back to my thatched hut.” I’ll take this a meaning for myself. If it is not too much to bear, how about you carve “Ailing Historian of the Thatched Hut” in fine seal script? Your younger brother Wang Jun, respectfully submitted to Master Yuansu, the society elder.

This stone seal is too short; if possible cut it in two and then it can be made into a knob for another seal, that would be wonderful.

張平子「歸田賦」云：「感老氏之遺誡，且迴駕乎蓬廬。」僕亦此意也。承不拒，乞為佳篆作「蓬廬病史」如何？友弟汪濬再頓首。元素先生社丈。其石章太倭，倘為分作兩半，以便作鈕，尤妙。⁹⁷

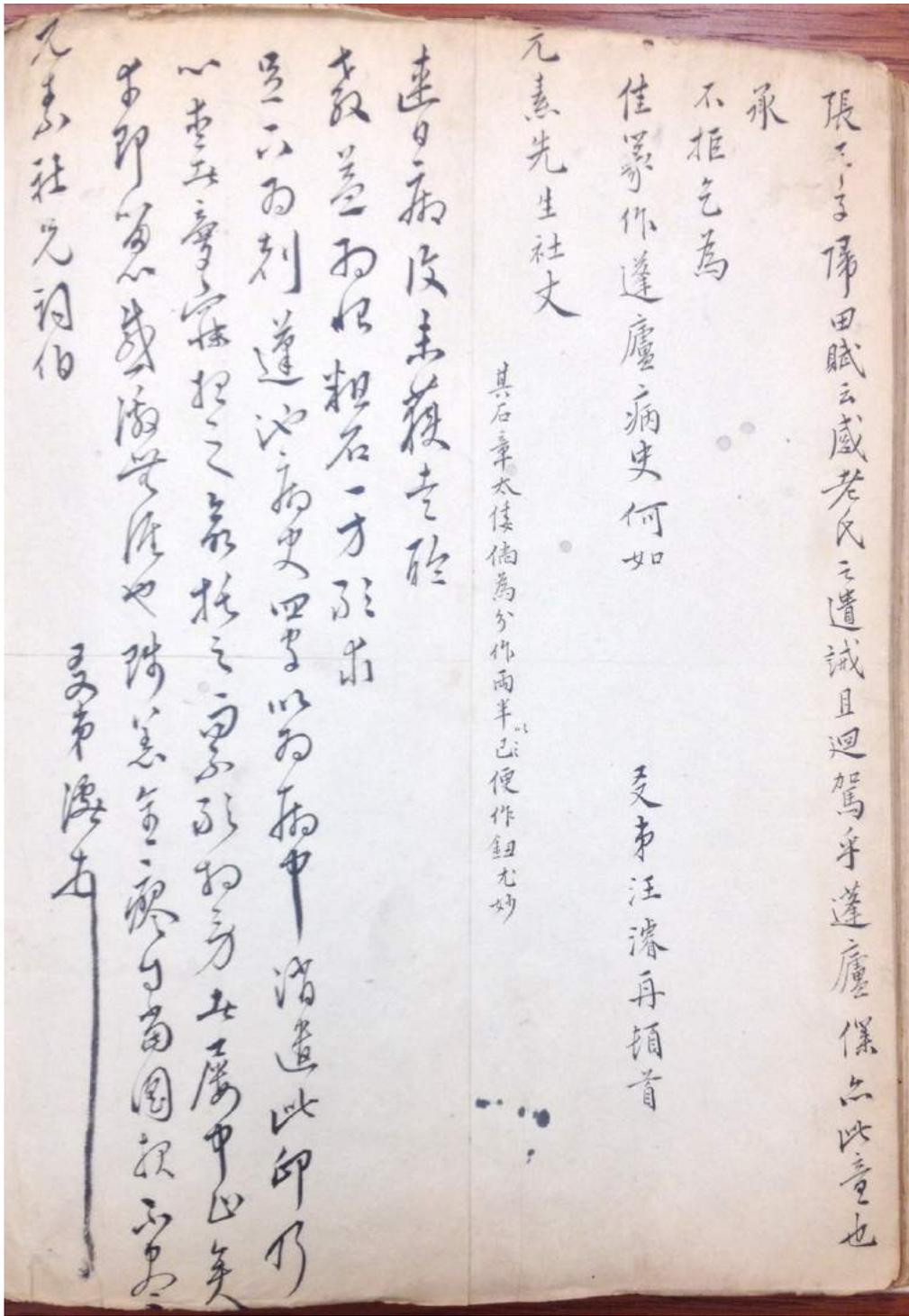
Wang begins in the first note with the title “Ailing Historian of Peng Pond,” invoking the specter of his mortality,⁹⁸ before later turning to a line from Zhang Heng’s 張衡 (78–139) *Rhapsody on Returning to the Fields* (*Guitian fu* 歸田賦) – “Moved by the warning left by Laozi, I shall turn

⁹⁶ Wang Jun [Metal: 46]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 565.

⁹⁷ Wang Jun [Metal: 45]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 563.

⁹⁸ It is unclear whether Pengchi (蓬池), here, refers to the “Pond of Penglai” (蓬萊池) or to “Peng Lake” (蓬池), alluded to in Ruan Ji’s 阮籍 famous line: “Strolling by Peng Lake, I let my eyes settle on Daliang: waves form ceaselessly from the blue waters, the countryside stretches far away” (徘徊蓬池上，還顧望大梁。綠水揚洪波，曠野莽茫茫。). The disjunction between sickness and immortality in the first instance would seem to suggest worries with lengthening one’s life; in the second, instance, Ruan Ji’s poem carries overtones of decay and gloom as he muses on the ruined capital of Wei.

my carriage back to my thatched hut” – to bestow upon himself a new moniker, “Ailing Historian of a Thatched Hut” (蓬廬病史). This line serves as a critical pivot in Zhang’s rhyme-prose, marking the point when the protagonist leaves behind “the perfect pleasure of rambling and roaming, even as the sun sets, oblivious of fatigue” (極般遊之至樂，雖日夕而忘劬。) – to heed Laozi’s injunction that “galloping and hunting cause one’s mind to become mad,” heading back to his hut to practice the zither and calligraphy. We saw with the Wen Peng soft stone legend and the side markings on He Zhen’s “Amid Laughter...” piece how a carver might use a seal to communicate their own “spirit and mind,” aligning the subjectivity of the cutter with that of the poet. Fang Yongbin’s seal for Wang Jun no longer survives, yet the request suggests a contrasting role for the hired engraver, or the entrepreneurial figure of the shopkeeper more generally: as a medium through whom other customers might fashion and refashion lyrical projections of themselves.



張三子歸田賦云感老氏之遺誠且迴駕乎蓬廬僕亦此意也

承

不拒乞為

佳篆作蓬廬病史何如

友弟汪濬再頓首

元憲先生社丈

其右章太僕倘為分作兩半正便作鈕尤妙

連日病皮未獲去於

其數益相相粗石一方亦

豈不為刻蓬池病史四字以為病中消遣此印乃

心畫其意實相之象括之而象亦相身其屬中心矣

半印以意感海字所也殊美宜與高圖款亦其

元憲社兄初伯

友弟汪濬

Figure 2.13: Letter from Wang Jun to Fang Yongbin
Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Metal: 45 and 46.

Fang Yongbin as a Seal Collector

The Harvard cache shows that in addition to his work in retail, Fang corresponded with other prominent seal carvers of the late sixteenth century, notably the renowned carver Wang Hui 汪徽 from Wuyuan (the home of the Dragon Tail) and the local engraver Wu Liangzhi 吳良止, a native of Xinan 溪南 in She County. In these letters, we see Fang assume for himself the guise of a client intent on collecting seal designs. In his first letter from the cache, Wang Hui refers to Fang with the intimate epithet of “the one who knows me” (*zhiji* 知己) and identifies a piece of jade that he had sent as the material for the seal:

I am grateful to you, my true friend, and have received the jade seal you want me to make to express the virtue of your name, for you to wear at your belt. The other day I thought about it and brought it out to play with. I haven't carved a jade seal for a good decade or so, but now I have gone back to it, itching to test my skills for my true friend.

弟感足下知己，敢留玉印一方作足下表德，為足下佩之，它日相思，持以把玩也。弟不為人篆玉章已十數年所矣，今復技癢于知己之前耳。⁹⁹

In a subsequent letter from the metal folio, Wang returns the seals he had carved to Fang Yongbin with two stamped impressions appending his note: both personal seals were based on Fang's literary names: “cognomen, Sixuan” (biezi Sixuan 別字思玄); and “Fang Yongbin, courtesy name: Yuansu” (Fang Yongbin zi Yuansu 方用彬字元素) (Figure 2.14).¹⁰⁰ In the course of four letters in the cache to the bronze cutter Wu Liangzhi, we similarly see: 1) Fang send Wu material for carving a seal; 2) Wu journey to Yanzhen to try and obtain Fang's seal script (*yinwen* 印文) for the carving (possibly from the “Treasure Store,” unfortunately Fang was not in); 3) Fang send Wu a gift of ink and a recently cut collection of poems trying to re-arrange

⁹⁹ Wang Hui [Moon: 109]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 469.

¹⁰⁰ Wang Hui [Metal: 79]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 615.

a meeting; 4) Wu finally send Fang a bronze seal with his name.¹⁰¹ The first of these letters bears Wu Liangzhi's personal seal and was drafted on a sensuous sheet of green decorative paper with flecks of gold (Figure 2.15). One of the more ornate samples in the Harvard cache, this piece speaks to Fang's investment in soliciting and collecting the calligraphy and seal impressions of his contemporaries. Indeed, one way of approaching the cache is as a carefully curated repository of around one hundred personal and leisure seals from prominent scholars of the sixteenth century, as Fang's own private "seal catalogue" (*yinpu* 印譜). We know that Fang collaborated with Wang Daokun's brothers in the production of a manuscript of seal impressions, yet it is unclear whether this contained contemporary or antique designs. The renowned connoisseur Zhan Jingfeng, however, wrote to Fang Yongbin to applaud his proprietorship of ancient seal scripts: "I heard that your recent acquisition of ancient seal designs is particularly rich, I would relish the chance for you to display them one by one."¹⁰² Such flattery, like Wang Daohui's earlier invitation to appraise the inkstone, points to Fang's newfound recognition among his peers as a connoisseur, yet still retains faint traces of the obsequiousness befitting a former customer of Fang's pawnshop: an earlier letter from Zhan Jingfeng reveals that he had approached Fang for a loan of over thirty taels of silver to cover a trip to the National Academy in Nanjing.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ 1) Wu Liangzhi [Metal: 94]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 633; 2) [Metal: 95]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 634; 3) [Metal: 114]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 670; 4) [Wood: 2]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 732. Wu Liangzhi became famous for his skill in working with bronze and, through his collaboration with Zhang Xueli 張學禮 of Yangzhou, produced copies of three thousand seals for an influential anthology of ancient impressions, primarily from the Qin and Han, *A Gathering of Seals from Research on the Proper Scripts of Antiquity* (*Kaogu zhengwen yinsou* 攷古正文印藪), published in 1589. See Zhang Xueli 張學禮 and Liu Ruli 劉汝立, *Kaogu zhengwen yinsou* 攷古正文印藪 [4 juan] ([Zhongguo: s.n.], 1589) University of Chicago Microform.

¹⁰² 聞近來所得古圖甚富，得一一即印示為幸。Zhan Jingfeng [Metal: 100]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 641.

¹⁰³ Zhan Jingfeng [Metal: 53]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 386.

I want to end this section, however, by underscoring one point: based on the evidence of the cache, whenever Fang sought to produce his own personal seals he reached out to other seal carvers (Figure 2.16). He could cut in ivory, bronze, jade, and stone, yet he still chose to send his script and blocks of material to different engravers (whether jade for Wang or bronze for Wu). In doing so, he effectively tried to open up and indulge the gap between calligraphy and carving that Wen Peng sought to close. Such an impulse betrays the influence both of his work as a shopkeeper – procuring seals from and for other clients – and his self-styled role as a collector, gathering designs from his contemporaries. And yet, it cannot be fully reduced to either activity. Instead, it hints at a divergent conception of the seal, one smothered by the scholar’s soft stone narrative proceeding from Wen Peng and the corpse of He Zhen. If it mattered for Wen that he personally carve over the traces of his own brushwork, Fang Yongbin – who was clearly capable of doing likewise – pursued collaboration and exchange: the more hands involved in the making of his “personal” seals, it seems, the better. If Wen Peng began as a client, yet took on the role of a carver to create a more “authentic” seal, Fang Yongbin was a talented carver who sought the role of a client capable of curating the reproduction of his name. In Fang Yongbin’s practice many of the distinctions that define literati seal carving fall apart: he carved for himself in ivory and for others in soft stone; he drafted his own calligraphy and commissioned others to cut it with materials he sold; he was a craftsman and a self-interested salesman, yet was also a proficient collector of antique scripts. Where later scholars fetishized the soft stone seal as a miniature space of mental refuge and lyrical self-expression, Fang embraced the possibilities of the seal as an assemblage, a network through which he could sustain and coordinate the investments of others. In this light, we can return to and re-read the episode where Wen Peng “discovered” soft stone: perhaps Wen’s hastiness to publicly disavow the hired carver of ivory

fans was actually the symptom of a deeper anxiety, a reaction to the dawning realization that an entrepreneurial artisan no longer had any need for the patronage of an educated calligrapher like himself.

小印自谓颇为得法
 且云其友之竹距簪乞惠一枚以頤大者而美
 绵帛乞惠数寸
 君或公礼附上乎
 部累之小价在此立候及可否
 元季伯先呈

前日过贵里辱授
 宗厨玉合为牙白中
 考加号幸里中僕以他往未得一晤
 为歉且为竊承希款托悞行如
 道不違人亦以为喜只在僕慢意

眷侍教生汪徽拜



Figure 2.14: Letter from Wang Hui to Fang Yongbin
 Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Metal: 79.

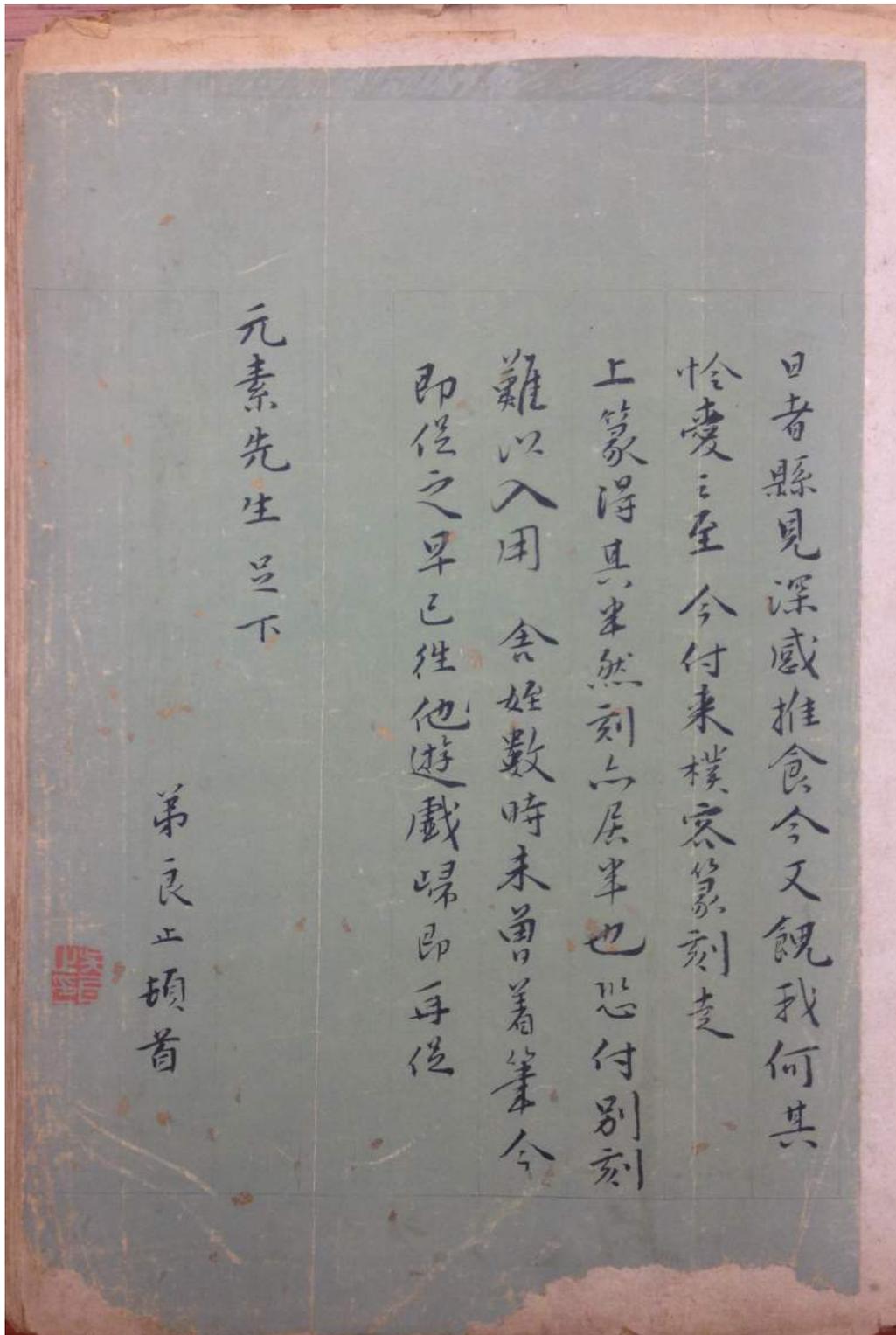


Figure 2.15: Letter from Wu Liangzhi to Fang Yongbin
Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Metal: 94.



Figure 2.16: “Cognomen, Sixuan” and “Fang Yongbin, Courtesy Name: Yuansu,”
Seal Impressions by Wang Hui, on letter from Wang Hui to Fang Yongbin
Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Metal: 79.

Part 3: Advertising Handbills

Through a close reading of Fang Yongbin's cache of letters, this chapter has formulated two historical arguments: 1) that the Huizhou dealer developed a synthetic entrepreneurial practice, fusing connoisseurial expertise with salesmanship; 2) that the Huizhou shopkeeper took up a new approach to the reproduction of seal script, working with diverse materials, while straddling the roles of hired hand, collector, curator, and client. In the first instance, the Huizhou dealer threatens the idealized image of the connoisseur propounded in mainstream late Ming literature; in the second instance, the Huizhou dealer's skill with the knife negatively defines, yet threatens the coherence of the emergent practice of literati seal carving, raising questions as to who could lay claim to calligraphic expertise and the custodianship of ancient scripts. These two developments are brought together in this final section as Fang Yongbin integrates his practice as a dealer and carver of calligraphy to manufacture advertising handbills. In doing so, he adapts the epigram as a promotional endorsement for a trademark: an inscription dedicated not to a singular artifact, but to the stylized proper name of a serially produced commodity.

The image of Fang Yongbin presented so far has been gleaned almost entirely from the responses of his clients in the Harvard cache. Fang himself remains an elusive and – aside from a single preface, the invoice for Wu Shouhuai, and the impressions of his commissioned seals – largely absent figure within his collection. There are no letters from Fang in response to the many requests for purchases or hired services, so we have no way of knowing how he haggled his price or negotiated repayments on his own terms. We can, however, catch a glimpse of Fang's tentative attempts to present himself as an author in one of his few surviving literary compositions: an inscription for a brand of tea, “Fang Yongbin's Inscription for Fineries of Pine Lichen Mountain” (Fang Yongbin Songluo lingxiu ming 方用彬松蘿靈秀銘) (Figure 2.17).

This text, which appears on two thin slips of paper that were later mounted and preserved within the cache, was printed in blue ink with a bold red title in seal script framed by a key-fret border. One print of the inscription bears the added detail of Fang Yongbin’s personal seal: “Master Sixuan” (Sixuan sheng 思玄生) – a supplement that together with the calligraphy of the title implicitly alludes to the author’s reputation as a dealer of seal stamps. We know from other letters in the cache that Fang Yongbin manufactured his own paper,¹⁰⁴ prepared woodblock prints, and sold tea¹⁰⁵ – in this light, these two pieces of ephemera further attest to his entrepreneurial practice, straddling and creatively combining different modes of cultural production. Within the cache, Fang’s promotional materials are juxtaposed with evidence of his other operations as a shopkeeper: the first copy of the inscription is mounted on a page together with a sheet of decorative golden leaf stationery bearing a request for advice on manuscript proofs – a pairing that seems to play on an implicit correspondence between Fang’s list of leaves in his inscription and this finely rendered leaf-shape cut-out replete with vein patterning (Figure 2.18); the second copy of the “Fineries...” advert, meanwhile, is mounted alongside a letter fragment with a customer’s request for a supply of brushes and paper from his shop (佳筆敢乞一枝。舊白箋啓乞數副。)(Figure 2.19).¹⁰⁶

Located thirteen *li* north of Xiuning 休寧 in Huizhou prefecture in Southern Zhili, Mount Pine Lichen 松蘿山 became a prominent site for the cultivation and processing of tea during the Wanli era. Wang Daokun was one of the earliest poets to write of his first-hand experience testing freshly plucked tealeaves on the mountain, adhering to a common trope in Ming tea

¹⁰⁴ 有所欲言，容小僮面稟。雜色白製小箋，惠數番至感。佐公再頓首。Qiao Zuoqing 鄔佐卿 [Moon: 33]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 349, 350; 外記室所製彩箋，惠徼數種，幸示所值於來人，便登入也。Jiang Hongxu 姜鴻緒 [Moon: 82]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 415; 昏葉竹刷能付此力否？見諸親友一一道謝，千萬。Zhu Duo Zheng 朱多炏 [Moon: 30]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 341.

¹⁰⁵ On requests for tea see Wu Liangqi 吳良琦 [Metal: 93]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 632.

¹⁰⁶ Qiu Tan 丘坦 [Water: 44]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 849.

poetry of inviting the reader to vicariously imagine the ambience of the plantation through the persona of the lyricist.¹⁰⁷ Wang's poetic eulogy for Pine Lichen draws from both his own reputation (he refers to his rank as "Vice Minister of War") and embodied experience consuming tea on site: "I knew that [this tea] outstrips the competition, we casually partook of it for several days/ The Vice Minister's ails were quickly cured and he took to a reclining chair, intoxicated."¹⁰⁸ If Wang invokes the authority of his official title to endorse the tea, Fang Yongbin foregrounds the fate of the product's name:

An Inscription for Fang Yongbin's Fineries of Pine Lichen Mountain

The Fineries of Pine Lichen:

An outstanding scenic spot! The tea has started to bud. Pine lichen flourishes in winter, while the bamboo shoots blossom in spring. The "dragon balls" are taken first, "swallow tongues" chirp together. The "maidservant junket" offers up a gift, the "flagpoles" strewn across each other. With mist, finely ground. Bringing rainwater to the boil. Poured into a ceramic cup, nestled in the saucer. Fit for a great worthy to sip, responding to its freshness as if waking from a dream. Passed into the annals of history, it will forever possess a fragrant name.

Inscription by Fang Yuansu of Xindu

方用彬松蘿靈秀銘

松蘿靈秀:

地勝鐘英，茗柯肇萌。松蘿冬茂，笋乳春榮。龍團初拭，雀舌齊鳴。酪奴投獻，旗槍縱橫。和煙細碾，帶雨盈烹。陶罇當注，瓷盞須傾。高賢宜啜，醒夢應清。將垂青史，永擅芳名。

¹⁰⁷ For Wang Daokun's poem, see Wang, "Songluo shi xinchā" 松蘿試新茶, *Taihan ji*, 111: 2428; Wang wrote various other poems on his trips to Mount Pine Lichen: Wang, "Songluo dao zhong" 松蘿道中, *Taihan ji*, 111: 2428; Wang, "Su Songluo Wu Tian zhu junzi zai jiu jianfang" 宿松蘿吳田諸君子載酒見訪, *Taihan ji*, 111: 2429. Wang also composed another poem on testing free tea, yet does not refer to a particular site – the imagery of this poem closely resembles his poem on Songluo, see Wang, "Shi xinchā" 試新茶, *Taihan ji*, 109: 2295. An early poetic endorsement for Pine Lichen has also been attributed to Wang Daohui, see Hu Shanyuan 胡山源, *Gujin chashi* 古今茶事 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1985), 201.

¹⁰⁸ 已知出羣品，聊以供諸天。司馬俄癯疾，繩床任醉眠。Wang, "Songluo shi," 2428.

新都方元素銘。¹⁰⁹

“Pine Lichen” initially referred not to a particular tealeaf but to the processing methods that were developed on the mountain and Fang is not so much concerned with any distinctive attributes of the product – which would later be described as comparable to “pear blossom,” possessing the fragrance of “bean stamens” with the taste of “munching snow” – as with linking a medley of generic epithets for tea to the nascent celebrity of a local site.¹¹⁰ The first four couplets simply list an array of exemplary tealeaves, punning on the component characters for these titles: “swallow tongues” *chirping* etc. In the second half of the inscription, Fang recounts step-by-step acts of preparing and drinking tea, tacitly inviting his readers to imagine the experience of testing the product for themselves. The epigram concludes with Fang’s claims for the prospective longevity of this “fragrant name,” by which he means to refer to the brand “Fineries of Mount Pine Lichen” – and yet his concern with renown betrays an investment in the broader reception of his own name in an appended “sign-off”: “Fang Yongbin of Xindu.” Fang’s inscription effectively yokes his reputation as a salesman to the ascendant fame of a trademark. The early commercialization of Huizhou agriculture and the related expansion of Huizhou merchant capital in the Ming were, in large part, prompted by local tea production: with a text like Fang’s inscription, however, we find evidence of a movement from producing local export commodities, towards consolidating and marketing a local brand image in an epigram.¹¹¹ If Wang Daokun’s

¹⁰⁹ Jiang Dongshi 江東士 [Wood: 69]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 801.

¹¹⁰ Prior to the arrival at Pine Lichen of a monk named Dafang 大方 from the Huqiu monastery 虎丘寺 in Suzhou, there had not been any tea cultivation in Huizhou. Dafang did not actually plant tea at Pine Lichen, but pan-fried tealeaves that he had collected from neighboring mountains.

¹¹¹ Due to rising pressure on land in the twelfth century, Huizhou agriculture became increasingly commercialized as part of a shift to producing local export commodities, particularly tea. Historians attribute the success of Huizhou tea production to a shift in taste from powdered to leaf tea at the beginning of the Ming. Huizhou also benefited from a shift in consumption patterns from powdered tea to leaf tea in the Ming because its leaf tea could be shipped to centers of tea marketing in Nanjing, Suzhou, and Hangzhou more quickly than tea from other regions up the Yangzi or farther down the coast. This shift was largely prefigured by the Hongwu emperor’s

Dragon Tail inscription – the artifact with which we began – depends on distinctions between connoisseur and dealer, Fang openly performs both roles at once, as judge *and* salesman; carver, calligrapher, *and* poet. The handbill lacks the substantial weight of an inkstone, yet its materiality still matters, attesting to Fang’s deft ability to curate and coordinate the production of ink, paper, woodblocks, and seals. In this sense, the “object” of Fang’s epigram is not really tea, but the assemblage of the handbill itself, a testament to the expanding commercial operation behind the production of the “Fineries” trademark. Fang’s epigram was not intended to survive in a single material format – indeed, the preservation of two samples in the Harvard cache seems at odds with their ephemerality – but to spread the fame of the “Fineries” name through serial reproduction.

During the late Ming, Pine Lichen’s reputation grew in stature, a trend attested to in the Wanli era gazetteer for Xiuning prefecture, which identifies a concurrent proliferation of counterfeits. A latent concern in this gazetteer entry is the way the name “Pine Lichen Tea,” attaining a level of celebrity that caused demand to outstrip supply, might lose its connection to a unique method (*zhifa* 製法) or locus of production, an anxiety that leads to a comparison with Su Shi’s proverbial “Heyang pig” (Heyang zhu 河陽豕). In this tale, Su Shi sent someone to purchase pork from Heyang, which he had heard was exceptional, only for his intermediary to get drunk and miss out on the pig (which took flight at night). The man then offered up another type of pork to Su Shi’s banquet guests who, erroneously assuming it was the famed product from Heyang, praised it as “incomparable” (以為非他產所能及也). The parable mocks those quick to judge a commodity on the basis of what they have been led to expect from its name:

personal preference for leaf tea (over the tastes of Jiangnan gentry who preferred powdered tea) motivated by a desire to disturb patterns of corruption surrounding the levy of powdered tea.

Tea: The local mountain of the prefecture is named Pine Lichen on account of the many pines there: initially there was no tea. For a long time, the foothills were a source of betel palms, yet recently tea trees have been planted. A monk from a mountain monastery came across a processing method and developed it at Pine Lichen. The name took off and the prices of the tea soared. The monk made a profit and left his order for a secular life. People left but the name remained. The gentry sought out the tea of Pine Lichen and local managers had no way to respond and so followers wantonly sold fake products on the marketplace. Isn't this like what Dongpo said about the Heyang pig?

茶：邑之鎮山曰松蘿，以多松名，茶未有也。遠麓爲榔源，近種茶株。山僧偶得製法，遂托松蘿，名噪一時，茶因踴貴。僧賈利還俗，人去名存。士客索茗松蘿，司牧無以應，徒使市恣賈售，非東坡所謂河陽豕哉！¹¹²

Later commentators would continue to cast aspersions on the slippery relationship between the popularity of the Pine Lichen label and the quality of the product it designated, with perhaps the most famous example of this critique emerging in the conclusion to Zhang Dai's 張岱 (1597–1679) essay on his own new name, “Orchid Snow” (Lanxue cha 蘭雪茶), for a local Shaoxing 紹興 tea, previously called “Sun Cast” (Rizhu 日鑄). In reflecting on the popularity of his proposed title, Zhang, a native of Shaoxing, rehashes familiar anti-Huizhou stereotypes:

Four or five years later, Orchid Snow Tea caused a clamor in the market. Aficionados from Yue stopped consuming Pine Lichen and only drank Orchid Snow. Those who consumed Orchid Snow sometimes mixed in some Pine Lichen so that the repute of Pine Lichen went down and its price was lower than Orchid Snow – as was custom. Recently, in Huizhou and She County, the name, “Pine Lichen,” was also changed to Orchid Snow: it went so far that they have even started to switch the packaging for products bearing the Pine Lichen label – it was really quite remarkable.

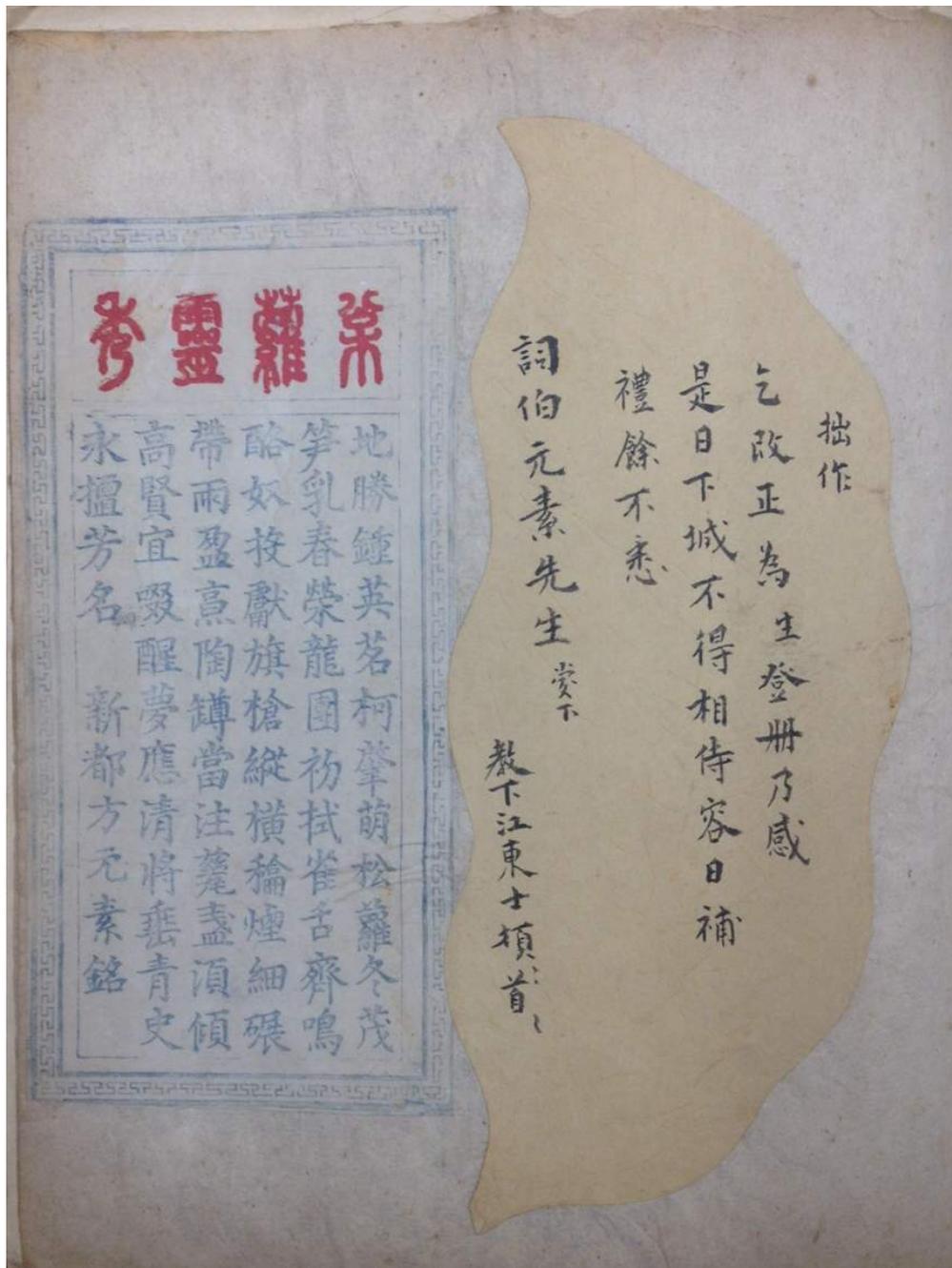
四五年後，蘭雪茶一闕如市焉。越之好事者，不食松蘿，止食蘭雪。蘭雪則食，以松蘿而纂蘭雪者亦食，蓋松蘿貶聲價俯就蘭雪，從俗也。乃近日徽歙間，松蘿亦改名蘭雪，向以松蘿名者，封面係換，則又奇矣。¹¹³

¹¹² *Xiuning xianzhi* 休寧縣志. *Shihuo zhi: wuchan* 食貨志：物產 (Wanli), 3.

¹¹³ Zhang Dai, *Tao'an Mengyi; Xihu Mengxun* 陶庵夢憶；西湖夢尋 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2001), 44.

Zhang's account of the ascendancy of "Orchid Snow" was, to a large extent, a parody of the history of the Pine Lichen label itself. Just as consumers were once duped into counterfeit Pine Lichen tea, Huizhou merchants stole Zhang Dai's "Orchid Snow" title and pasted it over their wares when they realized its popularity. Zhang predictably suggests that the merchants of Huizhou were carefree with the connection between a name and the quality of a product – they were even hasty to give up on the reputations of their own local specialties in pursuit of a quick profit. There is, however, little evidence beyond Zhang's own essay that the "Orchid Snow" title ever gained the recognition he claimed. Instead, his "playful" (余戲呼之「蘭雪」) efforts to rebrand the local Shaoxing tea, "Sun Cast," as "Orchid Snow," precipitate and even seem to resemble the way he feels "Pine Lichen" was renamed and repackaged.¹¹⁴ In this respect, Zhang's investment in the fate of the "Orchid Snow" label ironically dovetails with Fang Yongbin's promotion of "Pine Lichen," both authors – an early Qing arbiter of the fraught legacy of Ming material culture and the Huizhou dealer – accepting that by the late sixteenth century, a brand name was no longer a component of a valuable product, but a valuable product in and of itself.

¹¹⁴ The techniques of production used on Mount Songluo by the monk Dafang were passed on to other sites in which tea grew more plentifully, such as Mount Hua, so that a number of neighboring counties all produced tea under the Songluo name. From as far away as Fujian, requests were made to the monks of Mount Hua for the Songluo processing methods and thus was produced the so-called Wuyi Songluo tea, see Wu Zhihe 吳智和, "Mingdai sengjia, wenren dui cha tuiguang zhi gongxian" 明代僧家, 文人對茶推廣之貢獻, *Mingshi yanjiu zhuan* 明史研究專刊 9. 3 (1980): 1–74. See also James Benn: "This self-conscious adoption of the name of a famous tea offers a telling example of the power of the brand in the market for luxury comestibles in Ming times." James A. Benn, *Tea in China: A Religious and Cultural History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2015), 175.



葉 蘿 靈 秀

地勝鐘英茗柯肇萌松蘿冬茂
 笋乳春榮龍團初拭雀舌齊鳴
 酪如投獻旗槍縱橫輪煙細碾
 帶雨盈烹陶罇當注甕盞須傾
 高賢宜啜醒夢應清將垂青史
 永擅芳名 新都方元素銘

拙作

乞改正為 王登冊乃感

是日下城不得相待容日補

禮餘不悉

詞伯元素先生 蒙下

表下江東士頓首

Figure 2.17: “Cognomen, Sixuan” and “Fang Yongbin, Courtesy Name: Yuansu,” Seal Impressions by Wang Hui, on letter from Wang Hui to Fang Yongbin
 Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Wood: 69.

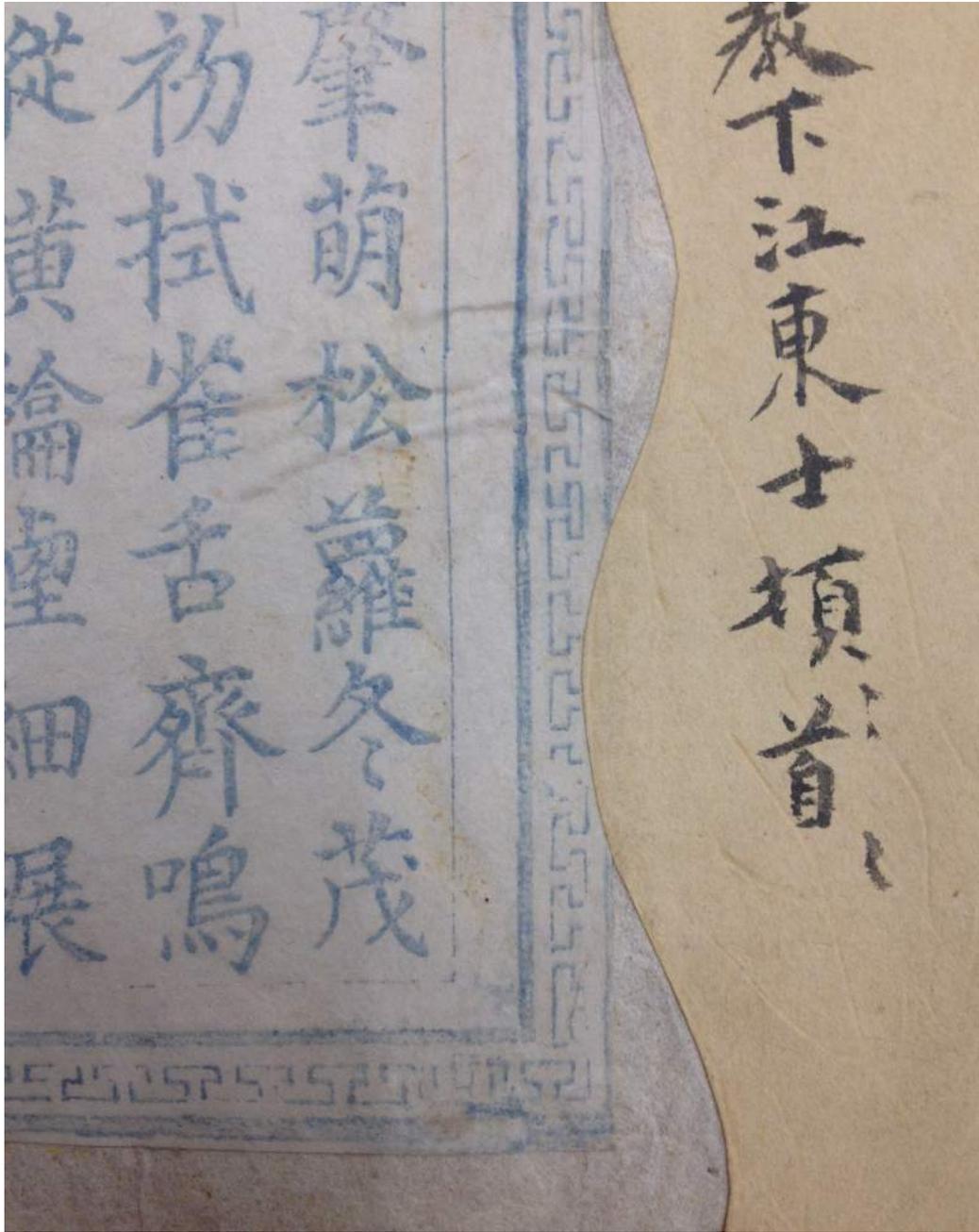


Figure 2.18: Detail of Handbill with “Fang Yongbin’s Fineries of Mount Pine Lichen Inscription”

Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Wood: 69.



Figure 2.19: Handbill with “Fang Yongbin’s Fineries of Mount Pine Lichen Inscription” pasted alongside letter from Qiu Tan to Fang Yongbin
 Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Water: 44.

Fang Yongbin’s two printed slips appear to be early examples of what are often called “handbills” (*fangdan* 仿單) or “package stickers” (*guotie* 裹貼) in later Chinese sources.

Historians of Chinese advertising often cite a handbill promoting the trademark of the Liu

Family Gongfu Needle Shop with a picture of a white rabbit grinding medicine, allegedly from the Northern Song, as the earliest evidence of this genre, yet almost all other surviving handbills date from the Qing.¹¹⁵ It was common, as Wu Renshu has noted, for Qing traders to use handbills as wrapping paper or promotional inserts within a package of tea or medicine, providing informational text to promote products under a particular trademark.¹¹⁶ We can begin to see how aspects of the design of Fang Yongbin’s handbill faintly anticipate stylistic features of later advertisements by comparing it with two Qing handbills for shops run by the Huizhou tea merchant Hu Xianghan 胡象涵, preserved in the “Stack of Old Papers” (Guzhi dui 故紙堆), published by the National Library of China.¹¹⁷ In the first of these handbills, Hu is advertising the name of a new shop “Hu’s Heavenly Spring” (Hu tianchun 胡天春) (Figure 2.20); and in the second, the name of one shop, “Hu’s Great Spring” (Hu ju chun 胡鉅春), is releasing a new brand of tea, “Heavenly Prime Health Enhancing Tea” (Tianyuan weisheng cha 天元衛生茶) (Figure 2.21) – in both cases, his personal name, as the author of the informational text, has been rendered subordinate to the more visually striking labels of the product and the shop. Fang’s attempt to foreground the brand name through his use of seal script and colored ink presages Hu’s presentation of his brands on unfurling banners with elaborate illustrated borders and auspicious decorative details: cranes in one instance and images of the eight immortals in another. Unlike Fang, Hu makes no use of seals, yet “tradename seals” became increasingly common in Qing handbills more generally – instead, Hu purposively adds a three character certificatory

¹¹⁵ Gary G. Hamilton and Chi-kong Lai, “Consumerism without Capitalism: Consumption and Brand Names in Late Imperial China” in *The Social Economy of Consumption*, ed. Henry J. Rutz and Benjamin S. Orlove (Lanham, MD: University Press), 253–79; Chen Shulin 陳樹林, *Zhongguo guanggao lishi wenhua: gudai juan* 中國廣告歷史文化：古代卷 (Tianjin: Tianjin shehui kexue chubanshe, 2007).

¹¹⁶ Wu Renshu, “From Viewing to Reading: The Evolution of Visual Advertising in Late Imperial China,” in *Visualising China, 1845-1965: Moving and Still Images in Historical Narratives*, ed. Christian Henriot, and Wen-Hsin Yeh (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 231–266.

¹¹⁷ Guzhidei bianweihui 故紙堆編委會, *Gu Zhi Dui* 故紙堆 (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 2003).

tagline, “Daily Splendor” (*ri long chang* 日隆昌), to his “Hu’s Heavenly Spring” advert to verify its authenticity against counterfeits.¹¹⁸ The most apparent difference between these cases, however, is Hu Xianghan’s central image of an official flanked by two female attendants reading a scroll bearing the brand name “Heavenly Prime...” in the “Hu’s Great Spring” advert. This image presents the advert as a mirror, reflecting back to the reader an eroticized vision of himself handling an advert. It is striking that Hu’s chosen scene has nothing to do with the consumption of the actual product and everything to do with the consumption of the words of its label: indeed, neither advert contains any depiction of men actually drinking tea or any images of tea-related paraphernalia. Within Hu’s meta-picture, the handbill seeks to advertise itself as an autonomous object of consumer desire.

¹¹⁸ Although the inference of counterfeiting is probably a marketing strategy to emphasize the product’s desirability.



Figure 2.20: Handbill for “Hu’s Heavenly Spring”
Source: *Gu Zhidui*, v.9, 12.



Figure 2.21: Handbill for “Heavenly Prime Health Enhancing Tea” from “Hu’s Great Spring”
Source: *Gu Zhidui*, v.9, 14.b.

CHAPTER THREE

BLACK MIST: BRANDING INK

Among the many ink-cakes (*mo* 墨) – solid tablets molded from mixtures of soot and glue – held in the collections of the Palace Museum in Beijing, there is a small rectangular stick weighing 34.7 grams, that bears a short inscription by Wang Daokun (Figure 3.1). Wang’s epigram complements an enigmatic label, “One with Clear Heaven” (*Liaotian yi* 寥天一), and the seal of a now unknown Wanli era (1572–1620) inkmaker named Sun Ruiqing 孫瑞卿. The survival of this slender artifact – a piece donated by the eminent twentieth century chemist Zhang Zigao 張子高 (1886–1976) and carefully documented as an antique in an ink-squeeze rubbing for the museum – raises the question of what it was about these markings that warranted protection and storage.¹ The worn base of the tablet hints that it was once ground lightly or tested (*shi* 試) in the pool of an ink slab, yet the preservation of its labels appears to have been prioritized over use of the ink itself. Grasping what mattered about these marks demands first reflecting on how they related to and supplemented one another: how, then, might we parse the interplay between an epigram by a renowned scholar (Wang Boyu *ming* 汪伯玉銘); an inkmaker’s stamp (the seal: “Made by Sun Ruiqing, Yuquan of Xindu” (Xindu Yuquan Sun Ruiqing *zhi* 新都玉泉, 孫瑞卿

¹ Zhang’s ink-cakes were included in the joint publication of the *Record of Four Ink Collectors* (*Sijia cangmo tulu* 四家藏墨圖錄), a lithographic printed copy of 84 rubbings of prized ink-cakes from the Ming and Qing, alongside pieces from the collections of Ye Gongchuo 葉恭綽 (1881–1968), Yin Runsheng 尹潤生 (1908–1982), and Zhang Jiongbo 張綱伯 (1885–1969) – all of whom worked at the Palace Museum in the early 1960s. The catalogue was reprinted in 2006, see Ye Gongchuo, Zhang Jiongbo, Zhang Zigao, and Yin Runsheng, eds., *Sijia cangmo tulu* 四家藏墨圖錄 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2006). For an introduction and critical revisions, see Wang Yi 王毅, Cai Xinquan 蔡鑫泉, “Sijia yuancang Mingmo kaoding pingxi – yi ‘Sijia cangmo tulu’ weilie 四家原藏明墨考訂評析—以《四家藏墨圖錄》為例, Wang Yi 王毅, Cai Xinquan 蔡鑫泉, *Zhongguo mo wenhua wenxue* 中國墨文化問學 (Shanghai: Shanghai yuandong chubanshe, 2014), 171–196.

制)); and the name of a product line, or *brand* of ink (*Liaotian yi*)? What brought these different markings together as components of the same surface?

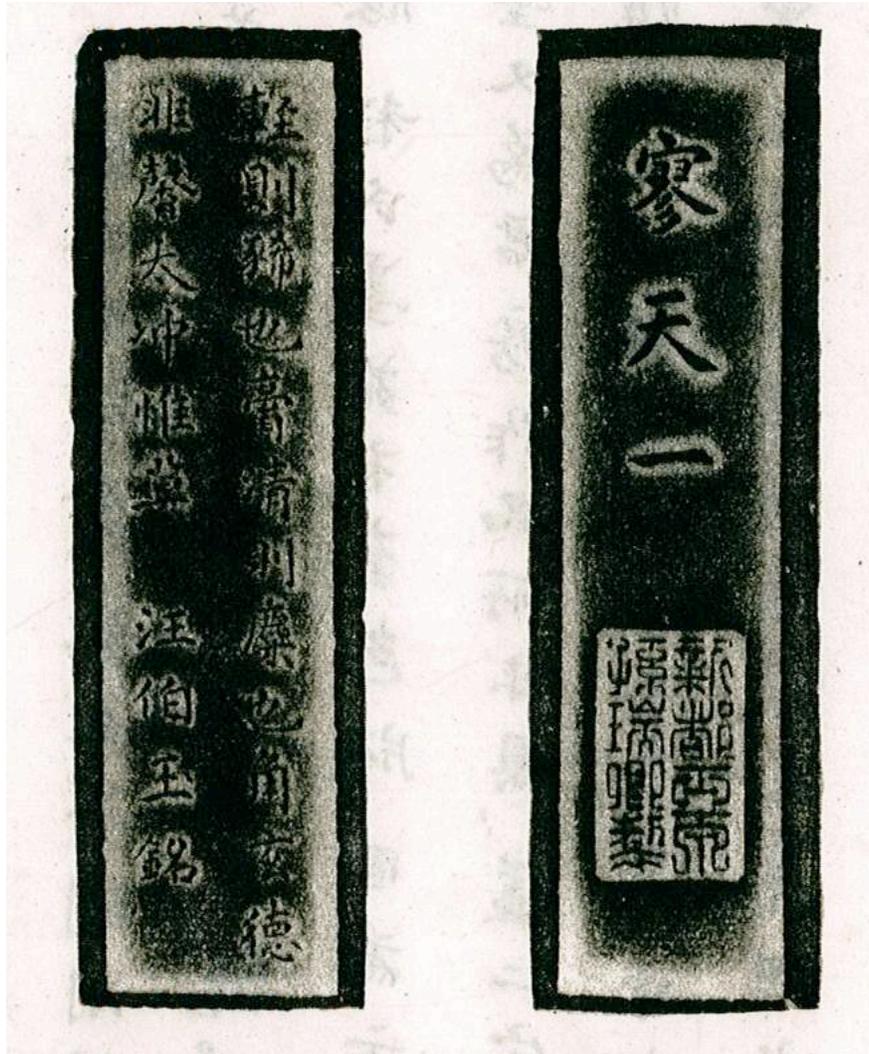


Figure 3.1: Rubbing of Sun Ruiqing’s “One with Clear Heaven” Ink-stick
Source: Zhang Zigao, *Sijia cangmo tulu*, 6.

In this chapter, I work with ink-cakes from the Ming and Qing dynasties to examine the changing relations between practices of literary inscription and commodity branding.² These

² Gary Hamilton and Chi-kong Lai have suggested that a complex system of “branding” in China can be traced, at least, to the Northern Song, with symbols, emblems, or labels being used to package and differentiate series of otherwise indistinguishable commodities (rice, tea, wine, scissors, and medicines). They take the Chinese terms *hao* 號 and *biaoji* 標記 to be equivalent to the meaning of “brand.” Hamilton and Lai are also keen to emphasize the connection between the rise of branding in Ming China and the reputation of place (Eckhardt and

strategies for marking things became increasingly intertwined in the sixteenth century with the emergence of a new class of brand, like the ambient designation “One with Clear Heaven.” During the course of the Ming, practices of labeling objects with the names of craftsmen (*zihao* 字號) or imperial reign titles (*nianhao* 年號) assumed newfound prominence in the marketplace as instruments for assuring quality and fixing benchmarks of distinction between different types of goods.³ “One with Clear Heaven,” however, competed with and deviated from such conventions as a commercial trademark formed through the creative misuse of poetic imagery, notably esoteric allusions to Daoist alchemical practice: in this case, a formulation from *Zhuangzi* 莊子: “when you rest in what has been arranged and put away thought of transformation, you become *One with Clear Heaven*” (安排而去化，乃入於寥天一).⁴ What was the meaning and value of such a mark? Who was its author? This chapter traces the careers of labels like “One with Clear Heaven,” examining how they were initially conceived and came to outstrip their ties to the reputations of both inkmakers and sponsors. By recovering the overlooked history of this unique approach to branding, I show how *writing on ink* – a substance that sustained the very art of writing in literati culture – recalibrated the relationship between the promotion of commercial goods and the prestige of poetry. Writing about the substance of ink

Bengtsson also use the example of the Changzhou comb). We find similar practices in medieval Europe, where place names eventually became generic names for products, see Gary G. Hamilton and Chi-kong Lai, “Consumerism without Capitalism: Consumption and Brand Names in Late Imperial China,”; Giana M. Eckhardt and Anders Bengtsson, “A Brief History of Branding in China,” *Journal of Macromarketing* 30 (2009): 210–221. The claims of Hamilton and Lai have had a major impact beyond Chinese history, inspiring anthropologists and archaeologists who have sought to show that commodity branding did not emerge with contemporary global capitalism or modern Western mass culture, but can be seen throughout human history, see David Wengrow, “Prehistories of Commodity Branding,” *Current Anthropology* 49: 7–34.

³ Historians of Ming material culture have treated the reign marks (particularly the Xuande 宣德 mark) on porcelain and bronze incense burners as “brands.” For an introduction, see Sun Yan 孫彥, Zhang Jian 張健, Wan Jinli 王金麗, *Zhongguo lidai taoci tiji* 中國歷代陶瓷題記 (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 1999). Following the work of Craig Clunas, scholars have also treated the names of famous craftsmen (Lu Zigang 陸子岡 with jade; Zhu Bishan 朱碧山 with silver; Zhao Liangbi 趙良璧 with pewter etc.) – recorded in lists by writers ranging from Wang Shizhen to Yuan Hongdao and Zhang Dai – as brands in the seventeenth century market.

⁴ Wang Shumin 王叔岷, *Zhuangzi jiao quan* 莊子校詮 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1988), 258; 263–4.

served as a proxy for thinking critically about the substance of literary writing. More broadly, this distinctive semiology of branding registers the effects of a far-reaching struggle to preserve “signature” values of individuality and exclusivity, while marketing a series of copies.

The chapter is divided into two sections: first, I trace the rise of the inkmaker’s personal name as a commercial trademark from the eleventh to the seventeenth centuries, examining how artisans and poets competed to define the prestige of such labels. In the second part of the chapter, I trace the ascendancy of a new class of name brand during the late sixteenth century, a label that started to surpass the inkmaker’s own name as a focal point of consumer desire. These practices of object inscription had a broader impact on the fate of poetic language in early modern China, giving dead metaphors new life as increasingly valuable, yet unstable semiotic products. The concept of brand is loosely, yet frequently invoked in discussions of late Ming celebrities or famous local products: here, I use it to refer to an allusive commercial label, devised as a new proper name, that serves as an extension of trademarks like a studio name or craftsman’s personal name, yet cannot be reduced to either of these templates. European historians note that the brand originated in medieval guild practices of quality assurance and regulation of liability that evolved into corporate assets, later playing a central role in the marketing of mass-produced, packaged commodities. In this account, the brand is a marketing device designed to regulate demand by means of “the promotion of differentiated products of standardized quality.”⁵ I suggest that in late sixteenth century China, we see a historical shift from using artisanal names as instruments of quality assurance, to the production of new semiotic assemblages – what I term brands – as names designed to competitively distinguish and advertise the novelty of a standardized, serially produced commodity. The literary inscription

⁵ John Frow, “Signature and Brand,” *High-Pop: Making Culture into Popular Entertainment* ed. Jim Collins (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 64.

became a primary medium through which this transition was staged, and its consequences addressed, in the late Ming.

Part 1: The Maker's Mark

Ink-cakes (sticks, tablets) bearing textual markings can be dated to the Tang dynasty, yet it is only in the Northern Song that we begin to find widespread evidence of how such marks were valued and studied as a field of connoisseurship.⁶ The earliest illustrated compendium of ink-sticks, Li Xiaomei's 李孝美 *Catalogue of Ink Designs* (*Mopu fashi* 墨譜法式), dated to 1095, displays the distinctive markings of famous inkmakers from Zu Min 祖民 of the Tang – who served as a court-appointed “Superintendent of Ink” (*moguan* 墨官) and was the first inkmaker with a recorded name – through to artisans from the eleventh century (Figure 3.2). Some of the designs in Li Xiaomei's collection bear simple dragon motifs and marks designating the status of a given product as a tribute to court (*gongyu* 供御) or as “perfumed” (*xiang* 香), yet the dominant inscriptions on these models are the names of inkmakers.⁷

⁶ In addition to a rare tablet found during an archaeological excavation in Xinjiang in 1972, which bears a three character engraving, “Genuine Heart of Pine” (Songxin zhen 松心真) and can be dated to 664, the Shōsōin Treasure Repository 正倉院 in Nara, Japan, holds sixteen Tang ink-sticks, fourteen of which bear commemorative markings. Certain models in the Shōsōin collection bear pasted paper labels or slogans painted in “cinnabar ink” (*zhumo* 朱墨), yet the majority of pieces were stamped with rectangular seals. As Cai Meifen and Lin Li-chiang have noted, these stamps seem to have contributed to the distinctive “canoe shape” of early ink-sticks as the pressure of the seal warped and tapered the two ends of the object. For more on this, see Cai Meifen 蔡玫芬, “Moyun shi li de Li Tinggui mo” 墨雲室裡的李廷珪墨, *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 故宮文物月刊 92 (November, 1990): 109–110.

⁷ The importance assigned to the artisan's name set the ink-stick apart from other writing implements in the scholar's studio such as inkstones, paper and the brush, which were classified in this period on the basis of their geographical provenance or method of production.

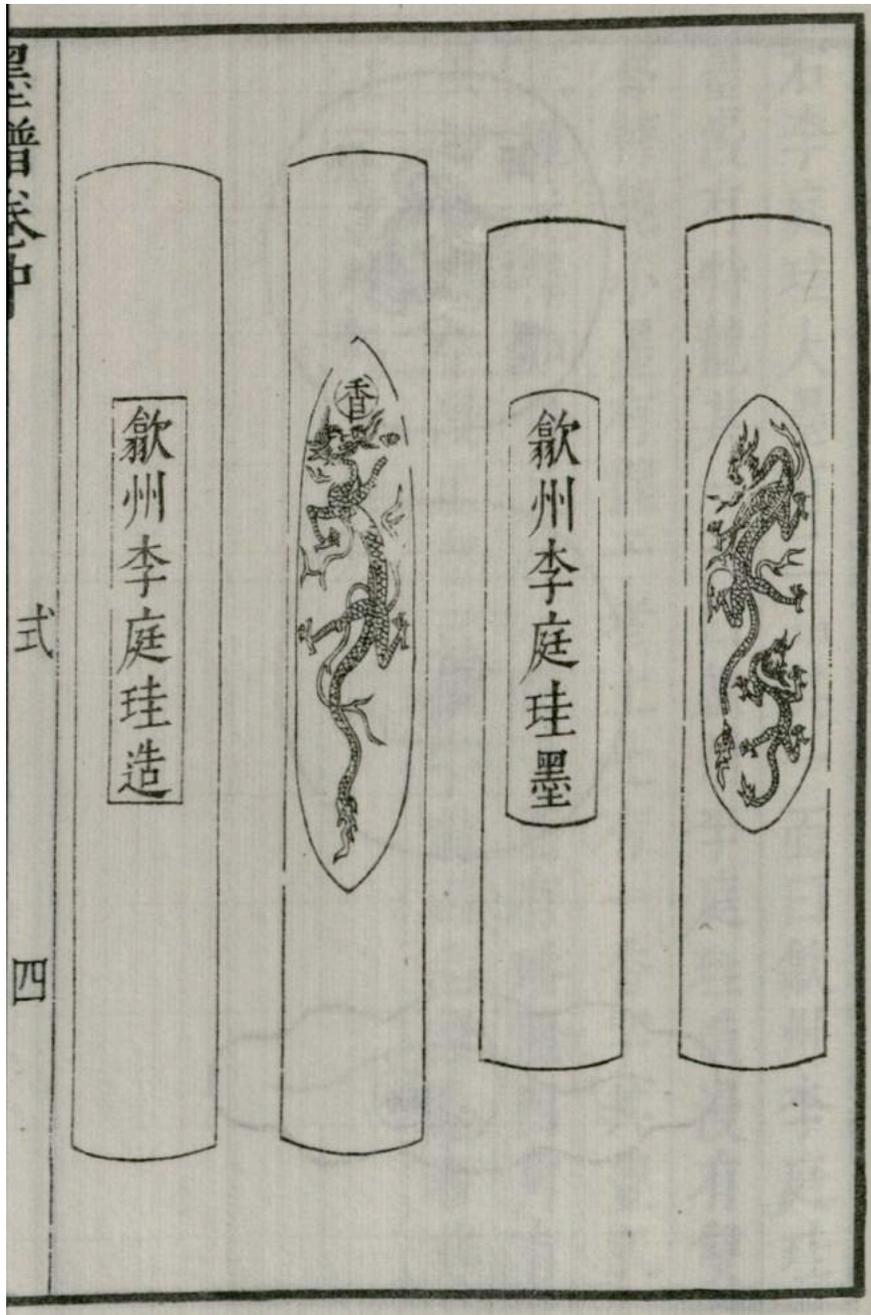


Figure 3.2: “Li Tinggui” Ink-stick Design

Source: Li Xiaomei’s *Catalogue of Ink* (c. 1095), 2: 4.

The illustrations in Li Xiaomei’s catalogue are accompanied by captions that instruct the viewer in how to assess the markings on an ink-stick and hence *read* the artifact:

Of the large pieces of Li Tinggui's⁸ 李庭珪 ink there are two varieties. One is inscribed, "Ink of Li Tinggui from Shezhou," on the front, and has a single dragon on the back. The other variety has, "Manufactured by Li Tinggui from Shezhou," on the front, and two dragons on the back.⁹

Such entries offer an accessible shortcut for recognizing top products without having to test the ink or evaluate the craftsmanship of the inkmaker.¹⁰ Li Xiaomei's effort to fix the correct labels of leading artisans reflects a growing anxiety surrounding the proliferation of counterfeit markings and false attributions. Not only are there numerous extant anecdotes recording the circulation of fake Li Tinggui ink-sticks, there was debate among collectors in this period about the status of marks attributed to Li that included the characters *gui* 圭 or *gui* 邽 for his name, as well as concerns as to whether the label Xi Tinggui 奚廷珪 was a transcription of a variant form of Li's earlier name or the name of another inkmaker altogether.¹¹

⁸ Li Tinggui 李庭珪 was born into an inkmaker's family in north China but escaped to the South after the fall of the Tang. He became famous for using pine from the Yellow Mountains (Huangshan 黄山) and thus is the ancestor of ink production in the Huizhou/Shexian region – the epicenter of late imperial ink manufacturing. He is seen to have popularized the exclusive use of tong oil (*tongyou* 桐油) to make the lampblack or soot (*yan* 煙) for ink.

⁹ Li Xiaomei 李孝美, *Mopu* 墨譜 (Beijing: Gugong bowuyuan tushu guan, 1930), 2: 5.

¹⁰ Throughout the Northern Song, writers started to reflect on how the values accorded to makers' marks affected practices of consumption. Su Shi, for instance, composed a short colophon on a gift he received from Li Chang 李常 to lament how reading and recognizing an artisan's signature threatened to replace practical methods of evaluation such as grinding and testing the ink with a brush. This gift for Su Shi, first acquired by Li from a Korean emissary, was inscribed with three-characters, "Zhang Ligang" 張力剛. Su Shi admits he did not recognize the mark, yet speculates that it was an inkmaker's name. After testing the ink, however, he discovers the exquisite "luster" (*guang* 光) and "purity" (*jing* 淨) of the product (not incomparable, he suggests, to the ink of Li Tinggui). In Su Shi's cautionary anecdote, Li Chang unwittingly relinquished an exceptional possession because he judged the value of the inscription, without assessing the ink itself. And yet, even as Su Shi criticizes a tendency to evaluate an ink-stick on the basis of an inkmaker's name, he praises Zhang Ligang's product by invoking the name, "Li Tinggui," as a benchmark of quality. See Su Shi 蘇軾, "Ji Li gong Zehui mo" 記李公擇惠墨, *Su Shi wenji* 蘇軾文集, ed. Kong Fanli 孔凡禮 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 70: 7984.

¹¹ Cai Xiang noted: "[The Li family's] original surname was Xi, but the emperor of the Southern Tang bestowed upon them the surname 'Li'." 本姓奚，江南賜姓李氏。Cai Xiang 蔡襄, *Puyang jushi Caigong wenji* 莆陽居士蔡公文集 (Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1988), 25: 230. Commentators disputed this point until Lu You 陸友 of the Yuan dynasty offered a comprehensive explanation, claiming they belonged to different families and had the same personal name by chance – Xi was a native of Xuanzhou and Li lived in Shezhou. Incidentally, Li Xiaomei seems to have been correct in listing Xi Tinggui and Li Tinggui as two figures, not one. Lu You commented that the Xin'an gazetteer stated: "After Cai Xiang, everyone said Li Tinggui was Xi Tinggui, but only Huang Bing and Li Xiaomei noted that Xi's ink-cakes could not match Li's." (新安志云：自蔡君謨以來，皆言李庭珪即奚庭珪，唯黃秉，李孝美云奚墨不及李。) For more, see Lu [Andrew Lo], "Su Shi dui mo wenhua de

In contemporaneous jottings, we find further evidence of the emergence of new practices of marking products among artisans in the Northern Song. He Wei 何蘧 (1077–1145) addresses some of the changing ways in which inkmakers labeled their ink-sticks in an entry entitled “Buying Soot and Stamping Trademarks” (*Maiyan yinhao* 買烟印號), from his “Record of Ink” (*Moji* 墨記), collected in *Stories Learned from the Waterside in Spring* (*Chunzhu jiwen* 春渚紀聞).¹² Contemporary inkmakers, in He’s account, had stopped personally collecting pine or processing lampblack in furnaces and had instead started to purchase supplies through intermediaries.¹³ Artisans also commissioned others to prepare glue for them, before stamping their own labels (*yinhao* 印號) onto the final products. He’s anecdote draws attention to a more expansive conception of artisanal authorship: the maker’s mark, in this account, was no longer treated as an index of a craftsman’s handiwork (“I made this”), but as an independent instrument for the assertion and extension of commercial proprietorship.¹⁴

The Figure of the “Ink Immortal”

As the markings of popular manufacturers were serially reproduced and increasingly counterfeited, leading connoisseurs strove to lay personal claims to a “nonpareil” source of ink.

gongxian” 蘇軾對墨文化的貢獻, *Songdai wenxue yanjiu congkan* 宋代文學研究叢刊 6 (December, 2000): 419–422.

¹² He Wei 何蘧, “*Maiyan yinhao*” 買烟印號, *Moji* 墨記, in CSJCCB, vol. 1495, 8.

¹³ *Ibid.* 9.

¹⁴ The practice of inscribing an artisan’s name onto an object was, as Dagmar Schaefer has suggested, associated with earlier forms of imperial quality control that were inflected by a prescription found in the “Almanac” section of the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 and the “Monthly Ordinances” (Yueling 月令) in *Liji* 禮記, that: “Every article should have its maker’s name engraved onto it, in order to ensure his honesty” (*wule gong ming yikao qicheng* 物勒工名, 以考其誠). The artisan’s signature was not only supposed to facilitate registration and accounting, but also to hold the craftsman responsible for any defective or “licentious” traits in a product: “so that in each product there is no innovation created out of licentious ingenuity, which might debauch the minds of superiors” (毋或作為淫巧, 以蕩上心). The signature supposedly bound the qualities of the product to the “honest” reputation of its maker. *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, *Ershi'er zi* 二十二子 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 10: 656–57.

This desire for a singular model of craftsmanship, untainted by the logic of the marketplace, spurred Su Shi's investment in the reputation of a contemporary artisan from Huizhou named Pan Gu 潘谷.¹⁵ Turning to poetry, Su Shi sought to fashion an image of the inkmaker as a figure of enchantment. He began by reflecting on the question of what lies behind a name:

*Dedicated to Pan Gu*¹⁶

When Young Pan wandered by morning in the He Yang Spring,¹⁷
He startled the market crowd like gleaming pearls or a white jade *bi*.¹⁸
How do you know he bowed after the trampling horse's hooves?
In his chest he had a whole bushel of dirt and dust.¹⁹
How does this compare with the inkmaker Pan, who wears tattered coarse wool?
The clear clinking of bluish cakes as they knock the black tablet.
His linen shirt is smeared a pitch black and his hands resemble cracked turtle shells.
But it has still not scarred this "ice jug that holds the autumn moon."
Common people only value hearsay and belittle what they see before their own eyes.
How trifling to vie for elegance with Zhang Yu and Li Tinggui!
One morning, Pan will enter the seas in the footsteps of Li Bai,
In vain I search for anyone who has painted the Ink Immortal!

贈潘谷

¹⁵ The flipside of this investment was that scholars from the Northern Song, like Su Shi, experimented with the production of their own ink. While in exile in Hainan, Su Shi made his own supplies – on one occasion almost burning down his house. He boasted that he “had made enough ink to last him for his whole life and that if [he] offered it to others, they would not know who had given it to them” (足以了一世著書用，仍以遺人，所不知者何人也。), Su Shi, *Su Shi wenji*, 70: 2229. He even bragged that it could match the ink could match that of Li Tinggui: “I made these ink-cakes with my own hands in Hainan, and the ink is not beneath that of Li Tinggui. Hainan has an abundance of pines and so there is plenty of material for soot. Because of the rich reserves of soot, I can choose the best” (此墨吾在海南親作，其墨與廷珪不相下。海南多松，松多故煤富，煤富故有擇也。), Su Shi, *Su Shi wenji*, 70: 2229.

¹⁶ Wang Wengao 王文誥 dates this poem to 1084 (Autumn of Seventh Year of Yuanfeng, 7 元豐) in Runzhou 潤州. Su Shi, *Su Shi shiji*, 4: 2: 2673.

¹⁷ “Young Pan” is a reference to the Jin Dynasty Poet Pan Yue 潘岳 (247–300) who was stationed in Heyang 河陽 and famously planted peach and pear trees throughout the district. Pan was famous for his good looks, as attested to in his biography in the *Jin History*: “(Pan) Yue was handsome in appearance and bearing ... When he was young, he often strolled around outside Luoyang holding a slingshot under the arm. Women who met him all surrounded him and threw fruit in his chariot, so when he returned, his chariot was full of fruit.”

¹⁸ The expression “like gleaming pearls or a white jade *bi*,” is a reference to Pan Yue's famous good looks.

¹⁹ An allusion to common criticisms of Pan Yue's sycophancy: the *Jin History* records how Pan along with Shi Chong fawned on the Jia family (Empress Jia 賈后 (256–300) and her nephew Jia Mi 賈密 (d.300), were the real power behind the throne during the reign of Emperor Hui). Pan Yue matched Shi Chong's 石崇 (249–300) sycophancy for the Jia family by always bowing to the dust of Jia Mi's carriage.

潘郎曉踏河陽春，明珠白璧驚市人。
那知望拜馬蹄下，胸中一斛泥與塵。
何似墨潘穿破褐，瑯瑯翠餅敲玄笏。
布衫漆黑手如龜，未害冰壺貯秋月。
世人重耳輕目前，區區張李爭媿妍。
一朝入海尋李白，空看人間畫墨仙。²⁰

The poem opens with a contrast between Pan Yue 潘岳 (247–300), the celebrated poet of the Jin dynasty, and the artisan Pan Gu, both of whose appearances obscure their intrinsic worth. Pan Yue was renowned for his “dazzling” looks, figured here as trinkets on a market stall, yet inside was clogged with dirt (a reference to his sycophantic prostrations in the dust trails of the imperial consort’s carriage). Pan Gu, by comparison, despite his cracked skin and the detritus on his tattered clothes, retains the “pure” contents of an ice jug. Su Shi is particularly drawn to points of contact between the artisanal body and the material the craftsman works with (cracked skin, stains) and through a series of metonymic displacements between producer and product, Pan Gu comes to be figured in terms of the properties of an object. In a chiasmic inversion, Su Shi’s poem weighs human character (*renpin* 人品) against the material integrity of ink (*mopin* 墨品), establishing an equivalence that would inflect discussions of the product among scholars throughout the late imperial period. We can trace the influence of the analogy by focusing on the motif of the “ice jug”: drawn from an early poem attributed to Ban Zhao 班昭 (c.45–117) and used as a metaphor for a gentleman’s inner “purity” by a range of Tang poets, it would be repurposed by later connoisseurs as a rubric for evaluating the materiality of ink.²¹

Amid such disjunctions between reputation and substance, Su Shi sets the stage for his own act of naming. In the concluding couplet, the poet reworks another line from Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) imagining Li Bai’s 李白 (701–762) journey to transcendence to anoint Pan Gu the

²⁰ Su Shi, *Su Shi shiji*, 4: 24: 1276.

²¹ Sang Xingzhi 桑行之, *Shuo mo* 說墨 (Shanghai: Shanghai keji jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994), 1103.

“Ink Immortal,” *Moxian* 墨仙 (a tongue-in-cheek reference to Li Bai, the “Poet Immortal,” *Shixian* 詩仙).²² This final line could be rendered in the future anterior in as much as the “image” Su Shi searches for ends up becoming the one produced by his poem. He elaborated upon the conceit of Pan Gu’s transcendence in the first of four poems for a gift made by the inkmaker dated to the following year, 1085, where he imagines the ink being brought to Penglai 蓬萊, the fantastical isle of the immortals.²³

The title of the “Ink Immortal” transformed Pan Gu’s reputation and even framed accounts of his death. Shortly after the poem was written, a story circulated that told of how Pan drunkenly fell into a well in an unwitting re-enactment of Li Bai’s legendary death from drowning. A version of this anecdote, attributed to Su Shi, emphasizes how it accorded with the name he had bestowed upon the inkmaker:

I once gave a poem to him that read: “One morning, Pan will enter the seas in the footsteps of Li Bai/ In vain I search for anyone who has painted the Ink Immortal!”

One day, he suddenly burned his promissory notes and began a three-day binge, before wildly rushing off to a well where he died. When people peered down into the well they saw him crouched at the bottom, clutching a string of prayer beads in his hand. When I saw Zhang Yuanming, he told me this.

余嘗與詩云：「一朝入海尋李白，空看人間畫墨仙。」一日，忽取欠墨錢券焚之，飲酒三日，發狂浪走，遂赴井死。人下視之，蓋跌坐井中，手尚持數珠也。見張元明，言如此。²⁴

Later versions of the same story more explicitly affirm how the trope of the “Ink Immortal” was materialized through Pan Gu’s metamorphosis, which starts to resemble the disintegration of a solid ink-stick in the dry “well” of an inkstone:

²² See Du Fu, “Song Kong Chaofu xie bing guiyou jiangdong jiancheng Li Bai” (送孔巢父謝病歸遊江東兼呈李白). The line reads: “Heading east to enter the seas [to Penglai] in search of mist and fog” [mist and fog, in Su Shi’s allusion, perhaps euphemisms for ink] (東將入海隨煙霧。).

²³ Su Shi, *Su Shi shiji*, 4: 25: 2754.

²⁴ Su Shi, *Su Shi wenji*, 70: 7971.

Later it was said that Gu was drinking on the outskirts of the town and didn't return home for several days. His family members searched for him and found that he had died sitting in a dried up well. His body was flaccid and they suspected that he had transformed.

Master Dongpo once sent a poem to him with the couplet, "One morning, Pan will enter the seas in the footsteps of Li Bai/ In vain I search for anyone who has painted the Ink Immortal!"

The saying reveals he made himself a recluse of ink.

後傳谷醉飲郊外，經日不歸，家人求之，坐於枯井而死。體皆柔軟，疑其解化也。東坡先生嘗贈之詩，有「一朝入海尋李白，空看人間畫墨仙」之句，蓋言其為墨隱也。²⁵

Zou Hao 鄒浩 (1060–1111) would take the image of Pan Gu as an immortal even further by suggesting that the adept Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓 (b. 796) initiated him in the techniques of inner alchemy, figuring an equivalence between inkmaking and Daoist self-cultivation that would inflect the terms of the Ming discourse on ink.²⁶ Commentators, meanwhile, went on to gloss Su Shi's final couplet as a "poetic omen" (*shichen* 詩讖), one that, in effect, murdered the inkmaker.²⁷ Pan Gu would continue to be defined by this scene of his corporeal transformation, assuming in later texts the posthumous epithet, "Ink Pool Lotus" (*mochi lian* 墨池蓮) (Figure 3.3).

²⁵ He Wei, "Pan Gu Moxian chuainang zhimo" 潘谷墨仙揣囊知墨, *Mo ji*, in CSJCCB, vol. 1495, 3.

²⁶ Zou Hao 鄒浩, "Meng chenhui Pan Gu Mo" 夢臣惠潘谷墨, *Daoxiang ji* 道鄉集 (Taipei: Hanhua wenhua shiye gongsi, 1970), 5: 157–9.

²⁷ Su Shi, *Su Shi pingzhu huichao* 蘇詩評註彙鈔, ed. Shi Yuanzhi 施元之, Ji Xiaolan 紀曉嵐, Zhao Keyi 趙克宜 (Taipei: Xinxing shuju chubanshe, 1967), 1064.

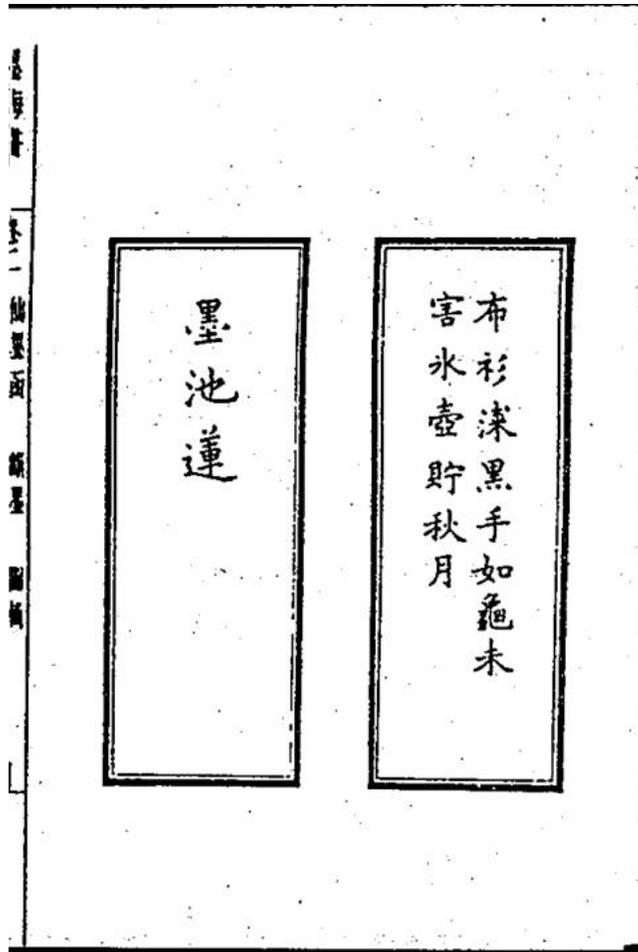


Figure 3.3: “Ink Pool Lotus” Ink-stick Design
 Source: Fang Ruisheng’s *Sea of Ink* (1620), 21.

For Su Shi, the poetic omen was largely self-serving, an act of what Annette Weiner might call “keeping-while-giving,” in that it increased the worth of Pan Gu’s ink-cakes in his own collection and raised the value of the pieces he intended to exchange with others.²⁸ From a broader historical perspective, Su Shi’s efforts to consolidate the masculine identity of the “scholar” (*shi* 士), a subject-position for which he later became the paragon, appear in this light to be predicated on his aesthetic manipulation and effacement of the artisan as a feminized

²⁸ Su Shi, “Shu Zhang Yu Pan Gu mo” 書張遇潘谷墨, *Su Shi wenji*, 70: 7950.

“other.”²⁹ His endorsement clearly had a broader impact: shortly after the poem was completed, we find traces of the figure of the “Ink Immortal” in writings accompanying gifts of ink. In 1090, He Zhu 賀鑄 (1052–1125), composed an eighteen-line poem to cover a present for the eminent official Yang Shi 楊時 (1053–1135) that invokes Su Shi’s spectral image of Pan Gu:³⁰

... Pan Gu of the Chen Pavilion was old and wise,
He only gave gifts to connoisseurs and never asked for money.
The old man, like a cicada from its pupa, is unbound from life.
Who can continue his work in future I have not heard or found.
I entrust to you one tablet, complete with a marking.
If you protect it and keep it hidden, it will last for thousands of years...

陳台潘谷老且賢，授唯識者不計錢。
是翁解化如蛻蟬，後可繼此無聞焉。
付君一圭款識全，保護謹密何千年。³¹

In He Zhu’s poem, the mark on the ink-stick is noted in passing not for what it says, but for its physical condition, the fact it is intact. The value of the ink lies not in its utility – a point that would have frustrated Su Shi, a critic of collectors who refrained from testing ink with the brush – but in the quiddity of this mark, the presence of which merits protection and storage. The label, on its own, remains silent and devoid of any denotative meaning, yet is animated by the preceding image of Pan Gu – Su Shi’s poetic product, a personification of the pure-gift – as he “sheds” his corporeal form.³²

²⁹ For a broader discussion of Su Shi’s efforts to reconcile new aesthetic pursuits in Northern Song dynasty China with constructions of “manliness,” see Ronald Egan, *The Problem of Beauty*, 369–382.

³⁰ There are a series of other parallels between He Zhu’s poem and Su Shi’s poems on Pan Gu in particular (孫莘老寄墨四首). The first lines of both poems begin with references to the state of the Culai Mountains: “In the Culai Mountains there are no more old pines” (徂徠無老松) (Su Shi) and “Snow sets heavily on the Culai Mountains, hoary pine trees topple to the ground” (徂來雪壓蒼松顛) (He Zhu). It is in this poem that Su Shi refers to Pan Gu as “Old Pan” (Pan weng 潘翁), the name taken up by He Zhu. Finally, Su Shi’s line: “Fish glue has been prepared from ten thousand pestle strokes” (魚胞熟萬杵), is also repeated, Su Shi, *Su Shi shiji*, 4: 25: 2754.

³¹ See Stuart Howard Sargent, *The Poetry of He Zhu (1052-1125): Genres, Contexts, and Creativity* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 157–8.

³² There is no mention of what the mark says, although Su Shi records a renowned inscription by Pan Gu for the official Feng Dangshi: “When Feng Dangshi was appointed to the West Palace, he sent an order to Pan Gu to make ink. It was inscribed, “Eastern Pavilion of the Office Hall.” It is this ink here (with which I write). Ruan Fu

Ming Ink

Writing in the early seventeenth century, the inkmaker Fang Ruisheng 方瑞生 (fl. Early 17th century) compared the ink of the Wanli era to the poetry of the High Tang.³³ The exaggerated terms of Fang's analogy, as if inflected by Su Shi's now famous comparison of Pan Yue with Pan Gu, attest to an enduring desire to weigh the cultural prestige of ink against the established reputations of poets. While critical treatises and scholarly writings from the Yuan and early Ming account for the ongoing development of inkmaking practices, the craft was transformed during the late sixteenth century as inkmakers took advantage of larger commercial markets and new advances in technologies of production for glue and molding to expand both the scale of their manufacturing businesses and the range of their products. At the same time, with the influence of a booming print industry, inkmakers and their patrons began to produce catalogues displaying illustrations of their ink-cake designs with prestigious poetic endorsements from prominent sponsors, many of whom were leading figures within the literary field.³⁴ *Master Fang's Catalogue of Inks (Fangshi mopu 方氏墨譜)*, first published in 1588 to advertise the wares of the leading Huizhou inkmaker Fang Yulu, was the first in a series of such projects from the Wanli era.³⁵ The book was ostensibly intended to promote the reputation of Fang Yulu, yet as a closer reading of the interplay between words and images across its pages demonstrates, it was

once said, "How many pairs of clogs will I get through in my life?" I would, however, say: "Who knows how many balls of ink you might use!" How often people complain that they cannot grind their ink! Instead, they are ground down by their ink."

馮當世在西府，使潘谷作墨，銘云「樞庭東閣」，此墨是也。阮孚云：「一生當著幾糸兩屐。」仆云：「不知當用幾丸墨。」人常惜墨不磨，終當為墨所磨。Su, "Shu Feng Dangshi mo" 書馮當世墨, *Dongpo tiba jiaozhu*, 283.

³³ 「墨之在萬曆，猶詩之有盛唐」 Fang Ruisheng 方瑞生, *Mohai 墨海, Mopu jicheng 墨譜集成* (Xi'an: Santai chubanshe, 2006) 1: 328.

³⁴ Cai Meifen 蔡玫芬, "Mingdai moshu" 明代的墨書, *International Colloquium on Chinese Art History, 1991: Proceedings: Antiquities, Part 2* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1992), 681–726.

³⁵ The best introduction in English is Lin Li-chiang, "The Proliferation of Images: The Ink-stick Designs and the Printing of the *Fang-shih mo-p'u* and the *Ch'eng-shih mo yuan*" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1998).

not always clear who was actually promoting whom – the inkmaker or his poet friends – or for what end.

We can trace Fang Yulu’s ascendancy as a leading inkmaker by briefly returning to the Harvard cache of letters attributed to his kinsman Fang Yongbin. A letter in the fire folio written from Fang Yulu (when he still went by the name of Da’ao 大漱) – appears to have been written before he achieved his celebrity and has two additional notes from Fang Yongbin showing that Yulu had written to request silver in a pawn deal (Chen Zhichao suggests that his pledge was a supply of ink) (Figures 3.4 and 3.5).³⁶ By contrast, a later letter to Fang Yongbin from another poet asks to return an “old” Fang Yulu ink-cake (Yulu jiu mo 于魯舊墨) – at this stage, Fang had clearly attained fame and taken his new name Yulu – stored in his family as a valuable pledge in the name of a debt.³⁷

³⁶ [方大漱兄懇當銀帖][四十五年正月廿九日去文二兩] Fang Da’ao [Fire: 92]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 978–9.

³⁷ Xie Bi 謝陛 [Fire: 56]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 934. Some customers wrote to Fang Yongbin requesting specific Fang Yulu ink-cake designs, see Tian Yiheng [Wood: 51]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 778. For other letters involving requests for Fang Yulu’s ink, see Yang Yizhou 楊一洲 [Moon: 19]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 313; Zhang Zhengmeng 張正蒙 [Moon: 35] Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 353; Wu Wanchun 吳萬春 [Metal: 64]: Chen, *Mingdai Huizhou Fang*, 597.

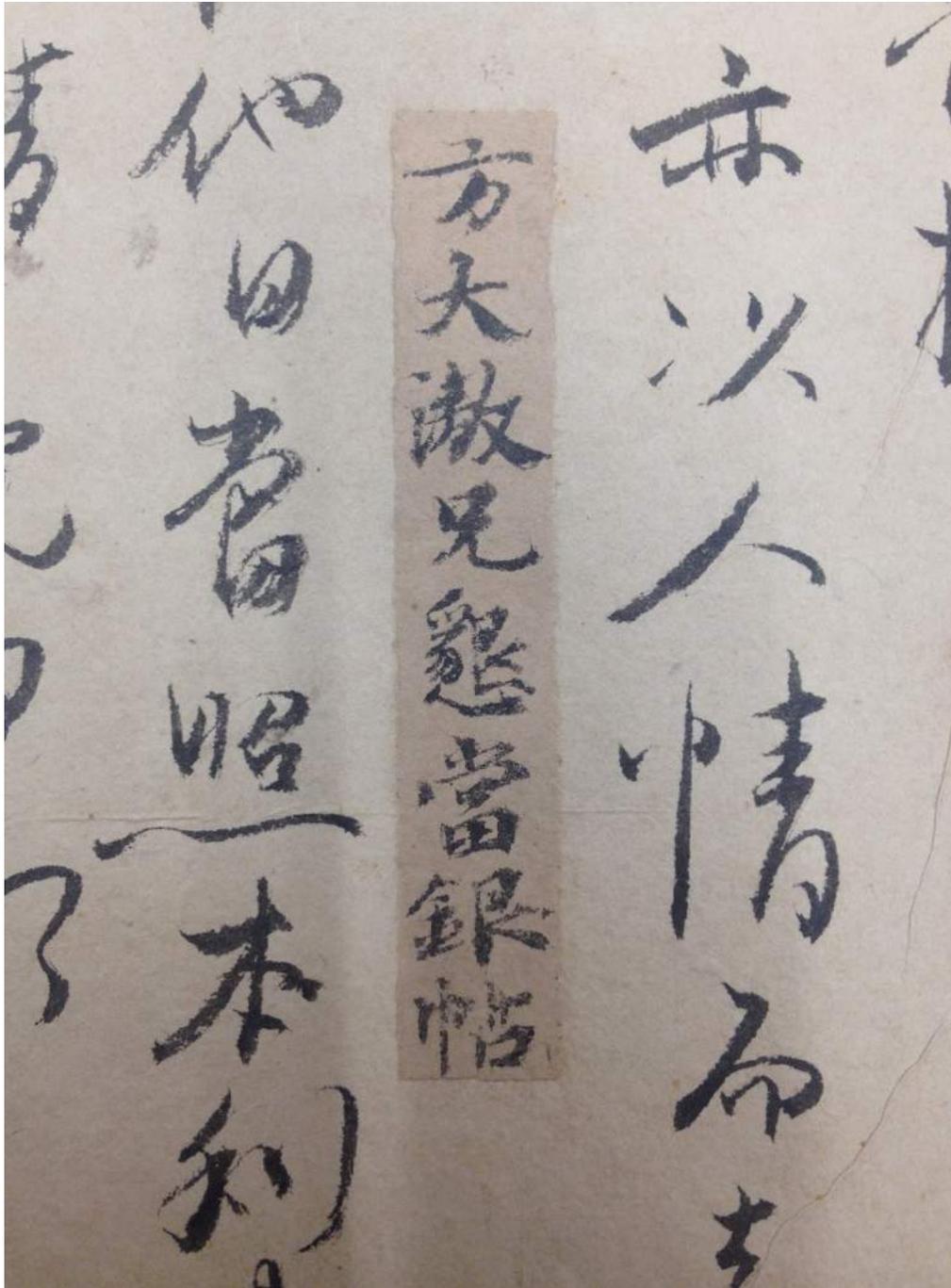


Figure 3.4: Detail of letter from Fang Da'ao [Yulu] to Fang Yongbin
Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Fire: 92.

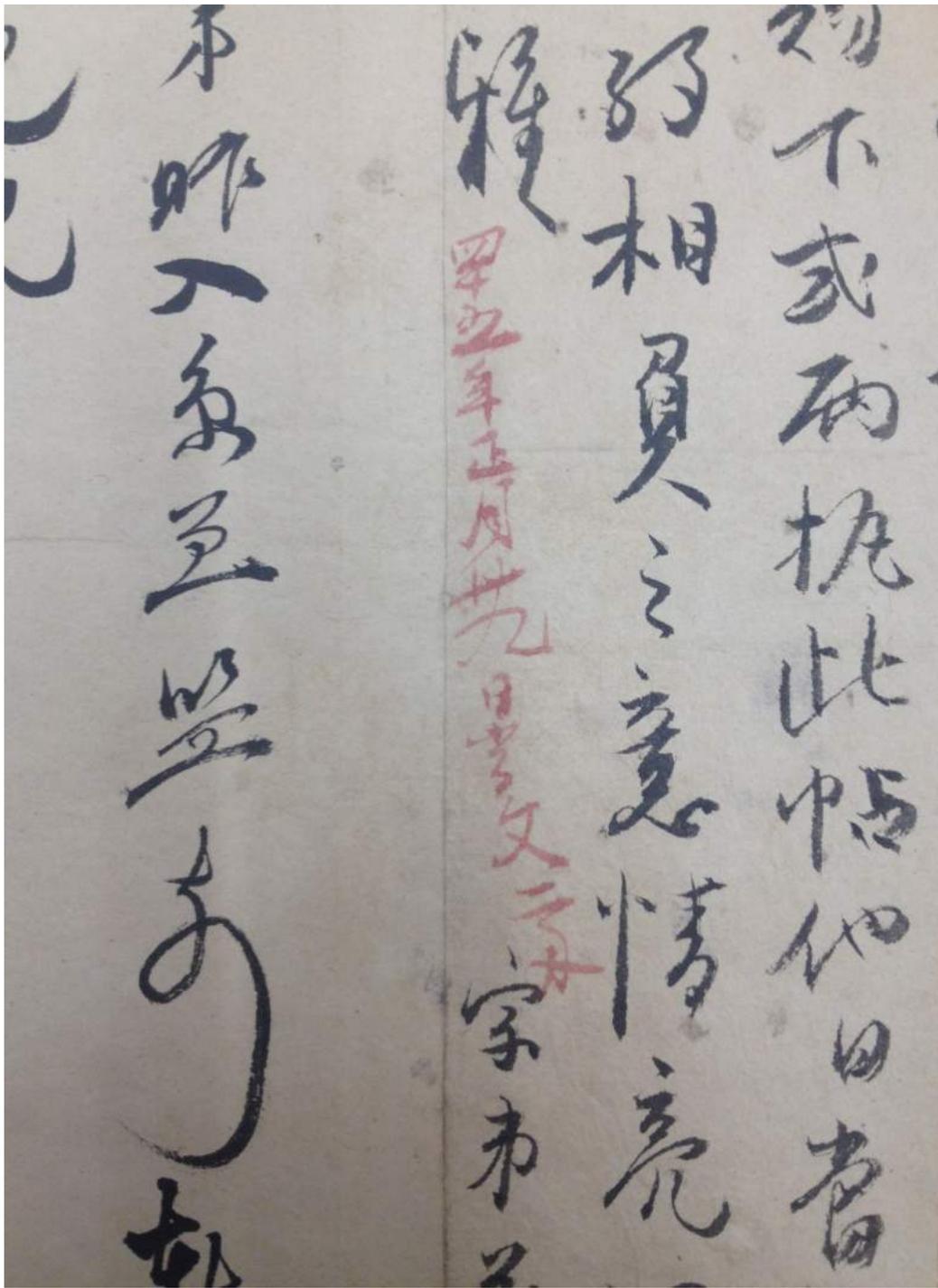


Figure 3.5: Detail from letter from Fang Da'ao [Yulu] to Fang Yongbin
Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Fire: 92.

Endorsing Fang Yulu

Master Fang's Catalogue is often paired with *Master Cheng's Garden of Ink* (*Chengshi moyuan* 程氏墨園), edited by his erstwhile collaborator and bitter rival Cheng Junfang 程君房 (1541–1610), as one of the great achievements in woodblock illustration from the late Ming.³⁸ With contributions from the influential painter Ding Yunpeng and the artists Yu Jiachen 俞嘉謨 and Wu Tingyu 吳廷羽 (or Zuogan 左干, the owner of the flute from chapter one), Fang's catalogue recycles a wide range of motifs from other paintings and illustrations, bringing previously distinct sets of images, scripts, and patterns into new configurations. The pages of Fang's catalogue constitute a “shared surface of conversion and equivalence,” one that, as Lin Li-chiang has argued, created new decorative vocabularies, preparing the way for Cheng Junfang to include prints of Saint Sebastian and the Madonna and Child in his *Garden of Ink* and for Fang Ruisheng to adapt European architectural drawings for illustrations in his *Sea of Ink*.³⁹ The encyclopedic scope of the catalogue is testament to a principle often cited by commentators in the late Ming: that the “myriad hues go back to black and the myriad words all go back to ink” (萬色歸於玄，萬言歸於墨). In an ink catalogue it was possible to depict or say anything.

Art historians have examined the innovative adaptation of other visual sources that characterizes Fang's catalogue, yet have largely overlooked the actual provenance of many of these images for the producers of the book: how did Fang Yulu or illustrators like Ding Yunpeng gain access to such templates? One of the most important sources for the designs that appear on Fang Yulu's ink-sticks was the private collection of paintings and antiques held by Wang

³⁸ Mei Nafang 梅娜芳, *Mo de yishu: Fangshi mopu yu Chengshi moyuan* 墨的艺术: 方氏墨谱和程氏墨苑 (Zhongguo Meishuxue Boshi Wenku: Guangxi meishu chubanshe, 2011). See also Lin Li-chiang 林麗江, “Wan Ming Huizhou moshang Cheng Junfang yu Fang Yulu moye de kaizhan yu jingzheng” 晚明徽州墨商程君房與方于魯墨業的開展與競爭, *Faquo hanxue* 法國漢學 13 (2010): 121–197.

³⁹ Jacques Ranciere, *Future of the Image* (London: Verso, 2009), 91.

Daokun.⁴⁰ This recycling of sources, in turn, reflects a broader effort on the part of Wang Daokun and his coterie to refabricate Fang Yulu's ink products as surfaces for broadcasting their own authority as tastemakers.

If we look, for instance, at a colophon that Wang wrote to commemorate the acquisition of a decorated inkstone attributed to the eminent Yuan dynasty painter Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254–1322) bearing images of the “True Forms of the Five Peaks” (*wu yue zhenxing tu* 五嶽真形圖), we learn that he also (at least temporarily) obtained copies of two famous sets of pictures: “Images of the Five Planets” (*wuxing tu* 五星圖) and “Images of the Twenty-Eight Lunar Mansions” (*ershi ba xiu tu* 二十八宿圖).⁴¹ Wang's colophon suggests that on one occasion he displayed the Zhao Mengfu inkstone alongside a prized scroll bearing both the Five Planets and Twenty-Eight Lunar Mansions owned by the famous art collector and calligrapher Mo Shilong 莫是龍 (1537–1587) and that the Suzhou scholars Wang Shizhen and his brother Wang Shimao wrote appreciative comments for this scroll: the implication in Wang Daokun's colophon is that the four men were present to view these pieces together.⁴² Wang Daokun was close friends with

⁴⁰ A striking example of this connection to Wang Daokun is offered in the design bearing the theme of “Sweeping [or “Washing”] the Elephant” (*saoxiang* 掃象) rendered by Ding Yunpeng. Ding returned to this theme in a series of works from the 1580s onwards: in the handscroll *Baimiao Lohans* (completed in the summer of 1580 and now held in the Princeton University Art Museum), in an ink and color hanging scroll entitled *Washing the Elephant* (dated to 1588 and preserved in the National Palace Museum in Taipei), in the design for *Master Fang's Catalogue* and in another design for Cheng Junfang's *Garden of Inks*. Ding's principal sources for these works have conventionally been taken to be a version of this same theme attributed to Qian Xuan (ca. 1235–after 1301) and later wood-cut illustrations based on a work supposedly by Yan Liben 閻立本 (ca. 600–674). Zhan Jingfeng, Ding Yunpeng's mentor, however, records that the Yan Liben painting was held in Wang Daokun's private collection. We have already noted the close connections between Ding and Wang: Wang wrote the biography of Ding's father, Ding's mother was a Wang 汪 of Xiuning and hence a relative of Wang Daokun, Wang not only left seals on numerous paintings by Ding, but inscribed his inkstone. It seems most likely that Ding studied the “Sweeping the Elephant” theme in Wang Daokun's collection and that this established link between artist and patron explains its later presence in Fang Yulu's catalogue.

⁴¹ Wang, “Zhao Wenmin yuanyan tu ba,” 1780.

⁴² For Wang Shizhen's comments on Mo Shilong's scroll with the Five Planets and Twenty-Eight Lunar Mansions, see “Wuxing ershi ba xiu moben” 五星二十八宿摹本 and “You wei Mo Tinghan ti wuxing ershi ba xiu

Wang Shizhen and was consequently able to secure his support, together with that of his brother Shimao and Mo Shilong, as authors of prefaces and contributors of calligraphy for *Master Fang's Catalogue of Inks*. This set of images (the painted figures of the Five Planets and Twenty-Eight Lunar Mansions), meanwhile, provided visual sources for some of the most iconic designs within the catalogue.⁴³ Although Wang made no explicit references to the sources for the designs, he contributed inscriptions that point to personal investments behind the image of the ink-cake. Take, for instance, two designs of round ink-cakes that appear back to back: the first displaying the deity of the Legs Lunar Mansion (*kuixiu* 奎宿) (Figure 3.6) and the second, the Wall Lunar Mansion (*bixiu* 壁宿) (Figure 3.7). These two figures appear adjacent to each other on a surviving copy of the scroll attributed to the artist Qiu Ying 仇英 (c.1498–1552) (Figure 3.8).

wuyue zhenxing tu” 又為莫廷韓題五星二十八宿五嶽真形圖 in Wang Shizhen 王世貞, *Yanzhou shanren tiba* 弇州山人題跋 (Zhejiang: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2012), 601–3.

⁴³ The talismans were also repurposed on an ink-stick design that bore a supporting inscription from the renowned scholar, Tu Long 屠隆 (1544–1605) praising the magical efficacy of the motifs.



(L) Figure 3.6: “Legs Lunar Mansion” Ink-cake Design

Source: Fang Yulu, *Master Fang’s Catalogue of Inks* (1588), 1:31a.



(R) Figure 3.7: “Wall Lunar Mansion” Ink-cake Design

Source: Fang Yulu, *Master Fang’s Catalogue of Inks* (1588), 1:31b.



Figure 3.8: Detail of “Legs” and “Wall” in Qiu Ying, *Divinities of the Planets and Constellations*, hand-scroll

Source: Collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York.

What initially appear as a pair of separate designs are actually two sides – recto and verso – to the same ink-cake. Taken together, the combination represents the auspicious event of the “Five Major Planets” (Gold 金 (Venus), Wood 木 (Jupiter), Water 水 (Mercury), Fire 火 (Mars), and Earth 土 (Saturn)) “gathering” (*ju* 聚) between the two lunar mansions (*wuxing ju kui bi* 五星聚奎壁). The two designs even feature simple astronomical maps showing the position of the planets in relation to the Wall and Legs mansions. Wang Daokun contributed short inscriptions that are printed below the designs in the catalogue. Celebrating how this auspicious heavenly formation registers the emperor’s munificence and the cultural splendor of the age, Wang uses the conceit of a radiant light emanating from the blackness of the night sky – a conceit that

would recur in the countless designs of other ink-cakes bearing astronomical and astral themes from the Wanli era – to hint at the dark luster of the ink:

Inscription for “The Five Planets Gathering Between the Legs and Wall Mansions” Ink-cake

The Heavenly Cock has cried, yet there is still no daylight. Between the Wolf and Porcupine,⁴⁴ the Five Planets shine resplendently. Extending North to the Palace Gates, rising on the Eastern Pavilion. When the Emperor’s virtue flourishes, cultural endeavors glow with radiance.

五星聚奎璧墨銘

天鷄號，夜未旦。狼獾墟，五星爛。亘北闈，起東觀。帝德隆，人文煥。⁴⁵

We learn from the date printed alongside the design featuring the Wall Lodge that this gathering of the planets occurred in the third month of 1584. This was also the date of a major meeting of Wang Daokun’s poetry society, “The White Elm Society” (*Baiyu she* 白榆社) to celebrate the local magistrate and co-founder Long Ying’s 龍膺 (1560–1622) success in the examinations and the occasion of his twenty-fifth birthday.⁴⁶ Elsewhere in the catalogue there are designs of ink-sticks intended as tailormade birthday gifts for various members of the White Elm Society and this design seems to have been similarly commissioned as a souvenir. The model not only publicizes, for consumers throughout the wider Jiangnan region, the access Fang’s supporters had to a highly prized painting, it also serves as a tribute, particularly in light of Long Ying’s subsequent career success, to the achievements of Wang Daokun’s coterie. Amid the factionalism and precariousness of court politics in the sixteenth century, scholars turned to literary societies to foster a vision of communal leadership, fashioning a “world of their own” around principles of worthiness and talent: one that might, in turn, be projected as a heavenly

⁴⁴ The Wolf (狼) and Porcupine (獾) are animal spirits for the Walls and Legs Mansions respectively.

⁴⁵ Wang Daokun, “Wuxing ju kuibi mo ming” 五星聚奎璧墨銘, *Taihan ji*, 78: 1613.

⁴⁶ For a poem Wang Daokun celebrating this occasion and listing the participants who attended the event, see *ibid.*, 2612. For an introduction to the history of the society see Geng, “Baiyu she shulüe,” 29–33.

sanctioned model for the age in which they lived.⁴⁷ At once a memento for a one-off event and a prototype for reproduction, the apparently superfluous form of the ink-cake design aspires to instantiate something of the desire behind this ideal: touting cultural custodianship and entrepreneurial vision, while weaving together the lives and official careers of the members of the White Elm Society with auspicious portents in cosmic time.

As the reputation of Fang Yulu's ink business grew in stature with the compilation of the catalogue in the 1580s, Fang's adopted guise as a literatus seems to have become less important for the main supporters of the publication.⁴⁸ While segments of poetry by Fang Yulu are presented on the surfaces of various designs for decorative purposes, not a single text in the wide selection of prefatory materials for the catalogue is attributed to the inkmaker himself. Fang Yulu was effectively rendered voiceless when it came to presenting the designs of his merchandise to the public. In the literary endorsements contributed by Wang Daokun's friends and the members of the White Elm Society, meanwhile, Fang Yulu's identity is in places altogether disregarded. Take, for example, one of the most coveted endorsements for the catalogue: the appraisal authored by Wang Shizhen. Ignoring the inkmaker or the distinct qualities of the product, Wang eulogizes an archetypal ink-stick:

⁴⁷ Tian Yuan Tan, *Songs of Contentment and Transgression: Discharged Officials and Literati Communities in Sixteenth-Century North China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 113–46.

⁴⁸ Through his involvement with Wang Daokun's Fenggan Society, Fang Yulu started to style himself as a poet and there is still a surviving copy of his collected poems containing numerous verses exchanged with other society members preserved in the Nanjing Library. Fang Yulu 方于魯, *Fang Jianyuan ji* 方建元集 (Nanjing Library: Wanli edition). For a brief study of this text, see Zhu, *Huishang yu Ming Qing wenxue*, 306–311.

A later tomb epitaph written by Li Weizhen records how during the course of his participation in the work of the Fenggan Society, Wang Daokun encouraged the merchant Fang Yulu, whose family had recently fallen on hard times, to turn to inkmaking as a way of “aiding literary thoughts” (*zhu wensi* 助文思) and “making a living” (*zhisheng* 治生). This retrospective account presents Wang Daokun not simply as a supporter of Fang's products, but as the inspiration behind his ink business. Li upends the assumption that a merchant-artisan might strive to assume the reputation of a poet by suggesting that Fang Yulu, with Wang Daokun's encouragement, actually progressed from poetry to inkmaking. Li, “Fang Waishi muzhi ming” 方外史墓誌銘, *Dami shan fangji* 大泌山房集, in SKQSCMCS, jibu, vol. 150, 87.

Dark and glossy, fine and black; paulownia from Yi mountain,⁴⁹ stewed into sap. Its light is so clear, it is as firm as a jade *bi*; when set up in water, it lasts long without eroding. It is like the black jade scepter given to Yu⁵⁰ and can be coupled with the Yellow Emperor's inkstone. So it is said: Wei Dan is the ancestral father,⁵¹ and *this* product, the lineal descendent of Li Tinggui, can serve from generation to generation as Sir Ink.⁵²

黝而澤，緻而黑；桐自嶧，燻厥液。光可晰，堅如璧；置之水，久弗蝕。是惟禹錫而妃以帝鴻氏之石，曰：仲將祚，廷珪嫡，爾方世世卿子墨。⁵³

Wang makes no references to the name of the inkmaker and the geographical marker, Yi 嶧, alludes not to the provenance of Fang Yulu's soot, but to the classical source of paulownia (*tong* 桐) wood in the "Tribute of Yu" (Yugong 禹貢) in the *Book of Documents*. The ink-stick, as "firm as a jade *bi* disc," is presented as a symbol of material integrity, paired with objects that serve as emblems of human virtue like the black jade scepter bestowed on Yu and the Yellow Emperor's Inkstone, also made from jade. "Jade-like virtue" (*yude* 玉德), an ideal associated with the durability of inkstone, was a metaphor for the character of a refined gentleman. In this instance, the references to jade also invoke descriptions of Li Tinggui's ink, praised for being as "firm as jade" (*qi jian ru yu* 其堅如玉) and able to "stand in water for several months without eroding."⁵⁴ As if the significance of lineage were not already apparent, Wang ends by anointing the object a "descendent" of Wei Dan 韋誕 (179–253), the legendary inventor of ink, and Li Tinggui.

⁴⁹ Yi Mountain was the famed geographical source of *tong* wood in the Tribute of Yu chapter of the *Shangshu*.

⁵⁰ "Xuanguai" 玄珪 refers to a "black jade scepter" that was given to Yu by Yao 堯 in recognition of the completion of his famous hydraulic engineering works.

⁵¹ The invention of ink was traditionally ascribed to the famous calligrapher and inkmaker, Wei Dan 韋誕 (179–253).

⁵² "Sir Ink" (Zimo 子墨) was a common personification of ink that dates to Yang Xiong's "Rhapsody on the Tall Poplars Palace" (Changyang fu 長楊賦). Yang's famous preface read: "Since I used brush and ink to create my composition, I thus borrow Plume Grove as host and Sir Ink as guest for the purpose of swaying the emperor's opinion."

⁵³ Fang, *Fangshi mopu*, in SKQSCMCS, zibu, vol. 79, 305.

⁵⁴ Zhang Qiande 張謙德, "Lun Mo" 論墨, in *Shiliu jia moshuo* 十六家墨說, ed. Kuai Songlin 鄒松鄰 (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1993), 29.

We learn from a letter to accompany the appraisal that Wang Shizhen did not know Fang Yulu when he drafted this text and mistakenly assumed that the inkmaker was a younger poet named Pan Zhiheng (he even jokes that he thought Pan Zhiheng might have been a descendent of Pan Gu).⁵⁵ Wang Daokun's brother, Wang Daoguan, subsequently attempted to justify this error by writing a colophon suggesting that a mistaken attribution had little impact on Wang Shizhen's "objective" description of the properties of the ink:

And so with Wang Shizhen's comments on ink: if the people he named were different yet the ink was the same, then Wang's evaluation was not mistaken, yet if he had referred to different types of ink and the same person, then there would have been no way to pass on what he said.

夫長公之評者墨也，人不同而墨同，長公之評非誤也；墨不同而人同，斯無以傳長公之言矣。⁵⁶

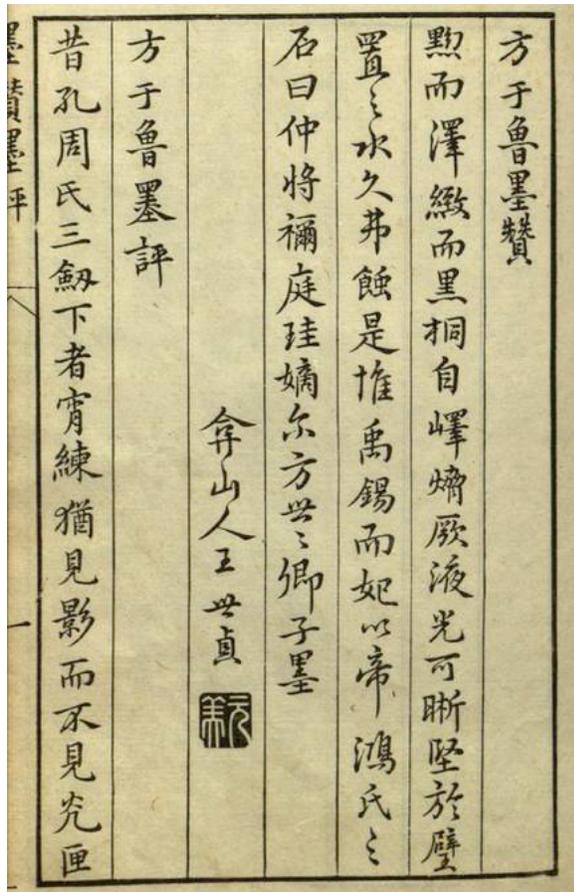
Even with this snub to Fang Yulu, the colophon was printed in the catalogue, suggesting that in addition to brokering the most prestigious submissions, Wang Daokun and his brothers retained full editorial control over what might be published.

Although Wang Shizhen seems to have had little or no investment in Fang Yulu's personal character (*ren* 人), elsewhere in the catalogue the text of his appraisal was recycled and displayed alongside Fang's trademarks (Figure 3.9). Relabeled an "inscription" (Wang Changgong ming 王長公銘), Wang Shizhen's text was included in a design with Fang Yulu's studio mark and workshop label (*zhaiming kuan* 齋名款), "The Pavilion of Halcyon Days" (*Jiarilou* 佳日樓), and a seal based on the motto, "Only the wise can then take pleasure in this" (賢者

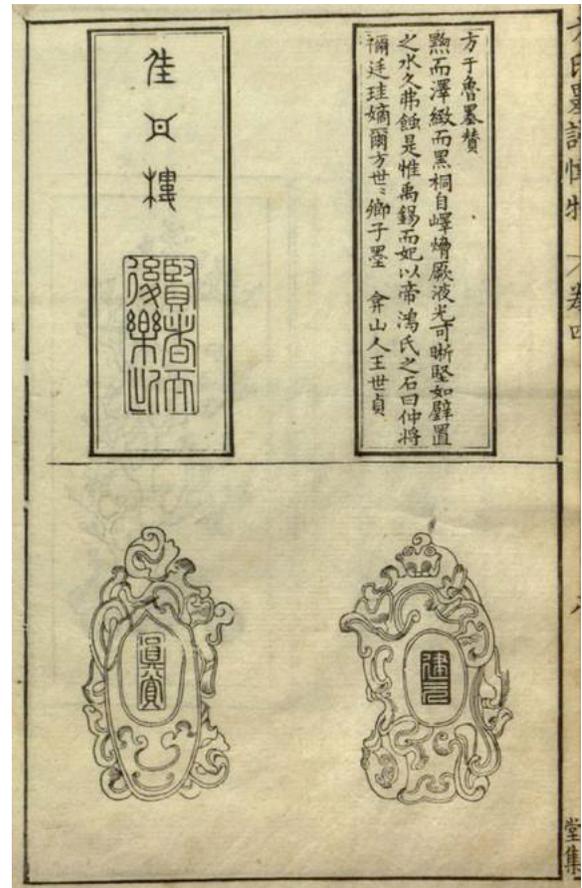
⁵⁵ Wang wrote: "Pan Jingsheng [Pan Zhiheng] of Xindu gave me four ink cakes he had made... This Jingsheng, could he be Pan Gu's relative?" (新都潘景升，甫貽余制墨四餅... 夫景升者，豈潘谷氏之苗裔也耶?) Fang, *Fangshi mopu*, in SKQSCMCS, zibu, vol. 79, 451

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 452.

而後樂此) drawn from Mencius (Figure 3.10).⁵⁷ In this instance, Wang’s words were not simply intended to be read, but to be viewed as part of one of Fang Yulu’s products.



(L) Figure 3.9: Wang Shizhen’s “Appraisal for Fang Yulu”
Source: Fang Yulu, *Master Fang’s Catalogue of Inks* (1588), 8:15a.



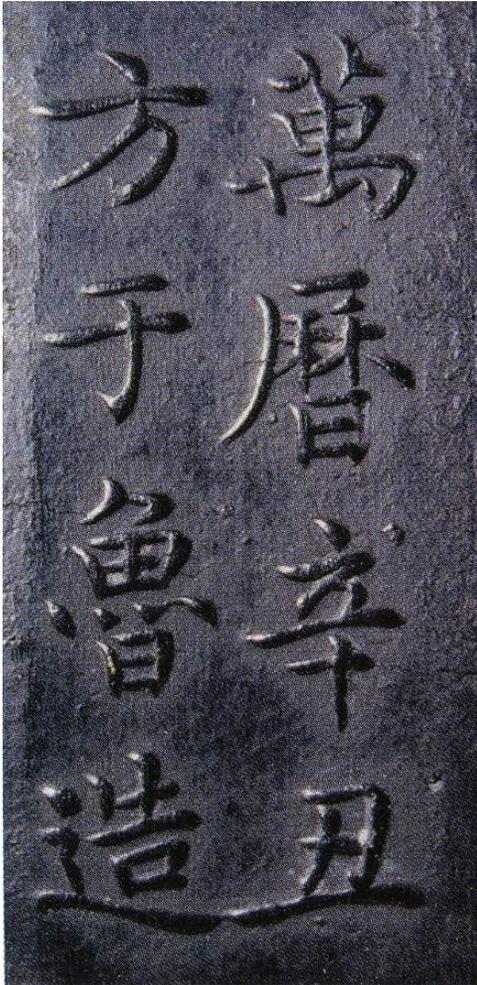
(R) Figure 3.10: “Master Wang’s Inscription” Ink-stick Design
Source: Fang Yulu, *Master Fang’s Catalogue of Inks* (1588), 4:8b.

Master Fang’s Catalogue contains a series of graphic designs, like the image bearing Wang Shizhen’s endorsement, that are specifically titled “inscriptions” (the suffix *ming* appears in the title). These designs all share the same features: a pair of plain rectangular frames, one of which holds the text of a dedication from a prominent sponsor (a composition that was also included as a preface to the catalogue), while the other bears one of Fang Yulu’s trademarks (“Made by Fang

⁵⁷ Ibid., 403.

Yulu” (*Fang Yulu zhi* 方于魯製, *Yulu zhi* 于魯製, *Jianyuan mo* 建元墨), or his studio mark:

“Pavilion of Halcyon Days” (*Jiari lou* 佳日樓, *Jiari* 佳日)), labels that were normally inscribed onto the sides of Fang’s ink-sticks (Figures 3.11 and 3.12; Figure 3.13).



(L) Figure 3.11: Detail of Ink-cake marking, “1601 [*xinchou*] made by Fang Yulu”
Source: Beijing Palace Museum.



(R) Figure 3.12: Detail of Ink-cake marking, “Made by Fang Yulu”
Source: Beijing Palace Museum.

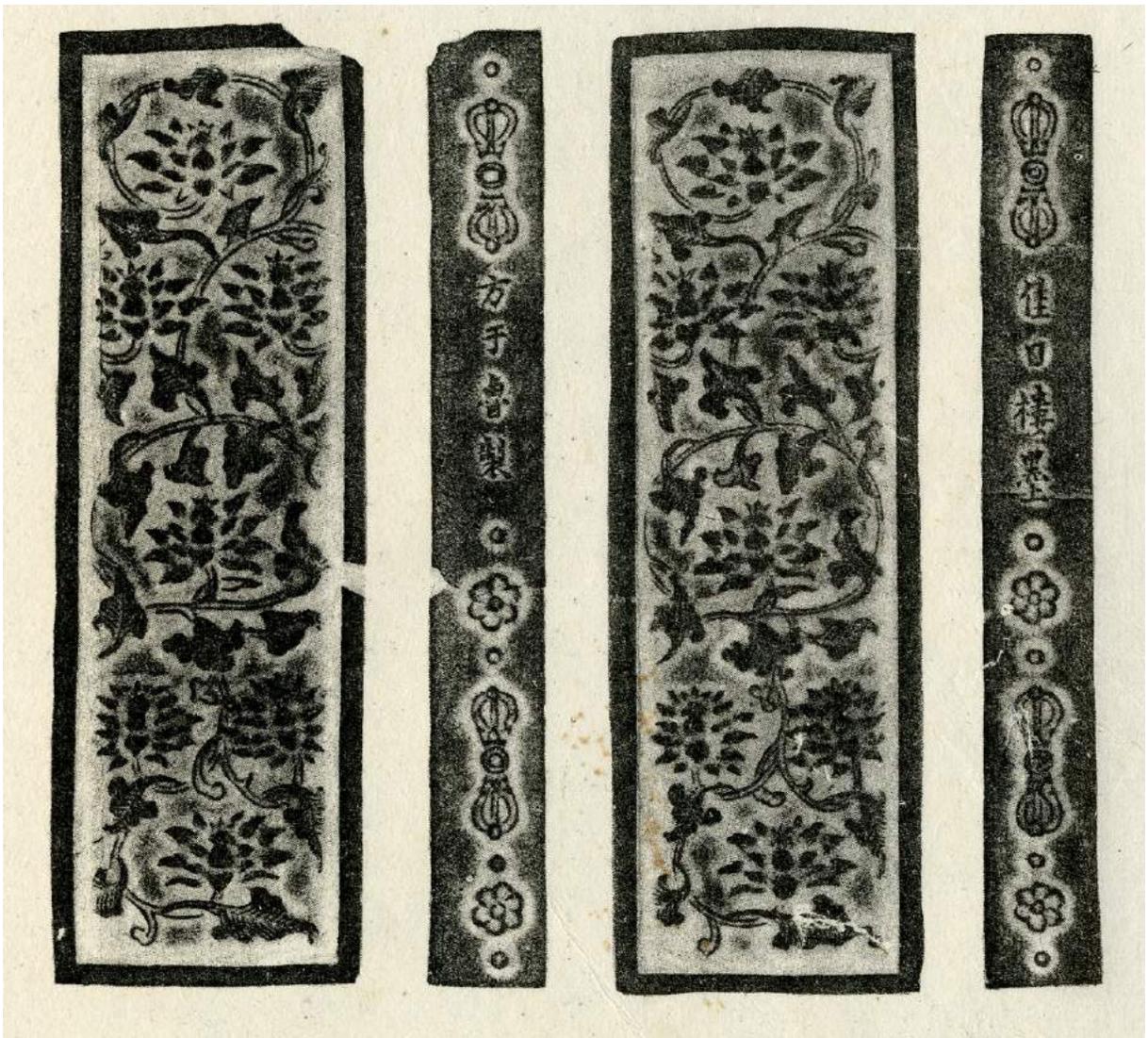


Figure 3.13: Rubbing of Fang Yulu’s “Halcyon Days Pavilion” Ink-stick

Source: Zhang Zigao, *Sijia cangmo tulu*, 25.

Comparing the catalogue with rubbings alerts us to an often overlooked inconsistency: namely, that the designs of the ink-sticks in Fang’s catalogue only display the front and back of the object, whereas collectors who made rubbings were committed to preserving the markings that appear on the sides of the ink-stick, suggesting their critical significance for judgments of value. A standard rectangular ink-stick possesses six surfaces for decoration and inscription, but Fang Yulu only chose to display two. In the remainder of the chapter, I argue that the markings that

appear on the sides of the ink-stick (the trademarks: maker's marks and studio marks) actually became a central topic of concern both within the writings in the catalogue and among commentators from the late Ming more generally. We can see, in this light, how attention to surviving ink-sticks – and the neglected dimensions of these objects – might productively disrupt and reorient approaches to reading *Master Fang's Catalogue* as a book.

The “inscriptional” designs, all of which display labels that would usually appear on the side of the ink-stick, are also significant because they are left out of a comprehensive table of Fang Yulu's ink products (*mobiao* 墨表) in the first volume of the catalogue.⁵⁸ This omission raises questions as to the status of the “objects” these images were supposed to depict: were they even designs of actual ink-sticks or simply printed advertisements to publicize prominent endorsements alongside Fang's trademarks?⁵⁹ Rather than focus exclusively on the ambiguous status of the goods these images represent, we might productively shift our attention to the visual effect of these designs: what new combinations were made possible by this mode of display?

First, it was through this style of formatting that Fang Yulu's trademarks assumed a prominent visual presence within the catalogue. In certain cases, through the appropriation of enigmatic scripts, the characters of the trademark emerged as the most striking feature of the design (Figure 3.14).

⁵⁸ Fang, *Fangshi mopu*, in SKQSCMCS, zibu, vol. 79, 317–320.

⁵⁹ Lin Li-chiang has speculated [in personal correspondence] that these pieces may have been designed for the literati that wrote the dedicatory texts with which they are inscribed; however, other designs that were intended as gifts for Fang's sponsors bear pictorial motifs, are listed within the table of ink-sticks, and are not titled as inscriptions. See, for instance, the design “Daqian chun” 大千春, dated 1584, originally a gift for Wang Daokun's birthday. 3: 22a; or “Xian Li pan gen” 僊李蟠根, for Li Weizhen, dated to 1584, 2: 33a–b, and “Er zhi” 二芝, bearing an inscription for Long Ying from Wang Daokun, 2: 35b.



Figure 3.14: “Old Han’s Inscription” Ink-stick Design
 Source: Fang Yulu, *Master Fang’s Catalogue of Inks* (1588), 4:39a.

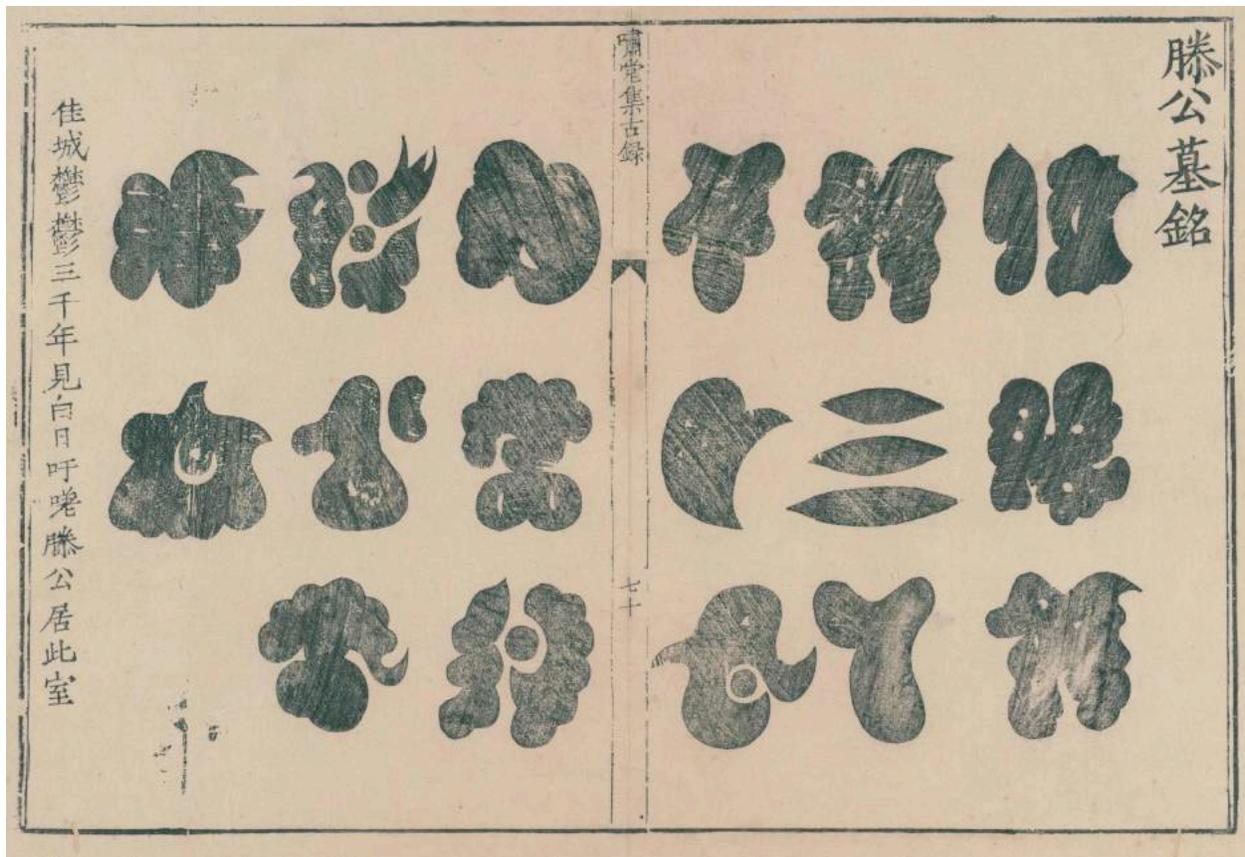
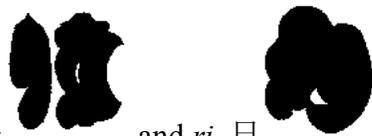


Figure 3.15: “Tomb Inscription of Xiaohou Ying”

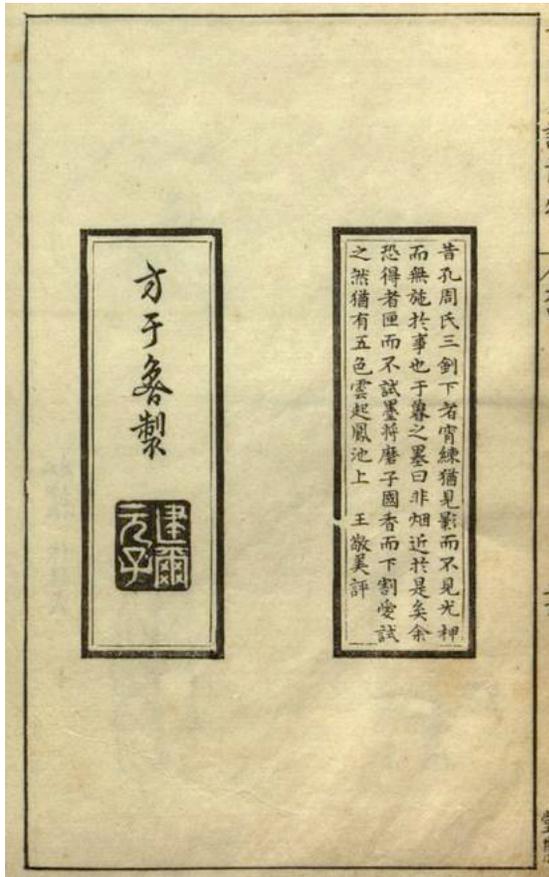
Source: Wang Qiu, *Xiaotang jigu lu* (Ming Reprint of Song Edition), 70a-b.

A piece entitled “Old Han’s Inscription” (*Hanweng ming* 函翁銘) bearing a dedicatory text contributed by Wang Daokun (Old Han 函翁), displays the characters, “jiari” 佳日, Fang Yulu’s studio mark (Jiari lou, like the design for Wang Shizhen’s inscription), yet the label is rendered



with graphs for *jia* 佳 and *ri* 日 taken from the inscription on a coffin lid (*guo* 槨) supposedly for Xiaohou Ying 夏侯嬰, Duke of Teng 滕公 (d. 172 BCE) (*Tenggong*

muming 騰公墓銘) (Figure 3.15).⁶⁰ This inscription, itself a hoax, was printed in Zhu Yun’s 朱雲 *Expanded Rhyming Epigraphic Dictionary* (*Guang jinshi yunfu* 光金石韻府) published in 1530, and reflects a broader contemporary fascination with “primitivist” calligraphy. In this game of visual citation, one that shuttles between Fang’s studio name, “Halcyon Days,” reprints of the Xiaohou Ying inscription and the transcription of its contents in *Xijing zaji* 西京雜記, the mark “jiari” 佳日 assumes an eccentric presence, at once legible and opaque, familiar and elusive.



**Figure 3.16: “Wang Cigong’s Inscription”
Ink-stick Design**

Source: Fang Yulu, *Master Fang’s Catalogue of Inks* (1588), 4:26b.



“I will set up your first son”
(jian er yuan zi 建爾元子)

Figure 3.17: Detail of “I will set up your first son” seal impression on “Wang Cigong’s Inscription” Ink-stick Design

Source: Fang Yulu, *Master Fang’s Catalogue of Inks* (1588), 4:26b.

⁶⁰ For a brief overview of the background of this inscription, see Bruce Rusk, “The Rogue Classicist: Feng Fang (1493–1566) and His Forgeries” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2004): 184–5; 193–4. Wang Qiu 王俶, *Xiaotang jigu lu* 嘯堂集古錄 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 70a–b.

In addition to adapting archaic variant scripts, many of these designs also incorporated “leisure seals” (*xianzhang*). During the sixteenth century as scholars started to carve their own seals in soft stones, they moved beyond engraving personal and studio names to adapt resonant poetic slogans, pursuing a vision of the seal as a composite miniature art object that fused sculptural, calligraphic, and literary modes of expression.⁶¹ Fang Yulu’s catalogue is a singularly rich, yet often neglected repository of leisure seals, the majority of which were not markers of ownership – Fang Yulu’s personal and studio seals (*mingzhang* 名章) also appear throughout the book – but were composed of short mottos that the reader was invited to parse in relation to the main label on the design: again, the trademark (Figure 3.16). Wang Shizhen’s younger brother, Wang Shimao, for instance, composed a piece for Fang Yulu that appeared as a preface for the catalogue (*Fang Yulu mopng* 方于魯墨評), yet was recycled in a design entitled, “Wang Cigong’s inscription” (*Wang Cigong ming* 王次公銘), alongside the label, “Made by Fang Yulu” (*Fang Yulu zhi* 方于魯製), and a seal composed of the phrase, “I will set up your first son” (*jian er yuan zi* 建爾元子) (Figure 3.17). These four characters are drawn from a line in “Bi gong” 閼宮, from the “Odes of Praise to Lu,” in *The Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing* 詩經): “Then the King said: “My Uncle, I will set up your eldest son and make him a marquis of Lu”” (王曰叔父、建爾元子、俾侯于魯). Viewers of the seal are left to infer the remainder of the couplet, while being asked to misread, “make him a marquis of Lu,” as “make him the Marquis Yulu.” The components of the inkmaker’s alias, here, form a word puzzle, the solution to which offers up the inkmaker’s name.

⁶¹ Kuo, *Word as Image*, 45.

The desire to make a spectacle of the characters that constitute Fang Yulu’s personal marks extended beyond the formatting of inscriptional designs and leisure seals to inflect other modes of textual presentation in *Master Fang’s Catalogue*. One of Fang Yulu’s sponsors, the renowned calligrapher and Ming prince Zhu Duo Zheng even explored the expressive possibilities of character re-arrangement *within* poetry, composing an acrostic “Add and Subtract” poem (*lihe shi* 離合詩) for the book. In this piece, Zhu invites his participants to subtract a character from each line of the first couplet to make a new character, then to add a character from each line in the second couplet to form another new character, and so on with the third couplet (subtracting (*li* 離)), and fourth couplet (adding (*he* 合)), to reveal a new four character word or phrase. The solution is “Fang Yulu’s Ink” (Fang Yulu mo 方于魯墨).

The dark chamber is deeply secluded: pillars block the exit.
 The method is as clear as the figure “one,” the old man returns to youthful vigor.
 What can be taken from humble me? The crescent moon emits radiant light.
 Be silent, and avoid using one’s mouth. The outlying lands submit to the court.⁶²

玄房窈窕， 出戶當楹。
 法顛畫一， 華顛復丁。
 鰕生奚取， 朏月生明。
 嘿毋尚口， 率土來庭。⁶³

Solution:

玄房窈窕， 出戶當楹。 [Answer: 房 – 戶 = 方]
 法顛畫一， 華顛復丁。 [Answer: 一 + 丁 = 于]
鰕生奚取， 朏月生明。 [Answer: (鰕 – 取 = 魚) + (明 – 月 = 日) = 魯]
嘿毋尚口， 率土來庭。 [Answer: (嘿 – 口 = 黑) + 土 = 墨]

Full Answer: Fang Yulu’s Ink 方于魯墨

⁶² A combination of two allusions from the *Book of Songs*: “Within the sea-boundaries of the land, All are the king’s servants” and “The country was all reduced to order; Its [chiefs] appeared before the king.”

⁶³ Fang, *Fangshi mopu*, in SKQSCMCS, zibu, vol. 79, 306.

Zhu's hermetic imagery and invocations of *Changes* terminology (*yishu yu* 易數語)⁶⁴ seem freighted with significance, yet are rendered superfluous as the poem is dismembered. To solve the anagram, one has to see how the forms of the characters can be visually re-combined as opposed to actually reading them: in a sense, the more superficial a viewer's response to the poem's allusions, the better. The form of Zhu's anagram wavers between abstraction and simplicity in as much as the characters that compose the enigma simultaneously reveal its solution: "Fang Yulu's Ink," a secret we learn in advance, is hidden in being exposed. Certain motifs in the poem still produce impressions of ink's blackness and light, yet Zhu's focus has shifted towards the graphic surface of Fang's mark as its own source of aesthetic captivation.

If we move beyond these verbal-visual gimmicks, we encounter a deeper ambivalence that pervades the writings included in *Master Fang's Catalogue* as to whether and when labels like "Yulu" or "Jianyuan" designate the proper name of a person or the impersonal name of a thing. We learn in the first lines of Tu Long's biography of Fang Yulu that the two characters *yu lu* 于魯 were originally the marks inscribed onto Fang's ink-sticks, which he took up as a personal name instead of Da'ao 大濼 when the Emperor praised his merchandise:

Fang Yulu, courtesy name: Jianyuan, was from Xindu [Huizhou]. His first name was Da'ao and his courtesy name was Yulu. Later when the Emperor heard of the inscription "Yulu's Ink" and praised "Yulu," Fang changed his proper name to Fang Yulu and took Jianyuan as his courtesy name.

方于魯，字建元，新都人。初名大濼，字于魯，後以于魯墨銘聞于今上，今上亟稱于魯，遂更以為名，字建元。⁶⁵

In this version of events, Fang Yulu became "Fang Yulu" because of the prestige of the markings on his products. Even Wang Daokun, the patron who went furthest in supporting Fang, wrote of

⁶⁴ Zhu uses this term to describe the imagery of his poem in an accompanying note (ibid).

⁶⁵ Fang, *Fangshi moku*, in SKQSCMCS, zibu, vol. 79, 301.

Yulu not as the name of an acquaintance but rather as a luxury label comparable to the most prestigious reign marks on ceramics:

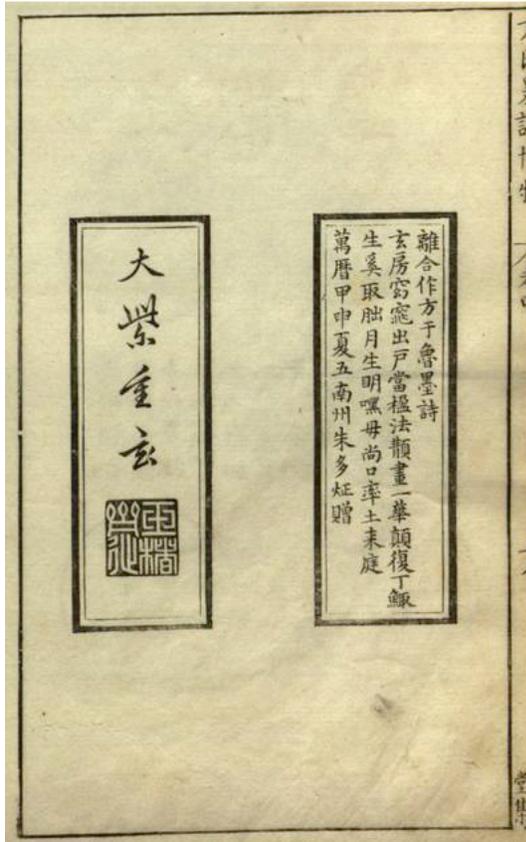
Of those in the present day who can match the ancients, there are only potters and inkmakers. Chai ware and Li Tinggui's ink were the most exceptional products of the past and now they are rare. With the fine ceramics of our Ming, nothing can match Xuande ware. As far as ink is concerned, it is only "Yulu" that is sufficient to face them.

今之足以古者，惟陶氏，墨氏。蓋柴之陶，李之墨，千古稱良，吾見罕矣。我明陶氏之良，莫如宣德，其在于墨，則于魯足以當之。⁶⁶

Through Wang's analogy, the designations "Yulu" 于魯 and "Xuande" 宣德 (or their antique precursors "Li's (Tinggui) Ink" and "Chai Ware") are abstracted from their specific referents – the identity of an inkmaker or an imperial reign title – and they assume an equivalence as interchangeable, generic signals of value.

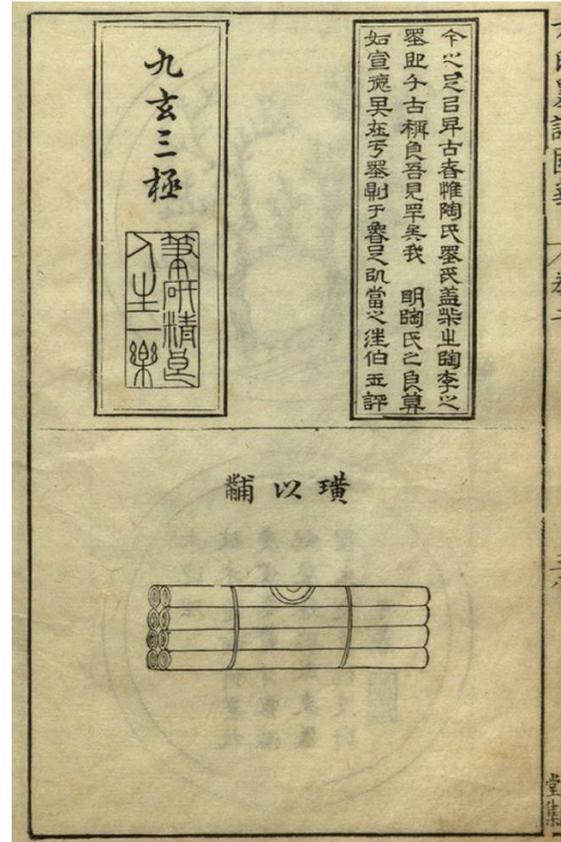
⁶⁶ Ibid., 305.

Part 2: Grades of Ink



(L) Figure 3.18: “Add and Subtract Poem” Ink-stick Design

Source: Fang Yulu, *Master Fang’s Catalogue of Inks* (1588), 4:18b.



(R) Figure 3.19: “Nine Mysteries and Three Absolutes” Ink-stick Design

Source: Fang Yulu, *Master Fang’s Catalogue of Inks* (1588), 2:38a.

Both Zhu Duo Zheng’s poem and Wang Daokun’s comment were included as prefaces to *Master Fang’s Catalogue of Inks*, yet were also presented in inscriptional designs. While the pieces contributed by Wang Shizhen and Wang Shimaο, as we have seen, were visually paired with Fang Yulu’s studio mark, “Jiarilou,” and maker’s mark “Made by Fang Yulu,” Zhu Duo Zheng and Wang Daokun’s texts were presented alongside a new set of labels. Zhu’s acrostic appears in a design next to the marking, “The Sublime Purple Double Mystery” (*Dazi chongxuan* 大紫重玄)

(Figure 3.18), and Wang’s comment is accompanied by the marking “The Nine Mysteries and Three Absolutes” (*Jiuxuan sanji* 九玄三極) (Figure 3.19).



Figure 3.20: Detail of rubbing of “Nine Mysteries and Three Absolutes” marking
Source: Zhang Zigao, *Sijia cangmo tulu*, 72.

These enigmatic designations were the titles of two of Fang Yulu’s “grades of ink” (*mopin* 墨品). During the late sixteenth century, manufacturers increasingly identified and grouped their products under distinct “grades,” the titles of which were inscribed onto the sides of ink-sticks and were intended to mark differences in the material qualities (or the recipe) of the ink (Figure 3.20).⁶⁷ Throughout the course of the Wanli and Chongzhen periods, these titles would become central to the way ink was evaluated.⁶⁸ When Xie Zhaozhi 謝肇淛 (1567–1624) reflected on the bitter rivalry between Fang Yulu and Cheng Junfang, for instance, he figured their duel as a

⁶⁷ Yin Runsheng provides the best introduction to “mopin” in his brief chapter on the subject in Yin, *Molin shihua*, 27–30. Yin also refers to these titles as “brands” (同商標和名牌貨一樣) and notes that ink connoisseurs could judge ink products based solely on the “grade” marking. I translate *pin* here as “grade,” (Cai uses “level”). Every ink manufacturer has a single “ink grade” that was their distinctive product. Some, like Fang Yulu, had more than one. The most famous brands in the late Ming were for Fang Yulu: Yaocao 瑤草, Daguo xiang 大國香, Taizi chongxuan 太紫重玄, Feiyan 非煙, and Jiuxuan sanji 九玄三極, (the *Fangshi mopu* lists these five grades as Fang’s main brands, however, he was also famous for the brand Liao Tianyi 寥天一, and later in his career (1596) released Huayi 畫一). Cheng Junfang was famous for Xuanyuan lingqi 玄元靈氣. Pan Fangkai’s 潘方凱 main brand of ink was Kaitian rong 開天容 and Fang Ruisheng was famous for his brands Ji guang 寂光, Tian jing 天鏡, and Zixiao feng 紫宵峰.

⁶⁸ Connoisseurship guides such as Gao Lian’s 高濂 (1573–1620) *Eight Disquisitions on Nurturing Life* (Zunsheng bajian 遵生八箋 (1591), a text that can be dated to shortly after the first printing of *Master Fang’s Catalogue*, offered guidelines on how to rank these labels.

contest between competing labels, “Nine Mysteries and Three Absolutes” (*Jiuxuan sanji*), and “Profound Origin of Numinous Vitality” (*Xuanyuan lingqi* 玄元靈氣) (Figures 3.21 and 3.22):

In our dynasty Fang Zheng, Luo Xiaohua, and Shao Gezhi all had their fame for a period. In recent times, Fang Yulu began to reach the marvelous level in ink making. The “Nine Mysteries and Three Absolutes” that he made thirty years ago was unprecedented. In the end, Cheng Junfang became his rival and made the “Profound Origin of Numinous Vitality” to surpass Fang. They both competed in price and the dispute is unresolved.

國朝方正，羅小華，邵格之皆擅名一時，近代方于魯始臻其妙。其三十年前所作九玄三極，前無古人。最後，程君房與為仇敵，制玄元靈氣以壓之。二家各爭其價，紛拿不定。⁶⁹

While the famous inkmakers of the early Ming are listed by name, Xie suggests that by the Wanli era, pricing and judgments of quality were being determined not solely on the basis of the inkmaker’s personal reputation, but on the reception of the title bestowed upon their top grade of ink.

⁶⁹ Xie Zhaozhi 謝肇淛, *Wu za zu* 五雜俎 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2009), 238.



(L) Figure 3.21: Detail of “Profound Origin of Numinous Vitality” marking
Source: Beijing Palace Museum.



(R) Figure 3.22: Detail of “Master Junfang” marking
Source: Beijing Palace Museum.

“Non Soot”: The Matter of a Brand Name

When *Master Fang’s Catalogue of Inks* was first published, Fang Yulu’s name was associated with five grades of ink. In a preface to the table of ink-stick designs at the beginning of the catalogue, Wang Daokun offers a brief introduction to the emergence of these titles across the course of Fang’s career: the earliest grade was named, “Jasper Reed” (*Yaocao* 瑶草), and was

followed by “Fragrance of the Great Kingdom” (*Daguo xiang* 大國香), then “Great Purple Double Mystery” (*Dazi chongxuan* 大紫重玄), with “Non Soot” (*Feiyan* 非烟) and “Nine Mysteries and Three Absolutes” (*Jiuxuan sanji* 九玄三極) as Fang Yulu’s latest and top lines.⁷⁰

Wang Daoguan is the only contributor to *Master Fang’s Catalogue* to reflect on how these titles mark qualitative differences in the substance of the ink. In his “Letter on Ink” (*Moshu* 墨書) included in a prefatory volume, Wang writes that “Great Purple Double Mystery,” “Nine Mysteries and Three Absolutes,” and “Non Soot” denote variations in the consistency of the soot or “grade” of lampblack. In the process of burning a pre-marinated wick in a lamp, the carbon residue or lampblack that was withdrawn when the flame was at its strongest would be coarsest and provided the material for the lowest grade, “Great Purple Double Mystery”; as the flames settled down, a softer and more finely textured soot could be extracted, which became the “top grade” (上劑), “Nine Mysteries and Three Absolutes”; finally, as the flames died out, a softer, lighter soot remained, which became Fang’s middle grade (中劑) “Non Soot.”⁷¹

Wang Daoguan’s letter suggests that the titles of ink grades correspond to particular recipes, yet throughout the catalogue we see them gradually shed these specific associations to acquire a “phantasmatic life” of their own as brands. The ink grade title became first and foremost a “semiotic assemblage”: a “connotationally rich and referentially poor proper name... structured to designate a rich singularity, coherent, simple, and integral, which evokes a world of beauty, harmony, energy, clarity, desire.”⁷² Many grade titles combine Daoist allusions to the

⁷⁰ Fang, *Fangshi mopu*, in SKQSCMCS, zibu, vol. 79, 316.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² John Frow, “Signature and Brand,” 56–74; 67. Such impulses resonate with what Roland Barthes calls “advertising language,” where statements of use-value and invitations for purchase are coupled with broader evocations of harmony and perfection (the “great oneiric themes of humanity”): ice-cream that “makes you melt with pleasure” describes a substance that melts while invoking the “grand theme” of “annihilation by pleasure” or a “perfusion of being”; “golden chips” designates a crisp surface *and* “inestimable worth.” For Barthes, the more

celestial and the sublime with an evocation of the sensory qualities of ink: its luster, its fragrance, its tonality, or its texture. A key term is “mystery” (*xuan* 玄), which suggests at once the color black (with a deep dark reddish hint), and the “creative aspect of the Dao,” or the undifferentiated stage from which myriad phenomena emerge. The use of the term also reflects a tendency among scholars to project moral values onto the physical features of an object (a practice particularly pronounced in descriptions of jade and tea), by invoking the concept of “dark virtue” (*xuande* 玄德), an attribute of a sage who finds communion through inner cultivation with the profound mysteries of the Dao. Related formulations invoked by inkmakers include the “three pneumas” – Mysterious, Original, and Inaugural (*xuanqi* 玄氣, *yuanqi* 元氣, and *shiqi* 始氣) – that are issued sequentially by the Dao and generate the cosmos. More generally, many of these titles resonate with the language of “Great Clarity” (*Taiqing* 太清) and later *waidan* alchemy – language that was, in turn, often culled from the *Elegies of Chu* (*Chuci* 楚辭) poetic tradition and closely related to Daoist cosmography – where the “elixir” is seen to be symbolic both of the “original state of being that underlies multiplicity and change” and of the attainment of that state by the adept.⁷³ “Mystery/black” might loosely serve as a descriptor, yet it was worked into almost nonsensical compounds that while laden with associations do not denote anything specific: Jiuxuan sanji 九玄三極, “Profound Origin of Numinous Vitality” (**Xuanyuan** lingqi 玄元靈氣), “Obscure Numen of Primordial Unity” (Taiyi **xuanling** 太乙玄靈).⁷⁴ Through this process of assembly, the brand assumed a semantic autonomy that transformed it into a self-signifying proper name.

duplicitous the slogan, the more effective it would be. Roland Barthes, “The Advertising Message,” in *The Semiotic Challenge*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 177.

⁷³ Fabrizio Pregadio, *Great Clarity: Daoism and Alchemy in Early Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 8–10.

⁷⁴ Yin, *Molin shihua*, 27–30.

Titles were also generated and publicized through the manipulation of poetic signifiers. The brand, “Non Soot,” for instance, points to an auspicious vapor, “non mist” (*feiyān* 非煙), from the “Astronomer’s Treatise” (*Tianguān shū* 天官書) in Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (ca. 145–86 BCE) *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史記):

Like mist, but not mist; like clouds, but not clouds; gloomy and billowing, chilly and swirling: these are called “felicitous clouds.”

若煙非煙，若雲非雲，郁郁紛紛，蕭索輪囷，是謂卿雲。⁷⁵

“Non mist” was a protean poetic trope, limning the elusive movements and insubstantiality of mist, while retaining a symbolic association with cloud portents and other propitious ethers (*xìqì* 喜氣). The motif might loosely allude to the role of clouds (*yún* 雲) and fog (*wú* 霧) as metaphors for the art of calligraphy, yet Fang Yulu redefines the associations of the trope with the substance of ink through a pun on the character *yān* 烟 as “soot,” thus approximating more “literal” descriptors like the established designation “pure soot” (*qīngyān* 清烟).⁷⁶ The title “Non Soot,” to borrow a formulation from Gordon Teskey, thus appears “twice made”: a figure gleaned from the “images and shadows of earlier poems,” preserved only so long as it is necessary to see that they have been cancelled.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記, ed. Wang Jun 王軍 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 160.

⁷⁶ Su Shi, “Shu Huaimin suo yi mo” 書懷民所遺墨, *Su Shi wenji*, 70: 7961.

⁷⁷ Gordon Teskey, *Delirious Milton* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 127.

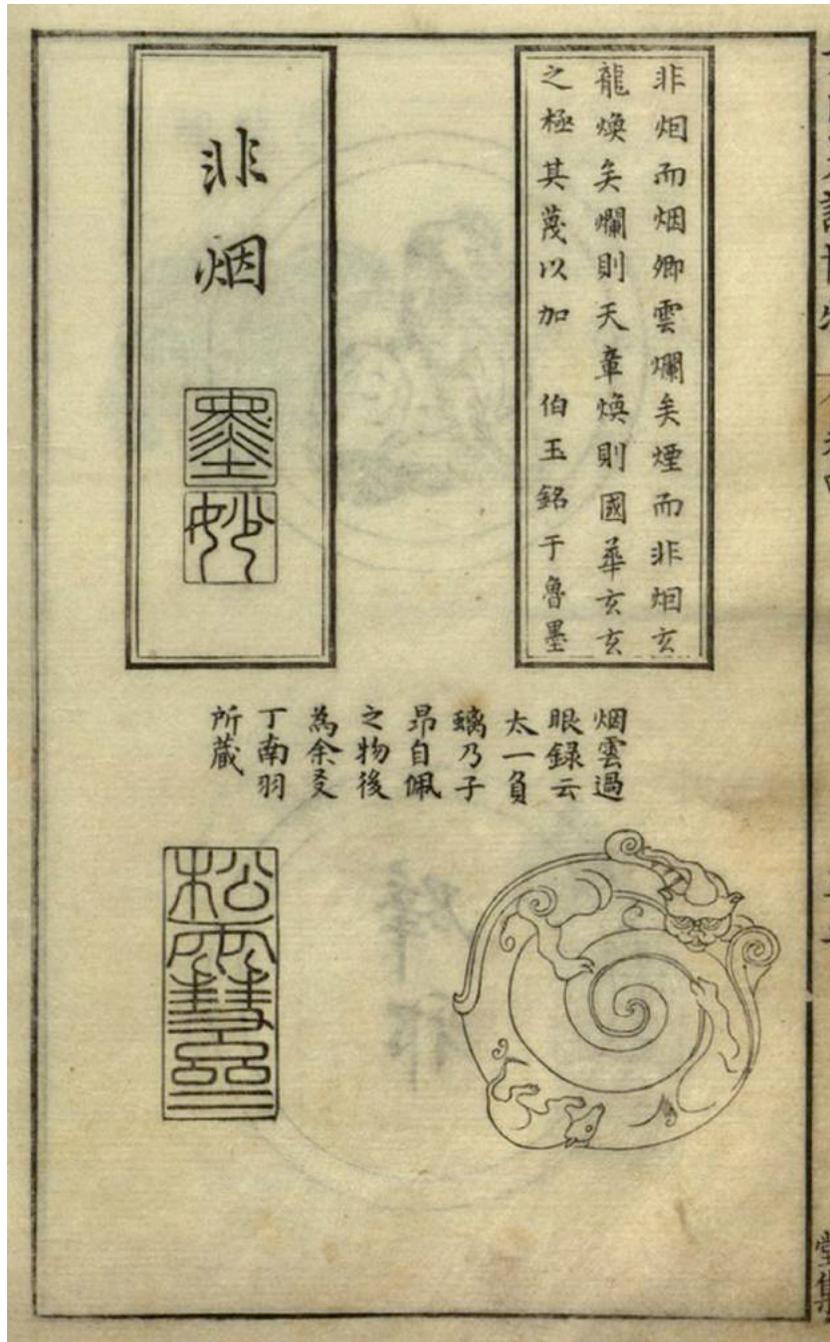


Figure 3.23: “Non Soot Inscription” Ink-stick Design
 Source: Fang Yulu, *Master Fang’s Catalogue of Inks* (1588), 4:33a.

To publicize Fang Yulu’s “Non Soot” label, Wang Daokun composed a short jingle that rewrites the passage from the “Astronomer’s Treatise” in which “non mist” first appeared. We have two slightly different versions of the inscription: a copy that appears in a design alongside

the label “Non Soot” in *Master Fang’s Catalogue* (Figure 3.23), and a copy preserved in Wang’s collected writings (*Taihan ji*). The former visually extends the punning implicit in the title “Non Soot” by switching between three forms of the character *yan* (烟, 烟, 煙), while the latter draws out the iterability of the jingle, repeating the title once more:

“Non Soot” Inscription (Master Fang’s Catalogue of Inks)

“Non Soot,” yet it is soot: the felicitous polychrome clouds are resplendent!⁷⁸ Soot, yet it is “Non Soot:” the black dragon shimmers!⁷⁹ Such resplendence is a heavenly pattern! This shimmering luster is the efflorescence of the state! The ultimate mystery of mysteries: there is nothing that can be added to it!

非煙銘

非烟而烟，卿雲爛矣。煙而非烟，玄龍煥矣。爛則天章，煥則國華。
玄玄之極，其蔑以加。⁸⁰

“Non Soot” Ink Inscription (Taihan ji)

“Non Soot,” yet it is soot: the felicitous polychrome clouds are resplendent! Soot, yet it is “Non Soot:” the black dragon shimmers! Such resplendence is a heavenly pattern! This shimmering luster is the efflorescence of the state! The limit to “Non Soot”: there is nothing that can be added to it!

非煙墨銘

非煙而煙，卿雲爛矣。煙而非煙，玄龍煥矣。爛則天章，煥則國華。
非煙之極，其蔑以加。⁸¹

The first half of the inscription pairs an auspicious image of “felicitous clouds” from the same source passage in the *Records of the Grand Historian* with a reference to “shimmering black dragons.” Clouds and dragons “follow each other” (*yun cong long* 雲從龍), and, here, resonate

⁷⁸“Auspicious clouds” are ethers (*qi*) of joy” (卿雲見，喜氣也). Later taken to be synonymous with *qingyun* 慶雲, a five colored auspicious cloud (*wuse xiangyun* 五色祥雲).

⁷⁹ See Lu Yun 陸雲 (262–303), “Foresake that Northern polestar! Solicit these Dark Dragons’ glories. Time grows late, what else could I say?” (棄置北辰星，問此玄龍煥，時暮勿復言，華落理必賤). Li Shan suggests that *xuanlong* 玄龍 is a metaphor for the beautiful and young girls of the capital.

⁸⁰ Fang, *Fangshi mopu*, in SKQSCMCS, zibu, vol. 79, 415.

⁸¹ Wang Daokun, “Feiyan mo ming” 非煙墨銘, *Taihan ji*, 78: 1613.

with poetic images of calligraphic “ink play,” as in Su Shi’s line: “Spurting clouds and foggy mist emerge / dragons and snakes coil together entwined” (嘯嘯雲霧出, 奕奕龍蛇縮).⁸² Images of “felicitous clouds” and “black dragons” similarly hover between the poles of metaphor and metonymy:

The black dragon, going into hiding, engenders the black springs. The dust from the black springs then rises to become a black cloud... What has ascended then descends as a flow of water that collects in the black sea.

玄龍入藏生玄泉，玄泉之埃上為玄雲... 上者就下，流水就通，而合于玄海。
83

As the text progresses, “Non Soot” becomes both a description in the “disguise of a proper name,” and a proper name in the disguise of a description: “you never know whether he names or describes, nor whether the thing he describes-names is the thing or the name.”⁸⁴ Wang’s jingle ends up not as a celebration of auspicious vapors or any definite properties of ink, but of the duplicitous conceit of “Non Soot” itself. Impressions of Fang Yulu’s product begin to emerge as if they were effects of the brand name’s repetition.

With Wang Daokun’s endorsement, “Non Soot” would go on to become Fang Yulu’s most widely recognized and well-publicized brand in the 1580s. The comments of other contributors to *Master Fang’s Catalogue of Inks* already reveal a shift away from a generic appraisal of Fang Yulu’s ink to a focus on this single brand name:

In the past, Master Kong Zhou had three swords, the third was called “Tempered by Night,” you could see its shadow but not its glitter, yet it was stored away and never put to use. Yulu’s ink called “Non Soot” is close to this. I’m only worried that those who get hold of it will store it away and not use it and then the ink will grind them down.

⁸² Su Shi, *Su Shi shiji*, 4: 25: 2754.

⁸³ Zhang Shuangdi 張雙棣, *Huainan zi jiaoshi* 淮南子校釋 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2013), vol. 1, 525.

⁸⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Signésponge – Signsponge*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 118.

昔孔周氏三劍，下者宵練，猶見影而不見光，匣而無施于事也。于魯之墨曰非烟，近于是矣。余恐得者匣而不試，墨將磨子。⁸⁵

The influence of Wang Daokun's inscription for "Non Soot" stretched beyond *Master Fang's Catalogue*, as the brand name became a focal point in the infamous rivalry between Fang Yulu and Cheng Junfang. The reasons for the fraught relationship between these two men was a topic of wild speculation and rumor during the seventeenth century: Jiang Shaoshu 姜紹書 (fl. Late 17th century), for instance, suggested that Fang coveted Cheng's concubine and attempted to marry her while Cheng was in Beijing; when Cheng found out, he allegedly tried to indict Fang, while Fang framed Cheng for murder and had him imprisoned.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, as Xie Zhaozhi attests, Fang was seen by most contemporary commentators to be the more respectable of the two, as scandalous stories emerged that Cheng lured young boys back to his garden where he threw them into his snake pit to make ingredients for his ink.⁸⁷ We know that Cheng and Fang had once collaborated together early on in their careers with Cheng going so far as to claim he had actually taught Fang inkmaking. Fang Yulu's publication preceded the *Garden of Inks* by over a decade, yet Cheng still tried to claim many of the visual designs in *Master Fang's Catalogue* as his own, including the model of the "Five Planets Lodging Between the Legs and Wall Mansion," which he casually noted he had once presented as a tribute to court. Given the success of Fang's catalogue in the 1580s, however, it is often hard to distinguish between cases where Cheng was identifying designs he had collaborated with Fang in producing and cases where he was simply copying Fang's work.

⁸⁵ Fang, *Fangshi mopu*, in SKQSCMCS, zibu, vol. 79, 305.

⁸⁶ Jiang Shaoshu 姜紹書, *Yunshi zhai bitan* 韻石齋筆談, in CSJCCB, vol. 1561, 31–32.

⁸⁷ Pan Dexi 潘德熙, *Wenfang sibao* 文房四寶 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991), 77–78.

As Xie's anecdote in *Wu za zu* shows, by the early seventeenth century, Fang's leading ink grade, "Nine Mysteries and Three Absolutes" was commonly judged against Cheng's leading title, "Profound Origin of Numinous Vitality." Cheng, however, also tried to lay claim to the "Non Soot" designation, by composing his own inscription for the brand.

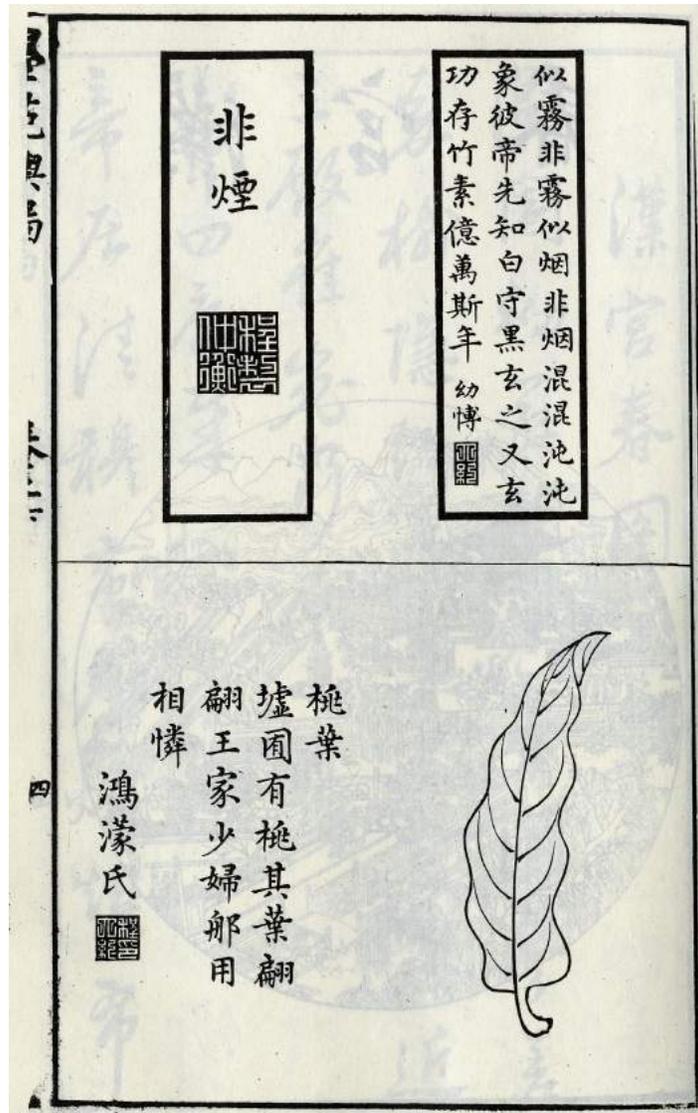


Figure 3.24: Cheng Junfang's "Non Soot Inscription" Ink-stick Design
 Source: Cheng Junfang, *Chengshi moyuan*, 4:4a.

As we have seen, there were no endorsements authored by Fang Yulu for his personal ink brands; Cheng, however, took it upon himself to write his own appraisal of "Non Soot." The text

copies the structure and theme of Wang Daokun's inscription, imitating his imagery, yet still avoiding any direct duplication (Figure 3.24):

Like fog but not fog, like soot but Non Soot, a gloomy murkiness, before the First Heavenly Emperor. Recognize the white while preserving blackness, dark mystery of dark mystery: its merit preserved on bamboo and paper, and it will last for all of time!

似霧非霧，似烟非烟，混混沌沌，象彼帝先。知白守黑，玄之又玄，功存竹素，億萬斯年。⁸⁸

By effectively rewriting Wang Daokun's text in his own words, Cheng, the inkmaker, simultaneously tried to approximate and challenge the authority of a prominent scholar. Although Fang Yulu's supporters had written extensively on how Fang had invented "Non Soot," even vaguely commenting on its recipe, Cheng goes one step further by presenting himself as an author of the brand name. Whether or not he ever manufactured this product in his early collaborations with Fang, Cheng used the pages of his catalogue to try to usurp for himself the agency to proclaim and assertively endorse the name. To some extent, he succeeded in this endeavor: Cheng's "Record of The Studio of Ink Treasure" (*Baomo zhai ji* 寶墨齋記), a collection of appraisals contributed to his shop by satisfied customers, contains several texts that take up the poetic motif of "Non Soot" as topic and theme:

Like soot but "Non Soot," material, yet immaterial, redolent without fragrance, a form with no appearance. Mired in mist, a dim silence, then confusion and flux. Primordial ether seeps out as misty drizzle, with trickling drops of nocturnal vapor.

若烟非烟，若質無質，似香非香，似色非色，漠漠嘿嘿，變幻恍惚。漏元氣而涇濛，盜沆瀣之流液。⁸⁹

"Non Soot" floats, a glossy pitch black, upon entering water its firmness is evident. How can Yishui flourish? The [Xin'an] School is even more prosperous.

⁸⁸ Cheng Junfang, *Chengshi moyuan*, in SKQSCMCS, zibu, vol. 79, 77.

⁸⁹ Xu, "Cheng Junfang: Baomo zhai ji" 程君房寶墨齋記, *Sheshi xiantan*, 932.

非烟浮黝黑，入水識堅剛。易水源何盛，新都派更長。⁹⁰

Even though few connoisseurs or commentators from the late Ming listed “Non Soot” as Cheng’s product and most continued to celebrate it as one of Fang’s leading brands, we still find evidence from the Qing dynasty of ink-sticks attributed to Cheng bearing the “Non Soot” mark. Song Luo’s 宋榮 (1634–1714) Kangxi-era catalogue *Mantang xu mopin* 漫堂續墨品 (1710), for instance, lists a product marked with Cheng’s name and the brand “Non Soot,” while the eminent Guangdong collector and connoisseur of ink, Ye Gongchuo 葉恭綽 (1881–1968), contributed a rubbing of an ink-stick bearing Cheng’s mark and the stamp “Non Soot” to the “Illustrated Catalogue of Four Ink Collections” (*Sijia cangmo tulu* 四家藏墨圖錄) (Figure 3.25).⁹¹

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Later appears in Song Luo’s 宋榮 (1634–1714) Kangxi era, *Xipo leigao* 西陂類稿 (1711), in which he lists an ink stick bearing the brand “Feiyan” that cost 3 *qian* and 5 *fen*.

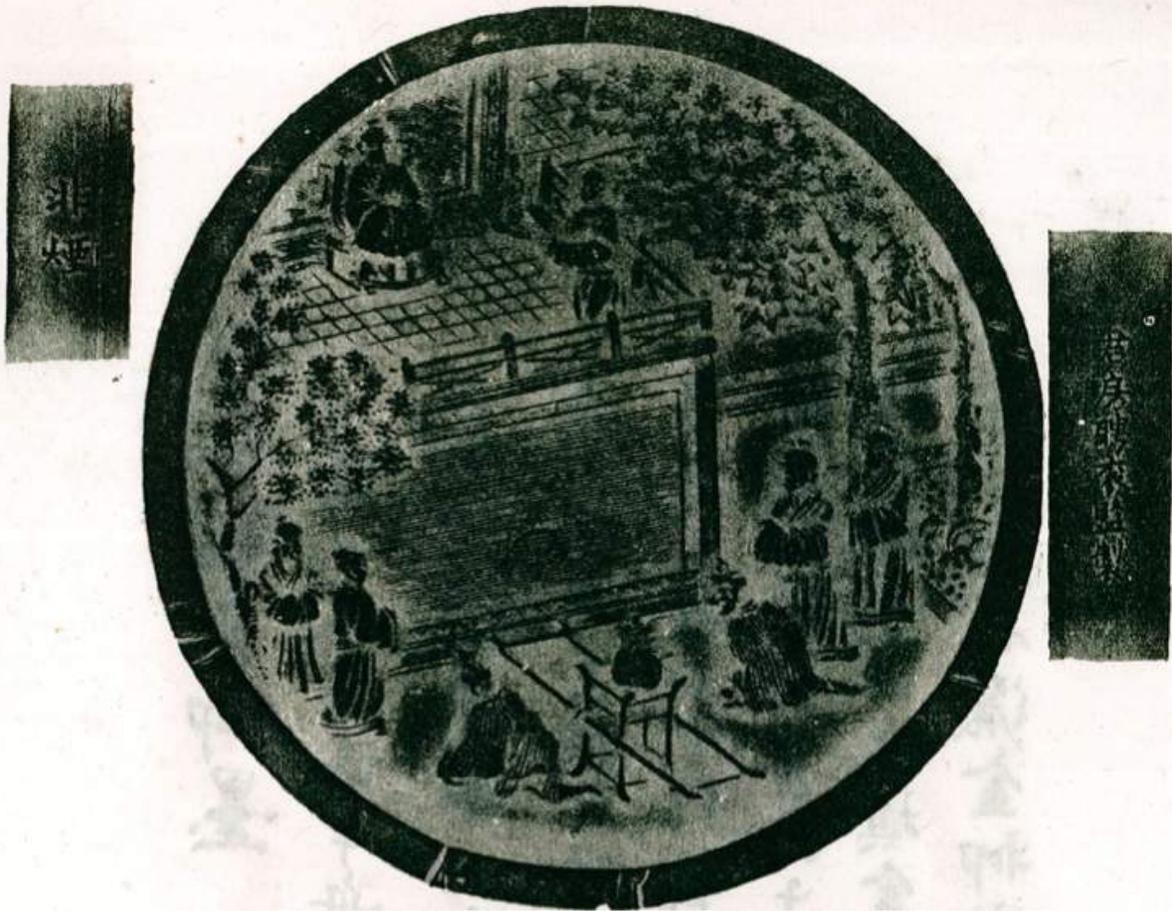


Figure 3.25: Rubbing of Cheng Junfang’s “Auspicious Dragon Fat Lampblack” Ink-cake
 Source: Zhang Zigao, *Sijia cangmo tulu*, 24.

Cheng Junfang’s appropriation of “Non Soot” as an ink grade title was, however, only one thread in the label’s checkered career. Other inkmakers also tried to stake their claims to the brand: the catalogue *Xuetang Mopin* 雪堂墨品, edited by Zhang Renxi 張仁熙 in the early Qing, for instance, records an ink-stick bearing the “Non Soot” mark dated to 1612 and this time attributed to Fang Ruisheng.⁹² Cao Sugong 曹素功 (1615–1689) also advertised the “Non Soot” mark as his own merchandise, without any attribution to either Fang Yulu or Cheng Junfang.⁹³ As “Non Soot” took on a life independent of either Fang or Wang Daokun, the text of Wang’s

⁹² Xu, “Xuetang Mopin” 雪堂墨品 *Sheshi xiantan*, 733.

⁹³ Cao Shengchen 曹聖臣, *Caoshi molin* 曹氏墨林, in SKQSCMCS, zibu, vol. 79, 475.

inscription for “Non Soot,” also travelled across time and space, and was re-printed in 1743 in Matsui Gentai’s 松井元泰 *Kobaien Bofuku* 古梅園墨譜 in Japan.⁹⁴

The career of “Non Soot” invites us to consider more carefully the relationship between a brand and counterfeiting. Was the appropriation and re-use of a label regarded as theft? Was the “Non Soot” label, when used by Cheng or Fang Ruisheng, even perceived as a copy? To begin to tackle these questions, we can turn to the case of another title, “One with Clear Heaven” (*Liaotian yi* 寥天一), the label on Sun Ruiqing’s ink-stick in the Palace Museum. This brand was released by Fang Yulu and endorsed, as with “Non Soot,” in a short inscription by Wang Daokun:

An Inscription for Fang Yulu’s “One with Clear Heaven”

How is it that One with Clear Heaven appears!
How is it that the Studio of Han is accomplished!
Clarity from pig’s fat, as light as an elaphure horn,
Abstruse virtue has no piercing fragrance,
Ultimate harmony is desolately dark!

方于魯寥天一墨銘

胡然而生寥天一，胡然而成函之室。
清則豨也膏，輕則麋也角。
玄德非馨，太冲惟漠。⁹⁵

The inscription opens with Wang adapting the closing lines of the poem, “Companion of the Lord till Death” (*Junzi xielao* 君子偕老), from the “Odes of Yong” – “She appears as if from heaven, she appears as if a goddess!” (胡然而天也、胡然而帝也。) – to pair his praise for the release of Fang Yulu’s brand name with the name of his own studio: as if he himself were an “overlord” (*di* 帝) to match the “heavenly” (*tian* 天) nature of this ink. Wang then celebrates the “purity” of the lampblack (a value that resonates with the eulogies for “Non Soot”) and

⁹⁴ Lin, *Proliferation of Images*, 271–279.

⁹⁵ Wang, “Fang Yulu Liaotian yi mo ming” 方于魯寥天一墨銘, *Taihan ji*, 78: 1612; Fang, *Fangshi mopu*, in SKQSCMCS, zibu, vol. 79, 397.

“lightness” of the glue with explicit references to the materials used: pig’s grease and horn. The epigram ends with Wang simultaneously elaborating on the material and ethical merits of the ink by playing with a line from the *Book of Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚書):

Book of Documents: “It is not the millet and grain which have the piercing fragrance; it is bright virtue”

黍稷非馨，明德惟馨爾。

Wang Daokun inscription: “Abstruse virtue has no piercing fragrance, Ultimate harmony is desolately dark!”

玄德非馨，太冲惟漠。

The meaning of the original line is that the moral integrity (“bright virtue”) behind the presentation of an offering supersedes the materiality of the offering itself (“millet and grain”), yet Wang manipulates this oft-quoted saying to articulate his own ideal principle for ink: here – changing *wei* 惟 to *fei* 非 – it is not the “fragrance” of “abstruse virtue” that matters; or, more plainly, it is not important whether the ink has a desirable scent from the addition of musk (*shexiang* 麝香) or perfume (common additives intended to mask the natural odor of ink). Wang then deploys another allusion to *Zhuangzi*: “Huzi said: “just now I showed him the vast gushing surge in which nothing wins out”” (壺子曰：吾鄉示之以太冲莫勝。) – a Daoist metaphor for the harmony of nothingness and the dark “desolate emptiness,” the “silent space beyond the stars” (*mo* 漠) that ensues, again evocative of the profundity of the Dao and the sheer blackness of ink. Wang is effectively saying that the lure of an ink-stick’s scent and any other sensual gimmicks should be superseded by the depth of its blackness, while at the same time appealing to the ideal of attaining sage-like self-realization through true communion with the Dao. Wang Daokun’s brother, Wang Daoguan, explains the significance of this line in his “Letter on Ink” (*Moshu*) printed in *Master Fang’s Catalogue*:

Wang Daokun taught Fang Yulu: “The bright virtue does not have a piercing fragrance, the ultimate harmony is desolately empty.” “Not having a piercing fragrance,” means not to submit to an assailing scent. “Only desolate emptiness,” means “blackness” and nothing more.⁹⁶ Fang Yulu took heed of this saying and his technique became the foremost in the whole empire. Alas! “Bright virtue is not fragrant, the ultimate harmony is desolately empty,” this principle should be exhaustively pursued!

太函氏之授建元曰：明德非馨，太冲惟漠。夫非馨，故襲有所不事也；惟漠，則黜而已矣。建元氏用其言，故以技甲天下。嗟乎！明德非馨，太冲惟漠，尽之矣！⁹⁷

For Wang Daoguan, the “fragrance” line was not just an endorsement of Fang Yulu’s new brand name, but an admonitory lesson that Wang Daokun had successfully instilled in Fang and one that ought to be promoted as a model for the judgment of all ink. Wang’s brand inscription reflects the development of a metaphorical system for writing about ink that can be traced back to Su Shi’s poem for Pan Gu, where the poet – otherwise concerned with superficial appearances and fame – yielded to the inkmaker for his imputed integrity and moral substance. By the late sixteenth century, writers searched for increasingly exaggerated puns and kennings, mixing physical and metaphysical properties in a playful effort to outdo competitors. In this process, we see a new, increasingly unruly mode of poetic production dedicated to repurposing metaphors from renowned classical texts, metaphors that were given a new lease of life precisely through their ossification as commercial labels.

Within the catalogue, Wang’s inscription was split between two designs: the first features a copy of the opening couplet of his text transcribed by the eminent Suzhou calligrapher Zhou

⁹⁶ Many of the key terms of this line are also explained elsewhere in the “Letter on Ink” by Wang Daoguan: the letter opens with the claim: “ink, is blackness and nothing more” (夫墨者，黜而已矣。), a principle Daoguan returns to in his later gloss on Wang Daokun’s line. He then explains the hierarchy of values associated with ink: “hardness, is its virtue; second: luster, its splendor; *fragrance, is that which assails people*” (堅，其德也；色澤，其華也，次也；芬芳，其襲也。). He cautions that: “appreciating fragrance and enjoying decorative ornament is not real discrimination” (聞香悅飾). Later in the letter, Wang Daoguan also suggests that scent (musk) can be added to the ink as long as it does not harm its blackness.

⁹⁷ Fang, *Fangshi mopu*, in SKQSCMCS, zibu, vol. 79, 324.

Tianqiu 周天球 (1514–1595) with Wang’s seal for his studio, “Han’s Third Studio Seal” (*Hansan shi yin* 函三室印), and the title, “Draft from the Valley” (*Hongzhong qicao* 洪中起草) (Figure 3.26); the second pairs the line on pig grease and the “fragrance” slogan with the seal, “Fang Yulu,” and the label “One with Clear Heaven” (Figure 3.27).⁹⁸ Just as Wang commenced his inscription by pairing his praise for the brand with his own studio name, these separate designs make two promotional appeals: one on behalf of Wang, the other for Fang. Although “One with Clear Heaven” was not listed as one of Fang Yulu’s five grades of ink within *Master Fang’s Catalogue*, it was frequently eulogized by supporters of the publication, often alongside “Non Soot,” as in the following lines in poems by Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551–1601) and Yu Ce 俞策 (1550–1627):

Black clouds cover the moon as “Non Soot” descends,
Purple fog, empty heavens, as the Ultimate One arrives...

玄雲蔽月非烟下，紫霧寥天太乙來。⁹⁹

Facing the pool, the five cloudy ethers do not scatter,
Day after day, a hundred gleaming treasures strung aloft.
Among them, there is the name “One with Clear Heaven,”
Not mist, “Non Soot,” it seems insubstantial.

臨池不散五雲氣，貫日高懸百寶光。
其中名有寥天一，非霧非烟若無質。¹⁰⁰

As a result of these endorsements, “One with Clear Heaven” was later listed as Fang Yulu’s leading brand in a range of publications including Gao Lian’s 高濂 (1573–1620) *Eight*

⁹⁸ “Hongzhong” is a commonly used reference to Wang’s estate on Huangshan 黃山.

⁹⁹ Hu Yinglin 胡應麟, “Fang Yulu yi moku qi shi zuye fuzeng” 方于魯以墨譜乞詩卒業賦贈, *Shaoshi shanfang ji* 少室山房集, in WYGSKQS, 1290, 586.

¹⁰⁰ Fang, *Fangshi moku*, in SKQSCMCS, zibu, vol. 79, 308.

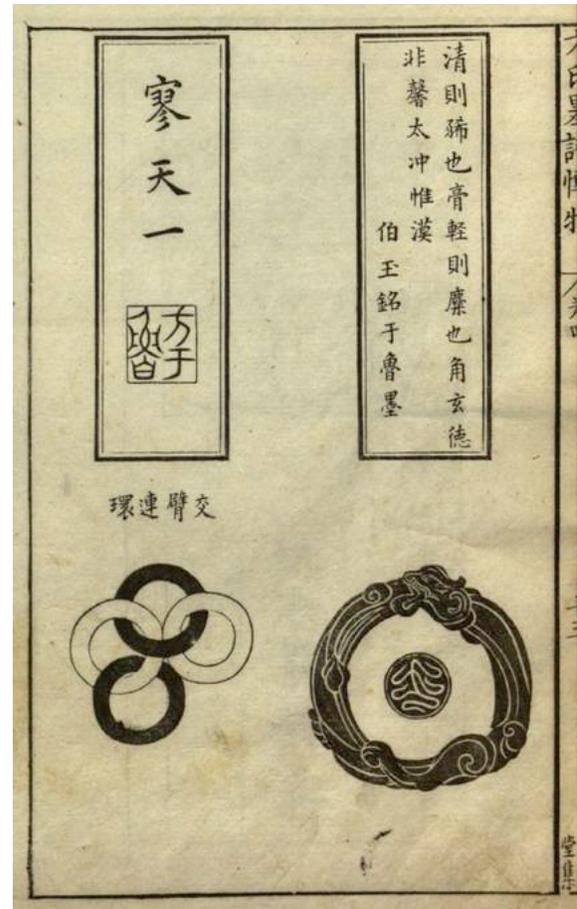
Disquisitions on Nurturing Life (*Zunsheng bajian* 遵生八箋) (1591) and Ma Sanheng's 麻三衡

Treatise on Ink (*Mozhi* 墨志) (c. 1646).¹⁰¹



(L) Figure 3.26: “Draft from the Valley” Ink-stick Design

Source: Fang Yulu, *Master Fang’s Catalogue of Inks* (1588), 3:41b.



(R) Figure 3.27: “One with Clear Heaven Inscription” Ink-stick Design

Source: Fang Yulu, *Master Fang’s Catalogue of Inks* (1588), 4:13b.

Shortly after its emergence onto the market, however, the label was the subject of a series of complaints from commentators. We find particularly forceful criticisms of the title in the writings of both Xing Tong 邢侗 (1551–1612), a prominent scholar and calligrapher, and Peng Haogu 彭好古 (b.1551; *jinshi* 1586) who was appointed as the new magistrate in She County in

¹⁰¹ Ma Sanheng, *Mozhi* 墨志, in CSJCCB, vol. 1496, 9.

1588:

Fang Yulu's ink was renowned in Shezhou, and his product prevails in color, luster and design. However, when you grind it, it is like paste with perfume, lacking the scent of ink. "Non Soot" and "One with Clear Heaven" were completely unlike [what they should have been]. Wang Daokun should be ashamed of his reputation as the Dong Hu of the "Great Black."

方于魯墨擅名歙州，當以色澤規樞取勝。磨之若糲，有香氣，無墨氣。所署「非煙」，「寥天一」，殊謬不然。左司馬公差愧太玄氏董狐。¹⁰²

Xin'an has long been famous for its ink. When I was an official in She County, Master Fang Yulu was widely promoted and among Yulu's inks, his "One with Clear Heaven" was celebrated as a peerless product. I took this top product and sent it as a gift to scholars from the four corners of the state. They all ridiculed it, derisively, saying, "It's bogus." When you grind it and test it, then you see that its glue is actually cheap paste, and its color is like coal. You cannot use it with a brush.

The county officer Gu Gong bought ink at a high price and Yulu had also given him a fake. Gu Gong was furious and went to check with Wang Daokun, to catch Fang Yulu and have him beaten.

新安以墨名舊矣。方餘令歙時推方氏於魯，而於魯墨推「寥天一」為絕勝。余嘗取其絕勝者贈四方修文之士，姍姍胥薄之曰：是胡贗也。因磨而試之，則見其膏如糊，其色如煤，不可以筆。

郡守古公重價購墨，于魯亦以贗應。古公怒，請驗於汪司馬，逮而笞之。¹⁰³

Both Peng and Xing draw attention to slippages between the reputation of the label "One with Clear Heaven" and the quality of ink-sticks bearing this mark. For both authors, there is a disjunction between the reputation of the brand and the substance of the ink. Peng goes so far as to label the products "counterfeit," yet despite his talk of "cheap paste and coal" it is unclear what he actually considers "fake": how, for instance, could Fang Yulu forge copies of his own products? The question then becomes whether Peng felt the actual source of the problem was the spurious reputation of the brand or the sham materiality of the ink. It is also possible that Peng and Xing's criticisms reflect an anxiety that pertains to the ontology of the brand as such, to what

¹⁰² Xing Tong 邢侗, "Mo ji" 墨記, in *Shiliu jia moshuo*, 15.

¹⁰³ Cheng, *Chengshi moyuan*, in *XXSKQS*, zibu, vol. 1114, 309.

Robert Moore terms its “semiotic vulnerabilities”: namely, the way individual branded products (or “tokens”) struggle to act as relays for the more abstract associations (New! Perfect! Shiny!) that the authors of adverts try to “encode” in consumer experience.¹⁰⁴ We catch a glimpse of how a “virtualized brand” fails to fully subsume the “messy” materiality of an individual object or the physical condition of the token on which the brand name is stamped.¹⁰⁵

More than anyone else it was Wang Daokun who bore the brunt of Xing and Peng’s criticisms. Xing wrote of how he should be “ashamed,” while Peng went further in trying to personally confront Wang for duping consumers. The leading art collector and connoisseur, Zhan Jingfeng, would later pick up on the impact of these allegations on Wang’s reputation and write that when the “insides of these ink-sticks were exposed, it led the gentry to doubt the personal character of Wang Daokun” (則中藏悉露矣，縉紳至疑司馬為人).¹⁰⁶ Both Peng and Xing’s texts would be printed in Cheng Junfang’s *Garden of Inks* and they were clearly supporters of Cheng’s ink business. What is striking, however, is that they both tend to gloss over Fang Yulu’s responsibility as a craftsman to present products that attest to his own integrity (like Pan Gu), to instead attack Wang Daokun as the author of the endorsements for the two brand names. In a passage that echoes the terms of Su Shi’s contrast between Pan Yue and Pan Gu’s products, Zhan presents an implicit analogy between the “fake” ink-stick with its tainted substance and Wang’s own spurious worth in the eyes of other gentry. If Su Shi was able to manipulate, for gain, the reception of Pan Gu through his poetry, Wang Daokun ended up being personally judged in light of the insubstantial name he had promoted.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Moore, “From Genericide to Viral Marketing: On “Brand”,” *Language and Communication* 23 (3–4) (2003): 331–57, 332.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Zhan Jingfeng 詹景鳳, *Mingbian leihan* 明辨類函 (Gest Library, Princeton University: 1632), 43: 6a.

One might expect that given these criticisms, the “One with Clear Heaven” label would fall into disrepute, yet this was not to be the case. Peng and Xing’s texts were included in *Master Cheng’s Catalogue of Inks* alongside Cheng Junfang’s own attempt to lay claim to the title (Figure 3.28). As with “Non Soot,” there is evidence in Zhang Renxi’s *Xuetang mopin* of an ink-stick made by Cheng Junfang bearing the “One with Clear Heaven” mark, and there was also a rubbing of an ink-stick with the label in the collection of the famous connoisseur, Yin Runsheng, attributed to Cheng (Figure 3.29), for an ink-stick now held in the Palace Museum (Figure 3.30 and 3.31). In addition, Yin also owned another ink-stick with the “One with Clear Heaven” mark, this time attributed to the Tianqi and Chongzhen-era inkmaker Jin Xuanfu 金玄甫 (Figure 3.32; Figures 3.33 and 3.34). Concurrently, the Huizhou inkmaker Pan Jiake 潘嘉客, adapted the mark for a limited edition cake in a commemorative five-set lacquered box, suggesting that amid charges of counterfeiting and copying the brand retained distinctive luxury connotations (Figure 3.35). Here, too, we can return to Sun Ruiqing’s ink-stick in the Palace Museum: Sun staked his own claim to the “One with Clear Heaven” mark by replacing Fang Yulu’s seal with his own and re-transcribing Wang’s inscription, switching the characters for clarity (*qing* 清) and lightness (*qing* 輕). That Sun continued to promote the “One with Clear Heaven” label and Wang Daokun’s endorsement despite the negative reviews of ink bearing these markings, proudly pairing them with his own mark, perhaps indicates that he saw his “copy” as an improvement on Fang Yulu’s formula: that he wanted to make an ink that finally fulfilled the promise he saw in the name. Regardless of his motivations, Sun’s appropriation of the label, only one in a string of adaptations by inkmakers throughout the Ming and Qing dynasties, reflects the extent to which a brand might break free of its connection to its backers and the tangible products it was intended for, assuming new life as a floating signifier available for re-inscription. Throughout this chapter

we have returned to instances of “ontological slipperiness” between humans and things: the conflation of the integrity of ink (*mopin*) and human character (*renpin*); Pan Gu becoming an ink-stick; Fang Yulu’s personal name being reconstituted as an object marking; here, we catch a glimpse of an inverse dynamic where the proper name of a thing starts to assume its own social biography, as if it might become a quasi-human celebrity.

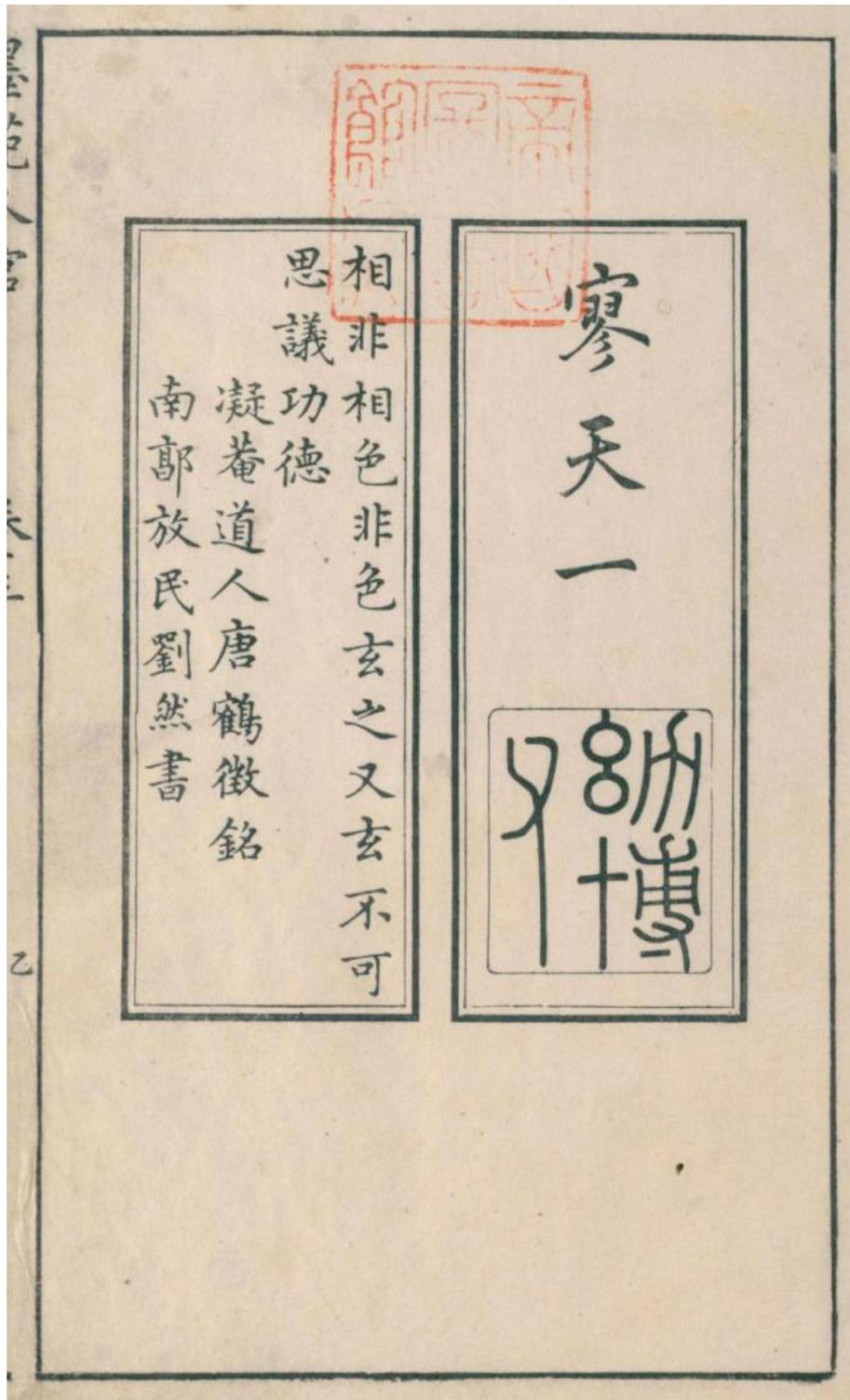


Figure 3.28: Cheng Junfang's "One with Clear Heaven Inscription" Ink-stick Design

Source: *Chengshi moyuan* (1610), 3:1.



Figure 3.29: Rubbing of Cheng Junfang's "One with Clear Heaven" Ink-stick

Source: Zhang Zigao, *Sijia cangmo tulu*, 4.



(L) Figure 3.30: Cheng Junfang's "One with Clear Heaven" Ink-stick
Source: Beijing Palace Museum.



**(R) Figure 3.31: Detail of "Cheng Junfang's Ink" marking
from Cheng Junfang's "One with Clear Heaven" Ink-stick**
Source: Beijing Palace Museum.

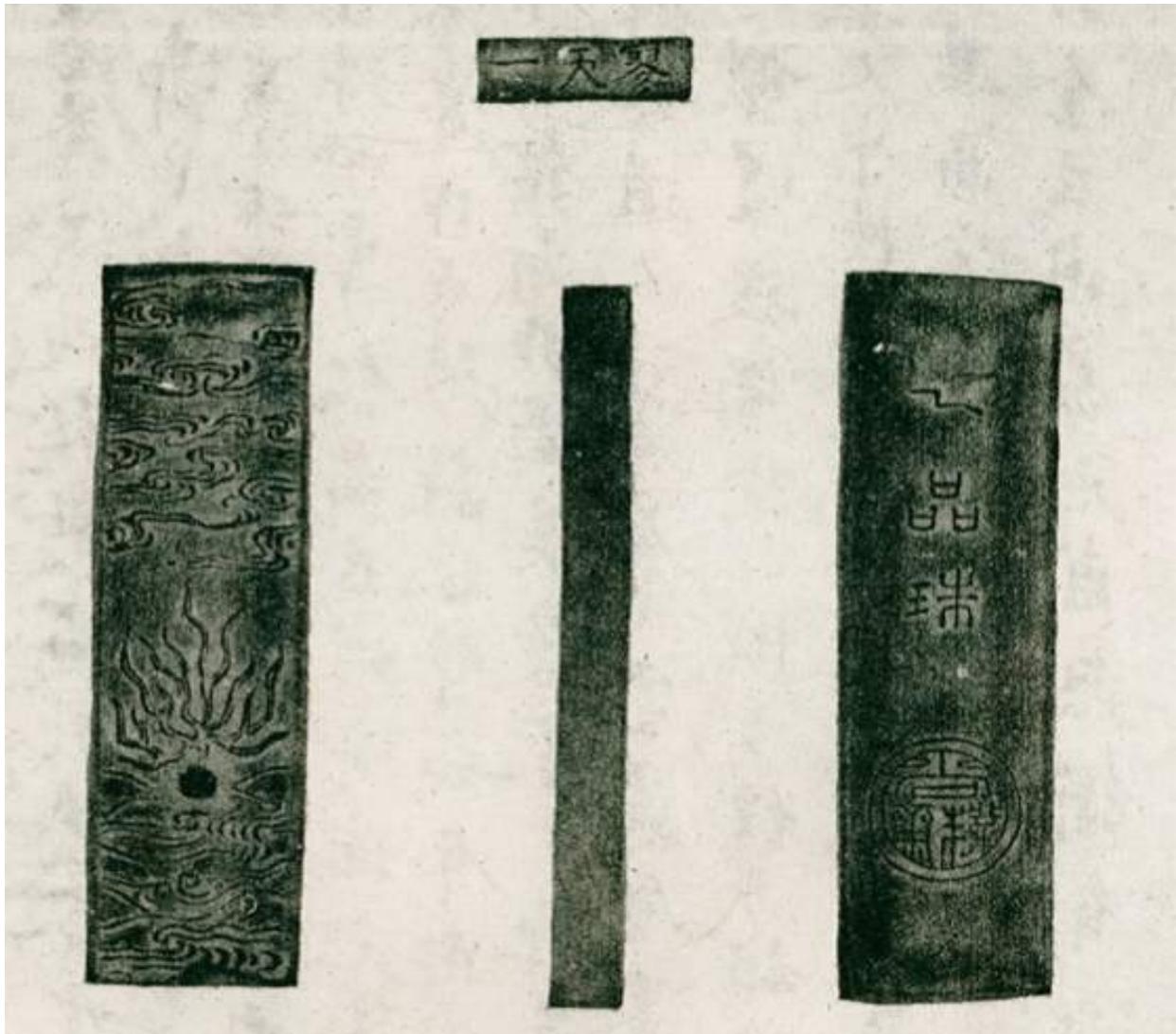


Figure 3.32: Rubbing of Jin Xuanfu's "One with Clear Heaven" Ink-stick
Source: Zhang Zigao, *Sijia cangmo tulu*, 75.



(L) Figure 3.33: Jin Xuanfu's "One with Clear Heaven" Ink-stick, recto
Source: Beijing Palace Museum.



(R) Figure 3.34: Jin Xuanfu's "One with Clear Heaven" Ink-stick, verso
Source: Beijing Palace Museum.



Figure 3.35: Pan Jiaké's "One with Clear Heaven" Ink-cake
Source: Beijing Palace Museum.

Coda

Writing in the mid-seventeenth century, Ma Sanheng in his "Treatise on Ink" (c.1646) records the names of over one hundred and twenty inkmakers from the Ming and lists the brand names of their leading ink products. The list includes the names of prominent scholars such as Tu Long 屠隆 (1543–1605) (an eminent scholar and erstwhile member of Wang's White Elm Society), Ding Yunpeng and Wu Tingyu (the illustrators behind the visual design of Fang Yulu's catalogue), and Wang Daokun's cousin, the inkstone dealer we met in chapter two, Wang Daohui. While Ma

labels these men as “inkmakers” (*zhimo zhujia* 制墨諸家), “inkmaking,” here, probably refers not simply to manufacturing ink, but to its commission and sponsorship.¹⁰⁷ It should be noted that there are inconsistencies throughout Ma’s list, a reflection of the disordered state of the market he encountered almost seventy years after the peak of Fang Yulu and Cheng Junfang’s rivalry.¹⁰⁸ And yet, regardless of whether the many titles listed by Ma really demarcate qualitative differences between ink products (which seems, given the sheer number, unlikely), they clearly demonstrate how extensive the practice of branding ink had become by the end of the Ming. It did not matter if Tu Long or Wu Tingyu – Zuogan, the proprietor of the inscribed endblown flute we encountered in chapter one – actually made a distinctive type of ink, their personal names had come to be linked with recognizable brands: “First Grade of Black Frost” (*Yipin xuan shuang* 一品玄霜) (Tu Long) or “Deep Spring of Abstruse Darkness” (*Xuan yuan* 玄淵) (Wu Tingyu).¹⁰⁹ While Tu Long and Wu Tingyu had earned renown in other fields, many of the figures on the list are unfamiliar and impossible now to identify: the chart reflects a situation where the “personal” names of “scholars” and “craftsmen” had become altogether indistinguishable. In many cases, it is far from clear which of the two names – the name of the “inkmaker” or the name of his brand – would have been more recognizable to a mid-seventeenth century consumer. Some of the brands seem to have always already lacked an author: “Marrow of the Black Unicorn” (*Qinglin sui* 青麟髓) was attributed by Ma to Fang Yulu, yet Li Weizhen claimed the name had been devised by Wang Daokun’s cousin, Wang Daohui.¹¹⁰ The Palace

¹⁰⁷ Wang Yi 王毅, ““Wenren zizhi mo” chengwei de juxianxing ji qi duice” 文人自制墨稱謂的局限性及其對策, *Huizhou Shehui kexue* 徽州社會科學 8 (2012).

¹⁰⁸ Ma, for instance, lists an inkmaker named Da’ao separately from Yulu, yet as we have seen this was Fang’s earlier name; his list of Yulu’s grades of ink, meanwhile, does not match the list of titles presented within Fang’s catalogue.

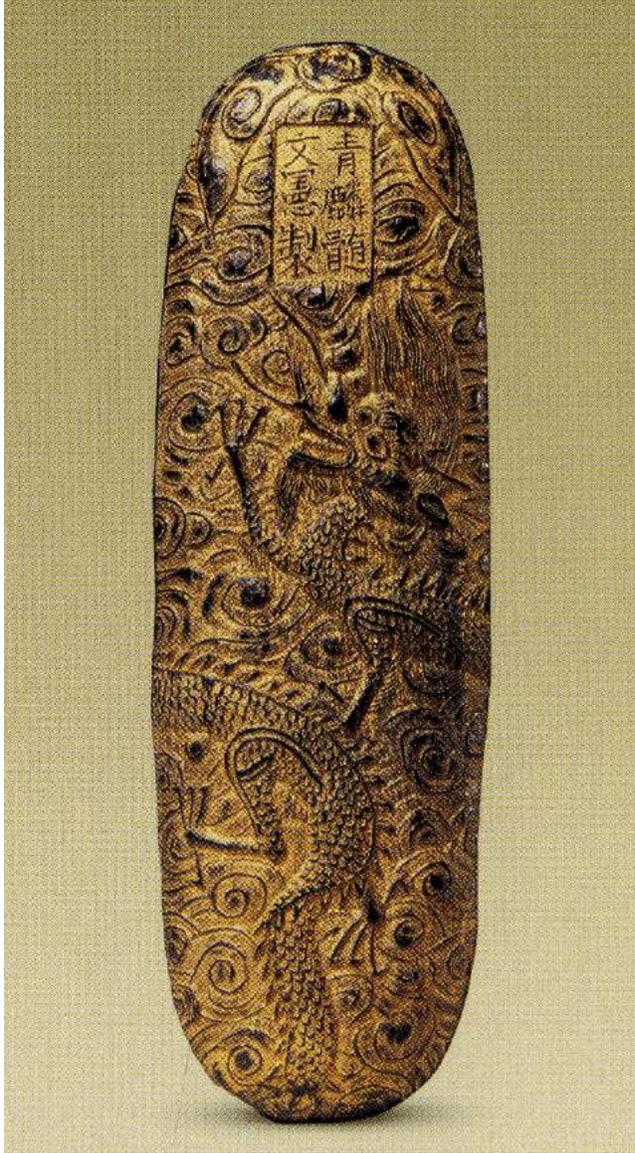
¹⁰⁹ Xu, “Mingmo bulu” 明墨補錄 *Sheshi xiantan*, 688.

¹¹⁰ Li, “Fang Waishi muzhi ming,” 87.

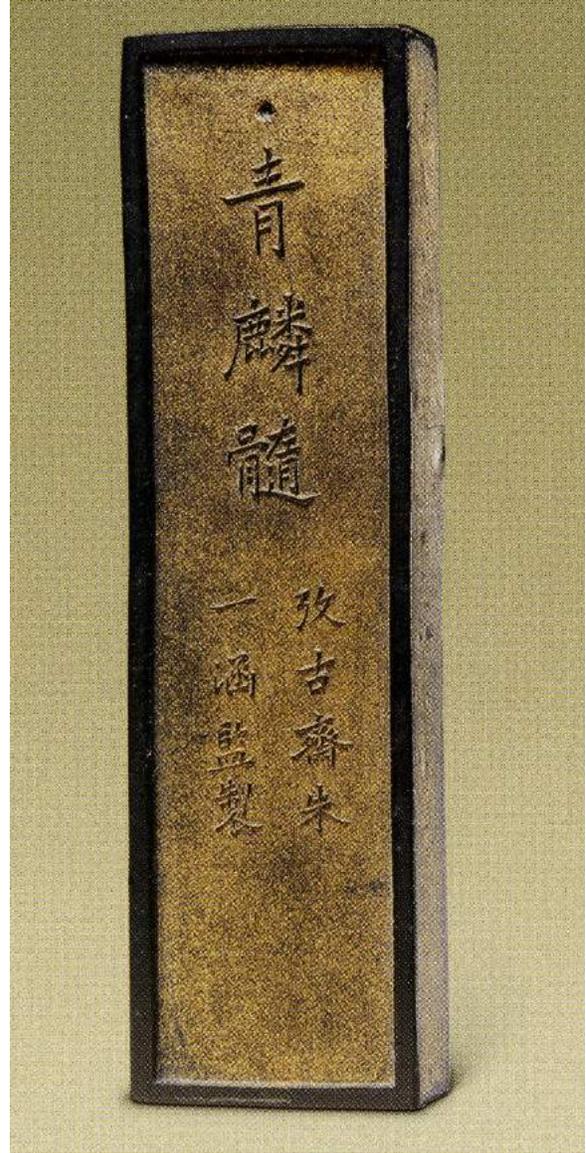
Museum holds two luxurious “gold” ink-cakes that bear the “Marrow” mark: one attributed to a now unknown Wanli inkmaker named Wang Wenxian 汪文憲 (Figure 3.36); the other attributed to a Tianqi era inkmaker named Zhu Yihan 朱一涵 (Figure 3.37). In both instances, the “Marrow” mark appears to have been the primary source of value for collectors, rather than the names of the craftsmen: the brand, in these cases, effectively authors its object.

Ma’s list attests to an ongoing struggle for producers to devise new names for their ink through kennings and circumlocutions, trying for the most part to simply fit the character *xuan* into more refined combinations. One is left wondering whether the challenge for these individuals was to manufacture a new type of ink or simply to coin a name that was discrete, yet reminiscent of earlier more prestigious brands: “Ultimate Black” (*Taixuan* 太玄), “Black Spirit” (*Xuanshen* 玄神), “Black Clouds” (*Xuanyun* 玄雲), “Black Frost” (*Xuanshuang* 玄霜), “Ultimate Black Mist” (*Taixuan yan* 太玄烟).¹¹¹ In Ma’s list, hierarchical distinctions are subsumed by a wave of referentially impoverished labels: designations that start to look and sound much the same.

¹¹¹ Ibid.



(L) Figure 3.36: Wang Wenxian's "Black Unicorn Marrow" Ink-stick
Source: Beijing Palace Museum.



(R) Figure 3.37: Zhu Yihan's "Black Unicorn Marrow" Ink-stick
Source: Beijing Palace Museum.

CHAPTER FOUR

PICTURING A MING RHINOCEROS HORN CUP

In 1577 the Wanli court became embroiled in a far-reaching political controversy due to the decision of the Grand Secretary, Zhang Juzheng 張居正 (1525–1582), to refrain from observing mourning rites for his deceased father. An already divisive figure due to contentious reformist policies, Zhang invoked *duoqing* 奪情, “cutting short the emotions,” a principle conventionally reserved for military personnel in times of great national emergency, to remain in the capital. In doing so, he was seen to have renounced the demands of Confucian ritual in order to maintain his tight grip on power.¹ After sending a eunuch to stand in as chief mourner for his father, Zhang continued to brazenly flout ritual proscriptions by attending the wedding of the emperor in 1578, a supposedly auspicious event from which anyone in filial grief should have been banned. According to the *History of the Ming* (*Ming shi* 明史), Zhang Juzheng’s actions met with both public and cosmic disapproval: protestors posted placards in the streets, while a comet rose in the southeast and slowly made its way across the night sky.² The events of the so-called *duoqing* controversy created factions that would continue to fight until the collapse of the Ming in 1644.

The Wanli Emperor’s acceptance of Zhang’s *duoqing* plea prompted vociferous protests at court from nine prominent officials who submitted a string of memorials in an attempt to impeach the controversial Grand Secretary. The protestors were subjected to brutal punishments and reports of the severity of Zhang Juzheng’s response quickly spread throughout the empire,

¹ For more on the significance of the Zhang Juzheng case and the politics of *duoqing* more generally, see Norman Kutcher, *Mourning in Late Imperial China: Filial Piety and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 25–6; 61–72.

² Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉 et al., *Ming shi* 明史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 5647.

eliciting condemnation from renowned scholars. Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550–1616), the acclaimed playwright, composed the following verse:

The master relied on a strange favor,
With an unyielding aura, he protected his powers.
For those who relied on the *yin*, a rainbow rose,
Suspicious of *yang*, hate led to a clash of dragons.³
The spirits of the brave “three supporters,” crushed,⁴
An air of death felt by worthies from all the states.
To the East of Wu, the phoenix is not yet dead,
To the West of Jiang, the *lin* unicorn has been sighted.

師卿依奇眷，剛氣護衡鉉。
依陰候虹起，疑陽忌龍戰。
銷心三輔豪，殞氣諸州彥。
東吳未鸞靡，西江已麟見。⁵

Tang’s poem registers concern with Zhang Juzheng’s “strange favor” and rigidity (剛氣) in holding to power: the rise of the rainbow, in this instance, serving as an inauspicious omen and euphemism for an immoral minister. He eulogizes the survival of the memorialists in his references to the portentous symbols of the phoenix and the *lin* unicorn: “East of Wu” refers to Wu Zhongxing 吳中行 (1540 ca.–1598, *jinshi* 1571) and Zhao Yongxian 趙用賢 (1535–1596, *jinshi* 1571) from the Hanlin Academy 翰林院, both cashiered and given sixty blows of the

³ A rainbow could be considered an inauspicious omen. The *Shi ming* 釋名 (Interpretation of Names) states: “A rainbow symbolizes attacking – pure *yang* attacks pure *yin* air, and that is the reason why [there is a rainbow]” (虹，攻也，純陽攻陰氣故也。). A “*yin* rainbow” (*yinhong* 陰虹) was also a euphemism for a crafty and fawning minister. The second part of the couplet is an allusion to the *Yijing*, intended to invoke conflict and blood: “(The subject of) the *yin* (or divided line) thinking himself equal to the (subject of the) *yang*, or undivided line, there is sure to be “a contest.” As if indignant at there being no acknowledgment of the (superiority of the subject of the) *yang* line, (the text) uses the term “dragons.” But still the (subject of neither line) can leave his class, and hence we have “the blood” mentioned.” (陰疑於陽必「戰」，為其嫌於無陽也，故稱「龍」焉。猶未離其類也，故稱「血」焉。).

⁴ The “three supporters” (*sanfu* 三輔) was a Han dynasty designation for the “governor of the capital” (*jingzhao yin* 京兆尹) and the metropolitan superintendents of the left and the right (*zuo pingyi* 左馮翊; *you fufeng* 右扶風).

⁵ Xu Shuofang 徐朔方 ed., *Tang Xianzu shiwen ji* 湯顯祖詩文集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), 179.

bamboo;⁶ “West of Jiang” refers to Zou Yuanbiao 鄒元標 (1551–1624), given the maximum penalty of a hundred blows of the heavy bamboo before being sent to serve as a soldier among aborigines in Guizhou.⁷ If Tang Xianzu evokes a sense of the suffering the protestors were made to endure with the “air of death,” other popular records from the period offered more gratuitous details: it was reported that Wu Zhongxing stopped breathing at one point during the beating (中行氣息已絕), as “they sliced off several lumps of flesh, as much as a fistful and an inch deep, so that his limbs were hollowed out” (剗去腐肉數十臠，大者盈掌，深至寸，一肢遂空); there were also claims that Zhao Yongxian, in the course of his punishment, lost a fistful of lacerated flesh (潰落如掌) from his buttocks.⁸

As the two men from the “East of Wu” – Wu Zhongxing and Zhao Yongxian – left the capital, they were presented with small cups bearing dedicatory inscriptions. The two epigrams were composed by a prominent Huizhou scholar and junior censor, Xu Guo 許國 (1527–1596), whose words of praise turn the respective objects – a jade cup for Wu and a rhinoceros horn cup for Zhao – into material allegories for the virtues of an “upright official.”⁹ While this is not an unconventional strategy in literary inscriptions, Xu’s words assume a new illocutionary force when framed by the events of Wu and Zhao’s punishment on December 1st 1577. The inscription

⁶ Among the other officials, Ai Mu 艾穆 (*juven* 1558) and Shen Sixiao 沈思孝 (1542–1611, *jinsi* 1568) from the Ministry of Justice 刑部 were banished after receiving eighty blows.

⁷ As an early example of how these acts of protest were sanctified by the families and supporters of those involved, a story started to circulate that during the beating, a “palm-sized heap of pulverized flesh” was carved from Zou’s body and that his wife dutifully preserved it as an example to his descendants. See Liu Jianming 劉建明, *Zhang Juzheng bingzheng yu Wan Ming wenxue zouxiang* 張居正秉政與晚明文學走向 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2013), 22–34.

⁸ Zhang, *Ming shi*, 6000.

⁹ Xu Guo and Wang Daokun were close associates from the same prefecture. Wang even composed a biography of Xu Guo’s father. Wang was out of office by the time of the *duoqing* conspiracy (ironically attending to his parents), yet he clearly sided with Xu Guo over Zhang Juzheng (who was Wang’s classmate). See Xu, *Sheshi xiantan*, 171–172.

on the jade cup for Wu Zhongxing adapts long-standing analogies between the material and the qualities of a *junzi* 君子:

Inscription on a Jade Cup

Refined and elegant: is this what made Bian shed tears? Bright splendor: is this what made Lin so angry? Pursued, chiseled, ever a vessel for use.

玉杯銘

斑斑者，何卞生淚。英英者，何藺生氣。追之琢之，永成器。¹⁰

“Refined and elegant” (斑斑者) and “bright splendor” (英英者) describe, at once, the surface of the cup and the resplendence of Wu’s reputation; references to the legend of the “Jade Disc of He” (Heshi bi 和氏璧) suggest how jade can both elicit and emblemize moral rectitude; Xu’s final line invokes a metaphor from the *Record of Rites* of a “vessel carved from jade” (玉不琢，不成器) for the man who “masters the Way” (人不學，不知道).

Xu’s inscription for the rhinoceros horn cup opens with a reference to the single horn of a “guardian” ram (*shenyang* 神羊) and its deep “black” grain conjuring the form of a mythical animal, the *xiezhi* 獬豸, that was supposedly able to identify and charge at corrupt courtiers:

Inscription on a Rhinoceros Horn Cup

The single patterned horn of a mystic ram:¹¹ a deep black grain. No regret for one’s heart being “carved out,” instead, “cracking one’s skull.”¹² With yellow wine sparkling inside, this will bring you long life!

犀杯銘

¹⁰ Xu Guo 許國, *Xu Wenmu gong quanji* 許文穆公全集 (Taipei National Library: 1625 edition), 10: 23. The inscriptions were removed from the Wanli edition, see reprint in SKJHSCK, jibu, vol. 40.

¹¹ The description of a “single horned ram” became synonymous with the *Xiezhi* 獬豸, a mythical one-horned ram that was able to detect and attack evil or immoral figures.

¹² An allusion to Bi Gan, a prominent historical figure of the Shang dynasty. Bi was the son of King Wen Ding and an uncle of the last king of the Shang, Di Xin. Di Xin, famed for his corruption, was angered by Bi Gan’s advice to rectify his behavior and so ordered his execution through the extraction of the heart (比干剖心). Bi Gan became a model loyal minister.

文羊一角，其理沈黝。不惜剖心，寧辭碎首。黃流在中，為君子壽。¹³

Implicit allusions to the archaic *xiezhi* point back to the protocols and insignia of the court: the animal was the identifying “badge of rank” – an embroidered chest-piece – for members of the censorial-supervising branch of the government. Xu then moves from celebrating Zhao’s remonstrance, to a call for the cup to be filled with wine when the rhinoceros horn assumes its putative “poison-detecting” powers. The conventional wishes for long life that conclude the inscription assume greater symbolic weight, here, as the cup is transformed into a talisman for Zhao’s safety in exile. The apotropaic power of the horn becomes a politically charged metaphor for Zhao Yongxian’s resistance to Zhang Juzheng’s corruption. Inscription was tied to admonishment and Xu Guo seems concerned, here, with reaffirming the potential of the form for moral exhortation. By presenting the cup as a disinterested gift and performing a toast that extols the actions of a political protestor, Xu Guo calls for a renewed seriousness of purpose in the ethical act of making a mark on an object, seeking to return to the cautious words (*shenyan*) and pointed monitions of the classical epigram. Read in light of the developments examined in earlier chapters, the case invites reflection on whether, by the late sixteenth century, it was still possible for an individual inscription to elicit and sustain meaningful relations through an object. We might even read Xu Guo’s inscription not just as a protest against political corruption at court, but as a protest in defense of a particular mode of object relation, as a strategy of “redemptive reification.”¹⁴ If Wang Daokun had eventually been reduced to a faulty inkcake, Xu Guo hoped for Zhao Yongxian to be redeemed as if he embodied the potency of a guardian ram.

¹³ Xu Guo, *Xu Wenmu gong*, 10: 23.

¹⁴ Reification within the Marxist tradition describes how humans are reduced to things (as the character of things as things withdraws). Brown proposes “redemptive reification” to describe a re-thingification that “resuscitates the character of things as things”... interrupting “reification-as-usual.” Brown, *Other Things*, 374. I use it to name a purposeful effort to use an inscription to commemorate and redeem a human as a thing.

Zhang Juzheng died suddenly in 1582 at the age of fifty-seven and many of those who had protested during the *duoqing* controversy returned to court to ensure that he and his family were posthumously disgraced.¹⁵ Xu Guo subsequently earned the office of junior grand-secretary and publicly set himself apart from the legacy of the previous administration by seeking to defer his promotion in order to honor the memory of his parents and wife.¹⁶ Wu Zhongxing's jade cup faded from view during the late Ming, yet Zhao Yongxian's rhinoceros horn would resurface in the midst of the dynastic transition and assume new levels of fame during the course of the Qing: the cup passed from the Zhao household to Yongxian's follower, Huang Duanbo 黃端伯 (1585–1645), a Buddhist layman who was executed for defiantly confronting the Manchu Prince Dodo (1614–1649) during the fall of Nanjing. Huang left the cup to his follower, Chen Qianfu 陳潛夫 (*juren*, 1636), a resistance fighter from Zhejiang who committed suicide after being caught with a militia behind Qing lines.

With the deaths of both Huang and Chen during the Manchu conquest and their posthumous enshrinement as martyrs, the journey of the cup became bound to a longer narrative of Ming loyalist resistance, extending from the protests against corruption under Wanli to the trauma of the 1640s. No longer the possession of a single man, a box for the cup was marked with the phrase, “With the Breath from the Mouths of Three Loyal Officers” (*Sanzhong kouze* 三忠口澤), an allusion to the *Record of Rites* – “When his mother died, he could not bear to drink from the cups and bowls that she had used – the breath of her mouth seemed still to be on them”¹⁷ – and an assertion that the fame of the vessel now stemmed from its passage between, and shared use by a community of defiant memorialists over seven decades. Xu Guo's

¹⁵ Zou Yuanbiao who had been savagely beaten in 1577 returned in early 1583 and began to memorialize against the Wanli Emperor's personal conduct.

¹⁶ *Ming Shenzong shilu* 明神宗實錄 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan, 1966), 3296–98.

¹⁷ 母歿而杯圈不能飲焉，口澤之氣存焉爾。

inscription offered praise for the spirit of a worthy official – a personification of the *xiezh* – that later figures could try to claim for themselves as they recited the epigram, while drinking from, and passing the cup to others. In doing so, later scholars sought for the etched words on the surface of the cup to retain the affective power congealed in these faint traces of “breath from the mouth.”

Overview

This chapter reconstructs the biography of the rhinoceros horn cup Xu Guo offered to Zhao Yongxian in order to reflect on the changing significance attributed to a vessel inscription in late imperial China. By following the unlikely trajectory of the cup, I move from the sixteenth century into the second half of the eighteenth century, a period during which antiquarian research on epigraphy (or the “study of metal and stone” *jinshi xue* 金石學) reemerged as a dominant intellectual paradigm. A widely discussed epistemological shift towards “evidential scholarship” fostered a new attentiveness toward collating and annotating ancient scripts engraved on bronze vessels and stone stelae. My chapter shows how the material techniques of the antiquarian – from the production of rubbings to new engravings of older inscriptions on planar wooden boards and stone blocks – might be adapted to shape the reception of objects from the more recent past. In doing so, we can reassess the techniques of the antiquarian not as secondary responses to encounters with ancient artifacts, but as media that produced conceptions of the antique – in this case transforming a small rhinoceros horn cup from the sixteenth century into a vessel of moral prestige worthy of being installed in a family temple. These rubbings were not intended to ensure the “indexical signification of antiquity,” but to manipulate the meanings of a novel artifact by

retroactively placing it within the field of “metal and stone.”¹⁸ In this process, we can observe a mode of translational violence as the associations of the horn were erased or displaced through contact with more dominant media such as ink-squeeze rubbings and new stone engravings. François Louis and Peter Miller have written of a need to decouple definitions of *jinshi xue* from the categories of historiography, philology, and empirical exploration, which tend to result in a predictable picture of scholars constructing and maintaining Confucian orthodoxy.¹⁹ In this chapter, I read Qing antiquarian practice not as a concern with the study of antiquity as such, but as a project centered around stabilizing and sanctioning the significance of a recent inscription. Qing antiquarians appear, in this account, preoccupied with the recent political past, trying to sure up their self-proclaimed roles as custodians of ancient script and inheritors of an intellectual lineage reaching back to antiquity through their obsessive-compulsive efforts to repeat and copy the twenty-four characters of an epigram from a small sixteenth century trinket. This seemingly peripheral case may shed light on the anachronistic character of Qing antiquarianism in general: that the edifice of “returning to antiquity” tried to contain, yet was haunted by the novelty, hybridity, and incoherence embodied in the superfluous form of a late Ming rhinoceros horn cup.

I read the biography of Xu Guo’s rhinoceros horn cup not as another tale of how an inscription might be remediated in different material formats, but as suggestive of a historical shift in emphasis towards the antiquarian craft of reproducing engraved words: as rubbings, in mounted albums, and on stone blocks. By the High Qing, physical acts of copying and transmitting older markings (regardless of how old they actually were) assumed a prestige in

¹⁸ Lillian Lan-Ying Tseng, “Between Printing and Rubbing: Chu Jun’s Illustrated Catalogues of Ancient Monuments in Eighteenth Century China,” in Wu Hung, *Reinventing the Past: Archaism and Antiquarianism in Chinese Art and Visual Culture* (Chicago, IL: Center for the Art of East Asia, Dept. of Art History, University of Chicago, 2010), 277.

¹⁹ Peter N Miller and François Louis, *Antiquarianism and Intellectual Life in Europe and China, 1500-1800* (The Bard Graduate Center Cultural Histories of the Material World. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 9.

scholarly circles that far outstripped the creative act of engraving one's own words onto a thing: inscription was surpassed by material practices of transcription and replication. Scholars were concerned with guarding the means of reproduction: rubbings delimited those aspects of material culture deemed worthy of intellectual investment, while fostering participatory communities of custodians, men whose roles in packaging handmade reproductions set them apart from passive readers of print or other everyday consumers of commodities. In the hands of a scholar from the mid-Qing, an inscription was primarily an object for replication in a rubbing, rather than a medium of political intervention that might yet change the course of history itself.

Part 1: Strange Antique

Before returning to the life of Xu Guo's vessel for Zhao Yongxian, the first section of this chapter reflects on the object-hood of the rhinoceros horn cup. What sort of "thing" was it and when did it become an acceptable token of elite male sociability? What made the material of the horn a surface deemed worthy of inscription? By addressing these questions, I identify a pronounced instability, encapsulated in late Ming cups carved from rhinoceros horn, concerning both what a vessel and an inscription should be and do. We see the emergence of a composite and disjunctive material-semiotic assemblage – captured in the awkward English translation of "rhinoceros horn cup" (simultaneously an animal, a raw material, and an artifact) – caught between competing claims to the exotic and the archaic, the organic and the cultural, a preternatural material with palpably erotic connotations and the wrought form of a carved artifact designed to broadcast social prestige. Such slippages forestalled and rerouted attempts to circumscribe the significance of the artifact through inscription. A larger aim of this section of the chapter, then, is to offer an account of the profusion of novel things in late Ming material

culture and to adumbrate the concomitant challenge this posed to the power of writing to name. This provides a stark backdrop against which we can better understand Xu Guo's inscriptive protest and the subsequent fate of his gift for Zhao in the Qing.

The Rhinoceros Horn Cup in Ming Material and Visual Culture

Both the rhinoceros and its horn (referred to with the single character *xi* 犀) were represented in Chinese sources dating from the Han as items of imported tribute. By the sixteenth century, the animal was treated as an exotic beast, its image depicted in illustrated catalogues of foreign territories such as the *Illustrated Gazette of Strange Outlying Lands* (*Yiyu tuzhi* 異域圖志) preserved in Cambridge University Library (Figure 4.1). This image is roughly contemporaneous with Albrecht Dürer's (1471–1528) famed woodcut of 1515, a print based on reports of an Indian rhinoceros that had arrived in Lisbon, and is suggestive of the ways the animal simultaneously animated the imaginations of artists at both ends of the Eurasian continent in the late Ming as an icon of alterity.²⁰

²⁰ Lai Yuzhi 賴毓芝, "Cong Dule dao Qing gong: yi xiniu wei zhongxin de quanqiu shi guan cha" 從杜勒到清宮：以犀牛為中心的全球史觀察, *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 故宮文物月刊 344 (2011) 11: 68–81.

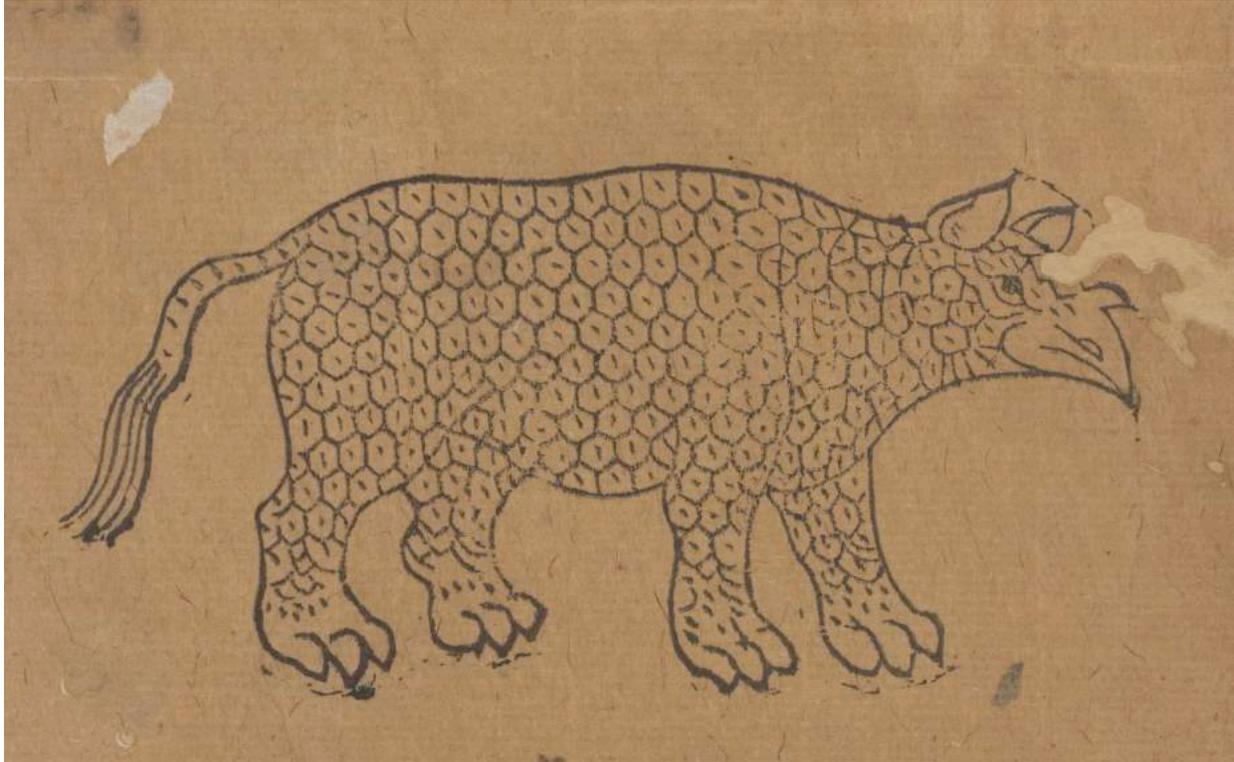


Figure 4.1: Illustration of Rhinoceros

Source: *Illustrated Gazette of Strange Outlying Lands* (Ming Edition), 1: 193.

There are sporadic references to luxury artifacts wrought from the material (*ruyi* scepters, hairpins, combs, belt plaques, small boxes) in collections from the Tang and the Song, yet it was only in the sixteenth century following the expansion of maritime trade routes from Fujian and Guangdong to Southeast Asia and India that we start to find reliable records of Chinese craftsmen working with the horn.²¹ Virtually all of the extant rhinoceros horn wine cups and bowls in museum collections are dated, at the very earliest, to the mid-sixteenth century, and it

²¹ On the history of the horn as an object of tribute, see Edward H. Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand: A Study of T'ang Exotics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 83. For an introduction to the sources on craftsmen from the late Ming and early Qing, see Ji Ruoxin 嵇若昕, *Jiangxin yu xiangong: Ming Qing diaoke zhan xiangya xijiao pian* 匠心與仙工：明清雕刻展 象牙犀角篇 (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 2009), 100–103. These trade routes become even more important following the lifting of the customs blockade in 1567. For an overview of the relations between the development of maritime trade in the sixteenth century and ivory and rhinoceros horn carving, see Cai Meifen 蔡玫芬, “Gangbu de gongyi: guanyu Ming mo Qing chu Zhangzhou gongyi pin er san shi” 港埠的工藝：關於明末清初漳州工藝品二三事 in *Zhongguo Haiyang fazhan shi lunwen ji* 中國海洋發展史論文集 ed. Liu Xufeng 劉序楓 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan renwen shehui ke xue yangjiu zhongxin zhuan shu 中央研究院人文社會科學研究中心專書) 54 (2008): 29–87.

was during this period that the cup appears to have become the predominant class of object rendered in the material.²²

During the late Ming and early Qing, the horn also became increasingly visible in literary and visual culture as a signifier of sensual indulgence: the landmark sixteenth century novel, *Jin Ping Mei Cihua* 金瓶梅詞話, with its taxonomic survey of Ming luxury objects, contains a number of episodes involving rhinoceros horn wine cups and through the repeated use of the poetic trope of the “numinous rhinoceros horn” (*lingxi* 靈犀) as a euphemism for Ximen Qing’s 西門慶 manhood, begins to divulge something of the powerful erotic charge that subtended the male imagination of the horn’s sensuous surface and shape.²³ In an illustration by Gu Jianlong 顧見龍 (1606–1687) of an episode in the Verdant Spring Bordello depicting Ximen Qing’s attempt to “deflower” (*shulong* 梳籠) the courtesan Li Guijie 李桂姐, we find a bare-chested man in the center of the composition, presented in full-frontal view, holding a rhinoceros horn cup in an outstretched arm for a refill as he gestures in conversation with his languorous neighbor (Figure 4.2). This character’s rakish pose exemplifies the theme of male bonding through wine and anticipated erotic pleasure that sutures the scene, while his offer of the cup to the servant frames Ximen Qing and Li Guijie fondling one another (Figure 4.3). The man’s draping mahogany robes appear to loosely complement the tones of this patterned horn, while his exposed flesh

²² The only pre-Ming rhinoceros horn carvings with verifiable dates are those preserved in the Shosoin repository in Japan, datable to the 8th century.

²³ In Chapter 31 of the *Jin Ping Mei cihua* 金瓶梅詞話, Ximeng Qing 西門慶 brags of a rhinoceros horn girdle he acquired from an imperial commissioner for one hundred *taels* of silver by claiming that: “at night it will illuminate an area of a thousand *li* and the flame will not be extinguished.” The related image of the “numinous rhinoceros horn” (*lingxi* 靈犀), referring to a type of horn with a white strand that ran from its root to tip, also appears several times in lyrics throughout *Jing Ping Mei* as a euphemism for Ximen Qing’s phallus (“the coverlet disturbed by crimson waves, Until the transfusing touch of the “numinous rhinoceros horn” penetrates her creamy breast”; “the talented gentleman is moved to remark to his partner, “I never knew the numinous rhinoceros horn could feel so good”).

hints at the associations of the material with an enhancement of virility and the carnal encounters that proceed from these bouts of drinking.²⁴

²⁴ The horn cup – mediating a fantasy of elite masculinity – evidently invites a gendered analysis: Sophie Volpp, drawing from the work of Eve Sedgwick, has written of what she terms a “homosocial homoerotics,” whereby shared articulations of desire for an object (in Volpp’s case a “boy actor”) facilitate the expression of longing among elite men. As in Gu Jianlong’s painting, the horn cup – drawing its erotic charge from its symbolic evocation of both male and female genitalia – instantiates sociality through a shared male expression of libidinous desire, while opening up a channel for the expression of desire between men themselves. A symptomatic reading might infer the presence of a similar dynamic behind the cathexis of Xu Guo’s horn cup by an expanding group of male literati from the sixteenth century onwards.



Figure 4.2: Gu Jianlong, *Ximen Qing Decides to Deflower Li Guijie*, painted album leaf
Source: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.



Figure 4.3: Detail from Gu Jianlong, *Ximen Qing Decides to Deflower Li Guijie*, painted album leaf
Source: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.



Figure 4.4: Rhinoceros Horn Cup with Wang Daokun's "Inscription on a Rhinoceros Horn Mallow Flower Cup"
Source: Private Collection.

Mixing Media: On a Pair of Flower Cups

The earliest records of inscriptions on rhinoceros horn cups also start to appear during the mid-sixteenth century, shortly before Xu Guo presented his gift to Zhao Yongxian in 1577. Two epigrams composed by Xu's close associate and a fellow Huizhou official, Wang Daokun, afford insight into the competing attributes of these objects in the late Ming cultural imaginary: the first, for a rhinoceros horn wine cup fashioned as a lotus leaf (*hey* 荷葉), and the second, for a vessel fashioned as a mallow (*kui* 葵) (or, perhaps, a common hibiscus):

An Inscription on a Lotus Leaf Rhinoceros Horn Cup

Ladle out sweet dew and pour it into this green lotus.
For your longevity: blessings for ten thousand years!

荷葉犀杯銘

挹甘露，注青蓮；為君壽。壽萬年。²⁵

An Inscription on a Rhinoceros Horn Mallow Cup

I have a *si* horn beaker, for your splendid banquet.
My heart will always be faithful: you are like the radiant sun.

犀葵杯銘

我有兕觥，薦君瑤席；我心靡他，君如皎日。²⁶

Wang's epigrams encode short toasts: the handler is invited to inhabit the "I" of the inscription and through lending their voice to the words of the vessel, wish a guest long life. On a surviving cup of questionable provenance bearing Wang Daokun's "Mallow Flower" epigram, the characters are incised on the lips of the vessel, evoking a symbolic relationship between the

²⁵ Wang, "Heye xibei ming" 荷葉犀杯銘, *Taihan ji*, 78: 1615.

²⁶ Wang, "Xi kui bei ming" 犀葵杯銘, *Taihan ji*, 78: 1615.

inscription and ingestion (Figure 4.4).²⁷ It was widely assumed that the material of the horn could “expel poison” (*jiedu* 解毒) and so Wang’s stock pronouncements of “auspicious blessings” (*shou* 壽), like the final wishes in Xu Guo’s epigram, call forth a sense of the sustenance afforded through oral contact with the surface of the cup.

Both of Wang’s epigrams playfully appropriate the guises of other objects to dress up the rhinoceros horn. As Cai Meifen and Derek Gillman have demonstrated, Ming rhinoceros horn cups, particularly those adorned with floral motifs, can be traced to the prefecture of Zhangzhou 漳州 in Fujian 福建.²⁸ Located on the Jiulong River 九龍江 estuary, customs-controlled Haicheng 海澄 was a major international trading center with the Spanish Philippines and was one of the chief ports through which foreign goods and exotica like Sumatran, Javan, and African rhinoceros horns passed into Ming China.²⁹ According to Gillman, cups fashioned from this imported material were most likely manufactured in workshops in the Haicheng area where they were produced alongside, and appear to have influenced the design of Dehua 德化 white porcelain ware or *Blanc de Chine*.³⁰ The labels for the two vessels inscribed by Wang Daokun

²⁷ This cup was presented and discussed on a Canadian website for contemporary collectors in an entry dated 02/01/2013: [<http://old.sinoquebec.com/showthread.php?t=705471&page=5>] [accessed September 2015]. Many horn cups, like this one, remain in private collections around the world making it difficult to evaluate the authenticity of the inscriptions and attributions. The text of the inscription on this cup is given: 我有兕觥，薦君瑤席；我心靡他，君如皎日。署名道昆。The cup also bears the mark Kang Hou 亢侯。It is unclear whom this mark refers to: Kang Hou was the *hao* of Chen Hongshou’s brother, Cheng Hongxu 陳洪緒 (1593–1642), yet I have been unable to find any further evidence for this association. The collectors assume the authenticity of the Wang Daokun inscription, yet given the paucity of documentation surrounding the acquisition of the cup or its history it is impossible to verify the provenance of the vessel.

²⁸ Cai Meifen 蔡玫芬, “Xi huajie zuo bei: jijian shiqi shiji de lianzuo huabei” 犀花解作杯 – 幾件十七世紀的連座花杯, *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 故宮文物月刊 270 (September 2005), 76–85; Dennis Gillman, “A Source of Rhinoceros Horn Cups in the Late Ming Dynasty,” *Orientalism* 12 (1984): 10–17.

²⁹ As early as the Hongwu era 洪武 (1323–1373), a local magistrate, Wang Wei 王禕, listed a flower shaped rhinoceros horn cup (*xihua jie zuo bei* 犀花解作盃) alongside crystal stalactites, luxurious peals, and a violet jade-like ink-stone as wonders of the region in his praise poem, “Ten Odes to the Clear Zhang” (Qingzhang shiyong 清漳十詠).

³⁰ John Ayers, “Blanc De Chine: Some Reflections,” *Blanc De Chine, Porcelain from Dehua* ed. R. Kerr and J. Ayers (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 19–33.

point to this dynamic context of trans-medial adaptation and transfer between decorative art practices in sixteenth century Fujian.

As rhinoceros horns were shipped into the port complex of Haicheng, horn cups resembling extant Dehua porcelain vessels were traded overseas and start to appear in European collections from the seventeenth century onwards.³¹ One such vessel with a ring-stand base, carved in the form of a five-petal hibiscus flower (or mallow) and akin to the second rhinoceros cup inscribed by Wang Daokun, was as Soame Jenyns has shown, acquired by the Tradescants (John the Elder (~1638) and John the Younger (1608–1662)) and exhibited in their “Ark” in Lambeth, the earliest English cabinet of curiosities and the first public museum in the country (Figure 4.5).³² Included in the 1656 catalogue *Musaeum Tradescantianum* along with “unicorn and albedo horns,” this cup, together with the rest of the contents of the cabinet, eventually served as the foundation of the collection of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.³³ Highly prized by European collectors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, just as they were beginning to be praised by notable members of the Chinese scholar-elite, carved rhinoceros horn cups can be seen to exemplify the “multi-valence and categorical fluidity” of curiosity cabinets for the way they straddled and blurred distinctions between conceptions of rarity and wonder, *naturalia* and

³¹ Harry Garner, *Chinese Export Art in Schloss Ambras* (London: Oriental Ceramic Society, 1975).

³² There has been disagreement over the dating of the rhinoceros horn cup in the Tradescant collection. Soame Jenyns, after consulting the Ashmolean inventory of 1685, placed the cup in the second quarter of the seventeenth century, while Harry Garner dates it to the late sixteenth century through a comparison with a cup in the 1595 inventory of the Schloss Ambras. The cup in the Tradescant collection has been compared by several authors to a *blanc de chine* flower cup standing on a ringstand base with reticulated work now held in the *Groninger Museum voor Stad en Lande*.

³³ For more, see Arthur Macgregor eds., *Tradescant's Rarities: Essays on the Foundation of the Ashmolean Museum, 1683, with a Catalogue of the Surviving Early Collection* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 180–181.

artificialia – as both finely wrought products of human craft and obdurate fragments of dead animals.³⁴



**Figure 4.5: Seventeenth Century Rhinoceros Horn Cup
in the Form of a Five-Petaled Hibiscus Flower**
Source: Tradescant Collection of the Ashmolean Museum.

Neither of Wang Daokun’s two inscriptional poems, like Xu Guo’s epigram, openly refers to the horn of a rhinoceros. Instead, both artifacts are imagined through analogies to other types of objects. As Cai Meifen notes, lotus and hibiscus were popular themes for cups made from jade. Lu Dian 陸鈿 (1042–1102) wrote of contemporary vessels with “mouths” fashioned

³⁴ Martin Kemp, “‘Wrought by No Artist’s Hand’: The Natural, the Artificial, the Exotic, and the Scientific in Some Artifacts from the Renaissance,” *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America 1450-1650* ed. Claire Farago (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1995), 175–96.

to resemble both lotus and hibiscus blossoms suggesting precedence for pairing cups based on these two flowers.³⁵ In his inscription for the lotus cup, itself an established poetic prop, Wang focuses solely on the flower: the cup is a “green lotus” (*qinglian* 青蓮), a pun on “clean and uncorrupted” or “honest and upright” (*qinglian* 清廉), filled with “sweet dew” (*ganlu* 甘露).³⁶ Outwardly appealing both to the “purifying” powers of the cup and the “purity” of the character of the guest receiving the toast, Wang’s pun and play with disguise are as close as he would come to hinting at the covert pleasures elicited by the decorative surface of the horn.

In his epigram for the mallow cup, Wang Daokun similarly alludes to the guise of the flower: the address to a guest, here, draws from a well-known passage in a memorial presented to the emperor by Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232) in which he compares himself to the mallow and bean as plants that lean towards the sun even if the sun does not always returns its light to them: “That they always face toward it is because of their devotion” (若葵藿之傾葉，太陽雖不為之回光，然終向之者，誠也。).³⁷ Wang’s pledge of his own unswerving loyalty before his guest is also inflected – through a further allusion to the poem “Mouse Ear” (Juan’er 卷耳) from the *Book of Songs* – by a sense of libidinous longing:

... I will now take a beaker from that *si* horn, Hoping I may not always feel pained.

³⁵ Cai, “Xi huajie zuo bei,” 82–83.

³⁶ The symbolism of the lotus, in addition to its associations with purity and curative powers, is derived from various puns: *he* 荷 is homophonous with *he* 合 meaning “join, combine” and *he* 和, “peace”; *lian* 蓮 is homophonous with *lian* 連 meaning “to link or connect” and “successive” (desire for wealth, success). Su Shi famously begins a series of drinking poems dedicated to Tao Yuanming composed while in exile in Hainan by identifying his last remaining, “lotus flower cup of exquisite craftsmanship” (獨有一荷葉杯工制美妙), while Wang Shipeng 王十朋 (1112–1171) wrote of, “holding a lotus flower cup and drinking facing lotus flowers” (手持荷葉杯，共對蓮花樹).

³⁷ Cao Zhi 曹植, “Qitong qin qin biao” 求通親親表, in *Xinyi Cao Zijian ji* 新譯曹子建集, ed. Cao Haidong 曹海東 (Taipei: Shanmin shuju, 2003),

我姑酌彼兕觥、維以不永傷。³⁸

This poem, at times attributed to a female author, is conventionally understood to express the misery of the queen at her separation from a prince, with the famous first stanza foregrounding the conceit of sexual frustration, juxtaposing euphemisms for male and female genitalia:

“Picking, picking the curly ears, they will not fill my slanting basket” (采采卷耳，不盈頃筐。).

A toast with the so-called *sigong* 兕觥 provides the queen’s male partner temporary respite from his desire. Wang’s mode of address, then, wavers between an outwardly austere claim of integrity, in a manner that resonates with Xu Guo’s politically charged praise for Wu Zhongxing and Zhao Yongxian, and a comparatively intimate expression, one endowed through citation with latent erotic connotations, of a desire to overcome separation.

Defining the Sigong

Wang’s mallow inscription mimics the idiom and affect of poems like “Mouse Ear,” yet his invocation of the so-called *sigong* also gestures to accounts of larger banquet celebrations from the *Book of Songs*:

... And go to the hall of our prince,
There raise the beaker of *si* horn,
And wish him long life, - that he may live forever.

躋彼公堂、稱彼兕觥、萬壽無疆。³⁹

How long is that beaker of *si* horn!
Good are the spirits in it and soft.
While it passes round, they show no pride;
All blessings must come to them.

兕觥其觶、旨酒思柔。

³⁸ From “Lessons from the States” (Guofeng 國風): “Odes of Zhou and the South” (Zhou nan 周南): “Juan Er” (卷耳).

³⁹ “Lessons from the States”: “Odes of Bin” (Bin feng 豳風): “Qi Yue” (七月).

彼交匪敖、萬福來求。⁴⁰

What was the *sigong*? Commentators conventionally glossed this object as a drinking vessel made from the horn of a *si* – a mythic animal that was, in turn, commonly defined as an ancient ox (niu 牛) with a single horn (translated by some scholars as a *gaur*).⁴¹ The *gong* made from the horn of the *si* (or from wooden imitations) was categorized by the Han dynasty commentator Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) as a “punishment goblet” (*fajue* 罰爵) intended for use in archaic drinking games. Given these associations in commentaries to the *Book of Songs*, the *sigong* label served as an apt epithet for a rhinoceros horn cup, hinting at a vessel made from the horn of an enigmatic bovine animal (the character *xi* 犀 was also etymologically linked to the character for an ox 牛), while invoking the sanction and prestige of a classical genealogy. Late imperial scholars were also familiar with various archaic inscriptions preserved in post-Song dynasty epigraphic collections like Wang Qiu’s (fl. twelfth century) *Record of Collected Antiquities from Whistlehall* that link the name of the *si* to vessels such as a Shang dynasty *you* 卣 and a Zhou dynasty *dui* 敦 (Figures 4.6 and 4.7). An entry for the Shang *si you* even features a primitive pictographic mark that depicts the shape of the horned *si*, offering a suitable archaic analogy for a rhinoceros (Figure 4.6). By claiming an affiliation with the *si*, it was possible to locate an ancient precedent for engraving horn vessels in the earliest set of recorded (although still possibly spurious) inscriptional markings.

⁴⁰ From “Minor Odes” (Xiaoya 小雅): “Sang Hu” (桑扈).

⁴¹ Paleontological evidence suggests that the *si* referred to in pre-Qin texts was a now extinct wild buffalo, yet following Guo Pu’s 郭璞 influential commentaries to the *Shanhai jing* 山海經, the *si* was commonly identified as an ancient ox (niu 牛) with a single horn: “the *si* looks like an ox, has one horn, is of greenish color, and weighs around 1000 pounds.” See Jean Lefevre, “Rhinoceros and Wild Buffalo North of the Yellow River at the End of the Shang Dynasty,” *Monumenta Serica* 39 (1990-91): 131–57. In the early twentieth century, the identification of the *si* proved to be an issue of some concern for the leading figures in European Sinology and was later at the center of a heated debate between Lionel Giles, the son of Herbert Giles, and Berthold Laufer.

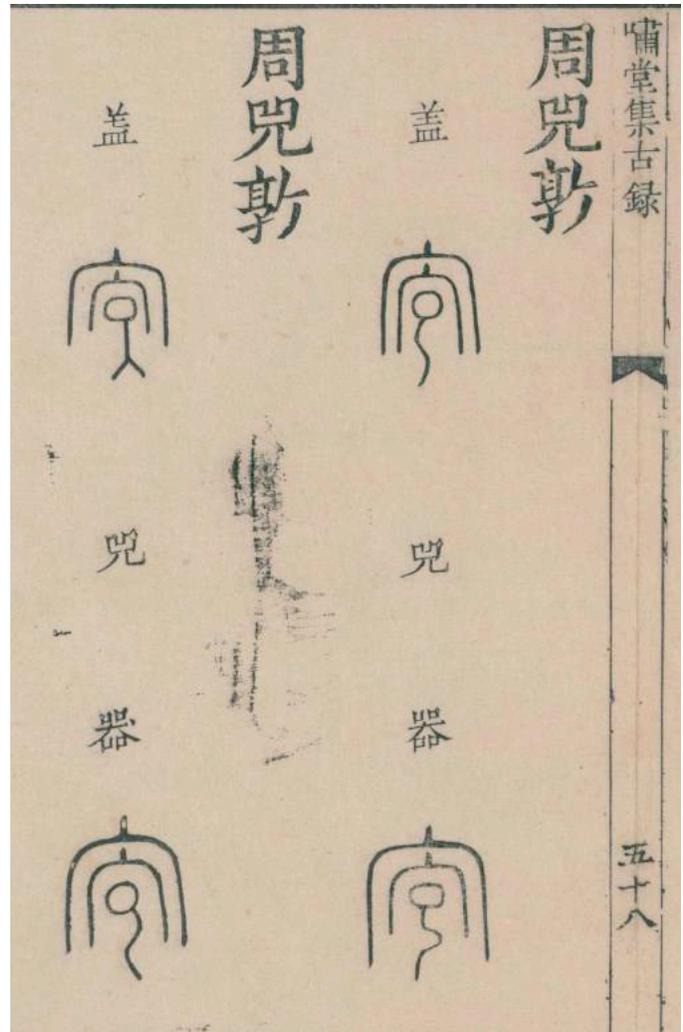
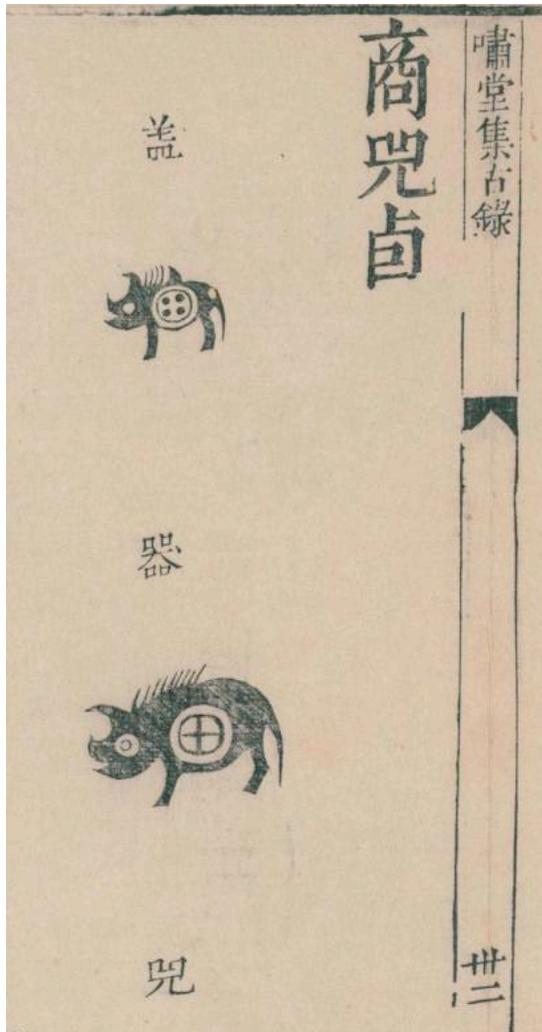


Figure 4.6: Shang *si you* inscription

Figure 4.7: Zhou *si dui* inscription

Source: Wang Qiu, *Xiaotang jigu lu* (Ming Reprint of Song Edition), 32a; 58a.

As Francois Louis has demonstrated, however, there was already a history of associating the *sigong* label with unconventional horn-shaped vessels. Nie Chongyi 聶崇義 (fl. mid-tenth century), the compiler of the *Illustrations to the Three Classics on Ritual* (*San li tu* 三禮圖), a text that did much to set the terms of the antiquarian discourse on ritual vessels in late imperial China, conflated the name of the *sigong* with an image of what appears to be a rhyton of Western

provenance (Figure 4.8).⁴² It is likely, as Louis suggests, that Nie was exposed to images of horn shaped drinking vessels with animal-head protomes from the Tang dynasty and that he mistook (unintentionally or intentionally it is unclear) what were actually luxury cups in a Hellenistic style that had been imported along the Silk Road to be artifacts of high antiquity. This was far from the only example of the *sigong* label being used to “classicize” (and, by extension, culturally domesticate) the provenance of unfamiliar horn shaped vessels: the editors of the influential *Xuanhe-era Illustrated Catalogue of Antiquities* (*Xuanhe bogu tu* 宣和博古圖), first published in Hangzhou during the Zhida 至大 era (1308–1312),⁴³ also defined a ritual bronze vessel that again clearly suggests the form of a foreign rhyton, the “Sacrificial-Animal-Head Cup of the Han” (Han xishou bei 漢犧首杯), in terms of its resemblance to the *sigong* of the *Book of Songs* (Figure 4.9). In effect, Song dynasty antiquarians – largely relying on pictorial records – grappled with the cosmopolitan legacy of Tang material culture by using classical designations like the *sigong* to include exotic cups in surveys of ancient artifacts. As a result, we can see the emergence of a productive tension in this strain of late imperial antiquarian scholarship: on the one hand, the *sigong* label was applied to exotic horn cups to endow them with a classical genealogy (distending typologies of the material culture of antiquity); on the other hand, the appearances and visual representations of these horn cups started to undermine the stability of the *sigong* as the authoritative designation of a unique classical vessel: raising concerns as to what material the *sigong* was actually made from, what it looked like, and whether or not it was

⁴² François Louis, “The Hejiacun Rhyton and the Chinese Wine Horn (*Gong*): Intoxicating Rarities and Their Antiquarian History,” *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. LXVII, No. 2. (2007): 201–242.

⁴³ The book presents itself as a new edition of the now-lost *Xuanhe bogutu* from around 1123, edited by Wang Fu (1079–1126), itself an expanded revision of an earlier catalogue of the emperor’s antiques, *Bogutu shuo* (Antiquities illustrated and explained), said to have been compiled by Huang Bosi (1079–1118) a few years before. The text was reprinted throughout the late imperial period: see *ibid.*, 233.

intended for ritual performances.⁴⁴ Clues of spatial distance – a Hellenistic protome, say – were translated into the distant past, while the classical name of the *sigong* became newly inflected with connotations of cultural heterogeneity. We can think of this process in terms of Panofsky’s notion of *pseudomorphosis* to characterize a historical form invested with a meaning that it had not possessed in the past.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ The most radical attempts to identify the ancient *gong* were taken by Ruan Yuan (1764–1849), a prominent collector who owned a bronze vessel that resembled an oversized classical bronze *jue* with three legs inscribed “Xie’s *sigong*,” and Wang Guowei who in his influential 1915 essay “Shuo gong” 說觥 (Explaining the *gong*), suggested the object was originally a lidded pouring vessel wrought from bronze.

⁴⁵ Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), 70–71.



Figure 4.8: Nie Chongyi's entry on the gong wine vessel
 Source: *Xinding Sanli tu* (1175), 12:5b.

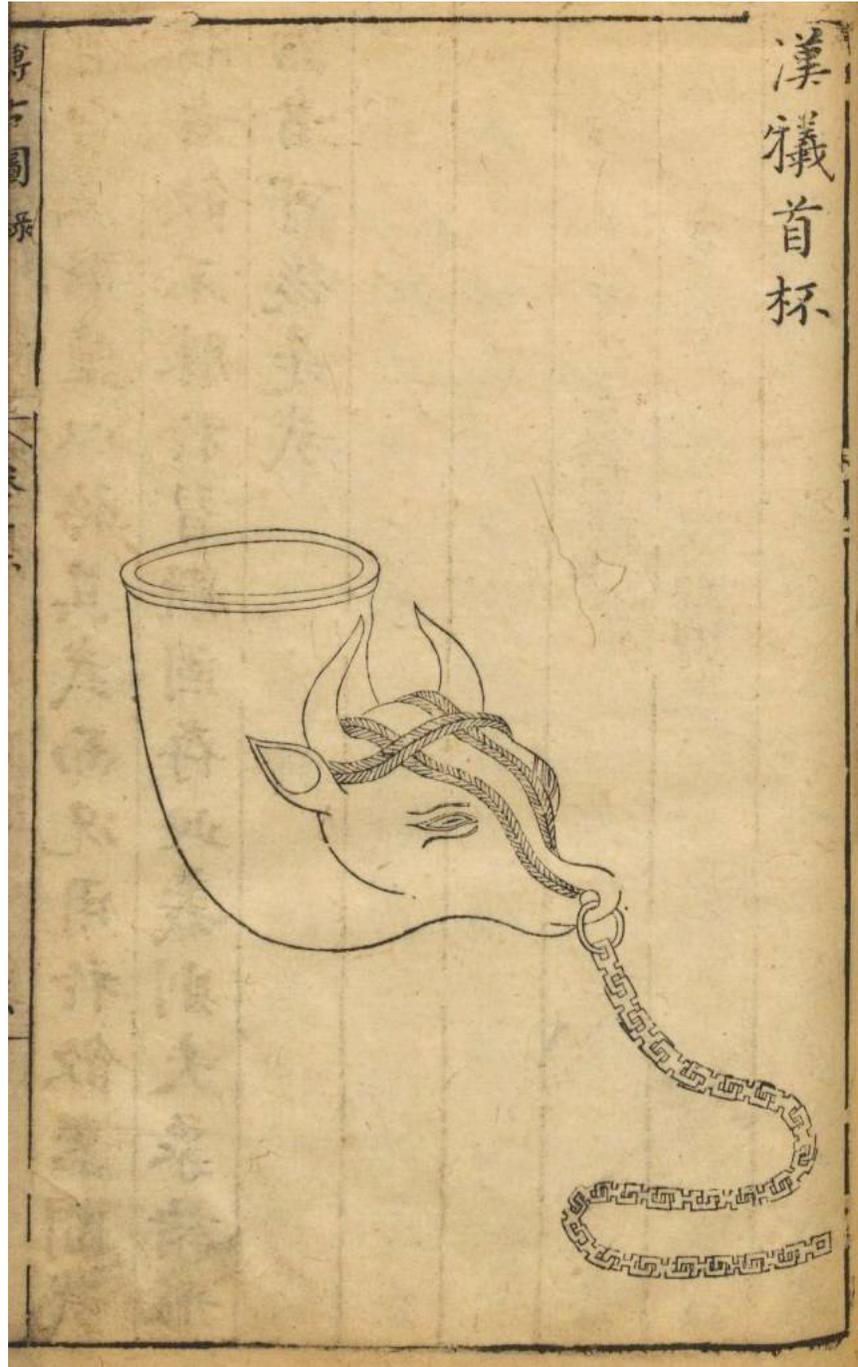


Figure 4.9: Illustration of “Sacrificial Animal Head Cup of the Han”
Source: *Xuanhe bogu tulu* (1603), *juan* 16:18.

Such tensions would be exacerbated in the Ming and Qing dynasties with the popular use of the *sigong* label for new rhinoceros horn cups. This became a trend that would increasingly frustrate classicists and antiquarian scholars from the period. In the late Ming, the commentator Zhang Cizhong 張次仲 (1589–1676) stressed that the *si* was “not what is nowadays called a rhinoceros” (非今所謂犀也) and emphasized that the *sigong* was only made from the horn of the *si* (兕觥以兕角為之).⁴⁶ By the mid-Qing, Yao Bing 姚炳 (fl. 1700–1710), went further by noting that while “nowadays horn vessels are all called “rhinoceros horn cups”” (今之角觥皆稱犀杯), even if a *sigong* could be made from wood in imitation of the *si* horn, it was emphatically *not* made from rhinoceros horn (觥惟用兕不用犀).⁴⁷ Both commentators were keen to halt the inaccurate use of the *sigong* in naming rhinoceros horn cups, perceiving this contemporary (*jin* 今) trend in material culture to be a threat to philological expertise predicated on the mastery of ancient texts. Seemingly trivial questions as to whether the *sigong* had a protome, or was made for drinking games, attest to a deep-seated philological concern with how the prestige of a classical name might remain intact in an unruly marketplace of novel things.

Picturing A Rhinoceros Horn

If Wang Daokun’s epigrams hint at the archaic associations of a horn cup, other writers of inscriptions for rhinoceros horn vessels from the late Ming would go further in their attempts to eulogize the antique guise of the *sigong*. This tendency is especially pronounced in a set of inscriptions written by Dong Qichang and Li Weizhen for a rhinoceros horn vessel owned by the official Wang Shiqi 王士琦 (1550–1619) (*jinshi* 1583) (*zi*: Guishu 圭叔). Wang is most famous

⁴⁶ Zhang Cizhong 張次仲, *Daixuan shiji* 待軒詩記, in WYGSKQS, jingbu, vol. 82, 49.

⁴⁷ Yao Bing 姚炳, *Shishi mingjie* 詩識名解, in WYGSKQS, jingbu, vol. 80, 372–373.

today for the lavish contents of his tomb, which, when excavated in 1956, presented a wealth of golden plaques, jewelry, and ornamental gems, in addition to the most celebrated find: a finely wrought golden gauze cap, now held by the Zhejiang Provincial Museum. Wang's prized rhinoceros horn, however, disappeared following the fall of the Ming and a sense of its appearance can be gleaned today only from the writings he commissioned.

In his inscription, Dong approximates the archaic diction and tetra-syllabic meter of hymns from the "Lesser Odes," rehearsing a movement from a scene of capture and conquest to a scene of celebration and tribute:

Rhinoceros Horn Inscription

Neither a bear nor a brown bear: he caught *this* rhinoceros,
And he makes use of it to "put his hosts in motion."
Neither gold nor jade: he toasts with *this* horn, and "fills it from a great *dou* ladle."
The "Civil and Martial," the filial and brotherly,
Seized prisoners for questions and took captives from the crowd.
A "vermillion bow," a *si* horn beaker,
For joyful banquets, these will be provided.
Uncle made this treasured *zun* vessel,
A "blessing and protection" for Emperor Zhang!
There is wine to match the waters of the Huai,
There are good blessings to match the wine!
Master Wang's descendants must forever protect it.

犀角銘

非熊非羆，厥獲維犀，利用行師。
非金非玉，厥觴維角，大斗斯酌。
文武孝友，執訊獲醜。
彤弓兕觥，燕喜則有。
叔作寶尊，章帝之佑。
有酒如淮，有福如酒。
王氏子孫永保受。⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Dong Qichang 董其昌, *Rongtai ji* 容臺集, in SKQSCMCS, jibu, vol. 171, 483.

The horn is figured as a prized trophy domesticated and re-purposed as a drinking vessel within the ritual setting of a banquet: “he toasts with *this* horn, and “fills it from a great *dou* ladle.”

Passing over any sensuous qualities of the horn – its shape or its patterning (it is enough to learn euphemistically that it is “not gold, not jade” 非金非玉), Dong identifies this synecdoche of a subjugated beast as a symbol of Wang’s martial prowess. Attention is drawn from the object to the character of its owner: Dong lauds Wang Shiqi, “the filial and brotherly” (*xiaoyou* 孝友), as a conquering hero (like the legendary Fang Shu 方叔 (ca. 800 BCE)) returning for a celebratory feast having vanquished a foreign enemy (as Fang Shu did the Xianyun 玁狁). At once an emblem of Wang’s victories (he contributed to successful campaigns in both the Korean peninsula and in the southwest) and a medium for the performance of commemorative toasts in his honor, the horn is compared, by turns, to a “vermillion bow” (*tonggong* 彤弓), the highest gift bestowed by the Zhou kings on a meritorious feudal lord, and the archaic *sigong*. Following on from his reference to the *sigong*, Dong “cloaks” the vessel in the garb of dedicatory inscriptions for bronze ritual artifacts: first, with the line, “Uncle made a precious *zun*” – adapted from an inscription for Zhou Shu’s *yi* vessel 周叔彝, “Uncle made this precious *zun yi*” (叔作寶尊彝), recorded in the *Xuanhe-era Illustrated Catalogue of Antiques*, and a play on the character *shu* 叔 in Wang’s *hao* Guishu 圭叔; second, by adapting the so-called “auspicious phrases” (*guci* 嘏辭), formulaic prayers to ancestral spirits, that appear at the end of ancient inscriptions on bronze: “For ten thousands years, may your sons and sons, grandsons and grandsons forever treasure and use [this vessel].”⁴⁹

⁴⁹其萬年子子孫孫永保用。On *guci*, see Hayashi Minao, “Concerning the Inscription “May Sons and Grandsons Eternally Use This [Vessel],” *Artibus Asiae*, LIII/1–2, 51–8.

Dong's poetic account of the horn, through his pastiche of scenes of hunting and banqueting from the *Book of Songs*, produces a classical chronotope. The poem was intended as a tribute to Wang Shiqi, yet we know that Dong transcribed it on other material surfaces for other patrons, showing how a dedicatory inscription might follow multiple divergent trajectories for different collectors: on a fan for one owner, on a scroll for another.⁵⁰ Dong's vision of the vessel as a symbol of antiquity was also stretched and reframed in a letter (an "attached response" *fu fushu* 附復書) that he wrote to Wang Shiqi, presumably accompanying his submission of the draft of the inscription. In this piece, which at times reads as if it were written for another object altogether, Dong takes as his central theme the white glow from the essence of the moon stored within the surface of the horn, playing with the associations of another enigmatic epithet, "Communicating with the Sky" (*tongtian* 通天).⁵¹ Dong's letter charts the conceit of the horn's nocturnal glow across a range of different textual sources: from well-known tales of the strange (the story of Wen Jiao 溫嶠 (288–339) being able to use the light from the horn at night to illuminate ghosts and spirits), to *materia medica* with their explanations of how the congealed *yin* 陰 behind the white light might protect the owner's body from harm, to a contemporary anecdote of how an official at a customs post had viewed a cup offered to him by a merchant that shone with the light of the moon:

⁵⁰ Xiang Dingxuan 項鼎鉉 (1575–1619) wrote that on a visit to Xiang's residence in Jiaying 嘉興 on the nineteenth day of the sixth month of 1612 (the forty fifth year of the Wanli reign), Dong transcribed a copy of the inscription on a fan as a gift for Xiang.

⁵¹ This name, usually traced to Ge Hong's 葛洪 (280–340) *Baopu zi* 抱朴子, accrued a range of attributes – from the presence of a red thread-like vein running from the base of the horn to its tip, to the horn's resistance to poison, to the way it could be used to part water – yet the title itself denoted the horn's purported ability to "absorb and reflect" the patterns of the night sky. The tenth century naturalist, Li Xun 李珣 (c. 855–930), defined the term by writing that: "during the time of pregnancy, [the rhinoceros] beholds the forms of things passing across the sky, and these are reproduced in the horn of the embryo." Li continues by suggesting that to verify whether a horn really was a genuine *tongtian* piece, it should, when placed in a water-basin "during a moonlit night," reflect the brilliancy of the moon. A closely related strain of interpretation, as Berthold Laufer noted, holds that while the designs in the tusks of an elephant emerge when the animal hears thunder, the patterns in the rhinoceros horn are formed while it gazes at the moon.

... This is not a plaything – dim and murky, it has an essence within that shines like a mirror to illuminate spirits.

無謂玩物，杳杳冥冥，其中有精若照鬼之鏡。

... Carved into a cup, one can drink several measures of fine wine every day, but it must have a medicinal function for it firmly protects the master's body. Why is this so? The cocoon fibers of insects gather in their feet, while the vital essence of a rhinoceros gathers in its horn. Rhinoceroses and clams, while not of the same species, are alike for the way they both draw in the moonlight: clams produce pearls by means of the moon, while the patterning of a rhinoceros horn is also produced by the moon. They are both things that can communicate with numinous spirits.

琢之為杯，日飲醇酒數斗，必收刀圭之用，以堅報主之身，何則？蟲之蟄下聚於足，犀之炁上聚於角，犀與蚌不同類，而其採吸月華則同，蚌得月則珠生，犀得月則紋生，皆通靈之物也。

... Recently, I heard that Master Liu saw a rhinoceros horn cup among other things in Hainan. The horn could be filled with wine and light floats within it and glitters, completely changing with the passage from day to night. In the daylight it turns red and at night it turns white – Liu, without understanding, refused it.

曩聞之劉大夫，在海南見一犀觥等，犀也而實之以酒，浮光晃耀，跳丸盪摩，晝輪紅而夕輪白，劉不解卻之。⁵²

Dong's focus in the letter drifts from the wrought form of a *vessel* (琢之為杯) to the processual physicality, or the atmospheric luminescence of its material. The surface and substance of the horn are figured as “other,” appearing in the present, in strange circumstances at the territorial boundaries of the empire, straddling and blurring the line between the known and the unknown.⁵³

⁵² Dong, *Rongtai ji*, in SKQSCMCS, jibu, vol. 171, 483.

⁵³ The letter ends by recounting the circumstances surrounding the request for the inscription. Dong stages an abstruse dialogue between himself and Wang, teasingly citing and reworking lines from the *Surangama Sutra* (*Lengyan jing* 楞嚴經):

The *Surangama Sutra* says that among the ten types of ascetic masters, there are those who make themselves strong with the essence of the sun and moon. His lordship can sit and approach the Way. If you say: “I am drawn to the main vehicle, as for the ten immortals, the illusory shadows from the dust of dharma are still insufficient to withstand my rhinoceros horn.” Then I ask if you could lend the vessel to the Old Man so he could use it for a day, and the Old Man can try it and see what it is like. As for the inscription for the cup, I wrote a couple of sayings in accordance with your instructions, but this is “what lies within the ways of the world.”

In the space between Dong's inscription and letter we begin to see a "dialectic of form and matter," as object (the cup) and material (the substance of the horn) "tug at one another despite their mutual support, the fact that they mediate each other."⁵⁴

Dong's account of how the horn cup stretches the limits of plausibility was taken further in another inscription for Wang Shiqi's vessel by Wang Daokun's close follower and erstwhile member of the White Elm Society, Li Weizhen. Li claims he had not seen the actual object, but was presented with an image for which he composed a lengthy inscription (a text that at nine-hundred and eighteen characters more closely resembles a tetra-syllabic *song*-eulogy (*song* 頌) or grand epideictic *fu*-rhapsody (*fu* 賦)):

Wang Guishu showed me a picture of a rhinoceros horn: its patterning and form were extraordinary. It could be a fantastic geography, a drinking vessel, or an "as you wish" scepter: a single thing with three merits. And so I composed an inscription for it.

楞嚴所云，十種仙人，有堅固日月而正性命者，公坐進此道矣。公若曰，吾趣向宗乘，十種仙人，法塵影事，未足當吾犀辟也，則請以觴借野叟為一日之用，野叟試其何如。杯銘應教作數言，則游方之內者也。

Invoking references from both the sutra and its commentaries to a class of adepts that were supposedly able to gain immortality through drawing in the light of the moon, Dong muses that perhaps the horn's glow might hold out a similar promise of transcendence for Wang. Dong then writes that if Wang were to say that it does serve this purpose he hopes to borrow the cup for a day to test it on his own. His tone here, wavering between skepticism and playful inquisitiveness, suggests a sense of hesitancy, as if he doubts the possibility of, yet still tacitly desires to behold Wang Shiqi's cup: "if you *really* believe the horn can do this, then let me see for myself." This sense of ambivalence inflects the final line of the letter when Dong writes that his inscription is focused on "roaming inside the lines" (遊方之內者) – an allusion to the words of Confucius recorded in Zhuangzi and a phrase contrasted with "roaming outside the lines" (遊方之外者) or the search for transcendence. His comment can be read as a gentle repudiation of claims for the magical efficacy of the horn ("you can talk about magic, but I'm going to focus on actuality"). And yet, at the same time, the line could be read as a teasing (almost self-effacing) remark on the insufficiencies of the inscription, as if Dong insinuates that without having access to the horn, without having experienced the powers attributed to it, stock allusions to classical hunts and banquets were the best he could offer. What seems certain from these closing lines to the letter is that when Dong Qichang drafted the inscription for Wang Shiqi, he had not seen the actual object. What we are left with instead are suppositions of the rhinoceros horn's strange materiality (its preternatural surface and substance) as a source of wonder and suspicion: this is a vision that lurks behind, is denied within, and yet ultimately outstrips Dong's inscriptional poem. Dong, *Rongtai ji*, in SKQSCMCS, jibu, vol. 171, 483.

⁵⁴ Brown, *Other Things*, 296.

王左丞圭叔眎余犀角圖，色理形質甚奇，可為山經，可為酒器，可為如意，一物而三善具焉。遂為之銘。⁵⁵

Over the course of the inscription, Li refrains from ever openly naming the “thing” within the picture as a rhinoceros horn and instead devotes his energy to suggesting ways in which the object oscillates between and blends the guises of a (miniature) mountain, a drinking vessel, and a *ruyi* scepter:

Does it make the Old Man from the River Bend laugh? Does it vex Yu Gong?
胡笑河叟，胡懲愚公。⁵⁶

Cloudy like a mountain jug; luminous like a jade libation cup.
雲如壘然，瑟如瓚然。

Like Magu’s talons, used for back scratching.
若麻姑爪，搔背斯利。⁵⁷

As this sequence of kennings might suggest, the text is composed almost entirely of allusions and Li’s principal contribution consists in creating imaginative juxtapositions and sequencing demonstratives, primarily for acoustic effect (sjang 象, ziX 似, nyo 如, hwok 或, nyak 若, yiX 以). Li takes a collection of utterly familiar classical references and through an art of re-combination creates an impression of some “thing” unknown: the archaic, here, is transformed into the stuff-matter of the “strange.” We can see this dynamic emerge at the beginning of the inscription, when, after listing the dimensions of the object, Li contrasts a description of ancient

⁵⁵ Li, *Dami shan fang ji* 大泌山房集, in SKQSCMCS, jibu, vol. 153, 511.

⁵⁶ Yu Gong was “vexed” (懲) because the mountains of Taixing 太行 and Wangwu 王屋 blocked him coming and going from his home (懲山北之塞, 出入之迂也。). The story is found in *Liezi* 列子: Tang Wen 湯問. The Old Wise Man from the River Bend (河曲智叟) laughs at Yu Gong and urges him to stop (河曲智叟笑而止之。).

⁵⁷ Li, *Dami shan fang ji*, in SKQSCMCS, jibu, vol. 153, 511.

carved bell racks – a classical synecdoche for the highest standards of ornamental artwork – from the *Artificer's Record* (*Kaogong ji* 考工記) with Zhuangzi's famous account of “giant trees”:⁵⁸

Like a carved rack that carries the bells and chime-stones:
Feathery, scaly, and naked creatures,
With a small, long head and round, bulging body,
With thick lips and a pointed beak.
And yet, it is unembellished!
Like a great tree riddled with holes that receive the breeze like a pond and
like a puddle, like a nose, like a mouth, like an ear, like a socket, like an
enclosure, like a mortar.

象筍簾，羽鱗羸蟲，小首而長，搏身而鴻，銳喙厚脣，實則素功載。
象大木，竅穴受風，似洼似汙，似鼻似口，似耳似珩，似圈似臼。⁵⁹

The first line invokes an exemplary model for carving, while suggesting the shape of a horn, or a body that tapers to a point at one end and assumes a more curvaceous plump form at another.

The second line complements the anthropomorphic imagery of the carved racks (with ears and eyes), while suggesting the emptiness within the horn. Read together, there is an implicit shift from a sense of solidity (*shi* 實) to emptiness (*xu* 虛) accompanying a movement from predominantly visual imagery to the acoustic effect of the propulsive head-rhyming particle *si* 似.⁶⁰ It is Li's sequencing of empty comparative markers (*xuci* 虛詞) – the nuts and bolts of the composition – that ends up overpowering any tangible impression of the object described. For a rhapsody that takes a picture as its aim, visual imagery is repeatedly negated in pursuit of the fluctuating intensities of empty patterned sound.

⁵⁸ The *sunju* 筍簾 were carved racks for stone or bell chimes made from two pillars (*ju* 簾) and a middle crossbeam (*sun* 簾), decorated with images of animals. The racks were also treated as exemplary models for ornamental artwork: in the *Zhuangzi*, for instance, the chief carpenter Qing (Zi Qing 梓慶) fashions a piece of wood into a *ju* rack for hanging bells that was then lauded as a product of supra-human agency: “Qing, the Worker in Rottlera wood, carved a bell-stand, and when it was completed, all who saw it were astonished as if it were the work of spirits” (梓慶削木為鐻，鐻成，見者驚猶鬼神。).

⁵⁹ Li, *Dami shan fang ji*, in SKQSCMCS, jibu, vol. 153, 511.

⁶⁰ Throughout his inscription, Li Weizhen tries to approximate the structure and phonology of passages such as Zhuangzi's account of the “pipes.” Li's manipulation of the resonant apertures from *Qiwu lun* thus prefigures a recurring movement across the text, from attempts at grasping the appearance of the horn to an experience of empty sound.

As Li's account of the image progresses, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between negative litanies (*not like... not like... not like...*) and positive analogies (*like... like... like...*), between *apophatic* and *kataphatic* lists.⁶¹ The successive negation of images and the quick proliferation and transition between notional attributes similarly result in the sense of an object that eludes stable definition. In trying to suggest the shape of the tip of the horn, for instance, Li writes of how it cannot be compared (*fei* 匪) to a series of other objects from the *Artificer's Record*: the sloping head of a jade tablet (匪圭上杼) (Figure 4.10); the curved tip or “ear” of a bow (匪弓簫竣) (Figure 4.11); and the so-called “striking limbs” of a stone-chime (匪磬股鼓) (Figure 4.12).⁶² It is as if we follow Li Weizhen flipping through the images of artifacts in an illustrated Wanli era copy of the *Artificer's Record* searching for an ever better template for the shape of the thing he has in mind.

⁶¹ See for instance an extended passage where Li lists all the artifacts the rhino horn is not: “...Not a *san* and not a gourd, neither a ladling cup nor a ladling spoon, not a *gu* vessel for a sacrificial offering or a *jue* vessel for a libation, not a *zhi* vessel raised by the honorable, or a horn cup for the lowly. And not like those porcelain and clay articles that are crooked, damaged, broken or uneven.”

既醉以酒，匪散匪匏，匪斗匪勺，匪酬以觚，匪獻以爵，匪尊舉觶，匪卑舉角，匪伊陶旒，髻墜薜暴。Li, *Dami shan fang ji*, in SKQSCMCS, jibu, vol. 153, 511.

By contrast, half way through the inscription, Li turns to a list of different types of geomorphic formations drawn from a chapter entitled “The Explanation of Mountains” in the *Erya* 爾雅. Li begins by paraphrasing Su Shi's account of his journey to the Mountain of Stone Bells, where he “slowly approached to investigate” the fissures and grottoes at the foot of the mountain emitting strange sounds:

“...If one slowly examines it, there are: large peaks and small mountains; there is a solitary mount and a cluster of looming forms; a small crest held within a great range and a small summit set aside from a grand peak; the upright and the crooked; a lofty precipice and a broken crest; a low stout mound and a high point; a soaring summit and a narrow pinnacle; a peak like two stacked pots and a peak surrounded by cliffs; a looming cavern like a hall and an obtrusive mound like an embankment.”

徐而察之，大山小山，有蜀有嶧，有霍有鮮，有章有隆，有墮有陁，有扈有嶠，有嵩有岑，有隰有厓，有密有盛。Li, *Dami shan fang ji*, in SKQSCMCS, jibu, vol. 153, 511.

In this passage, Li tries to break free from the confines of a discrete object altogether, envisioning an unfolding, unbounded landscape in a manner that prefigures a later allusion to “recumbent roaming” (*woyou* 臥游).

⁶² Li, *Dami shan fang ji*, in SKQSCMCS, jibu, vol. 153, 511.

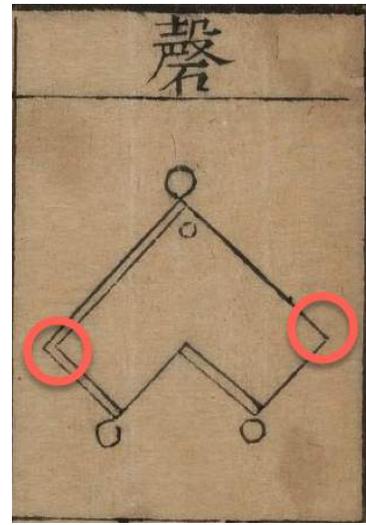
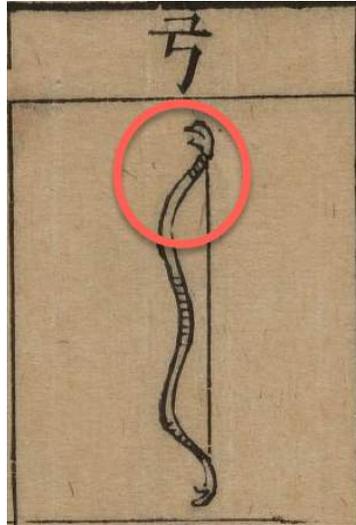
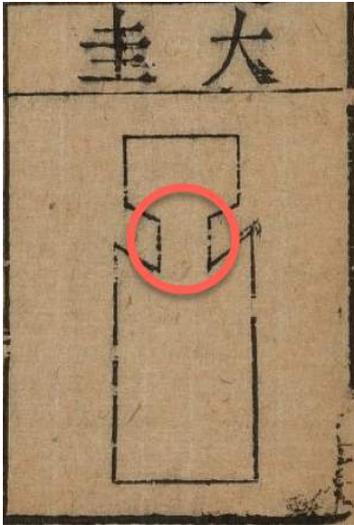


Figure 4.10: Illustration of “Great Jade Tablet”

Figure 4.11: Illustration of “Bow”

Figure 4.12: Illustration of “Chimestone”

Source: Xu Zhaoqing’s *Kaogong jitong* (Wanli), 1:4.

When it comes to suggesting the grain of the patterning on the surface of the horn, Li similarly turns to the *Artificer’s Record* moving his attention from analogies to the varnishing on the outer surface of a bow, to the rough, twisted lines on an ox horn, to the “lacquer grain” from the sinews of an elaphurine deer (*mi*), to the concentric cracks in the varnish on the surface of a drum:

Like the lines on the palm of a hand,
Twisted and rough, streaked patterning.
Finely grained like a ground worm,
Cracked in concentric rings.

若皆手文，絪昔班班，細者斥蠖，瑕者積環。⁶³

Such passages frustrate a reader’s capacity to deal with “continuity and discontinuity, wholes and parts, synchrony and succession.”⁶⁴ A coherent image of the thing is never fully possessed, only

⁶³ Li, *Dami shan fang ji*, in SKQSCMCS, jibu, vol. 153, 511.

ever on the cusp of coming into and eluding possession.⁶⁵ At the very beginning of the preface, Li mentioned the “strange pattern and form” (*seli xingzhi shen qi* 色理形質甚奇) he felt he perceived within the image he was shown. During the course of the inscription, Li’s focus veers widely from any coherent conception of a vessel to explore how the verbal surface of his prose might stretch a reader’s sense of the possibilities of patterning and the mutability of shaped form as such. Almost midway through his text, Li imagines how these images vanish into mist and give way to changing patterns of light – before writing of “strange forms metamorphosing, that cannot be accounted for” – a line that evokes the mutational movements generated by his own sequences and combinations of words.⁶⁶ It is a line that points less to an image of an artifact the text is trying to represent, than to the “thing” Li’s inscription aspires to become. In this verbal spectacle of purposeful waste, any symbolic link to Wang Shiqi, or physical link to a unique vessel, is deemed superfluous: indeed, it is striking that the author made no effort to conceal the fact that his inscription was dedicated to a picture rather than the actual object (if the object ever actually existed), an admission that reveals the underlying logic to this Ming “aesthetic of multiplicity” where more is more. We are left with a self-serving eulogy to profusion and prosperity, where a classical idiom is made newly strange for novelty’s sake.

⁶⁴ See, for instance, Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 95.

⁶⁵ These lists resist interpretation (there is no real meaning in the inscription) and instead require the reader to make abductive inferences about what this “thing” could be. An anthropological approach, following a theorist like Alfred Gell, might conclude that the sheer scale and intricacy of the text is simply designed to overwhelm the reader, creating a spectacle of “extravagance” that serves as an index of Wang Shiqi’s social agency, invoking his power and wealth.

⁶⁶ “...Not mist, not fog! Luxuriant green, fine aura! In the rising sun, it doesn’t glitter with light and in the dusk, its light doesn’t decline. Like the emerald gem or like “flowing yellow.” Like beef tripe or sheep intestine. Like the rock marrow of Earth’s lungs, or jade sap with gold slurry: these fineries can be fed upon to forget hunger. Slowly like tea, bursting out. Strange forms undergoing metamorphosis, they cannot be fully disclosed.” 非煙非霧，鬱葱佳哉，朝陽靡曙，夕陽靡頹，或如木難，或如流黃，或如牛肱，或如羊腸，地肺石髓，琬液金漿，秀色可餐，俾也饑忘，寬緩以茶，忽戾以奔，殊形變態，未可殫論。Li, *Dami shan fang ji*, in SKQSCMCS, jibu, vol. 153, 511.

Miscellaneous Treasure

The sense of confusion caused by Li's account of this picture perhaps led to its inclusion – as one of the few surviving references to the cup after the fall of the Ming – in Yao Zhiyin's 姚之駟 list of “miscellaneous treasures” (*zabao* 雜寶) from his landmark 1721 compilation *Arranged Anecdotes of the Yuan and the Ming* (*Yuan Ming shilei chao* 元明事類鈔).⁶⁷ Placed in an “miscellaneous” appendix to a chapter on “precious treasure” (*zhenbao men* 珍寶門), the cup comes as close as possible – in a work that tries to systematically organize trivia on the natural history of the Ming (with lists of anecdotes on everything from the stars to ants) – to eluding classification. Yao Zhiyin's entry for the cup, which simply reproduces Li's short preface to his inscription, ends up paired with other wonders like a five foot coral stand for a seventy-two stringed *pipa* that was found in a palace built from sandalwood in an eastern city of Kashmir by the armies of the General Guo Kan 郭侃 (1217–1277), or the portentous “Cup that “Reflects Events of the World”” (*zhaoshi bei* 照世杯), found to the west of Samarkand.⁶⁸ By the early Qing, it was unclear whether Wang Shiqi's rhinoceros horn cup (or at least the picture Li Weizhen had viewed) still existed, or if it did, who it might have belonged to. If Dong Qichang had tried to (at least nominally) inscribe the vessel as a medium for commemorating Wang Shiqi's legacy, it had ended up by 1721 – detached from a lineage of custodians and lacking any narrative surrounding its transmission – as an almost fictional thing, caught between reality and

⁶⁷ The entry stands out within the section on “miscellaneous treasure” for the way Li Weizhen's words refer not to an artifact, but to a representation of an object. The title of the entry, similarly, is conspicuous for the way it cites not a description of a given object or the name of the object itself (as in every other entry), but the title of Li's inscription. Yao Zhiyin 姚之駟, *Yuan Ming shilei chao* 元明事類鈔, in WYGSKQS, zibu, vol. 884, 435–6.

⁶⁸ Some of the entries are not so much objects as sites of preternatural wonder: a factory in Raozhou where iron can be dipped into the smelting water and transformed into bronze, a well of precious stones from South East Asia, or a mine in Fujian with crystals so large that over a hundred miners had to work to excavate them.

fantasy, preserved as a curiosity in a survey of select anecdotes on the stranger aspects of Ming material culture. This was one potential fate for a Ming rhinoceros horn cup: a footnote in a sprawling print encyclopedia recording the preface from a verbose literary response to a picture.

Li Weizhen's verbal performance of lavish expenditure, like Wang Daokun's epigrams or Dong Qichang's terse poem, is built from a set of new equivalences, allusions that fuse other images (flowers, the vermilion bow, carved bell racks) as a theatrical *mélange*. Li, Wang, and Dong all dedicate their inscriptions to a distinguished guest, yet the identity of this figure and his relationship to the biography of the vessel unravels in each case. We might place Xu Guo's protest against this backdrop, both to ascertain the underlying allure and contested attributes of the imported material he sought to inscribe, and to better assess the difficulty of propagating a moral exhortation and political memorial through an inscription. The challenge of how to resuscitate and renew Xu Guo's appellative gestures was subsequently taken up by scholars in the Qing as they sought to sustain his strategy of redemptive reification.

Part 2: Re-Producing an Inscription

The first section of this chapter examined the status of the rhinoceros horn cup in sixteenth and seventeenth century China as a "thing" that distends existing categories of vessels and perturbs hierarchies of the archaic and exotic. In this second section of the chapter, I return to the fate of Xu Guo's cup in the Qing, exploring its fate amid the resurgence of antiquarianism in the eighteenth century. So far we have seen how inscriptions transform material artifacts or images of things they name, yet I now shift focus to the attempts of a community of scholars to control and manipulate the material status of an inscription through practices of copying. If we have examined approaches to the textualization of an object, I now look at Qing investments in the

materialization and re-materialization of an epigram. If writers like Wang Daokun, Dong Qichang, and Li Weizhen made the archaic newly strange through their puns and juxtapositions, antiquarians from the mid-Qing deployed the media of ink-squeeze rubbings and stone engravings to elevate a recent vessel to the status of an antique, seeking to retroactively monumentalize the *sigong*. Wu Hung, drawing from Paul Ricoeur, has written of what he calls a “triumph of the document over the monument” that is best realized in the independent objectivity of the rubbing.⁶⁹ Here, I show how the document of the rubbing might be used to produce a new edifying monument: in the mid-Qing, rubbings provided templates for new wood and stone carvings that could subsequently generate more rubbings. In the iterative and compulsive act of making rubbings we can observe an enduring desire to reintegrate and fix a commemorative inscription in the collective memory. Antiquarian techniques pursued permanence and the sanction of an archaic aura that the singular inscription of a vessel could not sustain on its own: this excessive proliferation of copies and further words reads as anxious overcompensation for the concision and brevity of Xu’s lapidary epigram, as if the marked cup itself was not enough. In this creative adaptation of antiquarian media we see any nominal concern with the study of antiquity give way to lyrical reflections on the upheavals of the recent political past and the restitution of lost property.

“Song for the Sigong,” 1677

Having survived the upheavals of the dynastic transition and accrued ties to the legacies of anti-Manchu resistance fighters, Xu Guo’s cup for Zhao Yongxian was eventually acquired in the early Qing by an official named He Yuanying 何元英 from Xiushui 秀水 who invited the

⁶⁹ Wu Hung, “On Rubbings: Their Materiality and Historicity” in *Writing and Materiality*, 57.

acclaimed lyricist Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629–1709) to compose a song in praise of its biography. Zhu’s “Song for the *Sigong*” (*Sigong ge* 兕觥歌), the first dedication to the cup following the fall of the Ming, begins by distinguishing the rhinoceros horn from other exotic trinkets that might adorn the tables of a wealthy patron’s banquet (jade, conches, silver, gold): this “dust-expelling” horn – an early epithet for the material that, here, carries Buddhist connotations of purging sensory delusion and defilements – brought from Huangzhi 黃支, the ancient name of an Indian kingdom that presented a rhinoceros as tribute to the Han Emperor Pingdi 漢平帝 (1 BCE–5 CE), demands that all other treasures (*bao* 寶) be cleared away. Zhu then reads the inscription on the cup, an act that leads to his lyrical reconstruction of its history in a sequence framed by the words of Xu Guo’s epigram (*ningci* 寧辭; *shenyang yi jiao* 神羊一角; *manyin huangliu* 滿飲黃流):

Song for the Sigong

Turn over the jade bowls and discard the conches,
 Remove the engraved silver cups and the archaic golden beakers.
 This rhinoceros horn of Huangzhi expels all dust.
 The host brought in the vessel to present it before his guests.
 I requested to see the inscription it bore, to display, for all, the events of the past:
 Wanli, in his early years, greatly favored his ministers,
 Yet his senior official “cut short the emotions,” to the fury and rebuke of the people.
 One “Phoenix of the Eastern Slope” descended at the Wu Gate,
 Breaking the balustrade was better than declining to touch the inverted scale!
 When it came time for him to go into exile, well-wishers filled the inns of the capital,
 An offer of protection from Xu Guo, as they parted at the fork in the road,
 The single horn of a mystic ram, ah! It was one of a pair,
 Passed down and then it returned to Loujiang.
 Master Zhang bequeathed it to his follower,
 In daring to remonstrate, my master copies Zhao Yongxian.
 He loved to invite guests and they displayed no sign of weariness.
 As if for Pingyuan’s ten day drinking session, they came to see him.
 The court clothes have been pawned, with no regret,
 Writing, carefree, suffused with the “Mallard Flower,”

I've drained this beaker a few times,
 Before this vessel, what is there left to regret? I offer another passionate lyric!
 My master recently left the Banquet Office,
 Who on those couches in the west of the palace has the sharp glance of an osprey?
 Now in the Han Palace there is no White Tiger *zun*,
 Drinking from a cup full of this golden wine, do not put it aside lightly.

兕觥歌

覆玉碗，屏香螺；徹銀鑿落金叵羅。
 黃支之犀塵盡辟，主人持觥客前席。
 請看觥上銘，為君陳夙昔：
 定陵衝年資相臣，元老奪情眾怒嗔。
 朝陽一鳳午門伏，折檻寧辭逆鱗觸。
 歸時餞者滿都亭，珍重臨岐許文穆。
 神羊一角詎有雙，流傳既久歸婁江。
 張公以之遺弟子，敢諫吾公趙公似。
 更兼愛客無倦容，平原十日恆過從。
 朝衣典盡且不顧，快意但寫冕花濃。
 我浮此觥亦已數，尊前豈惜狂歌重。
 吾公邇年徙卿寺，西掖南床誰鸚視。
 漢殿今無白獸尊，滿飲黃流莫輕寘。⁷⁰

Midway through the poem, Zhu's focus shifts from the story of the cup to its present owner, He Yuanying, who had just left the court after nine years of service under Kangxi. Zhu uses the bond formed by the journey of the cup from Zhao Yongxian to He Yuanying to celebrate the latter's integrity: He too "copied" Zhao in holding those in power to account. The acquisition of this talisman of Ming loyalism both affirms the significance of He's return from the capital, while retrospectively justifying his achievements in office. Zhu concludes by pondering what happens now that He has left court, using the motif of the "white tiger vessel" (*baishou zun* 白獸尊) – absent from the "Han Palace" – to symbolize both the role of the cup as a medium of protest and, by extension, the character of a forthright official. In contrasting Zhu Yizun's praise for He Yuanying in following Zhao's example and this final reflection on the subsequent absence

⁷⁰ Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊, *Pushu tingji* 曝書亭集, in QDSWJHB, vol. 116, 116.

of such a figure at court, we can begin to gauge his own ambivalence, as a remnant subject born in the Ming, towards the larger problem of whether or not to serve the Qing: is He Yuanying to be praised for his “remonstrance” and departure from court? Or is Zhu lamenting the vacuum created by He’s return and tacitly beseeching worthy men to continue his service? Zhu’s reflections, here, assume greater weight when read against his own biography: two years later, in 1679, he would be nominated to participate in the major examinations held by Kangxi to win support from Han scholars, eventually entering official service at the age of 51. Zhu, nevertheless, would remain ambivalent in his loyalty to the Qing state: he was dismissed while compiling an official history of the Ming for making unauthorized copies of documents in the imperial collection. The “Song for the *Sigong*,” ends with a line that riffs on the concluding words of Xu Guo’s inscription, and in Zhu’s refrain we can intuit how the auspicious wishes for the holder of the cup are newly inflected by concerns with the precarious politics of the present and his own future. In the course of Zhu’s poem, meanwhile, Xu Guo’s rhinoceros horn cup is renamed a *sigong*.

Techniques of the Antiquarian: Weng Fanggang and the “Return of the Sigong to Zhao”

The rhinoceros horn cup eventually passed from He Yuanying and was acquired on the market towards the end of the eighteenth century by the Yan 顏 family of Qufu. It is at this juncture that the fame of the cup and the trajectory of its biography were transformed through the involvement of the prominent Qing dynasty antiquarian Weng Fanggang 翁方綱 (1733–1818). As antiquarianism re-emerged as a dominant intellectual movement in eighteenth century scholarly culture, Weng was at the forefront of the excavation and reconstruction of ancient monuments like the Wu Liang Shrine and the production and collection of rubbings of inscriptions from

ancient vessels and stelae. In Weng's encounter with the rhinoceros horn cup for Zhao Yongxian, we see him draw upon and adapt the material techniques of the antiquarian to manipulate the reception of the vessel and its inscription. The case suggests that behind the edifice of the Qing antiquarian investment in "returning to antiquity" through the study of "metal and stone," there were deep-seated concerns with constructing and controlling political narratives of the recent past.

Weng Fanggang's relationship with the cup can be traced back to the summer of 1778 when the Yan family of Qufu sent a rubbing to Beijing.⁷¹ As a renowned calligrapher, Weng was invited to transcribe the text of Zhu Yizun's "Song for the *Sigong*," which was to be mounted alongside the rubbing.⁷² Weng himself would contribute to a number of similar projects intended to commemorate famous antiques throughout his career. Coincidentally, in 1790 he acquired the Yanshan rock – one of the most prized antiques in the late imperial period, originally owned by the Southern Tang ruler Li Yu 李煜 (r. 961–975) – which had once also belonged to Xu Guo and set about producing a scroll with painted renditions of the specimen from different angles (by his close associate, the prominent painter Luo Ping 羅聘 (1733–1799)), alongside rubbings taken from the textured surface of the object.⁷³

We know that the scroll for the Yanshan rock included calligraphy and painted images of the object in addition to rubbings, yet there is insufficient evidence to fully ascertain what the final document produced by the Yan family and Weng for the *sigong* looked like. Weng

⁷¹ Weng Fanggang, *Fuchu zhai wenji*, in XXSKQS, jibu, vol. 1455, 366.

⁷² Weng Fanggang, *Fuchu zhai shiji*, in XXSKQS, jibu, vol. 1454, 503; Weng Fanggang, *Fuchu zhai wenji*, in XXSKQS, jibu, vol. 1455, 493.

⁷³ Weng composed a detailed historical study of the rock entitled "A Study on the Mountain-ink stone from the Treasures of Jin Studio" (*Bao Jin Yanshan kao* 寶晉硯山考) that was transcribed at the front of the scroll. In 1778 when the Yans asked Weng to transcribe Zhu Yizun's poem following the rubbing of Xu Guo's inscription, he composed a similar critical study of the history and transmission of Zhao Yongxian's *sigong* although it is unclear whether (or where) this was placed on the scroll. Both texts were included in the same section of Weng's collected works.

repeatedly refers to having received from Yan Hengzhai 顏衡齋 a “rubbing of its text(s)” (衡齋拓其文), suggesting that the rubbing was made and presented as a copy of Xu Guo’s inscription – it remains unclear from Weng’s writings, however, whether this was a rubbing taken from the engraved surface of the actual cup or from a transcribed copy of the inscription on wooden board or stone.⁷⁴ In a poem written in 1778 to commemorate the rubbing, Weng dwells briefly on the experience of transcribing Zhu’s poem for the scroll:

Written after a Rubbing of the Sigong Inscription by Xu Guo of the Ming (1778)

Censor Zhu Yizun wrote his “Song for the *Sigong*”
 Zhang Zaogong the Worthy has his “Record of the *Sigong*,”
 Recorded on top of the box in large script it says: “Three Loyal Ministers,”
 Above and below there are reflections on its one hundred-year history.
 The “Three Loyal Ministers” are Zhao Yongxian, Huang Duanbo, and Chen
 Qianfu,
 Drinking from this vessel will protect your body.
 Zhang said he was Chen’s son-in-law,
 Loujiang and Zhu Yizun had both passed away.
 Zhu’s poem had still not been carved onto the box,
 They wanted me to transcribe it to make a scroll.
 First there was He Yuanying and Zhang Zaogong later, why is there any doubt?
 Master Gui Fu and Master Yan Hengzhai continued to pass it between them,
 Master Gui was drinking in Yan’s Studio
 Inebriated, he called out to Xu Guo and Zhao Yongxian that “we are united,”
 At that time, the lamps at the window dimmed, as moonlight illuminated the room,
 A somber mood of the ages suddenly filled their hearts.
 There was a forceful aura to the split-stroke clerical script characters,
 The Master of Yingyang, Xu Guo, made it for Zhao Yongxian.
 That day, he hurriedly headed out of the gates of the capital,
 There is this engraving, which emits a marvelous resonance.
 My brush limns this piece, shining light from the sun and stars
**[Weng inserts a comment on the manuscript: “Fanggang was editing the
 “Outlines and Details of the Ming History” and added this inscription under
 the section for the year Wanli 5”],**
 To properly write history, I read and do not make an inscription.
 Only a jade cup could be used to toast with this,
 Why did well-wishers fill the inns of the capital?

⁷⁴ Weng, *Fuchu zhai wenji*, in XXSKQS, jibu, vol. 1455, 493. His comments on this rubbing ignore altogether the visual or physical properties of the horn cup (he makes no reference to the size, shape, or surface of the object).

The official's copy is a source of envy,
 How much more that it transmits the true not the false.
 Stored in Qufu for many years,
 On encountering a charming guest, only then will it serve in a spirited banquet.
 I have yet to see the vessel, but first read the text,
 I'm not fond of drinking, I'm just drawn to know the truth.
 It is easy to come across any old wasteful flashy artifact,
 It is more difficult to encounter the towering spirits of great men.

書明許文穆贈趙文毅兕觥銘拓本後

朱檢討作兕觥歌，章吉士有兕觥記。
 記端大書曰三忠，上下低回百年事。
 三忠趙公黃暨陳，能飲此觥能致身。
 章也自言陳氏壻，婁江秀水皆前塵。
 秀水之詩未鐫櫝，要我重書合成軸。
 何前章後奚必疑，桂生顏生遞相屬。
 桂生昨飲顏氏齋，醉呼許趙云吾儕。
 其時窻燈暈屋月，萬古鬱勃傾胸懷。
 八分小書氣莽莽，潁陽生爲定字丈。
 爾日匆匆出國門，有此雕鐫發奇響。
 我筆此條光日星，[方綱纂修明綱目謹增此二銘於萬曆五年分注下]
 直作史讀弗作銘。
 祇有玉杯可交酢，何須送者滿都亭。
 政使重摹已堪羨，何況流傳真不贗。
 曲阜藏來又幾年，必逢佳客方酣醺。
 我未見觥初讀文，我不善飲頗識真。
 易逢蹉琢光晶器，難遇嶽寄磊落人。⁷⁵

Weng begins with the details of the various engraved texts that adorn the sides of the cup's box and in many ways his poem can be read as a celebration of those who have packaged, stored, and handled the object, rather than the object itself – he says as much in the final couplet: “It is easy to come across a flashy artifact, it is more difficult to encounter the towering spirits of men.” Similarly, while Weng briefly reflects on the physicality of the inscription and the way it indexes the event of Zhao being forced from the capital – the deictic marker of “this engraving” could either suggest a metonymic connection between the rubbing he is viewing and the inscribed

⁷⁵ Weng, *Fuchu zhai shiji*, in XXSKQS, jibu, vol. 1454, 503.

surface of the cup, or designate the quality of a calligraphic reproduction of the cup's inscription on wood or stone – his focus quickly shifts to the significance of mounting the rubbing on a scroll alongside transcriptions of supplementary texts like Zhu Yizun's "Song for the *Sigong*" as a means of both correcting the history behind the inscription and ensuring its future transmission.⁷⁶ While Zhu Yizun alluded to the rhinoceros horn, Weng Fanggang altogether denies the materiality of the cup, adopting an epigrapher's perspective to direct focus to the split-stroke clerical script characters of the epigram. The poem effectively narrates the triumph of the calligraphic inscription and its independent objectivity over the vessel.

The act of making copies becomes the central theme in Weng's poem for the way it creates and sustains a sense of community between scholars across time and space, a notion underscored by the almost disorienting proliferation of personal names in the poem: Weng can add to the history of the cup by copying Zhu Yizun's poem onto the scroll alongside the rubbing of Xu Guo's inscription made by the Yans (he insinuates that his transcription will then be re-transcribed onto the cup's box) and in doing so enters into a privileged community of custodians (extending his friend Gui Fu's 桂馥 (1736–1805) drunken call to the spirits of Xu and Zhao "that we are united"). In an added note from a manuscript edition of the poem, Weng claims that concurrently with producing this new copy, he also included the date of Xu Guo's inscription for Zhao (1577) in the "Outlines and Details of the Ming History," a project for which he served as an editor. In the next half of this broken line, Weng asserts that he is invested in reading rather than making an inscription, and the poem as a whole represents a critical pivot towards treating Xu Guo's epigram as an object for annotation, collation, and historical study. This is the pivotal

⁷⁶ As Wu Hung has noted, an ink squeeze rubbing is not connected to its object through imaginary resemblance, but through physical contact: it is a "metonym" that draws its image directly from its object – a "skin" peeled from an inscribed surface. Wu Hung, "On Rubbings," 29–72.

moment when the case of Xu Guo's protest is brought back into a state-sanctioned narrative of the Ming.

A copy of the final scroll, including the rubbing, was given to Weng and accompanied him when he was reassigned from the capital to Jiangxi in the autumn of 1786.⁷⁷ Shortly after arriving at his new post, Weng met with a man travelling to Hunan named Zhao Wanghui 趙王槐 (Zheting 者庭) from Changshu 常熟 (*juren*, 1741), who revealed that he was the fifth generation grandson of Zhao Yongxian. Weng brought out the rubbing and showed it to Zhao, recounting their shared experience of viewing – with Weng *looking* at Zhao *looking* at the rubbing – in a colophon dated to the twentieth day of the twelfth month of 1786. Returning to this highly evocative scene in his later writings as if compulsively repeating it, Weng would hyperbolize Zhao's response, using pathetic fallacy to evoke the emotional jolt felt at this unexpected reunion in the face of presumed loss:

A Colophon for the Sigong

[The sections in brackets and bold are emendations of the printed copy of this text based on Weng Fanggang's manuscripts]

This vessel is presently stored in the Yan household in Qufu. Previously, a rubbing was sent to me [**Fanggang**] and I wrote out a long song [**When Fanggang received this instruction he was editing the “Outlines and Details of the Ming History” and added this inscription under the section for the year Wanli 5**] and evaluated references in Censor Zhu's collected writings and Zhang Qiji's appended text to ensure there were no mistakes. Today, I met Mr Jiating [**Zheting**] who talked of his family background and there was a pure and fragrant air to the words he spoke. I brought out the rubbing and we viewed it together. His sincerity was deeply moving and this was truly a fortuitous encounter. I wrote out this inscription, with a will to preserve this fated moment in ink.

20th day of the 12th month of *bingwu* [1786]

⁷⁷ Weng, *Fuchu zhai wenji*, in XXSKQS, jibu, vol. 1455, 366.

跋兕觥。「是觥今藏曲阜顏氏家，嘗以拓本遺予「方綱」，為作長歌並「方綱時受詔，纂脩《明史綱目》，謹以此銘增注入萬歷五年條下」為辨朱檢討集與章豈績跋之文，并非歧誤。今得唔嘉「者」庭先生，語及家世，清芬口澤，出此拓本共觀，精誠感召，良非偶然。因為書此銘，以志墨緣。」

丙午十二月廿日。

A Preface for Master Zhao of Changshu seeking the return of a Sigong from Yan Hengzhai of Qufu (1787)

In the autumn of *bing wu*, I was sent to Jiangxi and Old Zhao Zheting was travelling from Changshu to Hunan. When he left Nanchang, he came to call upon me. Speaking of his family background I knew that it was Zhao's fifth generation grandson, so I brought out the rubbing and we looked at it together. He stared with tears streaming for a long time before parting.

為常熟趙氏乞曲阜顏衡齋歸兕觥序

丙午秋奉使江西而趙翁者庭，自常熟往湖南道，出南昌見訪，語及家世知為趙公五世孫也，出拓本相眎，翁泫然久之別去。⁷⁸

Weng also used the experience of viewing the rubbing as a framing device for a poem he wrote in 1787 that served as both a bargaining chip in recovering the cup from the Yan family and as a memorial to the eventual return of the vessel to the Zhao family temple. Opening with the story of Zhao viewing the rubbing, Weng narrates the events of the exchange before concluding by linking the composition of his poem to the production of a new set of commemorative rubbings: his image of the light radiating from “Mi Fu’s boat,” a synecdoche for a collection of art and antiques, resonates with earlier scenes of viewing the cup – “the lamps at the window dimmed, as moonlight illuminated the room” – while evoking a newly resplendent store of images and calligraphy:

A Song for the Return of the Sigong to Zhao (1787)

The *si* horn beaker has been passed down for two hundred years,

⁷⁸ Weng, *Fuchu zhai wenji*, in XXSKQS, jibu, vol. 1455, 366.

From Huang Duanbo, Chen Qianfu, and Zhang Zaogong, it returned to Yan.
 Zhu Yizun's poem had yet to be inscribed on the box,
 I once more transcribed the poem and an evaluative essay.
 This studio and this vessel had a profound destiny.
 A copy was made to form an image that was then mounted on a scroll.
 The vessel lodging in the East of Lu was fixed in my mind,
 The album came with me to the West of the Jiang, and I displayed it to a guest.
 And who was the guest I happened to speak to?
 Zhao Yongxian's fifth generation grandson.
 That night, we prodded the lamp and two streams of tears fell,
 The winds rose up and the river surged with force.
 Zhao's two eyes flared like lightning,
 He looked at it for twenty days without sleeping or eating.
 In the third month, a missive from Hunan arrived,
 Not thinking a thousand *li* too far, he laid out his intentions.
 In the return letter, I explained how to proceed,
 A hundred bushels of bright pearls are no recompense.
 Through the alleys, he stuck to his precious lofty ideal,
 And as a friend, discussed his state of mind, until the autumn.
 He visited me, then, at the foot of Mount Lu,
 We looked at each other, and I saw his true countenance.
 Then from Jiangxi, I passed instructions to Shandong,
 Heaven decreed the return of this remnant thing to Changshu.
 I alone understood Yan's state of mind,
 In his habits, he cherished the extraordinary.
 There was nothing in the world to match this horn vessel,
 The only thing he wanted from the sack was Weng's poetry.
 Zhao proceeded to knock at his door and prostrated, stating his case,
 A plain interaction worthy of the superior men of the ages, with a pact as pure as
 ice and snow.
 The light from a lunar halo, still gleams in the traces of wine,
 With full-blooded sincerity, an aura that breaks mountains.
 Master Yan presented the horn vessel to his guest with a beaming smile,
 Old Zhao made a heartfelt pledge of recompense.
 The joy of this vessel, after so many years, at finally meeting its old friend,
 In tears, the old man returned home, making a proclamation at the family temple.
 All along, the tale of the storage of the vessel has been fortuitous,
 Yet today, the story can be extended further.
 As the compilation is released, a new ballad for the *sigong*!
 Overwhelming Mi's boat with rays from a moonlit rainbow.

兕觥歸趙歌

兕觥傳來二百年，黃陳章後今歸顏。
 朱檢討詩未銘櫝，而我一再詩文編。

此齋此觥緣不淺，摹冊成圖標成卷。
 觥居東魯定我懷，卷到西江欣客展。
 客爲誰乎可共論，文毅五世之賢孫。
 是夕挑燈墮雙淚，天風激盪江怒奔。
 趙叟雙瞳爛如電，見此兼旬廢眠飯。
 湖湘三月寄書來，不辭千里陳初願。
 報書我爲析其由，百斛明珠那惜酬。
 只緣陋巷珍高義，代友論心直到秋。
 秋來訪我廬山麓，青眼相看真面目。
 地從江介指齊魯，天教舊物歸嘗熟。
 顏公心事惟我知，顏公嗜好乃獨奇。
 世間無物此觥配，壓囊只要覃溪詩。
 君往叩門再拜說，淡交千古盟冰雪。
 月暈光仍舊酒痕，血誠氣可穿山裂。
 顏公奉觥向君笑，趙叟傾心誓相報。
 觥喜多年逢故人，叟泣還鄉告家廟。
 向來藏觥事偶然，今日還觥事更傳。
 譜出兕觥新樂府，壓倒米家虹月船。⁷⁹

Following his meeting with Zhao Wanghui, Weng helped broker an exchange both by composing this poem and another inscription on a small jade cup, now held in the Xintai Museum in Shandong, offered as a gift from the Zhaos (Figure 4.13).⁸⁰ Weng is keen to emphasize both the agency of the mounted rubbing in engendering the reunion and the decisive role of his poetry as the only valid substitute for the vessel. Before eventually passing over the cup, Yan Hengzhai reportedly made “several hundred” rubbings of the inscription for safekeeping.⁸¹ The swap resonated symbolically with the original pairing of a rhinoceros horn and jade cup and all three men saw their reputations rise in stature following the “Return of the *Sigong* to Zhao”: contemporary scholars praised Weng as a writer capable of shaping events through his poetry; Yan as a selfless antiquarian concerned with the ethics of transmission and

⁷⁹ Weng, *Fuchu zhai shiji*, in XXSKQS, jibu, vol. 1454, 675.

⁸⁰ For a description and pictures of this vessel, see Ma Peilin 馬培林, *Xintai wenshi ziliao xuan: di erji* 新泰文史資料選輯 2 (1987): 81–84.

⁸¹ Feng Guifen 馮桂芬, and Li Mingwan 李銘皖, *Suzhou fu zhi* 蘇州府志 ([Suzhou]: Jiangsu shuju, 1883), *juan* 147.

historical truth; and Zhao as the archetypal filial grandson. The story of one family's re-discovery of a lost possession became an allegory for recuperation in the wake of the dynastic transition. In this celebration of "reunion," the cultural work of mourning – grappling with the trauma of the fall of the Ming by remembering the fates of martyrs like Huang and Chen – was gradually laid to rest. As Weng concludes with the motif of the light emanating from Mi Fu's boat, his poem suggests a broader shift from the concerns of politics – the weight of loyalist attachment to the Ming – to the domain of the aesthetic. Through a coincidental pun, the story could be grafted onto the template of the "Return of the Jade Disc to Zhao" (wanbi gui Zhao 完璧歸趙), a stock expression for "returning a possession to its rightful owner" – and a cliché that had been propitiously alluded to in Xu Guo's inscription on the jade cup for Wu Zhongxing.

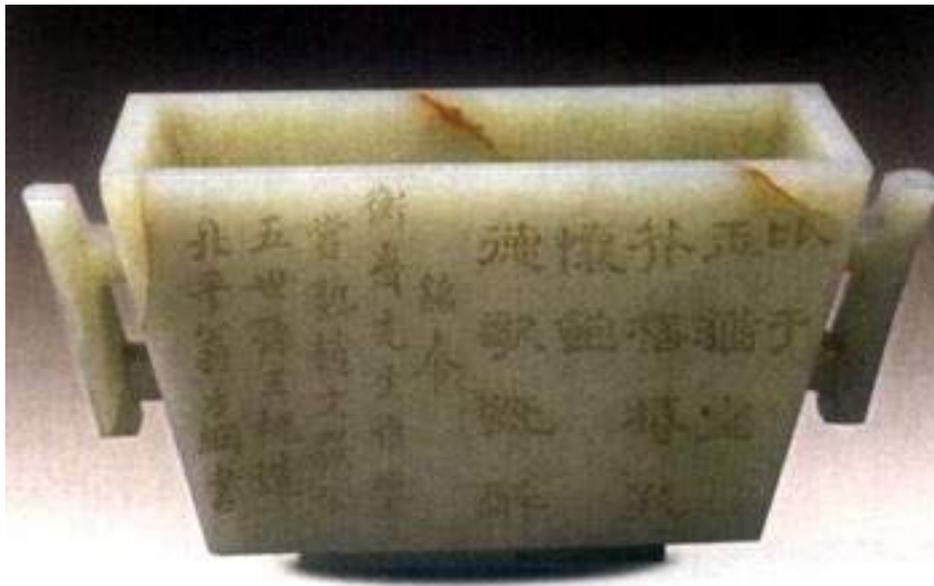


Figure 4.13: Jade Cup with Weng Fanggang's Inscription
Source: Xintai Museum, Shandong.

The Monumental Sigong: Zhao Wanghui and the Changshu Carvings

Zhao Wanghui subsequently installed the *sigong* in his family temple as if it were a ritual bronze for commemorating his ancestors through ceremonial performances. At this point, with the cup “hidden” in the ancestral temple in Changshu 常熟, its biography comes to an end: there are no further reports of encounters with the object and no evidence that it subsequently exchanged hands. Instead, the fame of the cup was eventually superseded by a stone monument, commissioned by Zhao on the inner wall of the ancestral temple and dedicated to the allegory of “return.” The central text in this set of carvings was a copy of Weng Fanggang’s “Song for the Return of the *Sigong* to Zhao,” which was accompanied by new poems and prefaces contributed by leading scholars and antiquarians from the period, including the famous calligraphers Wang Wenzhi 王文治 and Liang Tongshu 梁同書 (1723–1815).⁸² The stone engravings were rendered by the renowned carver, Mu Dazhan 穆大展. In the 1970s, the site of the temple was demolished to make way for a new hospital and fragments of the carvings were subsequently taken into local museum collections. The stone memorial was, however, used as a source for rubbings throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and a folio taken from the Changshu carvings, dated to the Qianlong era, is still preserved in the Taiwan National Library.

In addition to the carved texts, the Taiwan folio shows that Zhao commissioned a scale drawing of the vessel to be cut in stone (Figure 4.14). The image reveals a modest wine cup – only 11.5 cm in length and 5.75 cm in height and bearing almost no outward resemblance to a rhinoceros horn – with a slender decorative *chi*-dragon handle (*chi'er* 螭耳) and a simple *leiwen* pattern (雷紋) running around the thin rim of its base-stand. These antique details evoke the use

⁸² The other contributors were Zhu Gui 朱珪 (1731–1807), Xie Qikun 謝啓昆 (1737–1802), and Fei Fu 費浮, all from Daxing 大興; Su Quji 蘇去疾 (1728–1805) from Changzhou; Qian Daxin 錢大昕 (1728–) from Jiading; Jiang He 蔣和 from Wuxi, meanwhile, composed a preface.

of *chi* handles and *leiwén* on Zhou bronze vessels and early Qing dynasty archaistic jade carving from the Suzhou area (Figures 4.15 and 4.16). The image of the cup bears a faint resemblance to a rhinoceros horn bowl from the collection of Sir Harry Garner (1892–1977) held in the Victoria and Albert Museum, which also features the *leiwén* pattern and has similar dimensions (15 cm in length and 5.2 cm in height). Garner’s bowl has tentatively been dated to late Ming Zhangzhou, yet this seems to be loosely based on more reliable identifications of rhinoceros horn flower cups rather than any intrinsic details of this particular specimen (Figure 4.17). In general, archaizing trends in rhinoceros horn carving have been securely dated to the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, not the late Ming.⁸³

⁸³ Craig Clunas, *Chinese Carving* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996), 30.

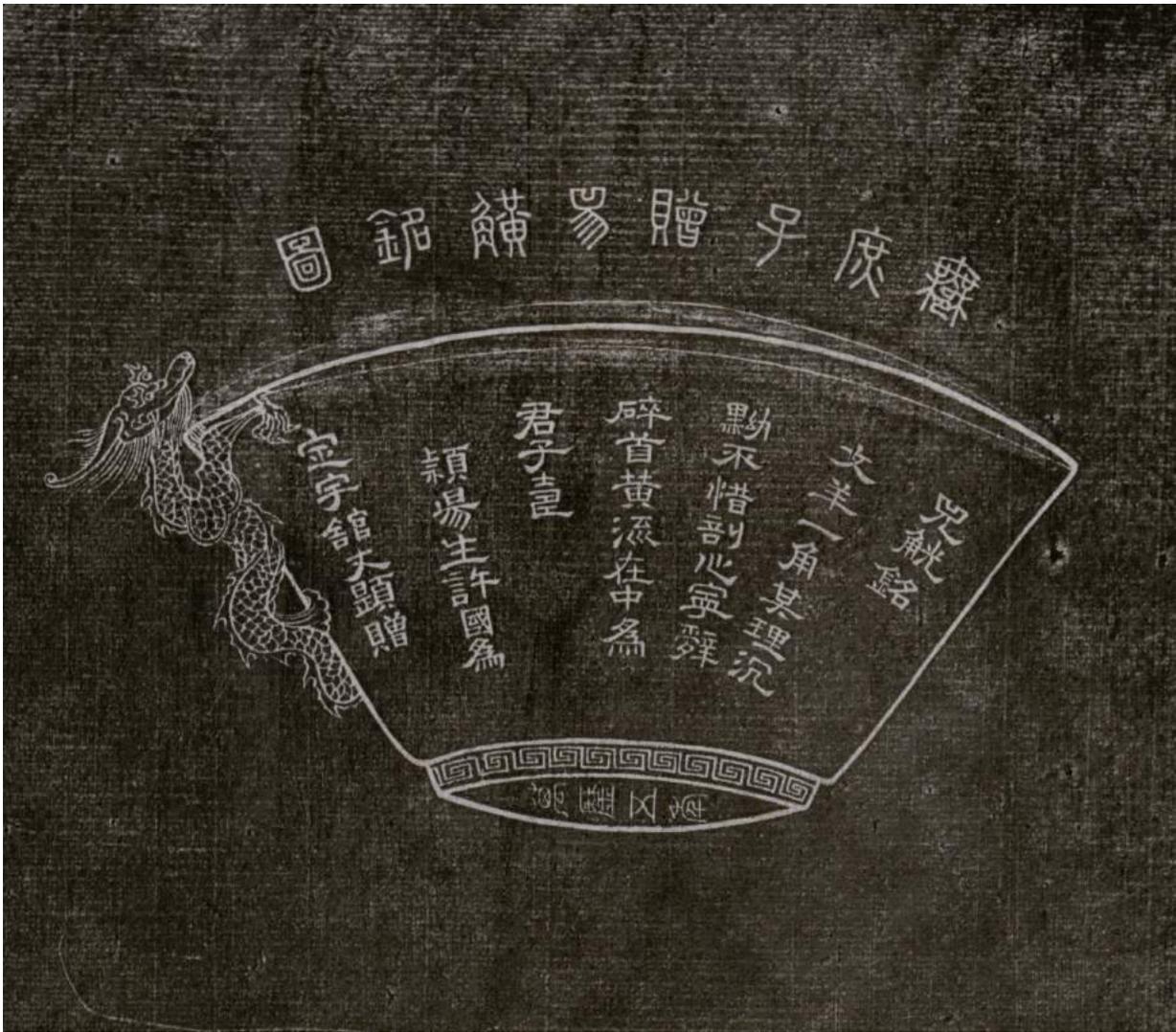


Figure 4.14: Rubbing of “Image of the Inscription on a *Sigong* presented by Minister Xu,” stone carving

Source: Qian Daxin, *Folio of Poems on the Return of the Sigong to Zhao*, Collection of the Taiwan National Library.



Figure 4.15: Late Ming Dynasty Clear Jade Cup
Source: National Palace Museum, Taiwan.



Figure 4.16: Qing Dynasty Chi'er Jade Cup
Source: National Palace Museum, Taiwan.



Figure 4.17: Late Seventeenth Century Rhinoceros Horn Bowl

Source: Victoria and Albert Museum, UK.

There are also some discrepancies between this carved image and details of the cup in Ming sources: unlike the copies of Xu Guo’s epigram preserved in the Tianqi era edition of his collected writings or in other Ming dynasty compendia, which all refer to an inscription for a “rhinoceros horn cup,” this version of the text is entitled “Inscription for a *Sigong*” (*sigong ming* 兕觥銘) – a label first used by Zhu Yizun in the early Qing. There are likewise no references prior to Weng Fanggang’s account of the copy of the inscription he received from Qufu (which may have been carved in stone or wood) to the marking of the momentous date “Fifth Year of Wanli” (Wanli wunian 萬曆五年) etched in lesser seal script and now visible on the base of the cup, or to Xu Guo’s formal sign-off, “an offering from Xu Guo, Master of Yingyang, to the Official Dingyu” (潁陽生許國為定宇館丈題贈). We know that in the early Qing there was speculation that a counterfeit of the cup had emerged and although Weng claims to have set the

historical record straight, it is still possible that the copies of the vessel he saw were made of a later Qing rhinoceros horn cup that had been engraved with the famous words of Xu Guo, which were readily available in print. It is also possible that this is not a faithful reproduction of the cup, but a deliberately archaistic illustration for the stone monument, as with the heading transcribed in an ancient seal script, “Image of the Inscription on a *Sigong* Presented by Minister Xu” (許庶子贈兕觥銘圖).

The image of the cup is framed by three further scale images of the sides of its box, bearing records of the events of the “Return to Zhao” including Zhang Zaogong’s “Record of the *Sigong*” and the words of Zhao Wanghui. As such, the actual image of the cup – occupying just a quarter of this particular stone panel – appears circumscribed by a larger memorial to the means and history of the vessel’s storage. If the rhinoceros horn cup had become what Alois Riegel calls an *unintentional* monument through the contingencies of its historical transmission and the slow sedimentation of various political associations: to anti-corruption at the Wanli court, Ming martyrdom in the trauma of the dynastic transition, and Ming loyalism in the early Qing – this stone carving was an *intentional* monument – one that spatialized the inscription from the cup with the very medium of stone evoking fixity and finality, physically asserting an ending and hence establishing a definitive narrative of the “return” for posterity. The conclusive monument retrospectively constructs an uncontested history of the cup, making its past *past*. There remains a paradox, however, in the replacement of an unintentional monument with an intentional monument in that the very qualities that made the inscribed cup so legendary – its movement across the empire from dynasty to dynasty; the way its various owners relinquished personal possession, seeking to form a community that transcended the constrictions of time and space – are denied as the Zhao family arrest its travels and hide it in their family temple, supplanting the

rhinoceros horn with their own endorsed set of stone carvings. Xu Guo's inscription for Zhao Yongxian, engraved on the wall of the temple, subsequently assumes an epitaphic ambience.⁸⁴ The death of the vessel marks the final victory of a family's claims to property over a community of custodians who had renounced self-interested claims to ownership: the model of the family reunion may represent a shared allegory for reconciliation with the past and full restitution from loss, yet it is predicated on the demise of the collective commitments Xu Guo hoped to instantiate through his initial gift.

Repeatable Evanescence: Rubbings and Poems

Later writers from the Qing into the Republican era would commemorate both the Zhao stone monument and its reproductions often at the expense of the actual cup. Various poems from the early nineteenth century are framed by the scene of viewing a set of rubbings, like the folio preserved in the National Taiwan library, taken from the Zhao temple. For the most part, these poets try to match Weng Fanggang's "Song for the Return of the *Sigong* to Zhao," a poem that had also been carved onto the family monument and consequently accompanied copies of the image of the cup: Weng's poem was both a response to a rubbing and now a stone carving reproduced in rubbings.

Inspector Bin Ligeng of Changbai kindly presented the Sigong Inscription for Zhao Yongxian of the Ming Dynasty together with a copy of the stone carvings of Master Weng's poem

By Zhang Tingji 張廷濟 (1768–1848)

⁸⁴ Smaller commemorative souvenirs were quickly manufactured to supplement this monument: Xu Kang's 徐康 1897 catalogue contains a record of a limited edition "Sigong Returns to Zhao" inkcake, displaying an image of the vessel and the mark "made in Qianglong mou nian" (乾隆某年製), a piece allegedly owned by Zhao Cihou 趙次侯 a resident of the Old Mountain Pavilion (Jiushan lou 舊山樓) in Changshu. Weng continued to provide literary services for the Zhao family and even composed a stele inscription for Zheting's tomb that again thematizes the story of the *sigong*, see Weng, *Fuchu zhai wenji*, in XXSKQS, jibu, vol. 1455, 488.

...I obtained this rubbing and smiled,
Bright pearls and green jade are insufficient recompense.
Pecks and bushels evenly balanced, the *jialiang* measure has been established,
To bestow blessings on high officials at the imperial court.
The jade disc of the Zhao family is complete as before,
Weng's poem transmitted on stone of longevity.
With the breath of the mouths of three men, I regret I still haven't seen it,
When can I once more put down the zither in this river craft?

長白斌笠耕觀察良貽明趙文毅兕觥銘并翁學士詩刻拓本

我得此拓亦一笑，明珠青玉不足報。
斗斛平準嘉量成，爲祝官高官廊廟。
趙家完璧知依然，翁詩壽石尤同傳。
三家口澤惜未見，何時再放琴川船。⁸⁵

*In response to County Magistrate Zhao Xuexuan's request for a poem to match
Master Weng Tanxi's Song for the Return of the Sigong to Zhao*

By Zhang Jiuyue 張九鉞 (1721–1803)

The worthy squire showed us the image of the *sigong*,
And sought a match for the “Song for the Return of the *Sigong* to Zhao.”
This song was written by Weng Fanggang,
His revered disquisitions and forceful judgment caused the rivers to surge.
This vessel was a belonging of the master,
And has passed through cataclysm and the seas turning to fields of mulberry trees...

和翁覃溪學士兕觥歸趙歌應趙鞞軒邑候索

賢侯示我兕觥圖，索和兕觥歸趙歌。
此歌覃溪學使作，崇論雄辯奔江河。
此觥君家之故物，滄桑浩劫曾經過。⁸⁶

Zhang Jin 張晉 (1754–1819) adopted a similar stance to these two Zhangs in treating the experience of viewing and handling a copy of the Changshu carvings as a framing device in a longer song from 1805, beginning with his own unexpected encounter with another of Zhao's

⁸⁵ Zhang Tingji 張廷濟, *Guixin tangji* 桂馨堂集, in XXSKQS, jibu, vol. 1491, 659.

⁸⁶ Zhang Jiuyue 張九鉞, *Zixian shanren quan ji* 紫峴山人全集, in XXSKQS, jibu, vol. 1444, 132.

descendants and ending with a lyrical reflection on perceiving the light from the inky crinkles of the blackened paper:

A Song for the Return of the Sigong to Zhao (with preface)

By Zhang Jin 張晉 (1754–1819)

A man who gives himself to serve the state will never perish.
How can you ask of: “carving out one’s heart” or “cracking the skull”?
For a man to denounce someone, it is appropriate to seal one’s mouth.
At this time, they only drank pure wine.
Look!
Zhao Yongxian back then, was serving as the Chief Compiler,
His writings possessed great integrity and were without equal.
He once witnessed the affair of “emotions cut short,”
And made a case with no concern for his own position.
Pity those who were willing to disobey the Grand Secretary,
Dismissed from office and punished by being beaten with the rod.
Although, in those days, the “proper path” was still not followed,
There was no one in the court and among the people who had not heard of his reputation.
A single chariot left the capital in desolation,
Who blocked the road? It was the Master of Yingyang, Xu Guo.
He knelt and presented the *sigong* to the gentleman’s hands,
With profound sentiments he wished blessings on the gentleman.
The legendary *zhi* could chase out an evil minister,
With the mystic ram, must it be inferior to a *zhongyou*?
This *si* has been passed down for two hundred years,
From Huang to Chen, moving from location to location.
It has experienced the vicissitudes of time and kept watch of the stage of fame and reputation,
It would not be baseless to say that it is guarded by spirits sent from the heavens.
A precious collectible passed to Grand Scribe Zhang,
Later it finally ended up with Master Yan.
It was said that Master Zhao had a single grandson,
And every time he recited the inscription, his tears would stream down.
The learned Weng is the Master Poet of today,
He used his poetry to assist, and offered it as a gift to Master Yan.
For a thousand *li* he brought it back to the family temple.
Treasured it like it was comparable to beautiful jade.
I happened to be a guest in the capital,
I caressed this new image and heaved a sigh.
Ah... this small vessel, what is there left to say about it?
Within lie the souls of the loyal ministers.
While the vessel had not returned, people still treasured it,

That it has been returned is only right for the Zhao grandson.
 I wrote this song and presented it, but my sentiments have still not been fully
 expressed,
 I regret I cannot see the vessel, and can only see the picture.
 With the wine, prod the lamp, and lay it out to play with again,
 The inky crinkles of the paper emit a resplendent light.
 Night after night, this beam of light shoots to the Milky Way!

兕觥歸趙歌并序

丈夫許國當不朽，安問剖心與碎首。
 丈夫即貶宜緘口，此時只合飲醇酒。
 君不見：
 文毅在昔官編修，文章氣節無與儔。
 一朝目擊奪情事，建言不為身家謀。
 可憐疏人忤時相，罷官得罪予廷杖。
 當年直道雖未行，朝野莫不聞其名。
 單車蕭然出都去，阻道者誰颺陽生。
 跪奉兕觥把君手，殷勤願為君子壽。
 神豸原能逐眾邪，文羊何必輸中卣。
 此兕流傳二百年，歸黃歸陳亦屢遷。
 身歷滄桑閱朝市，天令鬼守非虛言。
 珍藏更有章太史，後乃卒歸顏氏子。
 傳聞趙氏有孤孫，每誦銘言淚如水。
 覃溪學士今詞宗，以詩為介遺顏公。
 千里持歸告家廟，寶之直與璠璵同。
 伊余偶作長安客，摩挲新圖重太息。
 區區一觥何足言，中有忠臣舊精魄。
 觥縱不歸人亦寶，觥歸乃見孤孫好。
 作歌下拜情未舒，恨不見觥惟見圖。
 對酒挑燈更展玩，紙上生稜墨花燦，
 夜夜虹光射霄漢。⁸⁷

Proceeding from Xu Guo's inscription, Zhang Jin re-narrates the full story of the return of the cup to Zhao: Zhao Yongxian's resistance to Zhang Juzheng's *duoqing* case; his punishment and banishment from court; Xu Guo's gift of the rhinoceros horn cup; the cup's travels over two hundred years; and Weng's assistance in bringing the cup back to the Zhao temple. The last quarter of the poem turns from the history of the vessel to the materiality of the rubbing as Zhang

⁸⁷ Zhang Jin 張晉, *Yanxue tang shiji* 艷雪堂詩集 (1835 edition): 1: 38–40.

Jin recounts his experience of viewing the copy. The rubbing newly precipitates relations of both distance and proximity for Zhang: he reflects on his inability to see the actual object, evoking a sense of lack that corresponds to his powerlessness to fully express through song the sentiments the experience arouses. Just as Weng Fanggang largely disregarded the appearance of the cup to try and apprehend the character of the man behind it, so Zhang contrasts the insignificance of what he sees of its physical form with the less tangible aura of the “spirit” of the righteous memorialists it belonged to. And yet, Zhang begins by noting his affective response to his haptic contact with this “new image”—one that can be repeatedly indulged. He ends by imagining the inky surface of the rubbing as it becomes a resplendent spectacle of light: as if its own objecthood – its quiddity as a new memorial *made for* the Zhao family’s memorial – constitutes an independent source of lyric captivation. In this sense, the rubbing of the stone carving paradoxically seems to offer both less and yet somehow *more* than the inscribed vessel. As both a memorial and a substitute, the rubbing marks and disavows a deeper absence, attaining new value for the way it stands in for, and thus obscures the phantasmatic object of an almost “ontological or mnemonic drive,” a drive seeking a “structure of duration and the presence of the durable.”⁸⁸

This scene itself, however, can be read as a copy, with Zhang Jin trying to re-stage the moment when Weng and Zhao saw the rubbing that brought the cup back home. It is indicative of a pattern of copying earlier responses to the inscription that I have tried to trace across the course of this chapter. As Xu Guo’s dedicatory toast for Zhao Yongxian was recited by later poets in their own lyrics – whether Zhu Yizun or Weng Fanggang or Zhang Jin – its political significance was reformulated: as a protest against government corruption, as a tribute to Ming martyrs, as a critical reflection on the paradigm of early Qing loyalism, as a response to the

⁸⁸ Brown, *Other Things*, 280.

displacement of the dynastic transition, and as an intentional monument. Similarly, through practices of copying – as rubbings, on mounted scrolls, as wood and stone carvings, as rubbings of these carvings – the material status of the inscription was continually remade, gradually shedding both its symbolic and physical connections to the surface of the rhinoceros horn cup. In this process, lyrical and material acts of copying the inscription inspired and sustained one another: rubbings were made of poems as poets strived to recreate experiences of handling and viewing rubbings. The historical materiality of the rubbing as an inky “skin peeled from an inscribed surface” came to provide a particularly compelling analogy for poets seeking lyrical resonance with Xu Guo’s inscribed words. Iterative acts of remembering – made manifest in this symbiosis of rubbings and poems – eventually surpassed and supplanted any stable conception of what it was that was actually being remembered. If inscriptions aspire to fixity and durability, these poems on the gleaming inky crinkles of rubbings seem drawn to what John Wilkinson calls “repeatable evanescence” – the paradoxical effect of reconciling a reader to contingency, to the evanescent, *time and again*.⁸⁹ We have seen the trope of luminescence reappear in Ming descriptions of the rhinoceros horn’s preternatural materiality, as an enigmatic source of wonder and the fleeting trace of a “strange” alterity. Here, the luminescence of the rubbing illumines a different cathectic investment in the object world: a fragile reassurance gleaned from a staged spectacle of restitution, or momentary respite from a lingering sense of collective loss.

⁸⁹ John Wilkinson, “Repeatable Evanescence,” *Thinking Verse* (2014), 28.

CODA

There are as many epigrams as there are things.
“Epigrammata autem genera tot sunt, quot rerum.”

Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484–1558)

And the pithy phrase is a thing of beauty.
文約為美。

Liu Xie

This dissertation has worked to elucidate a moment of pronounced perturbation in sixteenth century China where the relationship between writing and its material substrates was opened up and rethought. I have examined these changes through readings of the inscriptions and inscribed artifacts attributed to an eminent prose stylist, Wang Daokun, and his spiraling network of merchant and artisanal associates in late Ming Huizhou. More specifically, the previous chapters have adumbrated the emergence of new strategies of commercial labeling that harnessed the form of the literary inscription (*ming*). Such practices proceeded from the collaboration between entrepreneurial artisans, merchants, and scholars, and eventually reconfigured the social roles these designations were taken to delimit. With cases like the “Fineries of Mount Pine Lichen,” “Non Soot,” or “One with Clear Heaven,” the inscription came to serve as a mechanism for branding, leading to an unprecedented degree of mixing between the “literary” and other graphic schemes for the assertion of commercial proprietorship. Ascertaining whether “One with Clear Heaven” is a classical poetic figure or an artisanal trademark no longer seems possible, it is simultaneously both and neither. John Frow has written of the brand as a “marker of the edge” between the aesthetic space of a text and the institutional space of a regime of value that frames

and organizes aesthetic space.¹ In the late Ming, the literary inscription starts to function in a similar fashion, at once striving to sustain the allure of an object through poetic techniques of allusion, analogy, and personification, while working to regulate the distribution of serially produced commodities through the organization of niche markets and competitive distinctions. This mixing between literature and commercial signage calls into question the integrity of the poetic, while giving a lease of life to the epigram as a device for the commodification of powerful consumer desires.

In the final chapter, I have presented a possible line of response to these developments by tracing the biography of Xu Guo's inscribed rhinoceros horn cup. With this case, we see Qing antiquarian-poets try to revivify an epigram through iterative acts of lyrical performance and copying. Their efforts to ensure the singularity of this remonstrative inscription ultimately rest on a proliferation of reproductions: seriality becomes a condition of the individual mark. It is striking, however, that while the subsequent uses of Wang Daokun's inscription for "One with Clear Heaven" and Xu Guo's inscription on a rhinoceros horn cup for Zhao Yongxian seem incongruous, the texts themselves – both authored by the sons of Huizhou merchants, men who had served as prominent officials at court, composed within a decade of each other – display certain similarities: both epigrams adapt antiquated analogies to eulogize what are distinctively sixteenth century things; both inscriptions invoke models of sage-like self-realization, through communion with the Dao or through righteous protest; both authors look for moral lessons in the materials of their artifacts: a dark, desolate lampblack, or the patterned horn of a guardian ram. As Lawrence Manley writes of epigrams composed contemporaneously with Wang and Xu's work in Renaissance London, the impulse to "immortalize by inscription" could just as well become the "satiric impulse to fix a neat, indelible image in a last, unanswerable word": the

¹ John Frow, "Signature and Brand," 71.

pointed remonstrance of a motto could easily slip into the mnemotechnic mode of the jingle and vice versa.² Even as the inscription participated in the invention of new forms of commercial labeling, its oscillation between making a worthy point and wit, its anachronic character and formal plasticity allowed it to diverge from any single straightforward vector of use. While it participated in the commodification of writing and decorative objects, the lapidary form of the inscription simultaneously offered itself up as a device for the creative refabrication of both. In the middle years of the sixteenth century, around the same time that Wang Daokun turned to the antique form of the literary inscription, a vogue for neo-Latin inscriptive epigram – inspired by the Greek Anthology and the pointed wit of Martial – spawned the new Renaissance “genre” of the verbal-visual emblem: a piece of decorative inlaid work, or a detachable ornamental appliqué.³ The symbiosis of epigram and emblem – much like the *ming* inscription as it migrated between the surfaces of things and the pages of illustrated books – developed new idioms for placing stress, in a global early modernity, on the significance of the particular and the resonances of the incarnate.

This dissertation has attempted to recover the contradictory dimensions of the literary inscription, a miniature form that was at once ancient and modern, monumental and ephemeral, austere and irreverent, lyrical and prosaic, constricted and capacious. These contradictions made the inscription a particularly suitable form with which to intervene in a material culture where simple distinctions between the singular and the serial, the archaic and the exotic, the tangible and the intangible, the true and the false no longer seemed persuasive. The suppleness of this form, its capacity to circumvent such distinctions, challenges us to refine our own vocabularies for making sense of human investments in things. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth

² Manley, “Proverbs, Epigrams, and Urbanity,” 259.

³ Daniel Russell, “The Genres of Epigram and Emblem,” *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Vol. 3: The Renaissance*, ed. Glyn P. Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 279.

centuries, writers creatively refabricated their local material habitats precisely by exploiting the contradictions of the *ming*, a gesture attested to in a Qing collection that juxtaposes monitory inscriptions on an opium pipe, a Han dynasty goose-foot lamp, and a pair of western spectacles.⁴ Even as it was repurposed for advertising, the literary inscription remained a medium through which writers might eloquently miss the point, while taking the requests of unserious things seriously.

⁴ Liang Shaoren 梁紹任, *Liangban qiuyu an suibi* 兩般秋雨齋隨筆 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012), 188–189.

APPENDIX 1:

TRANSLATIONS OF WANG DAOKUN'S INSCRIPTIONS ON THINGS

The following set of inscriptions is drawn from *juan* 20 of the 1633 (6th Year of Chongzhen) edition of Wang Daokun's *Taihan fumo* 太函副墨, edited by his grandson Wang Yaoguang 汪瑤光 and preserved in Peking University Library. *Taihan fumo* was envisaged as a compilation of the highlights from Wang Daokun's other collections of poetry and prose *Taihan ji* 太函集 and *Fumo* 副墨 (1571). Whether or not we accept the prefatory claim that Wang Daokun personally selected these pieces for posthumous publication, this set represents his family's sense of his best work in the *ming* 銘 genre. Wang wrote many inscriptions that survive in his other collections of prose, in various Ming dynasty anthologies, and on extant artifacts – this selection of translations is intended to give the reader a sense of his style and literary achievement in this terse, yet evocative form.

An Inscription, with Preface, for Wang Yuanli's Spoon-Head Dagger

Yuanli carried a spoon-head dagger as he passed through the Taihang Mountains. He encountered a great gale and his dagger tried to leap out from the bark. Yuanli thought this was strange and so tightly fastened it to his girdle. When I was out on maneuvers, the troops under my command captured a great number of barbarian weapons. This spoon-head dagger was an inch and a half wide and a little over a foot long. I would say it is a most excellent “fine weapon.” I hold Yuanli, a true cavalier, in great esteem so I inscribed it for him. The inscription reads:

Grasping a foot-long box, restraining a roaming dragon.
Thin as Green Duckweed, floating like a white rainbow.
Be sure to hold it at your side, giving strength to the martial gallant.

汪元蠡匕首銘有序

元蠡挾匕首過太行山，會大風，匕首自樸中躍出。
元蠡以爲異，結佩佩之。余在行間，所部獲夷器何可勝數，
匕首廣寸半，長尺有奇，余所謂佳兵此其最也。
余多元蠡壯士，遂爲之銘，銘曰：

操尺櫝，擾游龍。薄青萍，浮白虹。永言佩之，為俠者雄。

An Inscription for Guo Cifu's Calabash Ladle

Fruit of the Chalcedony Pool, splendor of the Great One,

Suited to wine and tea.

郭次甫瓠子瓢銘

瑤池實，太乙華，宜爾酒，宜爾茶。

An Inscription for Zha Bashi's Lute

What fine wood! A raccoon-dog's mottled head.
What a fine melody! Strumming of Wusun.
A thousand autumns of countless blessings!
Suffused with music.

查八十琵琶銘

何哉木，狸首斑。何哉曲，烏孫彈。千秋萬歲，樂以盤。

An Inscription for Zuogan's Endblown Flute

Like whirling wind; like catenating clouds.
If one listens intently, one "discerns clarity,"
Ridden of acute sense, one "holds the covenant."

左千簫銘

如風簾簾，如雲裔裔。傾耳司徹，黜聰司契。

An Inscription on a Song Dynasty She Inkstone

And you're timeworn: are you made of horn?
And you're solid, yet are you unadorned?
And if I employ you would I be mistaken?

宋歙硯銘

而羸而，角乎而，而敦而，朴乎而，吾庸而，錯乎而。

An Inscription for Fang Yulu's "One with Clear Heaven"

How is it that One with Clear Heaven appears!
How is it that the Studio of Han is accomplished!

Clarity from pig's fat, as light as an elaphure horn,
Abstruse virtue has no piercing fragrance,
Ultimate harmony is desolately dark!

方于魯寥天一墨銘

胡然而生寥天一，胡然而成函之室。
清則豨也膏，輕則麋也角。
玄德非馨，太冲惟漠。

An Inscription for "The Five Planets Gathering Between the Legs and Wall Mansions" Ink

The Heavenly Cock has cried, yet there is still no daylight.
Between the Wolf and Porcupine, the Five Planets shine resplendently.
Extending North to the Palace Gates, rising on the Eastern Pavilion.
When the Emperor's virtue flourishes, cultural endeavors glow with radiance.

五星聚奎璧墨銘

天鷄號，夜未旦。狼獾墟，五星爛。
巨北闔，起東觀。帝德隆，人文煥。

An Inscription on a Lotus Leaf Rhinoceros Horn Cup

Ladle out sweet dew and pour it into this green lotus.
For your longevity: blessings for ten thousand years!

荷葉犀杯銘

挹甘露，注青蓮；為君壽。壽萬年。

An Inscription on a Rhinoceros Horn Mallow Cup

I have a gaur horn beaker, for your splendid banquet.
My heart will always be faithful: you are like the radiant sun.

犀葵杯銘

我有兕觥，薦君瑤席；我心靡他，君如皎日。

An Inscription on a Goosefoot Staff

You are too great to eat, standing straight for “the upholder of what’s right.”
Would that I took you for my body, I would then never be weary.

藜杖銘

爾碩不食，亭亭乎司直。我躬爾，我則無射。

An Inscription on a Bamboo Staff

Someone offered me sandals; someone gave me a small table.
And yet, with such spruced charm, I could only take you.

竹杖銘

或賜我履，或授我几，猗與有斐，唯子是以。

An Inscription for a Bamboo “As you wish” Scepter

Metal? Stone? Curved yet straight?
Were you dormant in Nanyang?
Were you an accessory to a gallant dragon?

竹如意銘

金耶石耶？曲而直耶？南陽螫耶？矯矯乎龍為匹耶？

An Inscription to the Right of My Seat

Inspect its grand appearance,
Without having been worked upon it would not be refined.
Why is it stored away in a wooden chest? It uses obscurity to shine forth.
The sages of antiquity used it for sacrifices in autumn and winter,
Ascending to the halls of the merchants, condescending to be placed on the wall.
Chiseled as a jade scepter, holding in slight regard the tiger-shaped, and yellow cups,
Wild with music and wine, wasted at the banquets of friends,
As time passes like the waters flow, do not say that it is far-off.

座右銘

相彼章相，弗攻弗良。
胡然櫝藏，用晦而光。
古昔先王，爾烝爾嘗。

升賈之堂，見屈于牆。
琢彼珪璋，藐茲琥璜。
樂酒作狂，燕朋作荒。
逝流湯湯，勿謂來長。

APPENDIX 2:

AN INDEX OF WANG DAOKUN'S INSCRIPTIONS ON THINGS

The following two tables list all of the inscriptions on things attributed to Wang Daokun in *Taihan ji* 太函集 (table 1) and in other sources from the Ming to the present (table 2). Wang also wrote numerous *ming* inscriptions for buildings, but I have not covered these texts in this dissertation as their formal conventions diverge from those of the epigram on an object and merit analysis as a distinct sub-genre of classical prose. The first table follows the order of epigrams listed in *Taihan ji*. The second table lists other inscriptions attributed to Wang that are not included in any of his literary anthologies.

1) Inscriptions for objects attributed to Wang Daokun in *Taihan ji*:

	Title	Patron	Source	Details
1	<p><i>Chen Yushu obtained Six Rocks of Wu, they are all marvelous and the gathered writers praised them, while I composed inscriptions to be engraved onto the stones</i></p> <p>陳玉叔得吳石六則皆神奇諸作者贊之余為銘而勒之石</p>	<p>Chen Wenzhu 陳文燭 (1536–1595)</p>	<p><i>Taihan ji</i>, <i>juan</i> 78; also anthologized as exemplary inscriptions in <i>Wenzhang bianti huixuan</i> 文章辨體彙選, <i>juan</i> 450</p>	<p>A selection of epigrams for six rocks. Chen was renowned in the late Ming as an obsessive rock collector (see Gu Qiyuan, <i>Kezuo zhuiyu</i>). Wang Daokun wrote a preface for Chen's collected prose and Chen was a regular participant in the activities of Wang's poetry society the White Elm (白榆社). Wang's young follower, Pan Zhiheng 潘之恆 (1556–1621), records visits of the members of the poetry society to Chen's estate to view his rocks (possibly explaining</p>

				<p>Wang's reference to "gathered writers") (Pan, <i>Baiyu she shicao</i> 白榆社詩草).</p> <p>Wang's inscriptions for six specimens likely stem from this trip. There is also a letter in <i>Taihan ji</i> addressed to Chen accompanying the draft of the six inscriptions (<i>Taihan ji</i>, <i>juan</i> 104).</p>
2	<p><i>An Inscription, with Preface, for Wang Yuanli's Spoon-Head Dagger</i> 汪元蠡匕首銘</p>	<p>Wang Yuanli 汪元蠡</p>	<p><i>Taihan ji</i>, <i>juan</i> 78; <i>Taihan fumo</i> 太函副墨, <i>juan</i> 20; <i>Wenzhang bianti huixuan</i>, <i>juan</i> 450</p>	
3	<p><i>An Inscription for Guo Cifu's Calabash Ladle</i> 郭次甫瓠子瓢銘</p>	<p>Guo Di 郭第</p>	<p><i>Taihan ji</i>, <i>juan</i> 78; <i>Taihan fumo</i>, <i>juan</i> 20</p>	<p>Guo was a member of the White Elm Society. He was known as a recluse from Jiaoshan 焦山.</p>
4	<p><i>An Inscription for Zha Bashi's Pipa</i> 查八十琵琶銘</p>	<p>Zha Bashi 查八十</p>	<p><i>Taihan ji</i>, <i>juan</i> 78; <i>Taihan fumo</i>, <i>juan</i> 20; <i>Wenzhang bianti huixuan</i>, <i>juan</i> 450</p>	<p>Zha Nai 查鼎 earned fame for his skill in playing the <i>pipa</i> in the mid-sixteenth century. Wang Daokun composed a widely cited biography for Zha (<i>Taihan ji</i>, <i>juan</i> 28) and there is also a letter to him in Wang's collected</p>

				writings (<i>Taihan ji</i> , <i>juan</i> 97).
5	<i>An Inscription for Zuogan's Endblown Flute</i> 左干簫銘	Wu Tingyu 吳廷羽	<i>Taihan ji</i> , <i>juan</i> 78; <i>Taihan fumo</i> , <i>juan</i> 20	Wu Tingyu was an acclaimed flutist. He was also a student of the painter Ding Yunpeng, an inkmaker, and a contributor of illustrations to Fang Yulu's catalogue of ink.
6	<i>An Inscription for an Inkstone of "Conjoined Affinity," with Preface</i> 結緣硯銘有序	Ding Yunpeng 丁雲鵬 (1547–1628)	<i>Taihan ji</i> , <i>juan</i> 78	An inscription on an inkstone for Ding Yunpeng, a painter and Chan practitioner who was later celebrated as a founder of the Huizhou school of painting. Ding was responsible for many of the designs in Fang Yulu's ink catalogue. Wang Daokun wrote a biography for Ding Yunpeng's father and was related to Ding's mother, a fellow Wang 汪 of Xiuning. This particular inkstone was also inscribed by the influential Chan monk, Zibai zhenke 紫柏真可 (1543–1603), see <i>An Inscription for Ding Nanyu's Inkstone of</i>

				“ <i>Conjoined Affinity</i> ” 丁南羽 結緣硯銘, in <i>Zibai laoren ji</i> 紫柏老人集, <i>juan 11</i> .
7	<i>An Inscription for a Stone Gourd Inkslab</i> 石瓜硯銘	Possibly Zhou Tianqiu 周天球 (1514– 1595)	<i>Taihan ji, juan 78</i>	
8	<i>An Inscription on a Song Dynasty She Inkstone</i> 宋歙硯銘		<i>Taihan ji, juan 78; Taihan fumo, juan 20</i>	
9	<i>An Inscription on an Antique Inkstone</i> 古硯銘		<i>Taihan ji, juan 78</i>	
10	<i>An Inscription for Fang Yulu’s “One with Clear Heaven” Ink</i> 方于魯寥天一墨銘	Fang Yulu 方于魯 (1541– 1608)	<i>Taihan ji, juan 78; Taihan fumo, juan 20</i> The inscription as it appears in <i>Taihan ji</i> is also split into two texts for separate designs in Fang Yulu: 1) “Hongzhong qicao” (洪中起草) <i>Fangshi mopu, juan 3:41b</i> upper; 2) “Liaotian yi ming” (寥天一銘), <i>juan 4:13b</i>	The “Hongzhong qicao” design bears Wang’s seal “Hansan shiyin” (函三室印) and appears to have been commissioned to commemorate Wang’s studio (Figure 5.1). The design is signed “Inscribed by Wang Boyu” (汪伯玉銘). The calligraphy for this section of the inscription is attributed to the eminent Suzhou artist Zhou Tianqiu. Fang’s “Liaotian yi ming” design



Figure 5.1

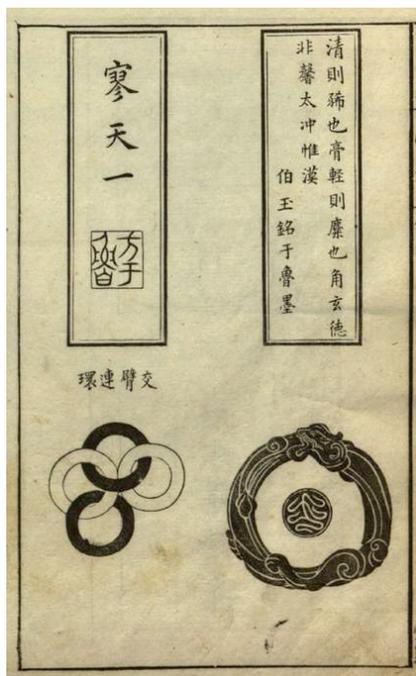
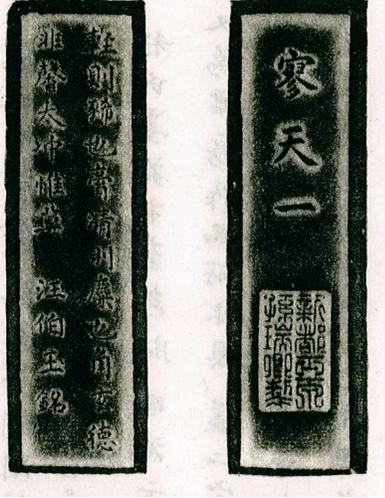


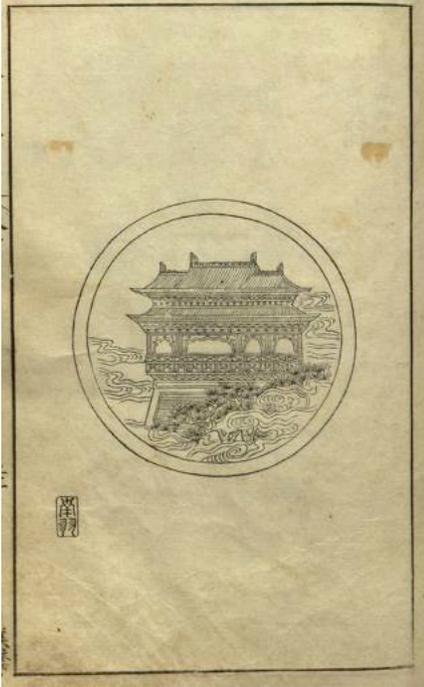
Figure 5.2

is signed “Boyu inscribed Yulu’s Ink” (伯玉銘于魯墨) and appears alongside the seal “Fang Yulu” (方于魯) (Figure 5.2). It is copied in *Master Cheng’s Garden of Inks* with a new epigram, 6:1a.

“One with Clear Heaven” became a popular and widely counterfeited ink brand in the late Ming market. Wang’s inscription has also been transcribed onto an ink-cake manufactured by the Wanli inkmaker Sun Ruiqing 孫瑞卿, preserved by Zhang Zigao 張子高 (1886–1976), and now held in the Palace Museum (Figure 5.3).

				
11	<p>An Inscription for “Double Ganoderma” Ink 二芝墨銘</p>	<p>Dedicated to Long Ying 龍膺 (1560–1622) on a Fang Yulu ink-cake design.</p>	<p><i>Taihan ji</i>, juan 78; <i>Fangshi mopu</i>, juan 2:35b</p> 	<p>The inscription appears on an ink-cake designed by Fang Yulu with an image of two black fungi. It is signed “Inscribed by Veteran of the White Elm Society [Wang Daokun] for Master Long of Wuling” (白榆社叟為武陵龍相君銘) (Figure 5.4). Wang Daokun and Long Ying (the local magistrate of Huizhou) were co-founders of the White Elm Society. The design is copied and slightly modified in <i>Master Cheng’s Garden of Inks</i>, 13:11b.</p>

12	<p><i>An Inscription for “Non Soot” Ink</i> 非煙墨銘</p>	Fang Yulu	<p><i>Taihan ji, juan 78; Fangshi mopu, juan 4:33b</i></p> 	<p>Wang’s inscription appears on a design in Fang Yulu’s catalogue of ink alongside the label “Feiyan” (非煙) and the seal “Momoiao” (墨妙) (Figure 5.5). It is signed “Boyu inscribed Yulu’s Ink” (伯玉銘于魯墨). The design is copied with a new inscription in <i>Master Cheng’s Garden of Inks</i>, 4:4a upper. Wang Daokun’s inscription was also adapted for a design in Matsui Gentai’s 松井元泰 <i>Kobaien Bokufu</i> 古梅園墨譜 published in 1743.</p>
13	<p><i>An Inscription on Ink for the Imperial Library of Gathered Jade</i> 羣玉册府墨銘</p>	Fang Yulu	<p><i>Taihan ji, juan 78; Fangshi mopu, juan 1:23a-b</i></p>	<p>An inscription for a Fang Yulu ink-cake design, signed “Inscribed by Master Taihan” (太函氏銘) (Figure 5.6). The calligraphy is attributed to Zheng Xiangwei 鄭象位. The inscription is actually presented above</p>

			 <p>Figure 5.6</p>  <p>Figure 5.7</p>	<p>the image of the ink-cake and not as a component of its surface (Figure 5.7). The illustrated image is accompanied by Ding Yunpeng's seal (Nanyu 南羽). The image is copied without Wang's inscription in <i>Master Cheng's Garden of Inks</i>, 4:15b.</p>
14	<i>An Inscription for "The Five Planets Gathering Between the Legs and Wall</i>	Fang Yulu	<i>Taihan ji</i> , juan 78; <i>Taihan fumo</i> , juan 20	Wang's inscription is included as a supporting text

Mansions" Ink
五星聚奎壁墨銘



Figure 5.8



Figure 5.9

for a Fang Yulu ink-cake design named the “The Five Planets Gathering Between the Legs and Wall Mansions.” Like the *Ink for the Imperial Library of Gathered Jade* design, Wang’s inscription is not depicted as part of the ink-cake, but as a supplement (Figure 5.8). The ink-cake design depicts the personification of the Legs Mansion on the recto surface of the ink-cake and the Walls Mansion on the verso (Figure 5.9). These characters are drawn from the “Images of the Twenty-Eight Lunar Mansions” 二十八宿圖. The combination of the two images marks the auspicious event of the five planets gathering between the Wall and Legs mansions in the third month of 1584. This date also marked an

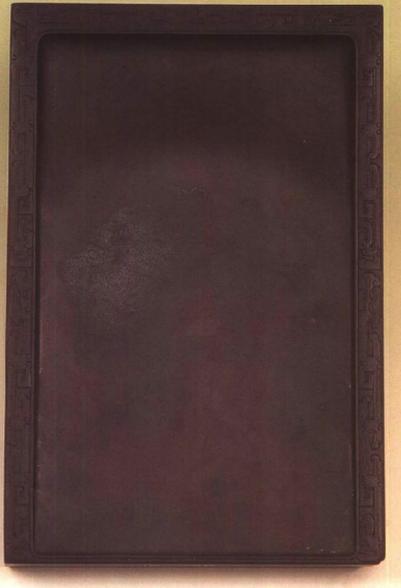
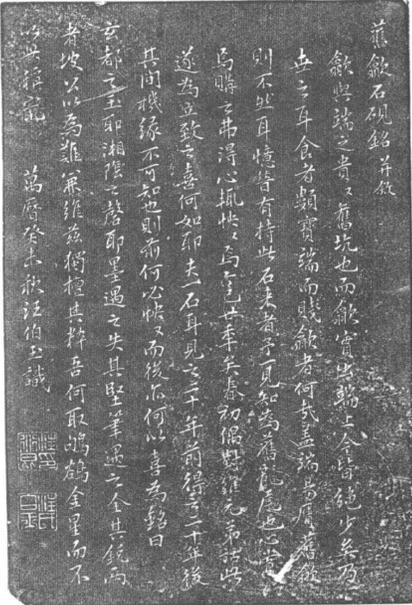
				important meeting of the White Elm Society and Long Ying's twenty-fifth birthday and success in the examinations. The inscription below the Legs Mansion image is dated and signed "Record made by the Uninhibited Historian of the Orchid Pavilion" (蘭臺逸史紀). Below the Wall Mansion image there is another inscription in <i>sao</i> meter by Wang Daokun that is not included in <i>Taihan ji</i> . This text is signed "Inscribed by Master Taihan" (太函氏銘) and accompanied by Wang's seal "Zuo Sima" (左司馬).
15	<i>An Inscription on Ink for Huang Zaizhong</i> 黃在中墨銘	Huang Zaizhong 黃在中	<i>Taihan ji</i> , <i>juan 78</i>	
16	<i>An Inscription for a You Vessel of Ink</i> 一卣墨銘		<i>Taihan ji</i> , <i>juan 78</i>	Dated to 1585.
17	<i>An Inscription for the Ink of the Standing Grain Fowl</i> 禾雞墨銘	Fang Yulu	<i>Taihan ji</i> , <i>juan 78</i> ; There is a design entitled "Muji" 木雞 with an inscription by Wang included in <i>Fangshi mopu</i> , <i>juan 3:40b</i> . The epigram in <i>Fangshi mopu</i> is a different composition from the	Wang's inscription for "Muji" appears on an ink-cake design in Fang Yulu's catalogue of ink alongside

			 <p>Figure 5.11</p>	<p>by Daokun” (署名道昆) and bears two seal script characters on the outside of the cup Kang Hou (亢侯) (Figure 5.12).</p>
			 <p>Figure 5.12</p>	
22	<i>An Inscription on a Mushroom Beaker</i> 芝杯銘		<i>Taihan ji</i> , juan 78; <i>Taihan fumo</i> , juan 20	
23	<i>An Inscription on a Goosefoot Staff</i> 藜杖銘		<i>Taihan ji</i> , juan 78; <i>Taihan fumo</i> , juan 20; <i>Gujin tushu jicheng</i> 古今圖書集成, <i>kaogong dian</i> 考工典, juan 219	
24	<i>An Inscription on a Bamboo Staff</i> 竹杖銘		<i>Taihan ji</i> , juan 78; <i>Taihan fumo</i> , juan 20; <i>Gujin tushu jicheng</i> , <i>kaogong dian</i> , juan 219	

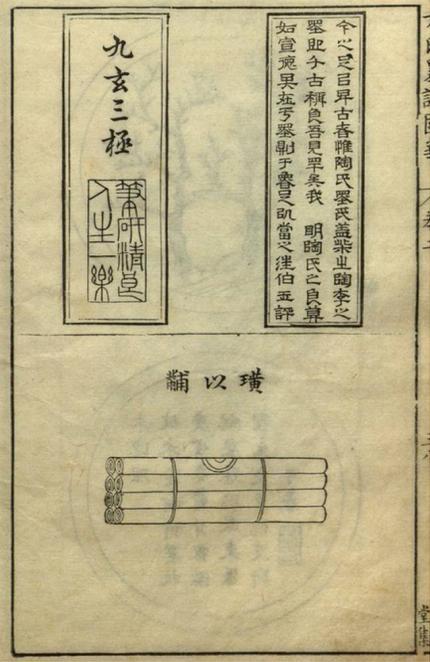
25	<i>An Inscription on a Bamboo “As you Wish” Scepter</i> 竹如意銘		<i>Taihan ji, juan 78; Taihan fumo, juan 20</i>	
26	<i>An Inscription on a Spouting Stone</i> 石溜銘		<i>Taihan ji, juan 78</i>	
27	<i>An Inscription on a Natural Lavatory</i> 天漏銘		<i>Taihan ji, juan 78</i>	
28	<i>An Inscription on a Sharpened Stone</i> 剡石銘		<i>Taihan ji, juan 78</i>	
29	<i>An Inscription to the Right of My Seat</i> 座右銘		<i>Taihan ji, juan 78; Taihan fumo, juan 20; Bokujō hikkei 墨場必携, xia juan</i>	

2) Inscriptions attributed to Wang Daokun in other sources:

	Title	Patron	Source	Details
30	<i>Master Zeng of Nanfeng’s Inkstone</i> 曾南豐先生硯	Zhan Jingfeng 詹景鳳 (1532–1602)	<i>Dongtu xuanlian bian</i> 東圖玄覽編, <i>juan 4</i>	Wang Daokun was invited by Zhan to compose an inscription for a new box, alongside another inscription by Wang Shizhen. The inkstone, a round Duan rock, was initially owned by Zeng Gong 曾鞏 (1018–1083) and later by Cheng Jufu 程鉅夫 (1249–1318).
31	<i>An Inscription for an Old She Stone Inkslab with a Preface</i> 舊歛石硯銘并序	Wang Daokun	Beijing Capital Museum	Held in the Beijing Capital Museum (Figure 5.13). The inscription is dated to the autumn of

			 <p>Figure 5.13</p>  <p>Figure 5.14</p>	<p>1583. With seals: “Wang Daokun” and “Master Wang Boyu” (汪氏伯玉) (Figure 5.14). Dimensions: 2.7×14.8×22.3cm.</p>
32	<p><i>Wang Nanming’s Inkstone</i> 硯汪南溟</p>		<p><i>Han hai</i> 翰海, <i>juan</i> 4</p>	<p>An epigram for what appears to be a (now lost) Fujianese “Phoenix Beak” ink slab.</p>
33	<p><i>Sima’s Inkstone Inscription</i></p>	<p>Zhou Guanggao</p>	<p><i>Mingnong shantang ji</i> 明農山堂集, <i>wen</i>: <i>juan</i> 26</p>	<p>A gift for Zhou offered with a copy of Wang</p>

	司馬硯銘	周光镐 (1536– 1616)		Daokun's <i>Fumo</i> . Signed "Given by Sima Master Wang Boyu" (司 馬汪伯玉先生贈).
34	<i>An Inscription on a Xuanhe Red Thread Inkstone</i> 宣和紅絲硯		<i>Wenru gong riji</i> 文如公日記, entry dated: 19 th September 1935	Acquired by Deng Zhicheng 鄧之誠 (1887–1960).
35	<i>A She Inkstone marked Master Taihan</i> 太函氏識抄手歛 硯		 Figure 5.15	A She "handle" (<i>chaoshou</i>) inkstone with an epigram and signature, "Signed Master Taihan" (太函氏識) that was recently put up for auction by the Fujian Southeast Auction Company (30 th October 2016) (Figure 5.15). Dimensions: 8.5×13×22cm.
36	<i>Black Ceremonial Robes and a Black Battleaxe</i> 玄袞玄鉞	Fang Yulu	<i>Fangshi mopu, juan 2:26b</i>	Signed: "Old Han's personal inscription, manufactured under the supervision of Yulu" (函翁自 銘, 于魯監製) (Figure 5.16). The same title and subject appear with a different inscription in <i>Master Cheng's Garden of Inks</i> , 10:34b.

				
37	<i>Nine Mysteries and Three Absolutes</i> 九玄三極	Fang Yulu	<i>Fangshi mopu, juan 2:38b</i> 	A design for one of Fang Yulu’s leading grades of ink (Figure 5.17). The text of Wang’s inscription is recycled from an “evaluative comment” (方于魯墨評) included as a preface for the catalogue.
38	<i>Old Han’s Inscription</i> 函翁銘	Fang Yulu	<i>Fangshi mopu, juan 4:39a</i>	A design in Fang Yulu’s catalogue formed by recycling an “evaluative comment” (方于魯墨評) from the

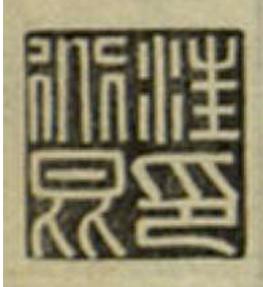
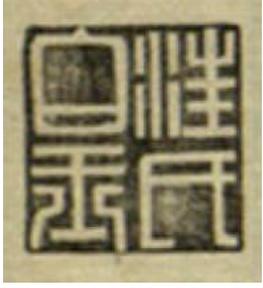
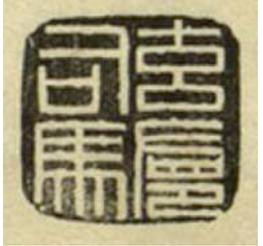
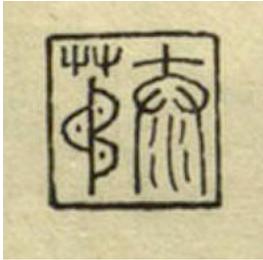
				<p>preface to <i>Master Fang's Catalogue of Inks</i> dated to 1582, alongside Fang Yulu's studio mark "Halcyon Days" (佳日) (Figure 5.18). This copy of the inscription has, again, been rendered by the calligrapher Zheng Xiangwei. The graphs for "Jiari" are adapted from the <i>Tomb Inscription for the Duke of Teng</i> (騰公墓銘).</p>
39	<p><i>Image of the Five Oxen</i> 五牛圖</p>	Fang Yulu	<p><i>Fangshi mopu</i>, juan 5:10a-b</p> 	<p>A design for an ink-cake featuring an image of the "Five Oxen Painting" (Wuniu tu 五牛圖) attributed to Han Huang 韓滉 (723-787) (Figure 5.19). The copy was made and signed by Ding Yunpeng. Wang composed a short supplementary inscription signed "Studio of Three Hans" (函三室) with the seal "Old Han" (函翁) that appears above the verso of the design (Figure 5.20). The design is copied without Wang's</p>

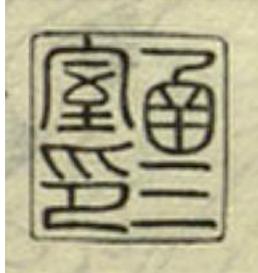
		 <p>白類為祥 純白真常 玄元守黑 異室同堂 西三堂</p> <p>五牛圖 一體純白喻真性無 染二首漸覆喻迷真 起妄三體純覆業垢 嬰纏四首漸白喻背 妄歸真五又純白喻 返本還源</p>	<p>inscription in <i>Master Cheng's Garden of Inks</i>, 12:10b.</p>
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Figure 5.20

APPENDIX 3:

WANG DAOKUN'S SEALS

 <p>Figure 5.21</p>  <p>Figure 5.22</p>	<p>Wang Daokun 汪道昆 (Figures 5.21 and 5.22)</p> <p>Notes: Wang's given name seal (<i>ming</i> 名). Used on his correspondence with Fang Yongbin and for his prefaces to his own literary anthologies and Fang Yulu's catalogue of inks. Also appears on the Capital Museum Dragon Tail. Reproduced by various late Ming seal carvers including Zhu Jian 朱簡 (1570-?).</p>
 <p>Figure 5.23</p>	<p>Wang shi Boyu 汪氏伯玉 (Figure 5.23)</p> <p>Notes: Wang's courtesy name seal (<i>zi</i> 字). Often used together with his given name seal.</p>
 <p>Figure 5.24</p>	<p>Xuanhu Sima 玄扈司馬 (Figure 5.24)</p> <p>Notes: A comparatively rare penname seal. Qing manuscript copies of Wang's <i>Taihan ji</i> are named <i>Xuanhu lou ji</i> 玄扈樓記.</p>
 <p>Figure 5.25</p>	<p>Taimao 泰茅 (Figure 5.25)</p>

 <p>Figure 5.26</p>	<p>Boyu 伯玉 (Figure 5.26)</p> <p>Notes: an abbreviated version of Wang’s courtesy name seal (<i>zi</i>).</p>
 <p>Figure 5.27</p>	<p>Hanweng 函翁 (Figure 5.27)</p> <p>Notes: Wang took “Old Han” as a penname in 1584.</p>
 <p>Figure 5.28</p>	<p>Hansan shiyin 函三室印 (Figure 5.28)</p> <p>Notes: A studio name introduced together with his new penname, “Old Han,” in 1584.</p>
 <p>Figure 5.29</p>	<p>Zuo Sima 左司馬 (Figure 5.29)</p> <p>Notes: Wang Shizhen and Wang Daokun were later paired as the “Two Simas” (Liang Sima 兩司馬) of the Wanli era, both because their official ranks were deemed to be as high as the ancient Sima civilian military officers and because their literary talents were deemed comparable to Sima Qian 司馬遷 and Sima Xiangru 司馬相如.</p>

APPENDIX 4:

WANG DAOKUN'S POETRY SOCIETIES

Wang Daokun's engagements with the late Ming market for decorative objects are intimately intertwined with the activities of his two poetry societies. Most of the texts and relationships covered in this dissertation involved members of either the Fenggan or White Elm groups: Fang Yongbin's pawnshop operation and Fang Yulu's ink business being prominent cases. The Fenggan Society, named after a local river in Xiuning, was primarily intended to help Daoguan and Daohui acquire literary expertise and establish business contacts in Shexian (Fang Yongbin and Fang Yulu were fellow members). The White Elm was a much larger organization that included leading artists and poets from across Jiangnan. Led by Wang Daokun and the local magistrate of Huizhou, Long Ying, this society reveals the confluence of cultural capital and political power behind Wang's name. Almost all the contributors of literary endorsements for Fang Yulu's ink catalogue came from the White Elm.

For a detailed introduction, see Geng Chuanyou 耿傳友, "Baiyu she shulüe" 白榆社述略, *Huangshan xueyuan xuebao* 黃山學院學報 1 (2007): 29–33; "Wang Daokun yu Mingdai Longqing, Wanli jian de shitan" 汪道昆與明代隆慶, 萬曆間的詩壇, *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu* 中國文化研究 4 (2006): 100–109.

1) Fenggan Society 豐干社

Founded: 1567

Members: Wang Daokun 汪道昆 (1523–1593)
Wang Daoguan 汪道貫 (1543–1591)
Wang Daohui 汪道會 (1544–1613)
Chen Quan 陳筌 (1535–1576)
Fang Ce 方策
Fang Jian 方簡 (1542–1584)
Fang Yu 方宇 (1546–1610)
Fang Yongbin 方用彬 (1542–1584)
Wu Shouhuai 吳守淮
Cheng Benzong 程本中 (1547–1584)
Xie Bi 謝陛 (1547–1615)
Fang Yulu 方于魯 (1541–1608)

Sources: "Fenggan she ji" 豐干社記, *Taihan ji*, *juan* 72; "Ji Fenggan she zhu junzi" 寄豐干社諸君子, *Taihan ji*, *juan* 109; "Beiyou bie she zhong zhuzi" 北游別社中諸子, *Taihan ji*, *juan* 109; "Ji Fenggan she zhuzi" 寄豐干社諸子, *Taihan ji*, *juan* 113.

2) White Elm Society 白榆社

Name	Year of Entry	Related texts in <i>Taihan ji</i>
Long Ying 龍膺 (1560–1622) from Wuling 武陵	1583	“Song Long xiangjun kaoxu xu” 送龍相君考續序, <i>Taihan ji</i> , <i>juan</i> 7; “You Huangshsan ji” 游黃山記, <i>Taihan ji</i> , <i>juan</i> 75.
Guo Di 郭第 from Changzhou 長洲	1583	Ibid.
Pan Zhiheng 潘之恆 (1556–1622) from Shexian 歙縣	1583	Ibid.
She Xiang 余翔 from Putian 莆田	1583	“You Huangshsan ji,” <i>Taihan ji</i> , <i>juan</i> 75; “Baiyu she song She Zonghan huan Min mozhang ji shi” 白榆社送余宗漢還閩末章即事, <i>Taihan ji</i> , <i>juan</i> 117.
Chen Rubi 陳汝璧 from Mianyang 沔陽	1583/4	“Chen jinshi Lifu guo Qianqiu li tongji Xiaoyuan de shu zi” 陳進士立甫過千秋里同集嘯園得書字, <i>Taihan ji</i> , <i>juan</i> 116.
Ding Yingtai 丁應泰 from Jiangxia 江夏	1584	“Song Long xiangjun kaoxu xu,” <i>Taihan ji</i> , <i>juan</i> 7.
Li Weizhen 李維禎 (1547–1626) from Jingshan 京山	1584	“Song Long xiangjun kaoxu xu,” <i>Taihan ji</i> , <i>juan</i> 7; “Zhao Li Taishi lai shaoxian ren she” 招李太史來少仙人社, <i>Taihan ji</i> , <i>juan</i> 112.
Zhu Duo Zheng 朱多炆 (1541–1589) from Nanchang 南昌	1584	Ibid.
Shen Mingchen 沈明臣 (1518–1595) from Yinxian 鄞縣	1585	“Lichun qian yiri cong Guo Cifu, Shen Jiaye, Fang Wengtian fu Meihua ge zhi bao, chi Erzong bu zhi, fen de kaizi” 立春前一日從郭次父, 沈嘉則, 方翁恬赴梅花閣之報, 遲二仲不至, 分得開字, <i>Taihan ji</i> , <i>juan</i> 116.
Zhang Jiazhen 章嘉禎 from Deqing 德清	1585	“Zhao Zhang Yuanli ru Baiyu she” 招章元禮入白榆社, <i>Taihan ji</i> , <i>juan</i> 117; “Song Zhang Yuanli gui Wuxing” 送章元禮歸吳興, <i>Taihan ji</i> , <i>juan</i> 117.
Zhou Tianqiu 周天球 (1514–1595) from Changzhou 長洲	1585	“Zhao Zhou Gongxia ru Baiyu she” 招周公瑕入白榆社, <i>Taihan ji</i> , <i>juan</i> 117; “Song Zhou zhang huan Wu” 送周丈還吳, <i>Taihan ji</i> , <i>juan</i> 117.
Tu Long 屠隆 (1543–1605) from Yinxian 鄞縣	1585	“Xi Tu Changqing zhi” 喜屠長卿至, <i>Taihan ji</i> , <i>juan</i> 117; “Zhao Changqing ru she” 招長卿入社, <i>Taihan ji</i> , <i>juan</i> 117.

Xu Gui 徐桂 from Wulin 武林	1585	“Qiu run zhao Xu Maowu ru she tong zaigong fu” 秋閏招徐茂吳入社同宰公賦, <i>Taihan ji, juan 117</i> .
Yu Ce 俞策 (1550–1627) from Yangxian 陽羨	1586	“Baiyu she xuwu ren, xi Yu Gonglin zai zhi, yi shi zhao zhi” 白榆社虛無人, 喜俞公臨再至, 以詩招之, <i>Taihan ji, juan 118</i> .
Lü Yinchang 呂胤昌 (1560–?) from Yuyao 余姚	1588	“Wanling Lü xiangjun li Xindu, zhao ru she ershou” 宛陵呂相君歷新都, 招入社二首, <i>Taihan ji, juan 118</i> ; “Ji tongshe Lü zhu jue yu” 寄同社呂主爵玉繩, <i>Taihan ji, juan 118</i> .
Wu Jiadeng 吳稼澄 from Xiaofeng 孝豐	1589	“Hanzhong xi Wengjin zhi” 函中喜翁晉至, <i>Taihan ji, juan 118</i> ; “Zhao Wu Wengjin ru Baiyu she” 招吳翁晉入白榆社, <i>Taihan ji, juan 118</i> .
Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551–1602) from Lanxi 蘭溪	1591	“Xi Hu Yuanrui zhi” 喜胡元瑞至, <i>Taihan ji, juan 118</i> ; “Zhao Yuanrui ru Baiyu she” 招元瑞入白榆社, <i>Taihan ji, juan 118</i> .
Zhang Yigui 張一桂 (1540–1592) from Shexian 歙縣	1591	“Dasi cheng Zhang gong zhi zhixi” 大司成張公至志喜, <i>Taihan ji, juan 119</i> ; “Zhao Zhang Dasi cheng ru Baiyu she” 招張大司成入白榆社, <i>Taihan ji, juan 119</i> .

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- CSJCCB: *Congshu jicheng chubian* 叢書集成初編, 4000 vols. Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1935.
- QDSWJHB: *Qingdai shiwen ji huibian* 清代詩文集彙編, 801 vols. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2009–2011.
- SKJHSCK: *Siku jinhui shu congkan* 四庫禁燬書叢刊, 311 vols. Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1997.
- SKQSCMCS: *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書, 1200 vols. Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1997.
- WYGSKQS: *Wenyuan ge Siku quanshu* 文淵閣四庫全書, 1500 vols. Facsimile reprint. Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1983–1986.
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