

YANG WEIZHEN (1296-1370) AND THE SOCIAL ART OF PAINTING INSCRIPTIONS

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AI-LIAN LIU

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Abstract

The dissertation explores the text-image relationship in late Yuan literati painting and the social dimension of painting inscriptions. Each of the first three chapters is devoted to the discussion of one painting and its inscriptions by the poet-calligrapher Yang Weizhen (1296-1370) and his contemporaries. By tracing the distinct assembling process of each work, the dissertation investigates the social conventions of painting inscriptions. The fourth chapter recounts the history of painting inscriptions from the fourth to the fourteenth century, with an emphasis on the social dimension, in order to place the late-Yuan practice in a historical context. Furthermore, the dissertation addresses the fluidity of meaning in Chinese painting and the role the audience (inscribers) played in the process of meaning-making. By bringing to light the social dimensions of painting inscriptions, this dissertation prompts a reevaluation of the use of inscriptions in the studies of Chinese painting.

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Last but not least, I am grateful for the unfailing love and support of my parents, to whom this dissertation is affectionately dedicated.

List of Images Discussed

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Introduction

Painting inscriptions have been long held as invaluable primary sources in studies of Chinese painting history. They have been essential to both traditional connoisseurs and modern scholars in securing authorship, historical contexts, audience reception and interpretations of the painted image. This dissertation addresses another crucial dimension of painting inscriptions – that is, painting inscriptions as a social medium to forge personal relationships and expand social networking among the educated elite. The present study focuses particularly on painting inscriptions by the late-Yuan literati, of whom Yang Weizhen (1296-1370) was an eminent representative. As the leader of southern literati and an outstanding calligrapher, Yang Weizhen had tremendous social cachet and his social writings were highly sought after. His active participation in artistic and social exchange via inscriptions makes him an ideal subject of the present inquiry. Furthermore, the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) is a pivotal period for the development of painting inscriptions. As a result of the art of painting being extensively incorporated into the social life of the educated elite, inscribing paintings also became a major channel of social exchange among the literati. Also, the great number of painting inscriptions that have survived from the late Yuan period allows us to examine the social dynamics among the artists and their audiences in great detail.

Painting inscription has been featured prominently in scholarly discourse often as the primary evidence of authorship and provenance of a specific work of art. Chu-tsing Li's study of the inscriptions following Zhao Mengfu's (1254-1322) *Autumn Colors on the Qiao and Hua Mountains* represents a most complex and thorough analysis of its kind.¹ Painting inscriptions,

¹ Chu-tsing Li, *The Autumn Colors on the Ch'iao and Hua Mountains: A Landscape by Chao Meng-fu* (Ascona, Switzerland: Artibus Asiae, 1965).

which often out survive their pictorial counterparts, continue to be crucial evidence of artistic ideas and activities, as demonstrated by Marsha Weidner in her reconstruction of the aesthetic activities of the late fourteenth-century monastic communities.² In addition, studies by John Hay, Alfreda Murck, Ho Chuan-hsin and many others have explored more broadly the artistic and political aspects of painting inscriptions as a means to broaden our interpretation of the painted image.³ In a recent study, however, Eugene Wang also warns of the potential pitfalls of “interpreting” painted images by reading the colophons.⁴ He argues that, by the fourteenth century, painting inscriptions by and large follow the “customary generic convention” that “neither report, document, nor narrate.”⁵ While agreeing with his assessment, my dissertation takes a closer look at the supposedly generic language of Yuan painting inscriptions as a form of social writing. From this perspective, painting inscriptions of the fourteenth century have proven to be fertile ground of information about how art objects were used in social scenarios.

Painting inscriptions and their history have also garnered great scholarly interest as a genre of Chinese literature in the past couple decades. For example, Yi Ruofen’s studies on poetic inscriptions discuss works by major literary figures of the Tang and Song dynasties (618-1279) with particular attention to their pictorial nature.⁶ Most recently, Liu Jicai’s

² Marsha Weidner, “Fit for Monks’ Quarters: Monasteries as Centers of Aesthetic Activities in the Later Fourteenth Century,” *Ars Orientalis* 37 (2009): 49-77.

³ John Hay, “Poetic Space: Ch’ien Hsuan and the Association of Painting and Poetry,” in *Words and Image: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting* (New York and Princeton: Metropolitan Museum of Art and Princeton University Press, 1991), 173-198. Alfreda Murck, *Poetry and Painting in Song China: The Subtle Art of Dissent* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000). Ho Chuan-hsin 何傳馨, “Yuan dai shu hua ti yong wen hua – yi Li Shixing jiang xiang qiu wan juan wei li 元代書畫題詠文化 – 以李士行江香秋晚卷為例,” *Gugong xueshu jikan* 19: 4 (2002), 11-40.

⁴ Eugene Wang, “The Elegiac Cicada: Problems of Historical Interpretation of Yuan Painting,” *Ars Orientalis* 37 (2009), 177-194.

⁵ Wang, “Elegiac Cicada,” 181; 185.

⁶ Yi, Ruofen 衣若芬, *Su Shi tihua wenxue yanjiu 蘇軾題畫文學研究* (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1999). See also Yi, *Guan kan, xushu, shenmei – Tang Song tihua wenxue lunji 觀看·敘述·審美: 唐宋題畫文學論集* (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 2004). A comprehensive bibliography of studies in poetic inscription can be found in the latter, 365-407.

comprehensive survey on poetic painting inscriptions, *Zhongguo tihuashi fazhan shi* (History of Poetic Painting Inscriptions in China), establishes a historical framework for studies on specific periods and authors.⁷ My dissertation will bring the literary perspective, which has been published mostly in Chinese and Japanese languages, into Western scholarship and incorporate it with my art historical inquiry. While providing a connection with the broader literary tradition, there are limitations to this wealth of scholarship when applied to the study of art history, however. First of all, these studies focus primarily on painting inscriptions in poetic forms and thus omit those in prose format. Secondly, as literary merit is often the chief concern, these studies inevitably center upon prominent literary figures and their works. Inscriptions that are by minor authors and deemed of little literary merit, nevertheless, can have great implications for the reception and social functions of art objects. Therefore, my dissertation takes an object-centered approach in order to further explore the social dimension of painting and painting inscriptions in the mid-fourteenth century.

In this dissertation, I will demonstrate, through three case studies of works produced and inscribed during the latter half of the fourteenth century, that painting inscriptions were first and foremost a form of social writing. Inscribing painting, by the fourteenth century, is part of the broader practice of exchanging literary compositions as gifts, and it follows the same rules of social engagement prevalent among all levels of the literati class. Using the painted image as a point of departure, the inscriptions were composed to cement relationships and construct social identity among the educated elite. My research takes an object-based approach to examine the inner workings of painting inscriptions as a social medium through in-depth

⁷ Liu Jicai 劉繼才, *Zhongguo tihuashi fazhan shi* 中國題畫詩發展史 (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 2010).

analyses of inscriptions that may otherwise seem generic and irrelevant to the painted images. Furthermore, the latter part of this dissertation traces the history of painting inscriptions from the fourth to the fourteenth century to place the late-Yuan practice in a historical context. By reconstructing the social scenarios within which art objects were utilized, my research participates in and contributes to the ongoing discussion on the social history of Chinese literati painting.

Before proceeding with discussions on any specific works of art, it is necessary to delve into the socio-historical background from which they were produced. The following account of Yang Weizhen's life and time, with an emphasis on his position as the leading figure of the southern literati, lays out the preliminaries for later discussions on the social function of art in the mid-fourteenth century.

Yang Weizhen: A Biography in Brief

Yang Weizhen was born in 1296, under the reign of Emperor Zhengzong (Temür, 1265-1307, r. 1294-1307), the grandson and successor of Khubilai Khan (1215-1294, r. 1260-1294).⁸ It was nearly two decades since the Mongol conquest of southern China, when the rule of the Mongol government over the Chinese population was consolidated and the loyalist resistance mostly faded. The Yang clan was an elite family of generations of scholar officials and local philanthropists in Zhuji (also known as Kuaiji), Zhejiang province. Yang Weizhen received a comprehensive education in Confucian classics, history and literature under the strict

⁸ The following summary of Yang Weizhen's biographical background is largely based on Sun Xiaoli's 孫小力 *Yang Weizhen nian pu* 楊維禎年譜 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 1997), unless otherwise noted. For additional biographical information on Yang Weizhen in English language, see L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368-1644* (New York; London: Columbia University Press, 1976), vol. 2, 1547-1552.

supervision of his father Yang Hong (1265-1339). Yang Hong was himself a “stay-at-home” scholar (*chushi* 處士), which is to say that he never served in public office. It was probably not due to the lack of ability or aspiration to serve, but rather the lack of opportunity. The civil service examination, through which Confucian scholars attained recognition and government positions, was abolished at the beginning of the Yuan dynasty and was not reinstated until 1313.⁹ Even though government positions might still be obtained through the so-called “clerical track,” it was often considered to be beneath the dignity of the highly educated elite. From the fact that Yang Hong and his brothers all chose to remain in their hometown and led a reclusive lifestyle, we may infer that the Yang clan was relatively well-to-do, and Yang Weizhen had a comfortable childhood.¹⁰ The precocious child prodigy was expected to achieve great things – since the reinstatement of the civil service examination, presumably Yang Weizhen was expected to succeed in the examination and achieve an illustrious official career.

Among the numerous sobriquets Yang acquired over his lifetime, Tiejai 鐵崖, or “Iron Cliff,” was the most frequently used and widely known. The name has a legendary origin – at the age of twenty five (in 1320), Yang Weizhen was recommended by the local government to be an examination candidate.¹¹ His strict father, however, insisting that he had not thoroughly studied the classics and thus not ready for such distinction, locked him up in a tower on the Iron-Cliff Hill (*Tiejai shan*). For five years Yang studied assiduously in the tower, while his family sent him provisions via pulleys. The account, confirmed by Yang Weizhen himself in the biography of his father, implies his self-confidence in his scholarship and the great expectation

⁹ Huang Rensheng 黃仁生, *Yang Weizhen yu Yuan mo Ming chu wen xue si chao* 楊維禎與元末明初文學思潮 (Shanghai: Dongfang chubun zhongxin, 2005), 76. The prefectural examination was reinstated in 1313. The national examination was not reinstated until 1315.

¹⁰ Yang Hong’s elder brother, Yang Shi, may have held a military position later in his life, but the detail is unclear. See Sun, *Nianpu*, 26.

¹¹ People’s age throughout this dissertation is given in Chinese reckoning, unless otherwise noted.

from his family.¹² When he finally received the coveted *jinshi* title in 1327, he was appointed the District Magistrate (*Xianyin*, 7a) of Tiantai, Zhejiang province.¹³ On various occasions, Yang Weizhen proudly pointed out that he was the very first *jinshi* in the Yuan dynasty to be appointed the highest administrator of a county district.¹⁴ It is evident that Yang Weizhen did not share the anti-Mongol sentiment of the previous generation, nor did he, at this point, feel discriminated against or unfairly treated as a southerner. Young and full of ambition, Yang was eager to begin his career as a local administrator with the sanguine hope of earning his place at court in due time.

Hopeful and idealistic as young Yang Weizhen was, the harsh reality soon dawned upon him once he took up the responsibilities of a District Magistrate in the following year. As reported by Song Lian (1310-1381) in Yang's epitaph, Yang Weizhen encountered some local powers called the Eight Vultures.¹⁵ The nature of their vice was not anywhere elaborated, but it probably involved bribing government officials, interfering with official affairs, obstructing administrative and juristic decrees and so on. In his conflicts with these local powers, Yang's uncompromising personality eventually led to his dismissal from his post in less than two years (1328-1330). He returned home to Zhuji after this disheartening blow and immersed himself in poetry and other scholarly pursuits. Nevertheless, Yang's sojourn to the capital (the only journey to northern China in his life), his success in the civil examination, and his brief career as the District Magistrate of Tiantai brought him some national recognition and began the weaving of a social network of literary figures nationwide. His reputation as an outstanding writer in

¹² Yang Weizhen, "Xiankao Shan'in gong shilu 先考山陰公實錄," in *Tieya wenji*, juan 2.

¹³ The translation of official titles in this paper follows those of Charles O. Hucker's *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985), unless otherwise noted.

¹⁴ Yang, "Xiankao Shan'in gong shilu." See also Huang, *Yang Weizhen*, 52, 57.

¹⁵ Song Lian, "Yuan gu Fengxun Daifu Jiangxi deng chu ruxue tiju Yang jun muzhiming 元故奉訓大夫江西等處儒學提舉楊君墓誌銘," in *Luanpo ji* 鑾坡集, reprinted in *Sibu congkan jibu* 四部叢刊集部.

archaic-style *fu* rhapsody, a mandatory test subject of the civil service examination for all Han-Chinese candidates, particularly attracted young scholars from different regions to come and study with him.¹⁶

After four years out of office, Yang received another appointment as the Saltern Office Director of Qianqing (near modern Shaoxing, Zhejiang province) in 1334. It was no great cause for rejoicing, however. First, Yang's previous post as a District Magistrate was an upper-class post of the seventh rank, while the Saltern Office Director was a lower-class post of the seventh rank (7b), which is to say that Yang was in fact demoted through no fault of his own. Second, while any Confucian scholar would take pride in being a chief administrator of a regional district—as a shepherd or parent to the commoners—it is quite a different matter with a manager of the saltern office. Collecting and managing the salt taxation was considered somewhat mundane and “clerical” and therefore demeaning for the scholars. Furthermore, the heavy salt taxation was an oppressive burden to commoners, and it would certainly hurt Yang's Confucian sentiment to be in the position of the oppressor. In his capacity as the Saltern Office Director, Yang was reported to have repeatedly argued with his superiors for tax-cuts, threatening even his own resignation.¹⁷ The unhappy situation ended with the death of both his parents in 1339, when he again returned home to observe mourning. For the next ten years he earned his living by teaching at private schools or tutoring sons of wealthy patrons, while living a semi-retired life and roaming the scenic sites of the Jiangnan area through the intricate waterways with his literary friends.

One of the most important turning points in terms of Yang's official career and personal

¹⁶ For the archaic-style *fu* rhapsody in Yuan civil examination system, see Huang Rensheng, “Lun Yuan dai keju yu cifu 論元代科舉與辭賦,” *Wenxue pinglun*, 1995:3.

¹⁷ Song, “muzhiming.”

life is the compilation of the “Three Histories” under the edict of Emperor Shundi (Toghōn Temür, r. 1333-1368) in 1343, namely the official histories of the Song (960-1279), Liao (947-1125) and Jin (1115-1234) dynasties. The project was headed by Prime Minister Toghtō (1314-1355) and a committee of high-ranking scholar officials of various ethnic backgrounds.¹⁸ Normally, the official history of the previous dynasty would be compiled soon after the founding of the new dynasty as a means to assert the legitimacy of the new dynasty and to appease the educated elite. The Three-Histories project was first initiated by Khubilai Khan in the early years of his reign; yet six decades after the fall of the Southern Song dynasty, the “Three Histories” was still nowhere near completion due to a prolonged debate on the issue of legitimate succession (*zhengtong* 正統).¹⁹

Although Yang Weizhen was out of office at the time and his official rank too low to be involved in the project, he was extremely passionate about the Three Histories project and the controversy over succession legitimacy. He wrote “Polemic on Legitimate Succession of the Three Histories (*San shi zhengtong bian* 三史正統辨)” and presented it to various court officials on the committee, including Ouyang Xuan (1273-1357) and Kangli Naonao (1295-1345), to not only advocate his view on the controversy but also solicit their patronage.²⁰ While the official

¹⁸ For detailed accounts on the Three Histories project and the legitimate succession controversy, see Hok-lam Chan, “Chinese official Historiography at the Yüan Court: The Composition of the Liao, Chin and Sung Histories,” in John D. Langlois, Jr. ed., *China under Mongol Rule* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), 56-106; and Chen Fangming, “Song Liao Jin shi de zuanxiu yu zhengtong zhizheng 宋遼金史的纂修與正統之爭,” *Shihuo yuekan*, vol. 2, no. 8 (Nov. 1972), 398-411. For further discussion on Yang Weizhen’s view on the issue of legitimate succession, see Richard L. Davis, “Historiography as Politics in Yang Wei-chen’s ‘Polemic on Legitimate Succession,’” *T’oung Pao*, 2nd series, vol. 69, livr. 1/3 (1983), 33-72.

¹⁹ The project officially began in 1261 with an edict of Khubilai Khan to collect historical documents for the compiling of the official history of the Liao and Jin dynasties, before the fall of the Southern Song dynasty. The Histories were eventually rushed to completion by the end of 1345. See Davis, “Polemic on Legitimate Succession,” 51.

²⁰ Yang Weizhen, “San shi zhengtong bian 三史正統辨,” in Tao Zongyi (fl. 1360-1368), *Chuo geng li* 輟耕錄, juan 3, reprinted in *Congshu jicheng jianbian* (Taipei: Taiwan shang wu yin shu guan, 1965), vols. 81-84. For a complete translation of Yang’s essay, see Davis, “Polemic on Legitimate Succession,” 51-72.

attitude of the Yuan government was inclined to view all three dynasties as legitimate regimes, each following its own legitimate succession, in this lengthy essay Yang Weizhen strongly argued for the Chinese Song dynasty as the one and only legitimate regime of the previous period. His perspective had found sympathy with some court officials, but was nevertheless at odds with the official ideology. In the end, the Three Histories were written according to the official point of view, and Yang's hope of ever leaving his mark on history, literally and figuratively, utterly dashed.²¹

It would be an over simplification to say that Yang's historiography is singularly Chinese-centered and hostile or contemptuous toward any non-Chinese regime. For one thing, he of course acknowledged the legitimacy of the Mongol Yuan dynasty. This legitimacy, however, comes only from their conquest of the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279) and therefore taking over the Mandate of Heaven from the previous rightful ruler of China. More importantly, his argument of "one *zhengtong* at a time" is deeply rooted in his studies of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. Yang Weizhen had specialized in the *Annals*, through which he attained his *jinshi* degree, and therefore it had been his lifelong ambition to become an official historian. The *Spring and Autumn Annals* is the earliest extant example of historical writing in the annals style, and its editorship has been traditionally attributed to Confucius (551-479 BCE). This annals style writing, chronicling the events of the court, later became the core of most of the Chinese official histories. To set up a chronicle of a regime as the "basic annals (*benji* 本紀)" is to recognize the regime as the legitimate successor of the Mandate of Heaven; therefore, it is the first and foremost task of any official history writing. The concept of "one *zhengtong* at a

²¹ Although most of the officials on the committee were Han Chinese or sympathetic to the traditional Chinese historiography, the final decision was made single-handedly by the Prime Minister Toghtō, recognizing three "zhengtong" at the same time, which was considered a brutal violation of the rules of Chinese history writing.

time” was first advocated in the *Annals*, which had long become an unquestionable rule of Chinese historiography by Yang’s time. Although the Yuan court adopted the Chinese tradition to compile official histories of the previous dynasties as a means of asserting its own legitimacy, it felt no obligation to the Chinese-centered notion of succession legitimacy. Its violation of this almost-sacred rule was unbearable for those who subscribed to the Confucian historiography. While those at court may have found it imprudent to express their objection to this violation, Yang Weizhen’s essay leaves us an “unofficial” point of view that was shared by many of his fellow Confucian scholars.

Curiously, among the numerous writings Yang left behind, the “Polemic on Legitimate Succession” is left out of his anthologies but quoted in its entirety in Yang’s biography composed by one of his closest students, Bei Qiong (1297-1379).²² Yang also listed the essay in various autobiographic accounts as one of his most important compositions.²³ It appears that Yang Weizhen regarded himself first and foremost a historian and Confucian scholar; even though his view was not appreciated by the Yuan court, he firmly believed it would eventually be vindicated by later generations. It shows a keen awareness of his reputation in posterity.

After this major disappointment, Yang invested more and more energy in his literary legacy, and from the mid-1340s he became even more active in the literary circles of southern scholars. It is probably no coincidence that the latter half of the 1340s was also the heyday of the “Elegant Gatherings at the Jade Mountain,” an informal poetry society and a series of literary gathering sponsored by Gu Ying (1310-1369), which took place in Gu’s estate, the Jade

²² Bei Qiong, “Teiyai xiansheng zhuan 鐵崖先生傳,” in *Qingjiang Bei xiansheng ji* 清江貝先生集, *juan 2*, reprinted in *Sibu congkan ji bu* (Shanghai: Shang wu yin shu guan, 1922), vols. 1526-1531.

²³ Yang Weizhen, “Tiedi daoren zizhuan 鐵邃道人自傳,” in Chen Yujing et al eds., *Yang Tieyai wenji* 楊鐵崖文集 (preface dated 1501), *juan 2*.

Mountain Villa in Kunshan (near Suzhou, Jiangsu province).²⁴ Yang Weizhen was often the leader of the Jade Mountain gatherings and other similar occasions in southern Jiangsu and eastern Zhejiang, leaving a large number of poems attesting to his literary activities during this period. The generous patronage of Gu Yin also facilitated the formation of the Tieya 鐵雅 (Iron Elegance) school of poetry, a poetry society headed by Yang Weizhen and Li Xiaoguang (1285-1350), whose number of members swelled to about a hundred at times.²⁵ In short, during the decade out of office, Yang built up his reputation as a leading scholar and poet among his peers and a social network among southern scholars that continued to grow until his death in 1370.²⁶

In 1350, Yang Weizhen was once again given an official post as the Superintendent of Agricultural Affairs in Hangzhou, and in 1356 the Prefectural Judge of Jiande, Zhejiang province; but it appears his official duties were no longer the focus of his life. Rather he spent most of his time socializing with his literary friends and invested his energy in writing poetry and literary compositions. He cultivated an uninhabited and carefree persona that traditional

²⁴ The patronage of Gu Yin and the artistic activities at the Jade Mountain Villa are discussed in David Ake Sensabaugh's "Guests at Jade Mountain: Aspects of Patronage in Fourteenth Century K'un-shan," in Chu-tsing Li, et al eds., *Artists and Patrons: Some Social and Economic Aspects of Chinese Paintings* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989), 93-99. See also David Sensabaugh, "Fashioning Identities in Yuan-dynasty Painting: Images of Men of Culture," *Ars Orientalis* 37 (2009), particularly 128-134.

²⁵ The name "Tieya (Iron Elegance) school" is a homonym of Yang Weizhen's style name Tiejai (Iron Cliff). In contemporary accounts, there were "over a hundred" members in the Tieya school, which is probably an exaggeration. Huang Rensheng takes a more realistic survey on the members of the Tieya school and concludes there are about ninety-eight members who were personally acquainted with Yang and still have works extant. See Huang, *Yang Weizhen*, 184-199.

²⁶ To be more specific, Yang Weizhen was indisputably the leader of Chinese scholars of the Jiangnan region. Although the definition of "Jiangnan" varied from one period to another, and can be a general reference to the areas "south of the Yangzi River." Here I adopt the later and more specific definition of Jiangnan as referring to Zhejiang and southern Jiangsu province, precisely the regions Yang frequented during his lifetime. According to Huang Rensheng, the constitution of the Tieya school is highly regional—its members were mostly from Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces. This strongly suggests Yang's status as the preeminent poet of the Jiangnan region, which is considered the Chinese cultural center of the late Yuan period. Admittedly, Yang's direct influence was probably limited to these areas and in retrospect not necessarily a national figure or most significant in the history Yuan poetry. See Huang, *Yang Weizhen*, 169.

accounts often compared to “the bearings of the gentlemen of the [Eastern] Jin (317-420).” One of the most vivid accounts is given by Song Lian in Yang’s epitaph:

At times he wore a Daoist headdress and a feathered robe, navigating his boat afloat the Dragon Lake and Phoenix Shoal, while he played the iron flute. The sound of his flute soared through the clouds, and the onlookers fancied him an immortal in exile. In [his] late years [he became] even more uninhibited. He built the Xuan Garden and Peng[lai] Pavilion north of the Song River. Not a day went by without [his entertaining] guests, and not one of his guests [in those gatherings] did not become intoxicated. When the gentlemen were mellow with wine, he called out his servant girls to sing *White Snow*, while he accompanied them with a pipa-lute. Now and then the guests whirled about in dance – elegant, free and easy. They indeed possessed the lofty bearings of the gentlemen of the [Eastern] Jin!²⁷

或戴華陽巾，披羽衣，泛舟舫於龍潭鳳洲中，橫鐵笛吹之。笛聲穿雲而上，望之者疑其為謫仙人。晚年益曠達，築玄圃蓬臺於松江之上，無日無賓，無賓不沉醉。當酒酣耳熱，呼侍兒出歌〈白雪〉之辭，君自倚鳳琴和之，座客或蹁躑起舞，顧眄生姿，儼然有晉人高風。

He also acquired a less respectable reputation through his dissolute association with women. It is said that Yang had a notorious fetish for bound feet, and often passed around tiny “golden-lotus” shoes of courtesans as wine cups on his drinking parties.²⁸ Even more offensive to moralists is that he often entertained his guests and friends with his “servant girls,” a

²⁷ Song, “muzhiming.”

²⁸ Sun, *Nianpu*, 119-120

euphemism for his own concubines. In one of his autobiographic essays he boasted that since his retirement he roamed the Nine Hills and Three Rivers (*jiufeng sanmao* 九峰三泖) in his boat with his four concubines,²⁹ while other contemporary accounts affirmed that he often entertained his friends and patrons with the musical talents of his concubines.³⁰ Although polygamy was nothing to be frowned upon in pre-modern China, to parade one's concubines in front of other men as singing girls was quite another matter. Still, during his lifetime, his eccentric and somewhat dissolute lifestyle was quite well tolerated (if not indeed admired) among friends. After all, in those "gentlemen of the Jin" Yang had a perfectly legitimate exemplar as a man unbounded by hypocrisy who expressed his true self in ways no matter how aberrant to others.

It is noteworthy that Yang's elegant poetry gatherings and wild drinking parties were set against a background of an increasingly corrupt and dysfunctional bureaucracy and social unrest caused by peasant rebellions breaking out in various regions of China. The rise of the Zhang Shicheng (1321-1367) regime in Suzhou was the one political event that particularly impacted Yang Weizhen and his circle of friends. Suzhou was the leading city of southern Jiangsu province and the capital of the ancient kingdom of Wu, hence the area is often referred to as the Wu region. By mid-fourteenth century, the Wu region was the richest and most populous in China, and Suzhou the silk capital of the world. After the disastrous flooding of the Yellow River in 1344, the Mongol government depended increasingly on the revenue from the rich southern provinces, and heavy taxation sparked social unrest and eventually open

²⁹ The "Nine Hills and Three Rivers" is a general reference of scenic sites near Songjiang, Jiangsu province.

³⁰ Yang Weizhen, "Fengyue furen xu 風月福人序," in *Dongweizi wenji*, juan 9; also see Qu You (1341-1427), "Xianglian bati 香奩八題," in *Guitian shihua* 歸田詩話, reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* (Tainan Xian Liuying Xiang: Zhuangyan wenhua shiye youxian gongsi, 1979), ji bu, vol. 416.

rebellions in Southern China. In 1353, Zhang Shicheng, a former salt smuggler, declared kingship and in 1356 he occupied Suzhou and made it the capital of his regime. The Yuan court, unable to deal with multiple rebellions militarily, attempted to negotiate a conditional surrender with Zhang. In 1357 Zhang accepted the terms and settled for the title of Grand Marshal (*taishi*), nominally in service to the central government, while in reality all his territory, military forces, and political authority remained intact.³¹ As Frederick W. Mote points out, Zhang's surrender, however calculated and superficial, gave him legitimacy especially in the eyes of the Chinese elite.³² Yang Weizhen's reaction to the Zhang Shicheng regime accorded with his standing as a loyal subject and current official of the Yuan government: first he condemned Zhang's open rebellion, but after Zhang's surrender he took on a more sympathetic attitude. Although he declined Zhang's request for an audience, he wrote a long letter and five essays of political advice to Zhang, urging him to command his forces against other local powers and uphold the sovereignty of the Yuan rule.³³ Compared with other rebel leaders and warlords, the Zhang regime was the friendliest toward the educated elite, which certainly gained the approval of Yang and his friends. By 1359, Yang had moved to Songjiang, where he lived a retired life, but he often socialized with officials of Zhang's government (which maintained a high level of autonomy from the central government) and encouraged his students to serve under Zhang.

In the autumn of 1363, Zhang Shicheng again renounced his allegiance to the Yuan government and declared himself the Prince of Wu, and he resumed his campaign against Zhu

³¹ For a more detailed account of Zhang Shicheng's rebellion, see Frederick W. Mote, "The Rise of the Ming Dynasty, 1330-1367," in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978-), 30-35.

³² Mote, "The Rise of the Ming," 33.

³³ Huang, *Yang Weizhen*, 20-26. The letter is cited in Bei Qiong's "Teiyai xiansheng zhuan." The five essays are included in one of Yang Weizhen's anthologies, *Dongweizi wenji* 東維子文集, reprinted in *Sibu congkan chubian* (Taipei: Taiwan shang wu yinshu guan, 1967), vol. 79.

Yuanzhang (1328-1398) for dominance. In 1366 Zhu laid siege to Suzhou and finally captured the city and Zhang Shicheng in 1367. In the following year Zhu Yuanzhang was proclaimed emperor in Nanjing under the dynastic name of Ming (1368-1644). Yang Weizhen's attitude toward the dynastic transition has been a somewhat hazy affair. It is widely circulated that when the new Ming emperor sent for Yang, he declined with a poem, "The Old Widow's Song," asking rhetorically: why bother an old widow of nearly eighty to remarry?³⁴ Based on this poem, on the one hand, Yang has been seen as a loyalist, or *yimin* (leftover subject), to the overthrown Yuan dynasty. On the other hand, some of Yang's other writings that celebrate the new dynasty present a sharp contrast and often lead to the questioning of Yang's moral integrity.³⁵ While "The Old Widow's Song" is still circulated without due consideration to its authenticity, Sun Xiaoli convincingly argues that it was a fabrication of an early Ming writer.³⁶ In fact, after decades of civil war and social unrest, the founding of the new dynasty and restoration of order were perceived as a welcome change by Yang Weizhen. According to both Song Lian and Bei Qiong, two of his earliest biographers, Yang Weizhen accepted Zhu Yuanzhang's invitation in 1370 and traveled to the capital at Nanjing to "collect the Books of Rite and Music." He stayed in Nanjing for over three months, until he fell ill and requested to be excused. He returned to Songjiang and within a month died of pneumonia at age seventy-five.

"Leader of the southeast literary circles" and his social milieu

Yang Weizhen's prestige as the "leader of the southeast literary circles" derives from his

³⁴ The poem is included in Chen Yan (1856-1937) ed., *Yuanshi jishi* 元詩紀事 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), 384.

³⁵ Huang, *Yang Weizhen*, 29.

³⁶ Sun, *Nianpu*, 307-309. See also Sun, "Yang Weizhen shengping shilu kaobian," *Shanghai daxue xuebao*, 1989:1.

achievement in the archaic-style *fu* rhapsody and *yuefu*-style poetry. The former, as mentioned above, was a mandatory subject in the civil service examination for all candidates of Han Chinese descent since the recommence of the examination in 1313.³⁷ Yang's early success in the examination and his reputation as an outstanding writer of the *fu* rhapsody attracted young scholars from other regions to study with him. During his lifetime he published an anthology of his *fu* rhapsodies, *Lize yiyin* 麗則遺音,³⁸ and together with another unpublished volume, *Teiyai fugao* 鐵崖賦稿,³⁹ attests to his productivity as well as the public demand for his work. His extant works of archaic-style *fu* rhapsody amount to ninety-one compositions, which is not only extraordinary among his contemporaries but also a rare occurrence in Chinese literary history.⁴⁰ His literary prestige, furthermore, is best illustrated by two "literary conventions (*wenhui* 文會)" held in 1350. The so-called "literary convention" was actually a privately-sponsored "examination" following the rules and format of the civil service examination. Aspiring scholars sent in their compositions to be judged by eminent literary figures invited by private patrons. The chosen compositions were then published by said sponsors. Therefore, it was not only a contest to try one's literary and exam-taking skills among his fellow candidates, but also a means to gain scholarly reputation. In 1350 Yang Weizhen was invited by two different patrons as the chief judge of such literary conventions. Each occasion attracted hundreds of contenders,⁴¹ and one of the patrons attributed this extraordinary enthusiasm to Yang

³⁷ Examination candidates of Chinese descent include what were classified as "Han people," northern Chinese formerly under the rule of the Jurchen Jin dynasty, and "southerners," formerly subjects of the Southern Song dynasty. Examination candidates of other ethnicity were not required to take the exam of archaic-style *fu* rhapsody. See Huang, *Yang Weizhen*, 85.

³⁸ *Lize yiyin* was edited by Yang's student, Chen Cunli (fl. 14th century), whose preface dated 1341. The volume contains thirty two *fu* rhapsodies. Reprinted in *Si ku quan shu zhen ben 4 ji* (Taipei: Taiwan shang wu yin shu guan, 1973), vol. 301.

³⁹ The volume is also known as *Teiyai xiansheng wenji*. The volume contains fifty *fu* rhapsodies, mostly Yang's later works. See Huang, *Yang Weizhen*, 376-377.

⁴⁰ Huang, *Yang Weizhen*, 379.

⁴¹ The first, Assembly of Cassia (*Jugui wenhui* 聚桂文會) attracted five hundred odd candidates, and the

Weizhen's literary prestige: "...as Master Yang ascended the lofty placard in his youth (i.e. attained the *jinshi* degree), and his literary compositions match the works of the Western Han (206 BCE-8 CE) and High Tang (618-907 CE), not one of the scholars of the mountains and woods does not want to enter his threshold (i.e. become Yang's student). It is why this literary convention flourished beyond the ordinary."⁴²

This account from the preface of the anthology published after one of the literary conventions points out another important function of such an event: as with a formal examination, the candidates who passed the "examination" automatically became "students within the threshold (*mensheng* 門生)" of the chief judge, even if they never had or never would develop a personal relationship. The mock examination created a social obligation on the parts of both the student and the master. On the one hand, as Yang's nominal students, these young scholars could correspond with Yang, ask him for advice or recommendations, or request his literary compositions in the form of prefaces, colophons, inscriptions, epitaphs and so on, without ever meeting their "master" in person. On the other hand, Yang also benefited from this age-old symbiosis, mainly by broadening his social network and accumulating prestige and influence in the literary circles, not to mention the homage (sometimes in material forms) and devotion no less serious than filial piety that was due to him from his so-called students.⁴³ It is no wonder that Yang, as someone who only tutored at schools when out of office, seemingly had hundreds of students – it is a claim that needs to be carefully scrutinized if one is to understand Yang's social relations. Nevertheless, in this case we also see that the social

second, Manifestations of the Star of Wisdom (*Yingkui wenhui* 應奎文會), attracted more than seven hundreds. See Sun, *Nianpu*, 168-169; 171.

⁴² Lü Fuzhi 呂輔之, "Yingkui wenhui zixu 應奎文會自序," in [*Jiaqing*] *Songjiang fuzhi* 松江府志, 1871, reprinted in *Zhongguo fang zhi cong shu. Hua zhong di fang* (Taipei: Cheng wen chu ban she, 1970), vol. 10.

⁴³ Lien-sheng Yang, "The Concept of 'Pao' as a Basis for Social Relations in China," in John K. Fairbank ed., *Chinese Thought and Institutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 303-304.

networking of the literati class was not always built upon personal connections but more often created by social conventions followed by all members of the community.

The other major achievement of Yang Weizhen is his leading role in the archaic *yuefu*-style poetry movement during the last decades of the Yuan dynasty.⁴⁴ As mentioned above, Yang Weizhen devoted more and more of his energy to the *yuefu*-style poetry during the 1340s, the decade out of office, and led the archaic *yuefu* movement by forming the Tiewa school of poetry. “Tiewa (Iron Elegance)” was a byname given to Yang as a compliment to his poetry by fellow poet Li Xiaoguang in 1341, which later became the acknowledged name for the informal poetry society.⁴⁵ The Tiewa school did not have a formal organization or regular meetings, but its members and activities can be traced by their publications. In 1346, Yang’s student Wu Fu (1300-1348) collected more than four hundred poems by Yang in the archaic *yuefu* style in *Tiewai xiansheng gu yuefu* 鐵崖先生古樂府, consisting of works from early 1340s, and was later published with the sponsorship of Gu Ying (1310-1369).⁴⁶ Gu Ying was an active member of the Tiewa school and, more importantly, a close friend and patron of Yang Weizhen, whose patronage was essential to the activities of the Tiewa school and the archaic *yuefu* movement.⁴⁷ As a highly educated son from a wealthy merchant family, Gu Ying opened his estate, the Jade Mountain Villa in Kunshan, to his literary friends and generously sponsored the publication of

⁴⁴ The term *yuefu* refers to the “Music Bureau,” a government agency for collecting and editing folk music, songs and lyrics first established during the Western Han dynasty. In terms of poetic styles, *yuefu* is further divided in two general categories, the “archaic *yuefu*” and “modern *yuefu*,” the former referring to the Han *yuefu* and the latter Tang *yuefu*. The Tang *yuefu* is, generally speaking, more regulated and refined than the grassroots nature of the Han *yuefu*. Furthermore, the archaic style *yuefu* is meant to be song lyrics, while the modern *yuefu* has evolved independent from music and become pure poetry.

⁴⁵ Sun, *Nianpu*, 90.

⁴⁶ Yang Weizhen, *Tiewai xiansheng gu yue fu*, reprinted in *Sibu congkan ji bu* (Shanghai: Shang wu yin shu guan, 1922), vol. 1500-1501.

⁴⁷ For more on Gu Ying’s patronage of the arts, see David Ake Sensabaugh, “Guests at Jade Mountain: Aspects of Patronage in Fourteenth Century K’un-shan,” in Li, Chu-ting et al eds., *Artists and Patrons: Some Social and Economic Aspects of Chinese Paintings* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989).

their poetry collections, often the product of the literary gatherings held at his Jade Mountain Villa. Yang Weizhen was the most revered figure among the guests of the Jade Mountain, where they converged frequently in the late 1340s. In 1348, Yang Weizhen edited *Xihu zhuzhi ci* 西湖竹枝詞, a collection of *yuefu*-style poetry of 120 poets responding to nine original poems by Yang in early 1340s.⁴⁸ The publication of this volume was also financially sponsored by Gu. Later, a poetry collection of works from the Jade Mountain gatherings, *Yushan caotang yaji* 玉山草堂雅集, was published in 1349 with a preface by Yang Weizhen.⁴⁹ The majority of the poets included in these volumes are now considered members of the Tieya school, including Chen Ji (1314-1370), Zhang Yu (ca. 1284-1350), Ni Zan (1301-1374), Yuan Kai (b. 1310), and other distinguished poets of the time.

The number of poets who participated in the archaic *yuefu* movement and the amount of works published surely is impressive, and by the quantity alone it seems Yang Weizhen was indeed the most influential figure of the literary circles. Further inquiry reveals that the listed members of the Tieya school were almost exclusively southerners – more precisely, poets who originated from Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces.⁵⁰ It appears that Yang's archaic *yuefu* movement was strongly regional. Nevertheless, with the decline of the court literary circles and the shift of the center of literary activities to the Jiangnan region in the late Yuan period, Yang's position as the leader of the southern literati was still quite significant to his contemporaries.⁵¹

⁴⁸ *Zhuzhi ci*, or songs of bamboo branches, is a kind of folk song originated in Sichuan province adapted by Tang poet Liu Yuxi (772-841) into a form of poetry. Because of its folk song origin, it is also considered a form of *yuefu* poetry.

⁴⁹ Gu Ying ed., [*Yushan*] *Caotang yaji*, reprinted in *Si ku quan shu zhen ben si ji* (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshu guan, 1973), vols. 390-391

⁵⁰ According to Huang Rensheng's study, there are ninety eight poets (instead of traditionally claimed "hundreds") who can be considered stable members of the Tieya school. This body of poets mainly consists of Yang's fellow poets and students, mostly from Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces. See Huang, *Yang Weizhen*, 389-409.

⁵¹ Traditionally, the most distinguished poets of the Yuan dynasty, the so-called "Four Great Masters," are Yu Ji (1270-1347), Yang Zai (1271-1323), Fan Guo (1271-1344) and Jie Xisi (1274-1344). All four of them

With the hindsight of history, we may not consider Yang Weizhen and the archaic *yuefu* movement as a significant event in the history of Chinese literature – rather the *qu*-drama now claims the crowning glory of Yuan literature – it is still important to note that poetry was considered the highest form of literature by Yang and his contemporaries. From the contemporary point of view, Yang’s reputation as the leading poet of the Tiewa school was certainly no trifling matter. It was also from this position Yang derived a commanding authority, which often manifests in his other writings. In addition to his *fu*-rhapsody and *yuefu*-poetry, Yang Weizhen’s oeuvre of literary compositions also comprises a large number of social and commemorative writings – from the informal and lighthearted “record (*ji* 記)” of a friend’s studio, an approving preface to a student’s anthology, an appreciative colophon to a friend’s art collection, to the solemn epitaphs or public stele inscriptions. *Dongweizi wenji* 東維子文集, one of Yang’s anthologies, alone contains over four hundred essays of such nature.⁵² The overwhelming quantity makes the content of these essays seem rather trivial and often highly formularized. Nevertheless, it shows Yang’s endorsement of any sort was highly sought after by his contemporaries. The relationship between Yang Weizhen and the requester may vary, and so does the quality of the writing. What really matters to the receiver, however, is the prestige of Yang’s name attached to the piece of writing. Further attesting to Yang’s eminent position is the authoritative and somewhat arrogant voice he often assumed in these writings. It appears Yang was very conscious of the weight carried by his words and the imposing image he created through them. Interestingly, he never complained about this particular social

were court officials with prominent career and national reputation. Accordingly, their influence, in terms of both literature and politics, was certainly more extensive than those of Yang Weizhen. However, with their death in the 1340s, their influence also waned. With no other eligible contenders, Yang Weizhen was singularly the most significant figure of late Yuan literary circles.

⁵² Yang Weizhen, *Dongweizi [wen]ji*, first published in 1589, reprinted in *Wenyuan ge siku quanshu* (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshu guan, 1983-1986), vol. 1221.

obligation, however trivial and burdensome it may be. Although he was frustrated by his official career, at least he found some compensation in being the most revered literary figure in his own circles.

Yang Weizhen was a character seemingly full of contradiction: throughout his official career he struggled between the aspiration to serve the Mongol government and the discontent toward the political situation; while he tried to wave aside his career disappointments with debauchery, creating for himself the image of an “immortal in exile,” he could not but be aware of the deepening chaos all around him. As free and eccentric he would like to appear, he was in fact deeply entangled in the social network and its conventions of the traditional literati. He left a large number of literary compositions written for social occasions, and he constantly sought kindred spirits through literary exchanges. In short, while Yang Wenzhen consciously and continuously distinguished himself from his peers, he was still by and large a man of his time.

Painting inscriptions in the field of cultural production

With regard to the social implications of painting inscriptions, the analyses in this dissertation are informed by the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu on the field of cultural production.⁵³ Bourdieu developed a theoretical approach as an alternative to the dichotomy of viewing a work of art or literature as creation of the artist that has intrinsic,

⁵³ The following summary of Bourdieu’s theories based mainly on his essay, “The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed,” translated by Richard Nice, in Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 29-73; see also Bourdieu, Richard Nice trans., *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984); and Susan Emanuel trans., *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996).

universal aesthetic value within, or purely as a social product subjected to the conditions of its time. Bourdieu regarded individual artists (or writers), and by extension groups and institutions of artists, as *agents* who operate in a structured *field* with its own governing forces and principles. The structure of the field is determined by the relative positions of the agents within the field. The agents in the field compete for resources and interests, which in turn determine the position of the agents. In the field of cultural production, the “resources” in question are often symbolic, such as recognition, prestige and authority. Therefore, while the field of cultural production is contained within the field of power (i.e. politics and economy), its governing principles can sometimes work in the opposite direction. For example, commercial success could mean loss of prestige (i.e. *symbolic capital*) for a certain “best-selling” author.

While the social and artistic lives of Chinese literati in the mid-fourteenth century share little outward commonalities with that of their European counterparts, Bourdieu’s theoretical framework can provide an insight to their complex and often overlapping social, economic and cultural positions. When it comes to our present inquiry on painting inscriptions, it is more appropriate to define our discussion more broadly as the “field of cultural production” rather than the “field of Yuan literati painting.” The concept of a “literati painter” would be quite alien to Yang Weizhen and his circle of friends. Those we regard as “literati painters” would be to their peers “men of letters who delight in painting.” A literati artist was never just an artist; he must first and foremost be a *litteratus*.⁵⁴ In other words, the recognition of being an agent in this particular field comes from the shared cultural legacy – the classical education in literature and history as well as training in calligraphy, of which Bourdieu termed *cultural capital*. The production of literati painting is part of a broader field of cultural production that encompasses

⁵⁴ The concept of a literati artist must first be a *litteratus* is central to Craig Clunas’s *Elegant Debts: The Social Art of Wen Zhengming* (London: Reaktion, 2004), whose work on the social history of art is also a model to my dissertation.

a multitude of artistic activities, including but not limited to literature and calligraphy.

The field of cultural production, according to Bourdieu, operates within the field of political and economic power. There are forces in the artistic field that work with as well as against the principles of the field of power. When applying this model to the late Yuan society, we will find that the forces of the field of power upon cultural production were greatly weakened since the Mongol conquest. The greatest manifestation of the forces of the power field upon the literati class is the civil service examination or, in the present case, its absence. The civil service examination was held only intermittently since its reinstatement in 1313, and the number of *jinshi* title awarded, particularly for southern Chinese, was greatly reduced comparing to previous dynasties.⁵⁵ The official recognition in the form of examination success and government office became rather out of reach for the majority of the southern literati. It is arguable that the prestige of the official recognition only increased due to its rarity, as can be seen in Yang Weizhen's case that he generated much of his symbolic capital from his early success in the examination and his brief career as a government official. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that as the forces of the power field weakened, the internal forces, such as artistic merits and social relationships, played a greater part in the position-taking among agents of the field.

When it comes to literati arts, artistic merits and social relationships are often the two sides of one coin. From a Bourdieusian point of view, the very definition of artistic merits (or *taste*) is a class marker socially constructed.⁵⁶ The dominating cultural class, in this case the literati,

⁵⁵ For a survey of the civil service examination during the Yuan dynasty, see Huang Rensheng 黃仁生, "Lun Yuan dai keju yu cifu 論元代科舉與辭賦," *Wenxue pinglun*, 1995: 3, 109-121. See also Xu Lili 徐黎麗, "Lüelun Yuan dai keju kaoshi zhidu de tedian 略論元代科舉考試制度的特點," *Xibei shida xuebao*, 1998: 2, 42-46.

⁵⁶ For the most comprehensive of Bourdieu's discussion on taste and class distinction, see Bourdieu, Richard Nice trans., *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1984).

dictates what is refined and what is vulgar. The time-honored tradition of regarding the work of a literati artist as the physical manifestation of his inner character had been so deeply engrained in the literati psyche by the fourteenth century that it was inconceivable to consider artistic merits independently from the artist. As Yang Weizhen exclaimed, with great authority, in his preface to the *Precious Mirror of Painting* (*Tuhui baojian* 圖繪寶鑑), “the good and bad of painting are the result of the high and low of character!”⁵⁷ Rightly or wrongly, as the art itself was not viewed as independent of its maker, the social position of the artist and the social relationships between the artist and the viewer inevitably swung judgements of artistic merits.

Painting inscriptions discussed in this dissertation are the visible traces of the forces at work in the field of artistic production. On the one hand, it is usually in the inscriber’s best interest to respond positively to a work of art and previous inscriptions by his peers; after all, being asked to inscribe a work of art is a mark of distinction of his taste—in other words, recognition of his position. Therefore, it is only proper, according to the social decorum, for the inscriber to reciprocate such compliment with good will. Occasionally, when an inscriber is at a higher social position (or regarding himself as being so), however, he may or may not comply with this social nicety. On the other hand, collecting inscriptions from fellow scholars is a way of accumulating recognition and social prestige. A text-image object born of this practice is physical evidence of the symbolic capital possessed by its owner. As the owner of the object, who may or may not be the artist, has the greatest stake in this matter, his social agenda often directs the reception and interpretation of the painted image.

Still, it is not to say that the parties involved in the making of text-image objects discussed

⁵⁷ Xia Wenyan (fl. fourteenth century), *Tuhui baojian*, reprinted in *Huashi caoshu* (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1974), vol. 2, 643. For further discussion on Yang Weizhen’s preface, see Deborah Del Gais Muller, “Hsia Wen-yen and his T’u-hui pao-chien: Precious Mirror of Painting.” *Ars Orientalis* 18 (1988): 131-148.

in this study always acted consciously in calculated shrewdness to benefit their social position jockeying. Here again I draw upon Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, a set of dispositions, inclinations or preferences the agent absorbed, from the objective social framework, through a long process of inculcation.⁵⁸ The agents act upon their *habitus* as a second nature often without critical analyses of their own motives. Similarly, members of the literati class interact with each other according to what each individual considers socially "proper," which is objective and subjective at the same time; thus we witness a wide range of responses when a literatus is presented with the task of composing a painting inscription, yet each is a balancing act between the social structure and individual inclination.

The following chapters examine how literati artists and their audiences interacted artistically as well as socially within the field of cultural production by analyzing painting inscriptions produced in the late-Yuan Period. Chapter one discusses the text-image relationship between Zou Fulei's *A Breath of Spring* and Yang Weizhen's extraordinary colophon that goes beyond the fulfillment of social obligations. The second chapter analyzes the assembling process of *Leisure Enough to Spare*, a scroll contains a "painting of a scholar's retreat" by Yao Tingmei and inscriptions by Yang Weizhen and twenty-one contemporary scholars. Chapter three discusses the fluidity of meaning in Chinese painting and the role audience played in the meaning-making process by studying the visually-overwhelming inscriptions on Zhang Zhong's *Bird and Peach Blossoms*. Last but not least, the fourth chapter traces the history of painting inscriptions from the fourth to the fourteenth century, with an emphasis on the social dimension, in order to place the late-Yuan practice in a historical context.

⁵⁸ For Bourdieu's definition of *habitus*, see *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72.

Chapter 1. *A Breath of Spring*

In the collection of the Freer Gallery of Art is one of Yang Weizhen's most celebrated works of calligraphy: his colophon to Zou Fulei's (fl. mid-fourteenth century) ink-plum painting, *A Breath of Spring*.¹ In the autumn of 1361, Yang Weizhen traveled to Songjiang (present-day Shanghai) to visit some friends, among them a Daoist hermit, Zou Fulei. Upon Yang's arrival Zou brought out his ink-plum painting to solicit an inscription. Stimulated by the extreme vigor shown in this single branch of a blossoming plum tree, Yang brushed his response in a matching overflow of energy. Since then, the two masterpieces have shared one physical space and coexisted in a peculiar partnership. While Yang's inscription speaks of friendship and admiration, its aggressive style clamors conflict and rivalry – a perplexing contradiction between form and content. In this chapter I will address this intriguing relationship first by evaluating Yang's colophon within his oeuvre and development of personal style and then placing it within the tradition of poem-scroll calligraphy. The stylistic characteristics adopted in this colophon brings to light Yang Weizhen's intent in responding to Zou's ink-plum painting by this innovative approach.

Furthermore, modern scholarship tend to discuss Zou's ink-plum painting and Yang's colophon as two distinct works of art – related but nevertheless deserving their own niches in

¹ The painting is recorded in traditional painting catalogues including Zhao Qimei's 趙琦美 (1563-1642) *Zhao shi tiawang shanhu* 趙氏鐵網珊瑚, Bian Yongyu's 卞永譽 (1645-1712) *Shigu tang shuhua kao* 式古堂書畫考, and An Qi's 安岐 (1683-1745) *Moyuan huiguan lu* 墨緣彙觀錄. After the death of An Qi, his property was seized by the Qing government, including possibly *A Breath of Spring*. The painting likely thus entered the Qing Imperial Collection and was subsequently recorded in the Imperial Collection catalogues such as the *Shiqu baoji* 石渠寶笈 series. At the turn of the twentieth century the painting was given to Miu Suyun 繆素筠 (1841-1918), a ghost painter and calligrapher for Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908). The scroll was in private hands before it was purchased by the Freer Gallery in 1931. A detailed account of the painting's documentation can be found in Archibald G. Wenley's "A Breath of Spring by Tsou Fu-lei," in *Ars Orientalis*, vol. 2 (1957), 459-469.

the history of Chinese painting and calligraphy respectively.² This chapter draws attention to their physical connection and investigates its effect on pre-modern audiences. Also, in this chapter I will examine the role painting inscriptions played in constructing the meaning and identity of an art object. Even by less well-known or sophisticated hands, the other inscriptions in the scroll and their interaction tell not only the life story of the scroll but also contain clues of the social conventions in the practice of painting inscription that deserve our further consideration.

1.1 Yang Weizhen's poetic inscription to *A Breath of Spring*

While modern publication enables art historians and the general public alike to access works of art in ways unimaginable to their creators and original audiences, it inevitably takes away the first-hand experience of unrolling a scroll in an intimate setting. Unfortunately, it also gives the misleading impression of a scroll being mainly “a painting,” with supplementary writings attached to it that come as an afterthought and are often sacrificed when space and resources are limited. To a pre-modern viewer a scroll was certainly more than “a painting.” Each part of the scroll contributed to the integral experience and identity of the piece. To somewhat replicate this first-hand experience, a virtual tour of *A Breath of Spring* must be attempted.³

When first unrolled, the viewer encounters a frontispiece (*yinshou* 引首) of three large

² For a discussion of Zou Fulei's painting in the context of Yuan ink-plum painting, see Maggie Bickford, *Ink Plum: The Making of a Chinese Scholar-Painting Genre* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 201-202. For discussions on Yang's colophon to *A Breath of Spring*, see Fu Shen et al, *From Concept to Context: Approaches to Asian and Islamic calligraphy* (Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1986), cat. no. 9; also Nakata, Yūjirō and Fu Shen, *Ō-Bei shūzō Chūgoku hōsho meisekishū* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1981-1982), vol. 4, 10-15.

³ The painting and its inscriptions are reproduced in Nakata Yūjirō, and Fu Shen eds., *Ō-Bei shūzō Chūgoku hōsho meisekishū* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1981-1982), vol. 4, 8-15.

characters, *A Breath of Spring* (*chun xiao xi* 春消息), that gives the scroll its title and hints to its content. The title was written by Yang Yu (1285-1361), a retired scholar official who resided in the same town as Zou Fulei. It appears that Yang Yu was also closely associated with Yang Weizhen in the late 1350s, since Yang Weizhen wrote the preface to his anthology, *New Accounts from the Mountain-Dwelling Recluse* (*Shanju xinhua* 山居新話), and after his death a memorial essay for the spirit road stele that details Yang Yu's life achievements.⁴ The term "a breath of spring" is a fitting title for a plum-blossom painting – in fact, for *any* plum-blossom painting, since plum blossoms are regarded as heralds of spring. Since the frontispiece is undated, we cannot presume it was originally written for this specific painting. Nevertheless, from Yang Weizhen's colophon we learn that Yang Yu's title piece was already mounted with the painting and an integral part of the scroll when Yang Weizhen saw it. Their physical bond solidifies the identity of the painting as "A Breath of Spring," and it gives the viewer a preconceived notion of what kind of painting he or she is about to encounter.

Following the frontispiece is the ink-plum painting by Zou Fulei: first we see a section of a rugged old plum tree made up from dry brush strokes and accentuated with dark moss dots.⁵ Smooth young branches, shooting straight out of the old trunk, present a strong contrast to the rough texture of the trunk. Plum blossoms in ink wash scatter over the branches, softening the sharp contrast between the branches and the old stump. Nothing seems out of the ordinary as far as ink-plum painting is concerned, until we further unroll the scroll to reveal branches lying across the composition in a forceful, horizontal S-curve. Two branches arch downward from the

⁴ Yang Weizhen, "Yuan gu Zhongfeng daifu Zhedong xuanwei Yang gong shendao bei 元故中奉大夫浙東宣慰楊公神道碑," in *Donweizi wenji*, juan 24. See also Wang Deyi et al eds., *Yuanren zhuan ji ziliao suoyin* 元人傳記資料索引 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chubangongsi, 1979-1982), 1527-1528.

⁵ In its present-day condition, the first thing a viewer will see upon unrolling the painting section is an inscription by the Emperor Qianlong (1711-1799) of the Qing dynasty. Here I omit the inscription because it was not present in the fourteenth century. This inscription will be discussed later.

very top of the composition, with young shoots interlacing to give visual complexity. While one of the branches ended with a cluster of plum blossoms, the other continues to sweep upward in one single stroke that occupied half of the length of the entire composition – a most extraordinary and peerless feat of calligraphic brushwork.

The composition is not only full of visual contrasts in texture, but also of contrasts between painted and unpainted surface. On the one hand, the naturalistic appearance of a blossoming plum tree is duly portrayed with appropriately textured brushwork. On the other hand, the artist arranged the plum branches and blossoms to break up the monotony of the unpainted surface, thus he created in the white background organic patterns that contribute to the overall effect upon its viewer. It is an approach not unlike the composition principle of calligraphy, which attests to the intimate link between the two sister arts. That said, the daring composition would not have half its visual impact if not for the complete confidence and decisive force in this single stroke that seems to fill up the empty space around it.

Last but not least, the composition is balanced by a poem inscribed by the artist himself on the lower left corner, which reads:

Wherever my Thatched Abode may be, I long for the return of spring; ⁶	蓬居何處索春回，
I bid the cold moon keep the old prune tree company. ⁷	分付寒蟾伴老梅。
Half a wisp of smoke disperses, leaving the empty room chill,	半縷烟消虛室冷，

⁶ *Pengju* 蓬居 (Thatched Abode) is short for *Pengbi ju* 蓬蓽居, the name of Zou Fulei's studio. The term *pengbi* is in itself short for *pen hu bimen* 蓬戶蓽門, or "door of thatch, gate of bramble," referring to dwellings of the poor. Zou used *pengbi* to rhetorically refer to his humble hermitage, which I chose to translate as the Thatched Abode.

⁷ *Hanchan* 寒蟾 literally means the "cold toad," which is an ancient and common allusion to the moon.

My daubs of ink preserve its shadows⁸ that come to my 墨痕留影上窗來。
windows.⁹

Although the painting is unsigned, the connotation of the poem as well as the seals after it confirm Zou Fulei's authorship. The first couplet speaks of a longing for the return of spring, which seemed to have propelled the artist to paint plum blossoms, a symbol of spring, in the early autumn. The reference to the "shadows upon the windows" in the second couplet alludes to the ink-plum painting lineage descending from the Song-dynasty monk-painter, Huaguang Zhongren (d. 1123).¹⁰ Although none of his work survives, Zhongren is considered the originator of the ink-plum genre in two respects: first, through his association with major literary figures, ink plum took hold in literati culture; second, Zhongren's work is the first to be consistently associated with the term *momei* 墨梅, or ink plum.¹¹ Maggie Bickford reconstructs Zhongren's style through contemporary texts, and concludes that Zhongren's style is close to the blurry, indistinct rendering of ink-wash flowers derived from the Xu Xi tradition,¹² which is

⁸ In various accounts, the "creation" of a certain kind of ink plant painting, especially ink bamboo and ink plum, is often described as an accidental act of tracing the shadow of the plant on window paper. Therefore, ink plants are often poetically referred to as "ink shadows," and in the present case it refers to Zou's ink painting of plum blossoms. See Xia Wenyan (c. 1315-?), *Tuhui baojian* 圖繪寶鑑, reprinted in *Huashi congshu* 畫史叢書 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1963), juan 2, 714; see also Maggie Bickford, *Ink Plum: The Making of a Chinese Scholar-Painting Genre* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 118-119.

⁹ Translation adapted partly from Wenley's translation; see Wenley, "Tsou Fu-lei," 464.

¹⁰ Huaguang Zhongren 華光仲仁 (d. 1123) is a Southern-Song Chan monk who is often credited as the originator of ink plum painting.

¹¹ Bickford, *Ink Plum*, 115.

¹² Xu Xi (d. before 975) was a bird-and-flower painter served at the court of the Southern Tang kingdom (937-975). None of Xu Xi's work survived, but according to historical accounts his bird-and-flower paintings were ink monochrome and without outlines. Because of this unassuming style, and more importantly because of his social status as a scholar official, Xu Xi has been celebrated as an important early literati artist and his style admired and followed by later literati artists. See Richard M. Barnhart, et al., *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press; Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1997), 89-92.

often referred to as “shadows.”¹³ Zou Fulei’s technique, as his sole surviving work shows, indeed follows the ink-wash flowers of Zhongren.

Associating plum blossoms with spring and ink-plum painting with Zhongren had become quite a cliché by the mid-fourteenth century, and the poem is not particularly striking. The calligraphy is also somewhat mediocre – after witnessing Zou’s prowess in calligraphic brushwork in the ink-plum painting, one naturally expects a more competent hand in calligraphy. Yet the inscription in running script is conservative and bland. It seems despite all the boasted kinship between calligraphy and painting, mastering “calligraphic brushwork” does not a great calligrapher make, and vice versa. Likewise, in Yang Weizhen’s case, his genius in calligraphy never really extended to the field of painting. Happily in this scroll Zou’s ink-plum painting is united with Yang Weizhen’s poetry and calligraphy, and truly makes it a masterpiece of the “Three Perfections.”¹⁴

Yang Weizhen’s colophon to *A Breath of Spring* consists of a poem in seven-character regulated verse, and a postscript:

East of Hesha¹⁵ are the alchemists, the two Fus:¹⁶

鶴東煉師有兩復，

¹³ Bickford, *Ink Plum*, 118-119.

¹⁴ The term “Three Perfection (*san jue*)” has been used throughout history in a rather flexible manner to refer to three extraordinary talents, skills or characteristics in one person or one work of art. For instance, the legendary painter Gu Kaizhi (circa 344-405) has been characterized as *cai jue*, *hua jue* and *chi jue* – the three *jues*, literally “perfections,” here refer to Gu’s extraordinary talents in literature, painting, and his artless, unpretentious disposition. Also, one of the earliest references to the term *san jue* can be found in the official history of the Tang dynasty (618-906) as a praise from Emperor Xuanzong (685-762, r. 712-756) inscribed on a landscape scroll allegedly painted and inscribed with a poem by poet-calligrapher Zheng Qian (685-764). This is the very first textual reference to a single work of art incorporating poetry, calligraphy and painting by the same artist. In later time, this form of “Three Perfections” became the standard definition, referring to the three sister arts of poetry, calligraphy and painting, realized in one work of art, and, ideally, by one poet-calligrapher-painter.

¹⁵ Hesha was a township near Songjiang, which is now under the jurisdiction of Shanghai.

¹⁶ The “two Fus” refer to Zou Fulei and his elder brother, Zou Fuyuan (fl. 14th century).

Companions of the immortals, devoid of vulgarity.	神仙中人殊不俗。
The younger Fu comprehends the plum painting of Huaguang;	小復解畫華光梅，
The elder Fu comprehends the bamboo painting of Wen Tong. ¹⁷	大復解畫文全竹。
The dragon of Wen Tong broke away from the wall; ¹⁸	文同龍去擘破壁，
While Huaguang preserved a breath of spring.	華光留得春消息。
Mahavrksarsi dreams sweetly, ¹⁹	大樹仙人夢正甘，
[Until] wakened by the bluebirds singing at the lightening of the eastern sky.	翠禽叫夢東方白。

And following the poem the postscript reads:

I arrived in Heshu and stayed in the Cinnabar Chamber of Comprehending Profundity. My host is the alchemist Leifu [sic]. After making the offering of tea, [he] repeatedly brought out paper from Qingjiang; again and again [he] pleaded for [my] brush and ink. The master and his elder brother Fuyuan are both skilled in the art of poetry and painting. [I] have seen Fuyuan's bamboo [painting], and

¹⁷ Wen Tong (1018–1079), a Northern-Song scholar official and literati artist who specialized in bamboo painting. His style was singularly popular among Yuan-dynasty literati artists, and he was hailed as the patriarch of the ink bamboo genre.

¹⁸ Since Wen Tong was not known for his painting of dragons, in the present context the “dragon” is to be understood as referring to Wen's bamboo painting.

¹⁹ The name Dashu xianren 大樹仙人, or the “Great-Tree Immortal,” possibly refers to Mahavrksarsi, whose story is recorded in Xuanzhang's (600-664) *Record of Travels to Western Lands (Da Tang xiyu ji)*. See Xuanzhang, *Da Tang xiyu ji*, reprinted in *Sibu congkan shibu* 四部叢刊史部, vols. 301-304 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1922), juan 5.

now I see this scroll of Fulei's plum blossoms, in which there is also an inscription of "A Breath of Spring" by the Mountain-Dwelling Immortal (Yang Yu). So, I composed a poem at the end of the scroll for him. It is autumn of the *xinchou* year of the Zhezeng reign, twenty-seventh day of the seventh month (August 27, 1361). Old Iron Zhen tries the ink [made by] Chen You (dates unknown) in the Thatched Abode, but regrets the lack of a [good] brush.

余抵鶴砂，泊洞玄丹房，主者為雷復煉師。設茗供後，連出清江楮，三番求東來翰墨。師與其兄復元皆能詩畫，即見元竹，復見雷梅，卷中有山居老仙品題春消息字，遂為賦詩卷之端。時至正辛丑秋七月廿有七日，老鐵貞在蓬華居試陳有墨，尚恨乏筆。

The first three couplets of the poem are rather conventional, and perhaps drift quite a bit away from the subject. The symmetrical structure of the first three couplets gives equal importance to Zou Fulei's plum painting and his brother Zou Fuyuan's bamboo painting. It seems to be an inscription that honors Yang's friendship with the Zou brothers, rather than an expression of his appreciation of the present painting. The allusions to the Wen Tong and Zhongren traditions are quite conventional and formulaic. The ending couplet, however, provides an original and intriguing interpretation that was perhaps inspired by the striking composition of the ink plum painting.

The last couplet presents a complete disjuncture in meaning as well as poetic structure from the preceding three. At first glance, it makes no reference to either the artist or the ink plum painting, and it breaks the symmetrical structure. In short, it is awkwardly at odds with the rest of the poem. Yang Weizhen's friends might not have found it to be an alarming situation, however. After all, one of the signature characteristics of Yang Weizhen's poetry is his

preference for unexpected expressions and unorthodox structures.²⁰ The first verse, “Mahavrksarsi dreams sweetly,” has its origin in Buddhist literature. Recorded in the famous monk-pilgrim Xuanzang’s (600-664) *Record of Travels to the Western Lands* (*Da Tang xiyu ji* 大唐西域記) is the account of an ascetic in Kanyakubja, a city-state in Central India. He meditated by the river for myriads of years, so that his appearance came to resemble a withered tree. As the years went by, trees grew from his shoulders and birds came to nest in the trees. Not to disturb the birds, the compassionate ascetic remained still and would not leave his place of meditation. Therefore, he was called Mahavrksarsi, which is translated in Chinese as “Great-Tree Immortal (*dashu xianren* 大樹仙人).” The story continues, however, that one day Mahavrksarsi saw the one hundred daughters of the King of Kanyakubja frolicking by the river and his amorous desire was awakened by their beauty.²¹ Taking the story into account, the “Great-Tree Immortal” in the context of this poem refers to the old plum tree coming into bloom after a long sleep of winter, possibly with an erotic undertone.

The second verse, as identified by Wenley in his 1957 article, is a poetic allusion referring to a sixth-century story of a certain Zhao Shixiong and his encounter with the immortals.²² The story tells that Zhao Shixiong moved to Luofu Mountain, a site with strong Daoist associations throughout history.²³ One day, Zhao was travelling on the road, slightly tipsy, when he saw a wine shop. From the wine shop issued a beautiful woman to greet him; with her Zhao entered

²⁰ For a detailed analysis of Yang’s poetry style and technique, see Liu Meihua, *Yang Weizhen shixue yanjiu* 楊維禎詩學研究 (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1983), 99-150.

²¹ The story concludes that Mahavrksarsi proceeded to see the King of Kanyakubja and ask the hand of a princess in marriage. None of the princesses were willing to marry the old ascetic except the youngest, who agreed to the match to solve her father’s dilemma. When the King offered his youngest daughter, Mahavrksarsi took it as a slight, and in his rage he turned all the princesses into ugly hunchbacks. See Xuanzhang, *Da Tang xiyu ji*, juan 5.

²² Wenley translated this couplet as “The Sage of the Great Tree dreams tranquilly, the bluebirds sing dreaming of dawn.” See Wenley, “Tsou Fu-lei,” 465.

²³ Luofu Mountain is located in present-day Huizhou, Guangdong province. It was the dwelling place of Eastern-Jin alchemist Ge Hong (ca. 283-363), and since then it has developed a strong association with the Daoist religion.

the wine shop for more drinks. Moments later, a child entertainer clad in green came singing and dancing for the guest. Zhao spent a convivial evening with them until he fell drunkenly asleep. When he woke up by the chill of dawn, he realized he was sleeping under a plum tree, while in the tree a bluebird was twittering.²⁴ The story of Zhao's encounter with the plum-blossom goddess is a fairly common allusion in the context of plum-blossom poetry.²⁵ In this poem, however, Yang Weizhen's blending of the two unrelated allusions gives an equivocal footnote to the painting. It brings to mind both the masculine quality of the rugged tree trunk and the feminine beauty of the soft ink-wash blossoms. The reference to the encounter with the plum-blossom goddess may have meant to be a compliment to the artist, who was a Daoist practitioner and alchemist, on his divinely inspired painting. It is only one of the numerous instances when painting inscriptions open the door to multifold interpretations that the artist never had intended originally.

It is important to note that first and foremost an inscription like this functions as a testimony to the social tie between the artist and the inscriber. The inscription's continuous references to Zou Fulei and his brother attest to its social function. From Yang's postscript we also find that Yang Weizhen's inscription is highly desirable ("again and again [he] pleaded for [my] brush and ink"), even if it seems somewhat arrogant a claim from Yang himself. Both the poem and the postscript stress personal connection. By contrast, the inscription by the Qianlong Emperor (1711-1799; r. 1735-1796) of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), situated at the beginning of

²⁴ The bluebird is the child entertainer in green. The word *cui* in *cuiniao* (bluebird) is understood as a bluish green color.

²⁵ The fictional account was first recorded in Liu Zongyuan's (773-819) *Longcheng lu* 龍城錄; the allusion to Zhao Shixiong's dream in Luofu Mountain was also used in poems by Shu Shi (1037-1101) and Huang Tingjian (1045-1105), just to name a few. It was a fairly well-known allusion by the fourteenth century. The account in *Longcheng lu* is included in Tao Zongyi's (1329-1410) *Shoufu* 說郛, to which Yang Weizhen wrote the preface.

the scroll, is distinctly impersonal:

Like breath is spring, it goes but must return.	一氣為春去必回，
Who gave the tidings to the winter plum?	誰將消息付寒梅？
Ruizhu the immortal envying Nüyi's art, ²⁶	蕊珠仙妒女夷巧，
Craftily stole a march on the East Wind. ²⁷	偷先東風特地來。

As the note after this poem indicates, it is a literary play on the original poem by Zou Fulei – it uses the same rhyming characters of the first, second and fourth lines in Zou's poem. Clearly, the Qianlong Emperor was reacting to the scroll and the scroll only, since a personal connection with the obscure artist four centuries earlier was quite out of question. Interestingly, the Qianlong Emperor made no comment on Yang Weizhen's inscription. It is no secret that the Qianlong Emperor enjoyed the literary game of elaborating on the poetic allusions by earlier writers, perhaps as a way to display his profound knowledge of Chinese literature. In this instance, however, he acknowledged Zou's poem as well as the title given by Yang Yu with his poem, yet completely ignored the existence of Yang Weizhen's inscription, which commands a no-less powerful presence in the scroll.²⁸ The Qianlong Emperor is known to have held a strong prejudice against Yang Weizhen's character; therefore, he may not have felt it necessary to honor Yang's inscription with his imperial sanction.²⁹ It goes to show, from the other end of the

²⁶ "Ruizhu (pearly stamens)" is, in Daoist context, a name for the immortal paradise; here it is used as the name of the plum-blossom goddess. "Nüyi" may be a goddess of flower, wind or spring-summer growth. See *Zhongwen da cidian*, 463; 12547.

²⁷ Translation adapted from Wenley's in "Tsou Fu-lei," 463.

²⁸ The analogy between "breath" and "spring" in the poem comes from the title given by Yang Yu.

²⁹ To the *Siku quanshu* edition of Yang Weizhen's *Teiyai gu yuefu* the Qianlong Emperor wrote a very harsh preface, based on the false assumption from a series of poems attributed to Yang. The poems praised the newly-founded Ming dynasty, while abusing the fallen Yuan dynasty; therefore, Qianlong accused Yang Weizhen of being a hypocrite. The poems were later proven to be unauthentic by late Qing

spectrum, that inscribing a work of art is an activity that involves decisions made based rather on the personages involved, not necessarily the work of art itself.

Following Yang Weizhen's colophon is a "preface" in clerical script by a certain Gu Yan (dates unknown). This curious "preface" praises the purity of Zou Fulei's character and his plum-blossom painting, though it predates Zou's painting by a decade.³⁰ Evidently, this preface was not intended for *A Breath of Spring* specifically. The generalized tone of the text, however, lends itself to *any* plum-blossom painting by Zou Fulei. It could have been mounted with the *A Breath of Spring* by Zou Fulei or by later owners to increase the prestige of the scroll. Moreover, by its own the preface certainly has little value in traditional connoisseurship—a mediocre piece of calligraphy by an unknown author does not stand well with the authorship-obsessed connoisseurs. A contrived relationship between painting and painting inscription is by no means uncommon. In the first place, an inscriber need not see the painting in person to inscribe it. Secondly, an inscription can be and has often been attached to another work of art as circumstances allow. The practice nonetheless reveals the traditional attitude of treating a scroll as a collection of related objects assembled according to the taste of the collector as much as the original design of the artist.

With the physical layout of the scroll in mind, we now return to Yang Weizhen's inscription as a work of calligraphy. The poem starts with medium-sized characters in running script and as it progresses the characters become larger and more energetic. For example, in the

scholar Ge Shubai 葛漱白 (dates unknown). However, Qianlong's opinion, being in the well-preserved and widely circulated *Siku quanshu*, has left a long-lasting damage to Yang's image even until today. See Huang Rensheng, *Yang Weizhen yu Yuan mo Ming chu wen xue si chao* 楊維禎與元末明初文學思潮 (Shanghai: Dongfang chubanshe, 2005), 29-31.

³⁰ Gu Yan's preface is dated 1350.

fifth column the character *fu* 復 occupies half of the column and squeezes the characters before and after it to the very edge of the paper. In the next two columns the characters are so blown out of proportion that each column barely contains two characters. Moreover, half way through the poem the characters *bo* 擘 and *hua* 華 each occupy an entire column. The enlargement of these two characters has little to do with their semantic meaning but with their structure – the last strokes of both characters are long vertical strokes so forceful that they seem to escape the calligrapher’s grasp. On the other hand, characters with prominent horizontal elements are emphasized with bold and even strokes that obstruct the flow of the text. Also, as the text progresses more and more pressure is applied to the brush. Toward the end of the poem it seems that the brush can no longer take the abuse of this superfluous energy and the last few characters barely register on the paper, composed of only streaks of very dry ink. It is indeed an extraordinary display of dynamism and a glaring antithesis to the dominating Classical Tradition.³¹ The visual tension created by every abrupt change of direction and pressure of the brush is harsh to the eye – indeed there is nothing pleasing about this work of calligraphy. By contrast to the relatively placid mood of the following postscript, the extreme style displayed in this poem takes on the showy quality of a performance. To further our understanding of the sources of this dramatic style and Yang Weizhen’s intention in applying this style to this particular occasion, we must first evaluate this inscription within Yang’s oeuvre of calligraphy.

1.2 Yang Weizhen as a calligrapher

³¹ The Classical Tradition refers to the calligraphic tradition based on the stylistic paradigm of Wang Xizhi (303-361). The most celebrated characteristics of Wang’s style are its fluidity and gracefulness. The Classical Tradition was revived and promoted by Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322) during the Yuan dynasty and was followed by most of the Yuan calligraphers. More on Zhao Mengfu and the Classical Tradition will be discussed in the following sections.

Strictly speaking, Yang Weizhen has never been considered a canonical master of calligraphy in traditional criticism.³² His calligraphy was treasured not necessarily for its artistic value but as writing samples of a great literatus and the leading poet of his time. His calligraphic style is as far from what was considered the orthodoxy, namely the Wang Xizhi (303-361) tradition, as that of any of his contemporaries.³³ The unbridled energy and intentional eccentricity distinguished Yang's style from the dominating Classical Tradition, promoted by Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322) of the previous generation.³⁴ Although the outward expression of Yang Weizhen's calligraphy can be described as the antithesis of the Zhao Mengfu style, fundamentally Yang indeed shared with Zhao a similar passion for everything archaic. This longing for antiquity practically permeated all areas of the arts and philosophical thoughts during the Yuan period. The difference lies in Yang's definition of "antiquity," and more importantly, his motive for evoking archaism in calligraphic style.

As his style reveals, Yang Weizhen looked beyond the Six-dynasties period, considered the Golden Age of calligraphy by many of his contemporaries, back to the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) and even further to the pre-Han periods for stylistic models. The majority of his extant works are in running or cursive script with a strong flavor of the draft-cursive style

³² In traditional criticism, Yang's calligraphic style is not always received with favor, mainly due to the unrestrained vigor in his aggressive style. For discussions on traditional views of Yang Weizhen's calligraphy, see Fu Shen, "Ma Wan hua Yang Weizhen ti de chun sui lou chuan tu 馬琬畫楊維禎題的春水樓船圖." *Gugong jikan* 7:3 (1973), 47; also Wang Lianqi, "Yuan Zhang Yu, Yang Weizhen Wenxin shi wen juan ji xiang guan wen ti kao lue 元張雨·楊維禎·文信詩文卷及相關問考略." *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 118 (2005), 104-105.

³³ The formation and development of the Wang Xizhi tradition is one of the center issues of the history of Chinese calligraphy, discussed and debated by pre-modern connoisseurs and in modern scholarship alike with great eloquence. For studies in English language, see Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); Peter Charles Sturman, *Mi Fu: Style and the Art of Calligraphy in Northern Song China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

³⁴ In the early fourteenth century, Zhao Mengfu almost single-handedly restored the Wang Xizhi tradition to the status of cultural orthodoxy to rectify the "degeneracy" of the Southern Song calligraphic practice. Zhao's structured approach, inspired by the Tang interpretation of the classical tradition, attracted many followers and his interpretation in turn dominated the Yuan period style.

developed during the Han period.³⁵ At times he employed the technique and structure of the clerical script and even the ancient seal script, the latter being long obsolete from daily uses. The result of Yang's eclectic approach is hardly graceful or harmonious; quite the contrary, Yang's calligraphy is usually full of contradiction and visual tension: an effect he seems to pursue with vehement energy as a counteraction to the elegance of the Classical Tradition. In contrast to Zhao's revival of the Classical Tradition as a way to ensure the survival of Chinese culture under Mongol rule, Yang Weizhen's adaptation of archaism aims to assert individuality. Intriguingly, although a prolific writer, Yang Weizhen hardly ever commented on any aspect of calligraphy, whether others' or his own. Therefore, in addition to examining his extant works for visual clues, the following discussion also turn to Yang's literary theories in order to better understand the source and expression of his eccentric style.

1.2.1 "Early" works

With a few exceptions, the majority of Yang's extant works were executed in the last decade of his life, representing his mature style; however, they do little to reveal his early training or stylistic development. The earliest of his datable works are from the late 1340s, and the stylistic characteristics of these "early" works are mostly consistent with his later works, indicating that by the late 1340s Yang had already developed a distinct personal style. For example, Yang's *Record of the Thatched Hall of Zhuxi*, which has been dated to 1349 based on external evidence, displays stylistic features that can be observed throughout his oeuvre.³⁶ The

³⁵ Among the forty-odd extant works of Yang, only one example of standard script, the *Epitaph of Zhou Shangqing*, survived. See Chen Fucheng, "Yang Weizhen de kai shu zhen pin 楊維禎的楷書珍品," *Shufa congkan* 6 (1983), 45-49. Chen concludes that Yang's standard script follows the style of Quyang Tong (d. 691), son of the early Tang calligrapher Quyang Xun (557-641).

³⁶ The *Record of the Thatched Hall of Yang Zhuxi* was probably written in 1349, when Yang Weizhen was

Record of Zhuxi was composed for Yang Qian's (style name Zhuxi, b. 1283) scholarly retreat, the Thatched Hall of Zhuxi (*Zhuxi caotang* 竹西草堂), and inscribed to a "painting of a scholar's retreat" by Zhang Wo (d. ca. 1356).³⁷ The *Record* is executed in running script with a hint of draft-cursive style. The text starts with the somewhat awkwardly brushed title, but as it progresses the flow becomes more fluent and daring. The individual characters are composed of aggressive strokes often with dramatic swelling and thinning. These dramatic fluctuations not only create unsettling visual clashes within a character, but they also draw the center of gravitation outward and unbalance the composition in a centrifugal way. Stacking these unbalanced characters together, the columns also become unstable and off-centered. The unsettling tension is the hallmark of Yang's calligraphic style; however, as further discussion will reveal, it is not nearly as extreme as that of Yang's later works. The style of the *Record* is relatively conservative compared to his later works – the characters in this text are comparatively self-contained and independent from each other. The flow of the text is also smoother and more rhythmic, which is to say the vertical lines are more distinct and the size of individual characters is relatively even. Still, a distinct personal style is already apparent. After all, by 1349 Yang was already in his mid-fifties, with a lifelong practice of calligraphy behind him. In short, the *Record of Zhuxi* may have been the earliest among Yang's datable works, but it

fifty-four years old. In the spring of 1349, Yang Weizhen traveled to the township of Zhangxi of Songjiang, where he met the local recluse-scholar Yang Qian (zi Zhuxi, b. 1283). Yang Qian invited Yang Weizhen to visit his estate and held banquets in his honor, and as a return of favor Yang Weizhen composed two essays for Yang Qian, the *Record of Could-and-Mountain-without-Hindrance Pavilion*, and the *Record of the Thatched Hall of Zhuxi*. As the content of the *Record of the Thatched Hall of Zhuxi* reveals, Yang Qian brought a painting of his Thatched Hall by Zhang Wo (d. ca. 1356) to request an inscription by Yang Weizhen, on which Yang wrote the *Record*. Presumably these events all happened in 1349 during Yang Weizhen's visit to Songjiang. For further discussion on the *Thatched Hall of Zhuxi* and its inscriptions, see chapter 2 of this dissertation.

³⁷ Zhang Wo's *Thatched Hall of Zhuxi* and its inscriptions are reproduced in *Qinggong sanyi guobao teji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 2004), painting volume, 355-362. Particularly for Yang's *Record of Record of the Thatched Hall of Zhuxi*, see also *Qinggong sanyi guobao teji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 2004), calligraphy volume, 469-474. This painting and its inscriptions will be discussed in the next chapter.

is by no means an example of Yang's early style. It betrays little of Yang's early training as a calligrapher.

The most unusual example of Yang's calligraphy is perhaps the *Epitaph of Zhou Wenying*, which is Yang Weizhen's only extant work in regular script.³⁸ As a text intended for stone engraving, the formality of this work is quite understandable. From the large number of epitaphs and memorial writings in Yang's anthologies it is not difficult to infer that Yang Weizhen undertook such formal writings quite regularly as part of his social obligations. It is only curious that only one of his works in regular script survived. This long text of 753 characters is executed painstakingly in small regular script on a grid, with each character barely half an inch tall. Upon first glance, the rigidity of the *Epitaph* presents a surprising contrast to Yang's calligraphic style. It would be difficult indeed to compare his sole surviving example in regular script with his other works in running script. The *Epitaph*, nevertheless, does share some characteristics in brush method with Yang's works in running script. For example, Yang tended to expose the tip of the brush at the beginning and the ending of every stroke, leaving sharp traces that give his calligraphy the characteristic aggressiveness. Also, like his running script, the *Epitaph* is marked with the clashing contrast between heavy and thin strokes. Still, it would be more illuminating when we consider Yang's regular script in its historical as well as contemporary context.

Some scholars have remarked on the affiliation of Yang's regular script with the style of the early-Tang calligrapher Ouyang Tong (d. 691).³⁹ Ouyang Tong's calligraphy was particularly

³⁸ *Epitaph of Zhou Wenying* is reproduced in *Qinggong sanyi guobao teji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 2004), calligraphy volume, 483-486.

³⁹ Chen Fucheng, "Yang Weizhen de kaishu zhenpin," *Shufa congkan* 6 (1983), 46; Hua Ning, *Yang Weizhen* (Taipei: Shitou chubanshe, 2006), 6.

noted for its daring approach, which would have been an appealing trait to Yang Weizhen.⁴⁰ Comparing the *Epitaph* with Ouyang's *Stele of Dharma Master Daoyin* (dated 663), their affiliation is apparent in the exposed brush tips and the sharpness of the corners.⁴¹ Furthermore, Ouyang's style displays remnant traits of the clerical script, especially in the exaggerated *na*-strokes.⁴² Yang Weizhen's style was also heavily influenced by the ancient clerical script. Nevertheless, these similarities, though not necessarily coincidental, can be relatively superficial. The sharpness in the shape of individual strokes in the *Epitaph* very well may be an imitation of stone engravings by which Yang evokes an archaistic flavor, which is appropriate for the purpose of this particular work. Ouyang's work on memorial steles supplies a striking example of regular script with a strong flavor of the carving knife. The rigidity in Yang's regular script, however, can be just as easily linked to other earlier examples in these aspects. In any case, Yang Weizhen's noncommittal attitude toward any previous calligraphic traditions, as the following discussion will reveal, makes it nearly impossible to pinpoint the exact calligraphic models that he followed.

The archaic flavor in the *Epitaph* is amplified by Yang's use of alternative characters and intentional awkwardness in the composition of individual characters. The former trait is a characteristic that permeates Yang's literary compositions: Yang often replaced a more commonly used character with its archaic form or a rarely-used one of the same pronunciation. It was not an uncommon practice among Yuan literati; but Yang Weizhen used it to express his appreciation for antiquity with a rare relish. The latter, on the other hand, is less apparent unless we compare the *Epitaph* with Zhao Mengfu's (1254-1322) work in regular script. Zhao

⁴⁰ Tseng Yuho (Zeng Youhe), *A History of Chinese Calligraphy* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1993), 173.

⁴¹ See Ouyang Tong, *Daoyin fashi bei* (Xi'an: Shanxi renmin meishu chubanshe, 1986).

⁴² The *na*-stroke is the falling right stroke, which in clerical script often ended with a heavy flaring press.

Mengfu's work in regular script represents the modernized version of the Classical Tradition which was the undisputed orthodoxy of his time. The style of Zhao's regular script is supple, fluid and elegant. The graceful beauty of Zhao's style is derived from his well-balanced composition of individual characters. By contrast, Yang Weizhen tended to anchor his characters on a heavy *na*-stroke, as noted above, or offset the balance of a character by slightly shifting one of the radicals. Also, Yang's emphasis on horizontal and diagonal strokes pulls a character away from its center and therefore creates a looser and more unbalanced appearance compared to the tightly composed characters in Zhao's work.

The archaic flavor and intentional awkwardness are also prominent in the works of Yang's contemporaries and close friends, Ni Zan (1301-1374) and Zhang Yu (ca. 1284-1350). Ni Zan's colophons to the *Epitaph*, for example, display typical characteristics of Ni Zan's regular script.⁴³ The extremely exaggerated horizontal strokes give his characters a squat appearance. The exposed brush tips protrude hazardously, creating a highly distinct personal style that echoes Ni's eccentric personality. Zhang Yu's early training with Zhao Mengfu notwithstanding, his later works also displays a further attempt to archaize regular script with intentional awkwardness. Yang's stylistic affiliation with this undercurrent of individualism signified the shared dissatisfaction toward the classical orthodoxy among the southern literati.

1.2.2 The draft-cursive mode

With the exception of the *Epitaph of Zhou Wenying*, we can observe two different but related modes from Yang's extant works: the draft-cursive mode and the dramatic mode. Draft-cursive script was developed as an abbreviated form of the clerical script for easy and fast writing, and

⁴³ Ni Zan inscribed the *Epitaph* twice.

is characterized by the rounded shape of individual characters and the exaggerated, swelling *na*-strokes. Furthermore, as shown in an ink-rubbing copy of Eastern-Han calligrapher Zhang Zhi's (d. ca. 192 CE) *Letter on the Ninth Day of the Eighth Month*, the corners are rounded with a swift movement of the wrist, and strokes are linked together with a continuous flow.⁴⁴ Unlike those of the running or cursive script, however, the characters in typical draft-cursive script are self-contained and independent from each other, and they line up in well-defined columns.

Draft-cursive script was popular among late Yuan calligraphers as a means to further archaize their calligraphic style. Deng Wenyan's (1258-1328) copy of *An Improvisation* (*Jijiu zhang* 急就章), a text synonymous with the draft-cursive script, represents a more conservative interpretation of the archaic style.⁴⁵ It displays all the classical characteristics of the draft-cursive script, including the flamboyant *na*-strokes, the supple shape of linked strokes, and the self-contained characters. As Zhang Yu's colophon reveals, it was considered a fairly authentic and faithful copy of the original, and therefore can be relied on as an example of the typical understanding of the draft-cursive script in the fourteenth century.

Yang Weizhen saw Deng's scroll in 1348 and left a positive but somewhat vague remark on the scroll: "[Lu] Ren had studied the draft-cursive script, and [he] considered this scroll a skillful copy [of the original text]." Lu Ren (fl. fourteenth century) was the person with whom

⁴⁴ Zhang Zhi's *Letter on the Ninth Day of the Eighth Month* is reproduced as ink rubbing in the Northern-Song *Chunhua mige fatie* (Beijing: Zhongguo shudein, 1988), 70-71. However, the authenticity of all of the extant works of Zhnag Zhi, along with many of his contemporaries reprinted in the *Model Letters from the Chunhua Pavilion*, have been called into question. These rubbing better represents the Northern-Song impression of early draft-cursive than authentic works by Eastern-Han calligraphers. For discussions on the early development of the draft-cursive script, see Xiao Yanyi, "Gu zhangcao shu yu chushi song 古章草書與出師頌," *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 110 (2003: 6): 16-24; also Chen Xin, "Chuhua getie zhong zhangcao fatie zhengli yanjiu 淳化閣帖中的章草法帖整理研究," *Tushuguan gongzuo yu yanjiu*, 2010: 5: 59-61

⁴⁵ *An Improvisation* is a first-century BCE text attributed to Shi You (fl. mid-first century BCE) of the Western Han dynasty. Shi You is traditionally credited as the originator of the draft-cursive script. Deng Wenyan's copy is in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing; reproduced in Wang Lianqi ed., *Yuan dai shufa* (Shanghai: Shanghai kexue jishu chubanshe, 2001), 143-145.

Yang viewed this scroll. Yang deferred to the judgment of his friend as perhaps a gesture of respect or humility. It is also likely that his noncommittal attitude implies a contrary opinion. His disapprobation may not concern the quality of Deng's work as a copy, but the act of unquestioning copying itself. Apparently, Yang Weizhen's writing in draft-cursive mode deviates significantly from the typical understanding of the script. In his *Poems for the Pavilion of the Fragrant Jade Well*, for example, although the characters are abbreviated following the rules of the draft-cursive script, and the strong *na*-strokes can be frequently observed, Yang's interpretation of the draft-cursive is much more free-flowing.⁴⁶ In contrast to the independent and well-defined characters of the typical draft-cursive script, Yang's brush strokes are often connected from one character to the next, forming a continuous flow. Furthermore, his characters also exhibit more irregularity both in structure and alignment. The characters tend to drift away from the central axis of the column, and the size of individual characters expands and contrasts constantly, creating an unsettling pulse throughout the text. This unconventional interpretation of the draft-cursive script gives an impression of unaffected casualness and untamed energy that defies categorization: it is difficult to pinpoint the traces of previous traditions in Yang's calligraphic style. The less-than-graceful style brings to mind the "old age" calligraphy of Mi Fu (1052-1107), who claimed after a lifetime of studying the Classical Tradition that in his old age he aimed to "unlearn" previous traditions in order to return to the state of naturalness.⁴⁷

Another example that may give us a glimpse of Yang's casual writing is his *Letter to*

⁴⁶ This piece is now mounted with the works by Zhang Yu (ca. 1284-1350) and Wenxin (fl. fourteenth century) as one handscroll in the collection of the Chinese University of Hong Kong Art Museum. Reproduced in Wang Lianqi, "Yuan Zhang Yu, Yang Weizhen Wenxin shi wen juan ji xiang guan wen ti kao lue," *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 118 (2005), 102.

⁴⁷ Sturman, *Mi Fu*, 151.

Lizhai.⁴⁸ The *Letter to Lizhai* represents the other end of the spectrum of Yang's draft-cursive mode. Here, less attention is paid to the shape of individual strokes, rather the characters are linked into one another in an organic flow, which tones down the degree of aggressiveness often associated with Yang's calligraphy. Although some particularly bold characters still punctuate the text, the overall effect is relatively relaxed. The casual and fluid writing reflects the informality of a personal letter.

The content of the letter offers an intriguing glimpse of the transaction of one of Yang's social writings. The letter was addressed to a certain Lizhai (dates unknown).⁴⁹ From the content of the letter we learned that Lizhai was probably a county magistrate. The letter was written in response to Lizhai's commission of a memorial essay for his ancestral shrine. In the letter Yang graciously thanked Lizhai for the payment of the commission. The letter leaves no doubt that Yang Weizhen received monetary compensation for his social writings from time to time. Even so, his reputation as a lofty scholar did not seem to suffer. It was treated simply and casually as a common and established practice among the educated elite.

1.2.3 The dramatic mode

While the draft-cursive mode may have had been reserved for casual occasions, Yang Weizhen's dramatic mode is far more deliberate in its intent. It is difficult to define this mode either as running script or cursive script. In fact, one of the most prominent characteristics of this mode is the organic blending of running script with wild cursive, meanwhile applying

⁴⁸ Yang's *Letter to Lizhai* is in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei; reproduced in Hua Ning, *Yang Weizhen* (Taipei: Shitou chubanshe, 2006), 8-9

⁴⁹ Yang Weizhen dated the letter in November 16 without giving the year. However, from the fact that he signed the letter as "schoolmaster of the Songjiang County College," it becomes apparent that the letter was written in 1359, when Yang briefly taught the Songjiang County College. See Sun, *Nianpu*, 236-237.

brush techniques and character structures from the clerical and seal scripts. His *Colophon to the Album of Ancient Currency*, for example, shows a combination of different script types with an extraordinary overflow of energy.⁵⁰ This shocking visual effect is delivered through several characteristics that are distinct to Yang's style. First of all, for characters with predominantly horizontal elements Yang tends to lay down his brush and drag it across the paper surface with extreme force—it is a technique as unorthodox as possible, and it is one of the reasons that Yang was severely criticized in traditional accounts. This sudden change of brush movement creates intentional discord and visual conflict with a boldness rarely seen in Yuan-period calligraphy. Secondly, Yang Weizhen also employed a wide range of ink tonality and texture to heighten visual contrast and create tension. In the *Ancient Currency* album, we can observe ink tonality from the darkest black to silvery grey, from saturated brushstrokes to the dry streaks that barely register on the paper, all within the relatively small frame of the album. Furthermore, as mentioned above, Yang's characters tend to drift away from the central axis of the column; in this dramatic mode, the characters not only vary in size drastically, but they also tend to run into the neighboring columns, weaving together to create an integrating visual effect rather than a liner flow.

The ostentatious style of this colophon begs the question: does the content of the album merit such a display of vehement force? At first the content of the inscription seems no more than just a passing social favor. The colophon was written for Yang's friend Yao Yuanze (fl. mid-fourteenth century), who had his collection of ancient coins mounted in an album and circulated among friends for their inscriptions. In his inscription Yang Weizhen reflects on the changes of the form of currencies since ancient time, and laments the corruption of the

⁵⁰ *Colophon to the Album of Ancient Currency* is in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei; reproduced in Chu Hui-liang (Zhu Huiliang) et al, *Yunjian shupai tezhan tulu* (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 1994), 121-122.

present-day monetary policy. Chu Hui-liang dated Yang's inscription to the early 1350s based on the issuing of a new paper money in 1350, which led to a serious currency depreciation and inflation in the economy, and this may have in turn sparked Yang's comments on the monetary policy. According to Chu, the corruption of the monetary policy and its ill effects also led to the Red Turban Rebellion. During a 1352 effort to put down the Rebellion, Yang's acquaintance Li Fu (1298-1352), then the Route Commander of Jiangzhou (present day Jiujiang, Jiangxi province), was killed by the rebel force.⁵¹ Li Fu was the Principal Graduate (*zhuangyuan* 狀元) of the 1327 Metropolitan Examination and therefore a "year-mate (*tongnian* 同年 or *tongbang* 同榜)" of Yang Weizhen.⁵² To commemorate the martyrdom of Li Fu, Yang signed his name in the *Ancient Currency* album as "*jinshi* Yang Weizhen, [*zi*] Lianfu, from the same placard as Li Fu, Duke of Loyal Constancy," even though Li Fu was by no means linked to the making of the album.⁵³ This allusion to a personal as well as political event charges the inscription with an emotional context without which the excessive dynamism of its style would be hard to explain.

As far as extant works indicate, Yang's dramatic mode is often reserved for painting inscriptions, especially when inscribing directly on the painting surface. For example, Yang's inscription on the collaborative work, *Old Tree, Bamboo and Rock*, by Zhang Shen (fl. late-fourteenth century), Gu An (ca. 1295-ca. 1370) and Ni Zan, delivers such a visual clash with the painted components that James Cahill commented that the artists were "trying to outdo each

⁵¹ The Route Commander was a third-ranking position, notably higher than any position Yang Weizhen had ever held.

⁵² Although it is unlikely that Yang shared a close friendship with Li Fu, their relationship as fellow-graduates of the Metropolitan Examination naturally created a social and political bound between the two men, and accordingly Yang expressed his admiration and lamentation for Li's martyrdom as a fellow graduate as well as a fellow government official.

⁵³ Chu Hui-liang 朱惠良, "You shuji guan shibian—Yang Weizhen ti guquan pu ce 由書蹟觀世變—楊維禎題古泉譜冊." *Gugong wenwu yuekan* 281 (Aug. 2006), 24-26.

other in amateurish ugliness."⁵⁴ The same aggressiveness can also be observed from Yang's inscriptions directly on the *Spring Landscape* by Ma Wan (fl. late-fourteenth century),⁵⁵ *Bird and Peach Blossoms* by Zhang Zhong (fl. fourteenth century),⁵⁶ and *Spring Mountains* by an anonymous painter.⁵⁷ Conversely, when inscribing a handscroll on attached paper separated from the painted image, Yang reverted to the relative casualness of the draft-cursive mode, as seen in his colophons to the *Portrait of Yang Zhuxi*,⁵⁸ Deng Wenyuan's *An Improvisation*, and Ma Yuan's (ca. 1190-1225) *Four Hoary-Heads of Shangshan*,⁵⁹ just to name a few.

This division, however, is not necessarily exclusive. Yang's inscription to *A Breath of Spring*, our primary inquiry, is seemingly a glaring contradiction to his habitual division. As mentioned above, Yang's colophon was inscribed not on the painting surface but a separate piece of paper following the ink-plum painting. Yet this exception is by no means a whim of the calligrapher. Quite the contrary, it is very likely that Zou's masterful display of calligraphic brushwork in this ink-plum painting stimulated Yang's response in the dramatic mode. Taken together, we may conclude that although not a painter himself, Yang Weizhen was keenly aware of the

⁵⁴ James Cahill, *Hills beyond a River: Chinese Painting of the Yuan Dynasty, 1279-1368* (New York: Weatherhill, 1976), 175-176. The painting is in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei; reproduced in *Gugong shuhua tulu* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1989-1995), vol. 14, 321-322.

⁵⁵ The painting is in the collection of the University Art Museum, Princeton University; reproduced in Shen Fu and Marilyn Fu, *Studies in Connoisseurship: Chinese Paintings from the Arthur M. Sackler Collection in New York and Princeton* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), 73.

⁵⁶ The painting is in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei; reproduced in Shih Shou-chieng and Ge Wanzhang eds., *Dahan de shiji: Meng Yuan shidai de duoyuan wenhua yu yishu* (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 2001), 308-309.

⁵⁷ The painting is in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. While Fu Shen suggests the landscape was also by Yang Weizhen based on the inscription, Richard Barnhart questions this attribution on stylistic basis. Barnhart attributes the painting to Yang's contemporary Yang Yanqing (Yao Tingmei). See Fu Shen, "A Landscape Painting by Yang Wei-chen." *National Palace Museum Bulletin*, vol. 8, no. 4 (1973), 1-13. Also see Richard Barnhart, "Yao Yen-ch'ing, T'ing-mei, of Wu-hsing." *Artibus Asiae* vol. 39 no. 2 (1977): 105-123. The painting is reproduced in Xu Guohuang, *Li Guo shanshui huaxi tezhan* (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 1999), 77-80.

⁵⁸ The painting is a collaboration of Wang Yi and Ni Zan, and is in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing; reproduced in Yu Hui ed., *Yuandai huihua* (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshu guan, 2005), 242-245.

⁵⁹ The painting is in the collection of the Cincinnati Museum of Art; reproduced in Avril, Ellen B., *Chinese art in the Cincinnati Art Museum* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 84-85.

painted images and the pictorial potential of his dramatic mode, with which he intentionally challenged the artistic creations of his painter friends to a startling effect.

1.2.4 Naturalness, archaism and individualism

Yang Weizhen's highly unusual style prompts the questions: what was the source of his calligraphic practice? And to what end did Yang flaunt his eccentricity to such an abrasive extent in his calligraphy? Invariably, traditional accounts attribute Yang's eccentric style to his "uncompromising personality." As no earlier models can be readily identified in his mature style, and Yang rarely discussed calligraphy, his own or others' alike, this generalized impression has been echoed in modern scholarship without further consideration. As mentioned above, Yang Weizhen's approach to calligraphy seems similar to Mi Fu's "old-age calligraphy," not necessarily in terms of style but in the intent to show a disregard of previous traditions. Mi Fu considered his "old-age calligraphy," though lacking in beauty and grace of his earlier works, more "natural" – it appears more casual and less governed by intellectual rationale.⁶⁰ "Naturalness" was the center of Mi's artistic concern in the last years of his life. It may not be a coincidence that "naturalness," in addition to archaism, is also quintessential to Yang Weizhen's literary practice and theories. The pursuit of naturalness, its multi-faceted nuances notwithstanding, may have led these two calligraphers of completely different backgrounds and circumstances into an unexpected kinship in their respective calligraphic styles.

The concept of "naturalness" can be vague, variable and, philosophically speaking,

⁶⁰ Sturman, *Mi Fu*, 151.

indefinable. Although Confucianism formed the philosophical foundation of Yang Weizhen's character, in his view on naturalness he rather followed the Daoist line. In an essay titled *Epigraph on Naturalness* (*Ziran ming* 自然銘) he related his view of "naturalness" based on Zhuangzi's (fl. fourth century BCE) *Xiaoyao you* 逍遙遊, "Free and Easy Wandering":

Let the Small and the Large be small and large; let the Long and the Short be long and short; then, everything in the universe thrives in its place. It is so, [because] it is unaware of its place – this is "self-so (naturalness)." ⁶¹

小大任小大，長短任長短，而物無不得其所。其然者，皆莫知其所，以為自然也。

In other words, to achieve a state of naturalness is to be one's self without striving for it, defining it, or even being aware of it. The paradoxical tone of this statement is by no means unusual to those familiar with the relativism in Daoist philosophy.⁶² The *Epigraph on Naturalness* is no more original than a witty wordplay off Zhuangzi's *Xiaoyao you*. Although Yang's definition of naturalness is not necessarily original, the assertion of self and the freedom of self expression indeed plays a quintessential part in Yang's archaism movement in literature. In *Preface to Yan Shao's Poetry Collection*, Yang defines a person's inherent nature as the originator of poetry:

⁶¹ Yang Weizhen, "Ziran ming 自然銘," *Dongweizi wenji*, juan 23. The essay was written for a friend Shen Zhongcan 沈仲參 (dates unknown), who named his studio "Ziran (naturalness)." Although Yang claimed this opening statement to be based on *Xiaoyao you*, the first chapter of Zhuangzi, it is not part of the original text. As noted by Huang Rensheng, this statement possibly derived from Guo Xiang's (d. 312 CE) commentary of the chapter. Guo Xiang's commentary is the oldest surviving example of its kind. Furthermore, the present day version of Zhuangzi was edited by Guo Xiang. The nature of naturalness, according to Steve Coutinho, is the "central concept of Guo Xiang's philosophy, which he attributes to Zhuangzi through his commentary." See Huang Rensheng, *Yang Weizhen*, 43; Steve Coutinho, *Zhuangzi and early Chinese philosophy: Vagueness, Transformation, and Paradox* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 64.

⁶² The chapter of *Xiaoyao you* centers on the relative concept of large and small. For a translation, see Burton Watson, *Zhuangzi: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 23-30.

Poetry originated in [human] emotion and nature. With nature comes emotion; with emotion comes poetry. As for the ancients, the emotion of *ya* (ceremonial odes) is pure, and the emotion of *feng* (folk songs) is complex.⁶³ As for those who came later, the emotion of Qu Yuan's poetry is sorrowful; the emotion of Tao Qian's poetry is placid; the emotion of Li Bo's poetry is untrammelled; the emotion of Du Fu's poetry is compassionate. The utterance of poetry comes solely from emotion. Although [emotion] cannot be attained through learning, the originator of poetry (i.e. the poet) cannot be an unlearned.⁶⁴

詩本情性。有性此有情，有情此有詩也。上而言之：雅詩情純，風詩情雜。下而言之：屈詩情騷，陶詩情靖，李詩情逸，杜詩情厚。詩之狀未有不依情而出也，雖然不可學，詩之所出者不可以無學也。

This statement attributes the "utterance of poetry," or poetic style, to the nature and emotion of the poet. The "emotion" cannot be imitated, because it is inherent to the poet's nature, which is supposed to be unique and spontaneous. The claim that poetry (no doubt he meant "good" poetry) can only come from one's nature echoes the ideal state of being in Daoist philosophy, but the provision of learning and self-cultivation also speaks strongly of Yang Weizhen's Confucian conviction. The learning comes from the poet's understanding of ancient poetry, because of its close affinity to "emotion and nature":

⁶³ Here Yang referred to the different "genres" in the *Book of Odes*. Since the *Book of Odes* has traditionally been revered as the most ancient form of poetry and its editorship attributed to Confucius, it is often discussed as the ideal form of poetry in Yang's theoretical writings. In practice, however, Yang Weizhen preferred the later *yuefu*-style poetry and is mainly known for his accomplishment in *yuefu* poetry.

⁶⁴ Yang Weizhen, "Yan Shao shixu 剡韶詩序 (Preface to Yan Shao's Poetry Collection)," *Dongweizi wenji*, juan 7.

The ancient *yuefu*-poetry is the overflow of *ya* and spin-off of *feng* – it is the closest to emotion and nature.⁶⁵ The poets of Han and Wei relied on similes and metaphors, and the poets of Jin relied on inherent temperament – they are not yet far from emotion and nature. The poets of the Northern and Southern [Dynasties] based on formality, on symmetry, on rhythmicity – thus they stray far from emotion and nature. The best of the High-Tang [poetry] can rival the Han and the Wei, but the Late-Tang [poetry] is the extreme degeneracy of the regulated-verse poetry. The poets of Song based [their poetry] on mundane affairs, morality or Chan fables – alas, they are even further away from emotion and nature!

古樂府，雅之流、風之派也，情性近也。漢魏人本興象，晉人本室度，情性尚未遠也。南北人本體裁、本偶對聲病，情性遂遠矣。盛唐高者追漢魏，晚唐律之敝極；宋人或對本事實、或本道學禪唱，而情性益遠矣！⁶⁶

In short, Yang Weizhen advocated for “naturalness,” by which he meant the liberation of self and emotion, achieved through archaism. Although archaism and individualism may not seem compatible with each other, what Yang advocated is to achieve the freedom of creativity and break away from the limitations of regulated-verse poetry (*lüshi*) through the revival of ancient *yuefu*-style poetry.⁶⁷ It is likely that Yang applied similar aesthetic principles to his calligraphic practice – first, through the revival of the draft-cursive style he sought to rectify the

⁶⁵ *Feng* and *ya* are both poetry genres from the *Book of Odes*.

⁶⁶ Yang Weizhen, “Yusi jixu 玉筍集敘” in *Yang Tieyai xiansheng wenji* 楊鐵崖先生文集 (Ming Zhuji Chen Shanxue xiaokan ben), *juan* 4. Similar claims are found frequently in Yang’s theoretical writings.

⁶⁷ *Yuefu* style poetry first developed in the Han dynasty and reached its height during the Tang. Nevertheless, the “*yuefu* style” for which Yang particularly advocated was the earlier, Han version of the format.

pleasing beauty of the so-called Wang Xizhi style popular among his contemporaries; second, through his calligraphy he appears, man and words, to be unrestricted by any rules, whether ancient or modern. His revival of the draft-cursive style is not an end but a means to bring forth individualism, and the rebellious irregularity in his draft-cursive mode is meant to be understood as the representation of the unfeigned nature of the calligrapher.

Paradoxically, such a state of naturalness, as claimed by generations of calligraphers, can never be truly unintentional or unselfconscious. More likely, it is a cultivated effect through years of practice that eventually becomes instinctive. It is, therefore, a crafted statement of the calligrapher's self-image. In Yang Weizhen's case, he represented himself as a free spirit who has more in common with the ancients, unbound by tradition or social niceties. His campaign of self-image building must have been quite successful – in fact, it was so successful that both of his biographers felt obligated to claim that Yang was not as eccentric, radical or arrogant as others perceived him to be; on the contrary, he was kind, generous and forgiving.⁶⁸

1.3 The clash between text and image

As discussed above, Yang Weizhen consciously employed different modes of calligraphic style in his painting inscriptions in accordance with their relative location as well the format of the painting. When inscribing on hanging scrolls directly on the painting surface, Yang often adopted the dramatic mode as if in competition with the painted elements; when inscribing handscrolls following the painted images, he reverted to the casual draft-cursive mode. Yang

⁶⁸ Bei Qiong (1297-1379), "Teiyai xiansheng zhuan," in *Qingjiang Bei xiansheng ji* 清江貝先生集(reprinted in *Sibu congkan jibu*, vols. 1526-1531. Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1922), *juan* 2, and Song Lian (1310-1381), "Yuan gu Fengxun daifu Jiangxi dengchu ruxue tijuYang jun muzhiming," in *Luanpo ji* 鑾坡集 (reprinted in *Song xueshi wenji* 宋學士文集, *Sibu congkan jibu*, vol. 1052-1515. Shanghai : Shangwu yinshu guan, 1922), *juan* 6.

Weizhen's inscription to *A Breath of Spring*, however, is an anomaly of this dichotomy: although not inscribed directly on the painted image, Yang adopted the dramatic mode with extreme force clamoring for attention. In this case, it appears Yang was responding directly to the style of the painting. The visual relationship between Zou Fulei's ink-plum painting and Yang's inscription is highly unusual in the fourteenth century and certainly a bold initiation on Yang's part. It is also a somewhat perplexing relationship: while the content of the inscription speaks of admiration and friendship, its style speaks of discord and conflict. How are the relationships between text and image as well as form and content to be understood? Unsurprisingly, Yang's seemingly eccentric approach to painting inscription is not without its roots in earlier traditions. In the following discussion I will establish the connection between Yang's inscription on *A Breath of Spring* and the poem-scroll tradition and analyze Yang's motive in adapting the poem-scroll tradition in a new context.

The "poem scroll," defined by Nakata Yūjirō as poetry written in handscroll format with large characters of cursive or semi-cursive script, is a legacy of the Northern-Song literati culture.⁶⁹ Born out of the "drunken playfulness" of the Tang-dynasty (618-907) wild-cursive masters, according to Nakata, the poem scroll became the dominating format for calligraphic expression in the Northern Song dynasty as well as the centuries to come.⁷⁰ Nakata's definition, however pithy, requires a further demonstration of the stylistic features which distinguish the poem scroll from other formats of calligraphy. Su Shi's (1037-1101) *Poems of the Cold-Food Festival* is one of the most well-known examples of a Northern-Song poem scroll.⁷¹ Written on a

⁶⁹ Nakata Yūjirō, "Calligraphic Style and Poetry Handscrolls: On Mi Fu's Sailing on the Wu River," in *Words and Images: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy and Painting* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art. 1991), 94.

⁷⁰ Nakata, "Poetry Handscrolls," 104.

⁷¹ *Poems of the Cold-Food Festival* is in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei; reproduced in

handscroll slightly over a foot tall, the characters in this piece cannot be called exactly “large characters.” Yet the dynamic force and the overflowing emotions displayed in the piece indeed give the viewer a monumental impression. The *Cold-Food Festival* is a transcription of two poems composed on the Cold-Food Festival of the year 1082, when Su Shi was in exile at Huangzhou, Hubei province.⁷² This masterpiece has been hailed as the most brilliant calligraphy of Su Shi. The tone of the poems is full of distress and anguish:

Since coming to Huangzhou,	自我來黃州，
Three Cold-Food Festivals have come and gone.	已過三寒食。
Each year I wish to linger with spring,	年年欲惜春，
But spring admits no delay for departure.	春去不容惜。
This year, I again suffer from bitter rain,	今年又苦雨，
Two months of autumn-like dreary weather.	兩月秋蕭瑟。
Lying in bed, I smell the crab-apple blossoms;	臥聞海棠花，
Mud smudges their rouge and snow.	泥污燕支雪。
In darkness, they were carried off;	闇中偷負去，
Truly, there must be a strong man [stealing them away]	夜半真有力。
in the middle of the night.	
How does it differ from a sickly youth,	何殊病少年，
upon leaving his sickbed, finding his hair already	病起鬚已白。

in Lin Boting ed. *Daguan: Bei Song shuhua tezhan* (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 2006), 354-355.

⁷² From the second to the fourth day of the third month in the lunar calendar, people were not allowed to make fire; therefore, they ate previously prepared food cold, hence the name “Cold-Food” Festival. Although the poems were composed in 1082, the piece is undated. Most scholars agree that it was executed during Su Shi’s exile in Huangzhou. Su Shi left Huangzhou in early 1084; therefore, the scroll can be dated between 1082 and 1084. See Fu Shen, “Tianxia di yi Su Dongpo—hangshi tie 天下第一蘇東坡—寒食帖,” *Gugong wenwu yuekan*, vol. 2 no. 7 (1984), 78-79.

white?⁷³

Spring flood is coming up to my door,	春江欲入戶，
But the rain shows no sign of letting up.	雨勢來不已。
My small hut is like a fishing boat,	小屋如漁舟，
Blurred in misty water and clouds.	濛濛水雲裡。
Prepared in my empty kitchen are only cold vegetables,	空庖煮寒菜，
The cracked stove has only burnt wet reeds.	破竈燒濕葦。
How did I know it is the Cold-Food festival?	那知是寒食，
I see scraps of paper money picked up by crows.	但見烏銜昏。
The sovereign's gates are far above nine levels [of Heaven];	君門深九重，
Tombs [of my ancestors] are ten-thousand miles away.	墳墓在萬里。
I would weep [for my misery] at the end of the road,	也擬哭塗窮，
Only [my heart] is like dead ashes that cannot be rekindled. ⁷⁴	死灰吹不起。

Compared with Su Shi's *Former Ode on the Red Cliff*, a prose composition in his own handwriting, the difference in style is remarkable.⁷⁵ Verily, one can recognize both of them as Su Shi's handwriting by the slightly squat form of individual characters and the fleshiness of his

⁷³ Translation by Bor-hua Wang in his dissertation, "Su Shih's Art of Writing and His Han-shih t'ieh (Columbia University, 1997)," 65-66, with minor adaptations.

⁷⁴ Translation by Bor-hua Wang, "Han-shih t'ieh," 67-68, with minor adaptation.

⁷⁵ Here I refer to the version of the *Former Ode on the Red Cliff* in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei; reproduced in Lin Boting ed. *Daguan: Bei Song shuhua tezhan* (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 2006), 348-349.

brushstrokes. The overall effect, however, is very different. While in the *Former Ode on the Red Cliff* the texts are carefully planned out and executed to give an orderly effect, the *Poems of the Cold-Food Festival* exhibits a great liberation in the varying size of individual characters and extending brushstrokes. The two pieces were both executed in Huangzhou within a year from each other; therefore, the difference cannot be attributed to the evolution of personal style. Also, they are both in the handscroll format.⁷⁶ The stylistic differences, therefore, must have been an artistic choice made in accordance to their differences in content. In the case of the *Red Cliff*, first of all, Su Shi was transcribing a long text in prose composed a few months earlier. Considering the length of the text, even of his own composition, it is unlikely Su transcribed it from memory. Secondly, both the former and latter *Odes on the Red Cliff* are considered Su's masterpieces in prose-writing. He certainly took pride in them, as he wrote in the postscript to the *Former Ode on the Red Cliff*, "I composed this prose last year; [I] never lightly showed it to others. Only a couple people have seen it." In short, he valued Fu Yaoyu (1024-1091), the recipient of the piece, as a worthy friend with whom Su shared his thoughts and feelings in exile. Therefore, the foremost concern with his writing out the *Former Ode* is to communicate with his friend clearly, and it may be the reason he chose regular script for this task.

At the end of his note Su Shi added, "There is also a *Latter Ode on the Red Cliff*, but I am too tired to copy it [now]. I shall [send it with] my next letter." Quite contrary to the romantic notion that calligraphy is a spontaneous and effortless flow from one's true nature without artifice, writing could be strenuous work even to a great calligrapher like Su Shi! To remain

⁷⁶ The purpose of each work may also differ slightly: the *Former Ode on the Red Cliff* was written upon the request of Fu Yaoyu (1024-1091); in the case of the *Poems of the Cold-Food Festival* it is less clear, since there is no dedicative inscription following the poems. It could have been a draft of the poems copied for Su Shi's own amusement. Nevertheless, it was soon acquired by private collectors as an art work. When Huang Tingjian inscribed the scroll in 1100, the scroll was in another Northern-Song poet Zhang Gongyu's (1023-1083) possession, treasured as a great work of calligraphy by Su Shi.

focused throughout the transcription of a long text certainly could be mentally demanding to say the least. It reveals how serious Su Shi must have been about his own writing, being conscious that they would be collected, treasured and copied as both literary and calligraphy masterpieces.

Transcribing poems, by comparison, would be an entirely different undertaking. The relatively compact form of poetry gives the calligrapher a more concise arena for self-expression through calligraphy. First of all, poems were usually short enough to transcribe from memory, and thus allowed the calligrapher to “accomplish it in one breath,” as put rhetorically in the old Chinese saying. Looking to the *Cold-Food Festival* for evidence, there is clearly a stop and shift of mood between the two poems, even though both were inscribed on the same scroll, presumably at the same time. Furthermore, the concise form of regulated-verse poetry also meant more condensed emotions. Both the content and the calligraphic style of the *Cold-Food Festival* are a lot stronger emotionally than the philosophical tone of the *Former Ode*. Interestingly, despite the frustration shown in his two Cold-Food Festival poems, the majority of Su Shi’s literary works from the Huangzhou period, whether it be poetry (*shi*), song-lyrics (*ci*) or prose, shows a sense of contentment.⁷⁷ It seems he indeed found (or at least tried to) a sanguine pleasure in his rustic surroundings, and even a sense of humor toward his misfortune. The intensity of sorrowful sentiment shown in his Cold-Food Festival poems is certainly unusual. The calligraphic style also seems to respond to this fit of potent emotions. No wonder Huang Tingjian (1045-1105) commented in his colophon, “Even if Dongpo (Su Shi) attempts it again, he would not be able to rival this!”

Likewise, the very best works by Huang Tingjian and Mi Fu, recognized by both traditional critics and modern scholars, are usually their poem scrolls, such as Huang’s *Poem on the Pavilion*

⁷⁷ Egan, “The Song Lyric,” 290-1.

of *Pines in Wind*⁷⁸ or *Mi's Sailing on the Wu River*.⁷⁹ The poem scroll was indeed regarded as the hallmark of the Northern-Song calligraphy and emulated by Yuan-dynasty calligraphers following in their footsteps. Zhao Mengfu, for example, is also known for his admiration for Su Shi's calligraphy. As one of the most well-rounded and prolific calligraphers, his transcription of Su Shi's work constitutes only of a small part of his oeuvre. Still, his role as a revivalist of the Northern-Song literati tradition and, more specifically, the poem-scroll format is significant to our present discussion on Yuan painting inscription. For instance, Zhao Mengfu transcribed Su Shi's *Misty River, Layered Peaks*, a poem originally composed for a painting by Wang Shen (ca. 1048-ca. 1103) of the same title.⁸⁰ Both Wang Shen's painting and Su Shi's poetic inscriptions are still extant, which provides a great opportunity for comparison against Zhao's transcription, and allows us to examine the revival of Northern-Song literati culture in the Yuan period.⁸¹ Zhao Mengfu could have seen the original compositions of Wang Shen and Su Shi – Zhao Mengfu was said to have copied Wang Shen's painting as well. However, when comparing Zhao's transcription with Su's original, the stylistic difference is quite evident: Zhao's running script characters are much larger than Su's regular script ones. Also, in his transcription Zhao

⁷⁸ *Poem on the Pavilion of Pines in Wind* is in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei; reproduced in Lin Boting ed. *Daguan: Bei Song shuhua tezhan* (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 2006), 389-392.

⁷⁹ *Sailing on the Wu River* is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; reproduced in Nakata Yūjirō, and Fu Shen eds., *Ō-Bei shūzō Chūgoku hōsho meisekishū* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1981-1982), vol. 1, 78-87.

⁸⁰ For a translation of the poem, see Alfreda Murck, *Poetry and Painting in Song China: The Subtle Art of Dissent* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 130-131. The painting and its inscriptions are also discussed in the fourth chapter of this dissertation. There are two versions of Wang Shen's *Misty River, Layered Peaks* extant, both in the collection of the Shanghai Museum. Images of the paintings reproduced in *Zhangguo huihua quanji* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1997-2001), vol. 2, 114-117.

⁸¹ Wang Shen seems to have painted more than one versions of *Misty River, Layered Peaks* (more than one extant copies are attributed to Wang Shen), and the painting and its inscriptions have been copied, separated and remounted throughout the centuries. There are two versions of Wang's *Misty River, Layered Peaks* extant, both in the collection of the Shanghai Museum. One of them contains the set of inscriptions by Su Shi and Wang Shen. For detailed discussion, see Sheng Shilan, "Zhao Mengfu Yanjiang diezhang tu shijuan santi," *Zhangguo shufa*, 2005:4. This group of painting and inscriptions is further discussed in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

often extended strokes that break out of the square structure of individual characters with a forceful intent. It deviates greatly from Su's squat, fleshy characters, but it rather brings to mind the long, pendulous and undulating lines characteristic of Huang Tingjian's style. Not only does the calligraphic style of this piece resemble little of Su Shi's style, it is also an unusual specimen in Zhao Mengfu's oeuvre. Zhao Mengfu was indeed an exceptional artist in terms of his ability to handle very different techniques and stylistic models with ease. The forceful style of this piece, which can almost be described as "heroic," does not match Zhao's more graceful, fluid and supple personal style. The dynamic flow of energy also has little to do with the content of the poem, which describes natural beauty with a slightly melancholy tone and a longing for seclusion. Rather I would argue Zhao Mengfu was role-playing a Northern-Song literatus when he transcribed the poem. The style he adopted is more like an impression of the Northern-Song period style, not a close study of Su Shi's personal style. Taking the most representative format of Northern-Song calligraphy, the poem-scroll format, he assumed Su Shi's artistic persona, who was best known for the "heroic spirit" in his literary works, when he transcribed one of Su's own compositions. Unlike its original function as a commentary to a landscape painting, Zhao's transcription is a self-contained work of art that pays tribute to one of the greatest literary minds and to the Golden Age of literati culture.

By adapting the poem-scroll format, Zhao Mengfu's transcription of *Misty River, Layered Peaks* elevated a painting inscription to the place of an independent work of art in its own right. Similarly, Yang Weizhen took the concept a step further with his inscription to *A Breath of Spring* to assert equal status with Zou's ink-plum painting. The inscription clearly evokes the poem-scroll tradition with the poem written in large running-script characters on a handscroll, followed by a postscript in smaller, less aggressive writing. The dramatic style is thought to be

most representative of Yang Weizhen's personal style, and to a great extent his personality in contemporary reckoning. It has every appearance of an independent work of art. The strong association of this format with the Northern-Song literati culture would not have escaped the notice of its original audience. To them, Yang's intention to connect his inscription with the greater tradition, and therefore make it more than just a footnote to the painting to which it was attached, would also be quite evident. The question remains: would Yang's inscription to *A Breath of Spring* have been seen as an artistic innovation or blatant arrogance?

Interestingly, Yang Weizhen was not the first to have challenged the other artist's work with his inscription either. Intriguing parallels can be found in Huang Tingjian's colophon to Su Shi's *Poems of Cold-Food Festival*.⁸² Seventeen years after Su Shi wrote the Cold-Food Festival poems, Huang Tingjian was invited by the owner of the scroll to inscribe it.⁸³ Undaunted by the artistic brilliance of his mentor and friend, Huang Tingjian brushed down his response in an equally daring flow of energy:

These poems of Dongpo (Su Shi) are like [those of] Li Taibai (Li Bai) – rather I am afraid Taibai's are not quite their equal. The calligraphy incorporates the brush idea of Yan Lugong (Yan Zhenqing, 709-785), Yang Shaoshi (Yang Ningshi, 873-954) and Li Xitai (Li Jianzhong, 945-1013). Even if Dongpo attempts it again, he would not be able to rival this. If someday Dongpo is to see my inscription, he would laugh at my [attempt to] be called Worthy in the absence of the Buddha.

⁸² For a detailed study on the relationship between the *Poems of the Cold-Food Festival* and Huang Tingjian's inscription, see Shih Shou-chien, "Wufo chu chengzun – tan Huang Tingjian ba hanshi tie de xinli 無佛處稱尊 – 談黃庭堅跋寒食帖的心理," *Gugong wenwu yuekan*, vol. 8 no. 1 (1990), 18-29.

⁸³ Huang Tingjian's inscription to Su Shi's *Poems of the Cold-Food Festival* is dated 1100.

東坡此詩似李太白，猶恐太白有未到處。此書兼顏魯公、楊少師、李西臺筆意。試使東坡復為之，未必及此。它日東坡或見此書，應笑我於無佛處稱尊也。

While praising Su Shi's poetry and calligraphy and placing his artistic achievement above the most revered poet and calligraphers in history, Huang also boldly asserted himself as only second to Su Shi in calligraphy. The characters in this inscription are larger than those in Su's original—as observed by Shih Shou-chien, it is a highly unusual practice and certainly reveals Huang's intention to rival Su's masterpiece.⁸⁴ This bold claim is backed up by the extraordinary dynamism in this inscription, which has indeed been regarded an outstanding example of Huang's calligraphy. Moreover, Huang's praise of Su's *Cold-Food Festival* and the artistry of this inscription have no doubt enhanced the prestige of the scroll as a whole. In the circumstances that led to the creation of this exceptional inscription we find many parallels with that of Yang Weizhen's colophon to *A Breath of Spring*: they both respond to a work by a friend that is of outstanding quality; they both respond, in format and style, with an intense aspiration to rival their friend's creation; and of course, they are among the most successful examples of a practice that is rather an anomaly in Chinese art history.

It must be acknowledged that while we may claim the extraordinary responses of Huang Tingjian and Yang Weizhen were "inspired" by the works of Su Shi and Zou Fulei respectively, their responses by no means take the form of stylistic or visual simulation. In fact, it is impossible to argue that the style of Yang's inscription was "inspired" by Zou's painting, since there is no stylistic commonality to be found in the two works: bold as its composition and brushwork is, the ink plum painting is executed in a controlled manner to render an elegant outcome; Yang's inscription, on the other hand, appears impulsive and often willfully coarse.

⁸⁴ Shih, "Wufo chu chengzun," 25.

Indeed, the “inspiration,” if it exists, appears to be of a very different nature. Furthermore, the perplexing disjuncture between form and content also calls our attention. As given in translation earlier, the poem and postscript speaks of Yang’s admiration for the art of the Zou brothers and honors his friendship with them. If the content of the inscription is conventional, the format and style are certainly not.

By placing Yang Weizhen’s inscription to *A Breath of Spring* in the poem-scroll tradition, this contradiction between form and content becomes more accountable. Works in poem-scroll format were taken as the most representative of a calligrapher’s style, artistic ingenuity and even personality. Thus, this display of Yang’s personal style at its most dramatic is to be understood as an assertion of self. The personal style is in itself an artistic statement independent of the content. Yet “rivalry” alone may not fully encompass Yang Weizhen’s intent: by putting forth his creative energy into this inscription, he not only responded to the artistic challenge of Zou Fulei, but also paid the highest compliment possible from one artist to another. In short, while fulfilling its function as a testimony of the social ties between two artists, Yang Weizhen’s inscription takes on the format of a poem scroll to evoke the Northern-Song literati tradition. By aligning his inscription with the greater tradition, Yang Weizhen elevated it to an independent work of art in respond to Zou’s masterful creation. No doubt it delivers quite a visual clash that may seem aggressively competitive. To its contemporary audience – fellow scholars who knew the artists in person or by reputation – however, the degree of creative energy and self assertion Yang put into this inscription would have been understood as the most flattering compliment and sincere admiration toward Zou Fulei’s *A Breath of Spring*.

Chapter 2. *Leisure Enough to Spare*: The Rhetoric of Reclusion in Text and Image

While the relationship between Zou Fulei's ink-plum painting and Yang Weizhen's poetic inscription in *A Breath of Spring* is dramatic and complex in its artistic and social dimensions, and the degree of intensity rather unusual, the pairing nevertheless fulfills the general expectation of the relationship between painting and painting inscription: that is, the painting inscription reacts directly to the artist and his or her creation. It is, however, not always the case. At first glance, *Leisure Enough to Spare* appears to be a typical example of a painting of a scholar's retreat, a subject matter prevalent among Yuan-dynasty literati artists.¹ The landscape painting, as well as the inscriptions that follow, celebrate the reclusive dwelling of a certain Mr. Du (dates unknown) and, more importantly, the idea of reclusion.² Text-image objects of this kind were often assembled as gifts among the southern literati; Wai-kam Ho even speculated that *Leisure Enough to Spare* may have been produced as a result of a literary gathering as a gift for the host.³ Upon closer examination, however, a rather unromantic picture of its production emerges: instead of the result of a spontaneous surge of creativity sparked during a gathering of poets and artists, the scroll is likely a commissioned production, and the majority of the inscriptions were composed without any knowledge of the landscape painting.

This chapter examines the parallel yet interdependent relationship between text and image

¹ Yao Tingmei's *Leisure Enough to Spare* is reproduced in Wai-kam Ho, et al eds., *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting: The Collections of the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, and the Cleveland Museum of Art* (Cleveland: The Museum, 1980), 137.

² Due to limited information provided by the scroll, I was unable to positively identify Mr. Du, the recipient of the scroll. The social implications of Mr. Du's obscurity will be discussed in detail later in the chapter.

³ It is, however, a misidentification that will be addressed later in the chapter. See Wai-kam Ho, catalogue entry on *Leisure Enough to Spare*, in Wai-kam Ho, et al., *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting: The Collections of the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, and the Cleveland Museum of Art* (Cleveland: The Museum, 1980), 137-138. Richard Barnhart also characterized *Leisure Enough to Spare* as a collaboration between Yang Tingmei and Yang Weizhen. See Barnhart, "Yao Yen-ch'ing, T'ing-mei, of Wu-hsing." *Artibus Asiae* vol. 39 no. 2 (1977), 112.

in *Leisure Enough to Spare*, and investigates this particular mode of assembling a text-image object that is perhaps more common than we have previously acknowledged. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the “painting of a scholar’s retreat” as a genre and its social and political significance in the last years of the Yuan dynasty.

2.1 Assembling *Leisure Enough to Spare*

Leisure Enough to Spare, now in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art, consists of a frontispiece by Zhang Bi (fl. fourteenth century) that announces the title of the scroll, *you yu xian* 有餘閒 in seal script, followed by a landscape painting by Yao Tingmei (also known as Yao Yanqing, fl. fourteenth century), a prose essay by Yang Weizhen, and twenty one poems by other contemporary poets.⁴ The physical order of the texts and image in the scroll, however, by no means reflects the chronological order in which they were executed. Of the twenty four pieces that form the scroll we now know as *Leisure Enough to Spare*, only three are dated: Yao Tingmei’s painting is dated the first month of the twentieth year of the Zhizheng reign (1360);⁵ Yang Weizhen’s *Essay on Leisure Enough to Spare* is dated February 17, 1360; and the second last of the poems by Meng Weicheng (dates unknown) is dated the seventh month of 1359. Furthermore, since Yang’s essay functions as a preface to the following poems, it is reasonable to assume that the majority of the poems predates Yang’s essay. Taken together, it is quite certain that these poets composed their poems without ever seeing the companion painting that

⁴ The scroll also contains another poetic inscription by the Qianlong Emperor on the upper-right corner of the landscape painting.

⁵ The exact date of Yao Tingmei’s painting is missing from his inscription: the character that denotes the day was scraped out at some point and was never filled in. The first month of the twentieth year of the Zhizheng reign falls in January 19 to February 16, 1360. In any case, we can be sure that the painting predates Yang Weizhen’s essay, which is dated to the “second month” of 1360.

was yet to be executed. Thus, we must ask the questions: can we still call Yang's essay and the poems "painting inscriptions," when the authors had no knowledge about the painting their compositions would accompany? And conversely, could Yao Tingmei have seen the poems beforehand and conceived the landscape to accommodate the texts? Before attempting to answer these intriguing questions, we must first investigate how and why this group of text and image objects was assembled.

2.1.1 Yang Weizhen's *Essay on Leisure Enough to Spare*

Yang Weizhen's *Essay on Leisure Enough to Spare* gives us tantalizing clues to the circumstances that led to the assemblage of the scroll. First, Yang expounded on the subject of "leisure enough to spare":

Master Ouyang (Ouyang Xiu, 1007-1072) says in one of his poems, "It is when I can steal a moment of leisure then I can get friends together for pleasurable purposes." Now, if leisure could be acquired only by stealing, it cannot be said to be abundant enough to spare. In a poem of Dongpo (Su Shi, 1036-1101) he says, "To take advantage of illness to secure leisure – there is nothing wrong with that!" So if it is an unavoidable illness that creates the leisure, this could not be called leisure abundant enough to spare either. How appalling is the poem by a man of late Song, which says, "Buying plenty of farmlands and gardens in preparation for [a future of] leisure."⁶ Now, if leisure has to depend on an extensive holding of real estate,

⁶ The verse is by Zhang Zongyong (fl. early eleventh century), a minor Northern-Song poet. See Li E (1692-1752), *Songshi jishi* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1983), 378.

this is precisely the kind of thing which will jeopardize one's leisure. Indeed, since one will never have enough leisure that way, how can he ever have leftover to spare?⁷

歐陽子詩曰：得朋為樂偶偷閒。閒僅得於偷，則不得謂之有餘矣。東坡詩曰：因病得閒殊不惡。閒得於不獲已之疾病，則又不得謂之有餘矣。鄙哉晚宋人之詩曰：賸買田園准備閒。閒必以田園之廣置，則又適以害吾之閒。而閒且日不足矣，謂之有餘又可乎？

Yang Weizhen opened the essay with a series of citations of verses specifically by Northern Song (960-1279) poets, only to criticize the meagerness of their ideas of "leisure." That said, these statements were probably not meant to be serious literary criticism but to set off his following arguments by contrast. It is a literary device that Yang used quite often to show off his lofty ideas and superior knowledge, and perhaps earned him the reputation for arrogance. It is also noteworthy that Yang did not name the source of the phrase "leisure enough to spare" anywhere in the essay. The phrase originated in *Returning to Dwell on the Farmstead* (*Guiyuan tianju* 歸園田居) by Tao Qian (365-427), a series of five poems hailed as the paradigm of reclusion poetry. As a matter of fact, none of the poems in the scroll make direct reference to *Returning to Dwell on the Farmstead*. As the following discussion will reveal, however, the literary tradition of rustic reclusion is so deeply rooted in Tao's works that they were somewhat taken for granted. We can safely assume that Yang and his fellow inscribers expected their audience to have no trouble identifying the source of the phrase "leisure enough to spare."

Next, Yang Weizhen revealed the true purpose of his making the arguments about "leisure enough to spare":

⁷ For an alternative translation, see Wai-kam Ho, *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting*, 137-138.

In Qinglong by the Song River, there is a hermit, Mr. Du.⁸ Inside, he has fine junior family members to take care of his household. Under him, he has diligent servants to engage in production. Outside, he has wise in-laws and friends to watch out for him and guard him. Thus he has the leisure to live peaceably, and to eat heartily, and to travel about year after year. Surely his leisure was not stolen as [moments spent with] friends, not derived from illness, and not jeopardized by any extensive enlargement of real estate. Could anyone doubt my word that this is truly leisure enough to spare?

淞之青龍有杜隱君者，內有良子弟為家督，下有勤臧獲為生產，而外有賢姻友為守望，君得以安居飫食優游以卒歲。則其閒也，不偷於得朋、不出於因病、不損於田園之廣置，閒曰有餘，豈誣我哉！

Yang Weizhen's description of "Mr. Du" presents the picture of a wealthy country gentleman. Although Yang emphasized Mr. Du's leisure came not from "extensive enlargement of real estate," by reading his essay with the following poems, which will be discussed later, we may infer that Mr. Du's fortune came from his farmland. To be sure, Yang's portrayal of Mr. Du's lifestyle seems enviable, but it is also somewhat unsettling. It seems that Du's "leisure" derived not from his own merits but the exertion of others. Could this really mean to be a compliment? Or is there something sarcastic about Yang's praises? Furthermore, Yang's essay is not the only one in the scroll that may have a negative connotation, which makes the

⁸ The exact location of Qinglong township today is uncertain. Historically, there were a couple different places called Qinglong in the suburb of Songjiang. One is located northeast of Qingpu (present day Qingpu district, Shanghai); the other is located within Huating County (present day Huating district, Shanghai). In short, the fourteenth-century town of Qinglong was probably in some distance north of Songjiang. See Zang Lihe, *Zhongguo gujin diming da cidian* (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1931), 574.

relationship between Mr. Du and these poets even more intriguing.

Lastly, Yang Weizhen gave another piece of information regarding how he came to compose this essay for Mr. Du, before he elaborately signed his name and titles:

The gentleman (Mr. Du) engaged my friend and student Zhang Mengchen (Zhang Shu, b. 1316) to ask me for an essay. I herewith composed this for him.⁹ And those who are well versed in poetry have written the poems that follow. Dongweizi wrote this on the first day of the second month of the *gengzi* year (February 17, 1360). By “Dongwei” I mean the *jinshi* graduate from the placard of the *dingmao* year of the Taiding reign (1327), [who holds] the office of Commissioner of Schools of Jiangxi [with the rank] of Grand Master for Admonishment,¹⁰ [whose name is] Yang Weizhen, from Kuaiji.

君介吾友生張夢臣徵說，為之說如此。而工詩者為歌之如左云。至正庚子二月初吉。東維子書。東維者，泰定丁卯榜進士，奉訓大夫、江西等處儒學提舉，會乂楊維禎也。

It turns out that Mr. Du did not personally know Yang Weizhen, or was not close enough to Yang to ask the favor in person. It was not unusual that Yang composed social writings of this kind for people he barely knew. However, if we compare the essay with his *Record of the Hall of the Unofficial Statesman* (*Yezheng tang ji* 野政堂記), composed for his student Zhang Zhong

⁹ Zhang Shu was a native of Huating (present-day Shanghai) and a scholar recluse. His biography can be found in Bei Qiong, *Qingjiang Bei xiansheng wenji*, juan 2. See also Wang Deyi, *Yuanren zhuanji ziliao suoyin* (Taipei: Xin wenfeng chuban gongsi, 1979-1982), 1092.

¹⁰ Yang Weizhen was appointed Commissioner of Schools of Jiangxi with the rank of *fengxun daifu* in the end of 1358, but he never actually took up the position due to the turmoil of war. By this time, the rebel forces in different regions of China were vying for control, which made travel quite unsafe. See Sun Xiaoli, *Yang Weizhen nian pu* 楊維禎年譜 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 1997), 226-227.

(fl. fourteenth century) on the very same day, the tone of voice could not be more different.¹¹ First, the *Unofficial Statesman* takes the format of a dialogue between Yang Weizhen and Zhang Zhong, which suggests personal interaction and intimate relationship. Second, Yang launched a lengthy discussion on the origin of the name of Zhang's studio, the "Hall of the Unofficial Statesman," and likened Zhang to other historical "unofficial statesmen" with generous praises for Zhang's moral merits. The earnest discussion on historical figures certainly seems more scholarly than the pithy citations of the well-known verses by the Northern Song masters. It is also noteworthy that the *Unofficial Statesman* is included in Yang's anthology, *Dongweizi ji*, while *Essay on Leisure Enough to Spare* is not. In short, the *Unofficial Statesman* was targeted at not only a more intimate but also more scholarly audience, and was considered a more serious literary endeavor rather than a passing social favor.

Yang's "annotated" signature, detailing his *jinshi* title and his current rank and official post, is another curious point about the essay. By this time of his life, Yang was one of the most well-known figures among the southern literati. Certainly, it was his reputation as a famous poet and scholar official that brought on this commission—for a commission we now know it was. It seems unlikely that Yang was concerned that whoever read the essay would not know who "Dongweizi" is. The clue to solving this piece of the puzzle may lie in the circumstances that first brought Yang Weizhen to Songjiang. Yang was granted the rank of Grand Master for Admonishment in conjunction with his official appointment of Commissioner of Schools of Jiangxi at the end of 1358; however, he was unable to take up the post due to the turmoil of war.¹² Since the late 1350s, rebel forces led by Zhang Shicheng (1321-1367), Chen Youliang (d.

¹¹ Yang Weizhen, *Dongweizhi ji*, *juan* 16. The *Record of the Hall of the Unofficial Statesman* is also dated February 17, 1360. Zhang Zhong was a native of Songjiang and a student of Yang Weizhen. For more on Zhang Zhong as an artist, see chapter 3.

¹² Sun Xiaoli, *Nianpu*, 226.

1364) and Zhu Yuanzhang (1328-1398) were fighting for control in various regions of Southern China. The constant warfare rendered extensive travel quite unsafe, if not impossible. Instead, Yang accepted the invitation of Gu Di (fl. mid-fourteenth century), the Vice Prefect (*tongzhi* 同知) of Songjiang, to teach at the prefectural college in the autumn of 1359.¹³ Nowadays, Songjiang is reduced to a district in the southwest quarter of Shanghai metropolis; in the fourteenth century, however, Songjiang was the seat of government of the prefecture and a prosperous city second only to Suzhou. Most significantly, Songjiang was at the time under Zhang Shicheng's control. Yang's host Gu Di was in fact employed by Zhang, which would indirectly put Yang under Zhang's protection. Of course, for the time being Zhang still held the title of Grand Master under the Yuan government. The region was relatively peaceful and therefore the position of a schoolmaster in Songjiang seemed a safer alternative to Yang's official posting in Jiangxi. Nevertheless, Zhang's affiliation with the Yuan central government was superficial and capricious at best. Still considering himself a loyal subject of the Yuan regime, Yang Weizhen may have felt some uneasiness about his association with Zhang Shicheng. Within this context, Yang's assertion of his official title and rank can be understood as a statement of loyalty and an expression of a hope that the chaos would soon subside and enable him to finally take up his rightful place in the legitimate Yuan government.

This seemingly unnecessary detailing of Yang's political career also reveals a clue about the function as well as the intended audience of the scroll. Could the essay target an audience who may not know who Yang Weizhen was? Could the flaunting of Yang's official titles be meant to impress a less-informed audience? These are the possibilities we must entertain as we further investigate the relationships between the patron, Mr. Du, and the inscribers, and Mr. Du's motives of commissioning *Leisure Enough to Spare*.

¹³ Sun Xiaoli, *Nianpu*, 236-237.

Also significant is Yang's statement that, "those who are well versed in poetry have written the poems that follow." It points out that this essay functions as a preface to the poems that were composed for Mr. Du on the subject of "leisure enough to spare." But what does "leisure enough to spare" signify? It certainly has personal significance to Mr. Du, and may easily be taken as the name of his studio. The format of the essay is indeed similar to the commemorative studio "records (*ji* 記)" Yang often composed on request; however, Yang's essay never positively affirms the assumption. In fact, only one out of the twenty-one poems makes an indirect reference of the possibility that Mr. Du took the phrase from Tao Qian's poem to be the name of his dwelling.¹⁴ Another possibility is that the poems were the result of a poetry contest on the same subject. However, as the format and rhyming characters varied greatly among the poems, the likelihood of them being the product of a poetry contest is much reduced.

Last but not least, throughout the essay Yang Weizhen made no reference to Yao Tingmei's painting as part of the final assemblage, even though Yao's painting predates his essay. Yang and Yao were both active in the same region at this time, and Yao was then studying at the Songjiang Prefectural College and was thus a student of Yang. A collaborative poem and its preface by Yang from a literary gathering attended by both just a couple months earlier confirm their master-pupil relationship.¹⁵ Therefore, we can only assume that either Yang Weizhen never saw the painting and did not know a painting was also commissioned for the same purpose, or he did not consider the painting the focus of the present endeavor. In any case,

¹⁴ Here I refer to the *fu*-rhapsody by Tao Tangwen (dates unknown), which will be discussed later.

¹⁵ The poetry preface (*shixu* 詩序) Yang wrote for this collaborative poem states that he and the other nine "students (*zhusheng* 諸生)," including Yao Tingmei, visited the Gu Villa in October 25, 1359. Sun Xiaoli infers that the nine were all students at the Songjiang Prefectural College, and therefore students of Yang Weizhen. See Yang Weizhen, "Lianju shu Guiyin zhuren zhaibi 聯句書桂隱主人齋壁," *Dongweizhi ji*, juan 29; also Sun, *Nianpu*, 238.

Yang's perception of the text-centered scroll is drastically different from what later generations perceived the scroll to be. As a matter of fact, the earliest record of the scroll, the Ming-dynasty art dealer Wu Qizhen's (1607-after 1677) *Notes on Calligraphy and Painting* (*Shuhua ji* 書畫記), lists the scroll as "Yao Yanqing's picture of *Leisure Enough to Spare*, followed by inscriptions by Yang Tieyai (Yang Weizhen) and twenty-one others."¹⁶ Without careful scrutiny of the inscriptions, even the seventeenth-century connoisseur assumed the scroll to be a painting of a scholar's retreat with inscriptions responding to the painting.

The essay is composed of medium-small characters in Yang's casual draft-cursive script. As discussed in the previous chapter, the style is typical of his inscriptions in handscroll format for similar purposes. What is striking about the piece is that it was written on silk, which is highly unusual for the time. Yang's essay and Zhang Bi's frontispiece are the only two pieces written on silk.¹⁷ It is no coincidence that the pieces by Yang and Zhang, famous poet and calligrapher in the region respectively, are written on more precious material. It is quite likely that Mr. Du provided the silk when soliciting their work out of respect for their artistic and social prestige.

2.1.2 Tao Qian's *Returning to Dwell on the Farmstead* and the rhetoric of rustic reclusion

Even though Yang Weizhen did not choose to enlighten his readers on the source of the phrase "leisure enough to spare," the late-Yuan idiom of reclusion is so entwined with Tao Qian's work and poetic persona that it is worth taking a side step to investigate Tao's rhetoric of

¹⁶ Wu Qizhen, *Shuhua ji* (Taipei, Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1971), 272-273.

¹⁷ Zhang Bi was a native of Songjiang. As a notable contemporary calligrapher, a short entry of Zhang is included in Tao Zongyi's *Shushi huiyao* (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1984), 331. Also, according to an early-Ming gazetteer, Zhang Bi sponsored a private school in the local Confucius temple in the mid-fourteenth century. See Li Xian (1408-1466) et al eds., *Ming yitong zhi*, *juan* 9, 6.

rustic reclusion before we return to the discussion of the scroll. Among the myriad role models of recluses from the Six Dynasties period (222-589), Tao Qian was perhaps the most well-known and had certainly left the greatest literary legacy to later generations.¹⁸ As a talented poet and principled man from humble beginnings, Tao's life was a constant struggle between public service and disengagement – during this period, political power was monopolized by aristocratic clans and high ranking posts were hereditary rather than meritocratic; it is no wonder that the late Yuan literati found ready sympathy for and identified with Tao's political situation and personal dilemma. Tao held undistinguished posts and was in and out of office for most of his career, until he permanently retired at the end of 405 at age forty. Of this final choice in reclusion and his life afterwards he reasoned and described in two of his most beloved compositions: *Returning Home* (*Guiqu laixi ci* 歸去來兮辭), a rhapsody with preface, and a series of five poems entitled *Returning to Dwell on the Farmstead*.¹⁹ The former, because of its narrative nature, became popular subject matter in painting from the late eleventh century onward.²⁰ The latter, on the other hand, has solidified Tao's historical status as the "patriarch of eremitic poets" and immortalized Tao's poetic persona as the most revered recluse-poet. Indeed, as noted by

¹⁸ Tao Qian was characterized as the "patriarch of the poets of hermitage, past and present" by Zhong Rong (468-518) in *Shipin* (Classification of Poets). See Zhong, *Shipin* (Taipei: Taiwan Zhonghua shuju, 1965-1985), *juan zhong*, 4. Tao Qian's idiom in reclusion was constantly evoked and reinvented by later generations. As observed by Charles Yim-tze Kwong, since Song time, Tao's poetry has been a "reservoir of images, archetypes, and topoi repeatedly invoked and applied to new situations." See Kwong, *Tao Qian and the Chinese Poetic Tradition: the Quest for Cultural Identity* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1994), 5.

¹⁹ For a translation of *Returning Home*, see James Robert Hightower, *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), 268-270. Hightower translated the title as "The Return."

²⁰ Many scholars have noted that *Returning Home* was adapted by Su Shi and his fraction as a call for political rally. And Li Gonglin's (ca. 1040-1106) alleged illustration of the rhapsody had also made it a popular subject in painting. For discussions on the pictorial representation of *Returning Home*, see Marsha Weidner, "Ho Ch'eng and Early Yuan Dynasty Painting in Northern China," *Archives of Asian Art* 39 (1986): 6-22; Susan E. Nelson, "Catching Sight of South Mountain: Tao Yuanming, Mount Lu, and the Iconography of Escape," *Archives of Asian Art* 52 (2000/2001): 11-43; and Elizabeth Brotherton, "Beyond the Written Word: Li Gonglin's Illustrations to Tao Yuanming's *Returning Home*," *Artibus Asiae* 59, no. 3/4 (2000), 225-263. It is noteworthy that Tao's *Peach Blossom Spring*, a utopian allegory, is also a popular painting subject, but is beyond the scope of the present study.

Alan J. Berkowitz, Tao was the first to write extensively about his own reclusive life. This unprecedented approach endeared him to later generations – from his simple but genuine words we feel like we know the poet.²¹ While keeping in mind that Tao’s poetic persona may not truthfully reflect biographical facts, which are scarce, his idealized image nevertheless had great impact on the establishment of reclusion as topos.²²

Returning to Dwell on the Farmstead was presumably composed in 406, a few months after Tao’s retirement.²³ The five poems described various aspects of Tao’s reclusive life. The most relevant to the present discussion are the first and the third poems:

I	其一
Since youth I have not fitted the worldly tune;	少無適俗韻，
My nature loved mountains and hills.	性本愛丘山。
By mistake I fell into the dusty net,	誤落塵網中，
And was gone for three and ten years. ²⁴	一去三十年。
The fettered bird yearns for the old woods;	羈鳥戀舊林，
The pond-fish longs for the former deep.	池魚思故淵。
Cleared some land to the south of town,	開荒南野際，
Adhering to my rusticity, I returned to my farmland.	守拙歸園田。
My homestead covers a few acres,	方宅十餘畝，

²¹ Alan J. Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement: the Practice and Portrayal of Reclusion in Early Medieval China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), 217-221.

²² Kwong, *Tao Qian and Chinese Poetic Tradition*, 3-4.

²³ Sun Junxi ed., *Tao Yuanming ji xiaozu* (Xinxiang, Henan: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1986), 41.

²⁴ Although the verse literally states, “And was gone for thirty years,” it actually means “thirteen years.” From the beginning to the end of Tao’s official career is a total period of thirteen years. See Sun, *Tao Yuanming*, 41.

My thatched hut has several rooms.	草屋八九間。
Elms and willows shade the rear garden;	榆柳蔭後園，
Peaches and plums stretch out before the hall.	桃李羅堂前。
Hazy, hazy, the distant villages;	曖曖遠人村，
Soft, soft, the smoke from hamlet lanes.	依依墟里烟。
Dogs bark in hidden alleys;	狗吠深巷中，
Cocks crow atop mulberry trees.	雞鳴桑樹巔。
Within my doors there is no dust or clutter;	戶庭無塵雜，
In the bare rooms I have leisure enough to spare.	虛室有餘閒。
Long was I in the confining cage;	久在樊籠裏，
And now I have managed to return to Nature. ²⁵	復得返自然。

The first poem gives Tao's reasoning of his choice for reclusion: he was not a worldly man and had long felt stifled in government service. He chose a rustic retirement to follow his nature by returning to Nature. According to tradition, however, Tao chose reclusion mainly to preserve his integrity. In Tao's biography in the official history is the often repeated and garnished story of Tao's refusal to pay his respect to a visiting inspector when he was the Magistrate of Pengze, his very last official appointment. Reportedly he said, "How could I, for the sake of five pecks of rice (i.e. the salary of a county magistrate), bend at the waist before some country bumpkin?"²⁶ This famous account, its literary embellishment and idealization notwithstanding, has been intrinsically linked with Tao's poetic persona. It is certainly a

²⁵ Translation by Charles Yim-tze Kwong, with minor adaptations. See Kwong, *Tao Qian and Chinese Poetic Tradition*, 30.

²⁶ This famous account is recorded in various forms in *Songshu* (History of [Liu] Song), *Jinshu* (History of Jin) and *Nanshi* (History of the Southern Dynasties). Translation by Berkowitz, in *Patterns of Disengagement*, 216.

situation that echoes the predicament of many late Yuan literati. Highly educated as they were, many of them did not find success in the civil service examinations. To enter the government service meant low-ranking, clerical positions that were considered demeaning. Tao Qian had taken up official posts in order to “supply the necessities of life,” but finally found government service a violation of his nature and integrity.²⁷ In that case, Tao Qian’s dilemma between political engagement and reclusion was also the late-Yuan literati’s dilemma; thus they sympathized with Tao and found comfort in the solution his example had provided – to become a scholar-farmer:

III

I planted beans below the southern hill;
 The weeds flourish, but the bean shoots are few.
 At dawn I rise to clear away the weeds;
 And come back with the moon, hoe on shoulder.
 Tall bushes crowd the narrow path,
 And evening dew soaks my clothes.
 Wet clothes are no cause for complaint,
 As long as my wishes not be violated.²⁸

其三

種豆南山下，
 草盛豆苗稀。
 晨興理荒穢，
 帶月荷鋤歸。
 道狹草木長，
 夕露沾我衣。
 衣沾不足惜，
 但使願無違。

In this poem Tao pointed out that he withdrew to a rustic life so his “wishes” may not be violated. Ideally, he was then able to “supply the necessities of life” without “bending at the

²⁷ The phrase comes from Tao’s preface to *Returning Home*, translated by Hightower, in *The Poetry of T’ao Ch’ien*, 268.

²⁸ Translation by James Robert Hightower, with minor adaptation. See Hightower, *The Poetry of T’ao Ch’ien*, 52.

waist” or bending his principles. What his “wishes” were is up to interpretation. More importantly, in this poem Tao portrayed himself as a clumsy farmer whose garden was overrun by weeds. Behind the self-mocking tone is the pride of a scholar: he was not cut out to be a farmer, but he carried on manual labor with fortitude and a good sense of humor because it brought him philosophical pleasure and spiritual (and presumably financial) freedom. The image of the clumsy scholar-farmer indeed became a popular archetype that has been frequently evoked in later literature.

The profound influence of Tao Qian’s literary legacy and poetic personality is to be felt in almost every poetic composition in the scroll in question. Looking back from the twenty-first century, Tao seems to us a natural choice of a role model for the late Yuan literati. In reality, however, Tao was not necessarily the most popular recluse to be identified with in the fourteenth century. On the contrary, it is more likely to find examples in late Yuan literature of scholars taking sobriquets or naming their properties after obscure figures, as if boasting of the depth, and sometimes the eccentricity, of their knowledge in literary history. For instance, in the aforementioned essay, *Record of the Hall of the Unofficial Statesman*, Yang Weizhen pointed out that Zhang Zhong’s role model as an “unofficial statesman” was Chen Si (608-692). Chen Si was a reclusive scholar-farmer in the seventh century with no particular historical or literary significance. His name is found solely in a memorial essay composed by the early-Tang poet Chen Zi’ang (661-702).²⁹ According to this memorial essay, Chen Si was not a government official, but his virtuous example reformed the people of his hometown. In his essay, Yang Weizhen asked rhetorically whether it is not better to be a virtuous recluse, whose character sets

²⁹ Chen Zi’ang (661-702), “Zizhou Shehongxian Wudong shan gujushi Chen jun bei 梓州射洪縣武東山故居士陳君碑,” in *Chen Shiyi ji* 陳拾遺集, *juan* 5.

an example for those who are near him, than an unprincipled government official. In Confucian ideology, it is the duty of the head of the government to set an example of virtue to the people he governs. Therefore, Chen Si was regarded by Zhang Zhong as an “unofficial statesman.” Chen Si’s conduct, however virtuous, can only be found in this one single source. It had not been adopted regularly as an archetype of scholar-recluses. The choice of Chen Si as a role model calls attention to Zhang’s extensive knowledge of history and literature. Chen’s obscurity appeals to Zhang also because it allows him to specify his own mode of reclusion and distinguish himself from others.

It is certainly understandable that obscure figures might have more personal appeal to later individuals who took their names as a medium to express and distinguish themselves from the myriad recluses both historically and contemporarily. Tao Qian was the most obvious choice, and that is exactly why he was not the most popular one. Tao’s poetic personality was so blended into the general language of reclusion that he, without meaning any disrespect to the beloved poet, seems to have lost the intimate, personal appeal. It makes the present case – namely, Mr. Du’s identifying with Tao’s rustic reclusion – all the more intriguing.

As the previous discussion on Yang Weizhen’s essay reveals, Yang did not address himself to a particularly intimate or scholarly audience. Yang portrayed Mr. Du as a wealthy country gentleman, but not necessarily a scholar. Mr. Du was certainly no clumsy farmer. Yet Mr. Du commissioned the scroll to advertise his “rustic reclusion” by setting great store by the most famous scholar-farmer recluse. What can be his motive? The lack of any biographical information about Mr. Du prevents us from finding a conclusive answer to that question. Still, we may infer that the wealthy farmer aspired to the class superiority of the literati and would go to great length to assemble the scroll as physical evidence of his association with these poets and artists. Further clues regarding Mr. Du’s identity and social standing can be found in the

twenty-one poems as well as in Yao Tingmei's painting.

The twenty-one poems that followed Yao Tingmei's landscape painting were written on six pieces of paper. A close reading of the poems reveals a surprising pattern: poems written on the same piece of paper appear to respond to each other formally and thematically. An awareness of those who inscribed beforehand is reflected in the choice of formats, phrases, poetic allusions and general sentiments. Conversely, it suggests that each inscriber did not see the compositions on the other pieces of paper when composing his own. This intriguing pattern tells us much about the process of assemblage of the scroll: pieces of paper were circulated from one poet to another, along with Mr. Du's request and the given topic of "leisure enough to spare." Someone may have been charged by Mr. Du with the task of soliciting poetic compositions; and it is certainly possible that some form of compensation was offered. Different pieces of paper could have been circulated simultaneously to collect inscriptions in order to achieve the end result more efficiently. Furthermore, while poems on the same piece of paper seem to in some way respond to each other, oftentimes they show little knowledge of or regard for the recipient, Mr. Du. It leads to the question: how many of the inscribers actually had intimate knowledge about Mr. Du and his particular mode of reclusion? Their poems carry messages, some revealing, some ambiguous, about the relationship between Mr. Du and the poets, and their own conflicting feelings about reclusion.

2.1.3 Group one: whose reclusion is this?

The first group of poems consists of the first eight poems inscribed on three pieces of paper. It is not without reason that Wai-kam Ho mistook this group to be poems composed at a literary

gathering.³⁰ Not only is the paper very similar in color and texture, but also many of the poems shared similar literary motifs and poetic allusions. It is also noteworthy that this group contains the only two poems that are dedicated to Mr. Du directly, which suggests a closer personal relationship. The first poem by Wan Yi (dates unknown) tells something about the Mr. Du he knew:³¹

Master Du chose to dwell by the Xia Stream;	杜君卜築霞溪上，
With his mind set on fields and gardens, his joy is abundant enough to spare.	志趣田園樂有餘。
To his guests he speaks of no worldly affairs,	對客不談當世事，
Within closed gates he discourses on the <i>Physiognomy of Oxen</i> . ³²	閉門且說相牛書。
Spring comes, birds and flowers answer each other in accord.	春來花鳥應相得，
After rain, he often hoes the vegetable patch by himself.	雨過畦蔬每自鋤。
He sends a message for those out there chasing after fame	寄語雲邊聲利客，

³⁰ In the catalogue entry of *Leisure Enough to Spare*, Ho speculated, "It is most interesting to find from the collected work of Yang Wei-chen (Yang Weizhen), *Tung wei-tzu wen-chi (Dongweizi wenji)*, a poem with a short introduction dedicated to a scholars' gathering which was held in the winter of 1359... The gathering included our artist, Yao T'ing-mei (Yao Tingmei), as well as eight other people who contributed to the first part of the colophon section of the present painting." The gathering in 1359 refers to the visit to the Gu Villa in October 25, 1359, as mentioned earlier (see note 15 of this chapter). The gathering was indeed attended by Yang Weizhen, Yao Tingmei and eight others, but the names of the other poets do not match any of those in the *Leisure Enough to Spare* scroll. See Ho et al eds., *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting*, 138.

³¹ The identification of many inscribers, including Wan Yi, remains unknown. It appears that they were minor poets with limited local reputation, and their works were not preserved either in the form of personal or collective anthologies.

³² There were several books titled "*Physiognomy of Oxen (Xiang niu jing)*" in history. Here it is probably not a specific reference, but alluding to Mr. Du's rustic character and his interests in agricultural affairs. See *Zhongwen da cidian* (Taipei: Zhongguo wenhua daxue chubanshu, 1990), vol. 6, 1069.

and fortune:

“Do not trouble your horses and carriages to visit my hut.” 毋勞車馬枉吾廬。

First, Wan Yi pointed out Mr. Du’s dwelling place by the river – during Yuan times, Qinglong was a river port a short distance south of the Wusong River.³³ This piece of topographical information has also been confirmed in several other poems.³⁴ More importantly, the phrase “chose to dwell (*buzhu* 卜築)” references the chapter *Choosing A Dwelling by Divination* (*buju* 卜居) in *Chuci* (*The Songs of Chu*), whose authorship was traditionally attributed to Qu Yuan (ca. 339-278 BCE). In *Choosing a Dwelling*, Qu Yuan consulted a diviner about how to conduct himself, after three years in exile. The “dwelling” in this instance refers not to a physical dwelling place but a moral choice between engagement and withdrawal.³⁵ Qu Yuan, of course, chose reclusion and remained in exile to preserve his integrity. The familiar theme of the dilemma between engagement and withdrawal is once again subtly echoed with this allusion. The question, in Mr. Du’s case, is whether he had indeed faced the choice between public service and reclusion. On the one hand, the ending couplet seems to suggest that Mr. Du had been troubled by “those who chase after fame and fortune,” which imply he had been asked to serve the government. On the other hand, a reclusion not by choice would not be anything worth writing about at all. All things considered, this emphasis on “reclusion by choice” has to be seen as rhetoric by way of a convention that glorifies reclusion as a way of life intentionally chosen.

The various agricultural references in the poem affirm Mr. Du’s identity as a farmer-recluse. It is interesting to note how Wan Yi enhanced Mr. Du’s rustic character with

³³ Zhou Zhenhe, et al eds., *Shanghai lishi ditu ji* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin cuubanshe, 1999), 22.

³⁴ Of the twenty-one poems in the scroll, five poems make reference to Mr. Du’s residence by the river.

³⁵ Fu Xiren, *Xinyi Chuci duben* (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 2007), 157-159.

some scholarly sophistication. The book Wan put into Mr. Du's hand is *Physiognomy of Oxen*, which deals with the evaluation of cattles, the basis of agriculture. The eighth poem by Zhang Qian (dates unknown) also shares many of the sentiments that appeared in Wan's poem, with a slightly more flattering tone:

I admire the hermit, Master Du, of Longjiang,	每愛龍江杜隱君，
Who dwells in a thatched hut of a few rooms by the river. ³⁶	數間茅屋住江濱。
Playing chess under the pine tree, he whiles away the clear	圍棋松下消清晝，
days;	
Leaning on his staff, among the flowers, he watches the	住杖花間看白雲。
clouds.	
Fragrances linger on the pottery incense burner, and the	陶鼎香凝書帙淨，
books are neat and clean;	
The twinkling Star of Shaowei illuminates and disperses	少微星動夜光分。
the night.	
His leisurely mood surpasses that of Emperor Xi. ³⁷	閒心迥出羲皇上，
He hears no more of the disturbances of the Four Seas. ³⁸	四海風塵了不聞。

The mentioning of Mr. Du's possession of books indeed gives the recipient a more scholarly character. More significantly, the "Star of Shaowei" symbolizes the scholar-official

³⁶ "Longjiang" here is probably short for "Qinglong of Songjiang."

³⁷ "Emperor Xi" refers to the mythical sage king, Fuxi.

³⁸ In *Yuanren zhuanji ziliao suoyin* (Index to Biographical Materials of Yuan Figures), there were several Yuan figures named Zhang Qian, but none of them is likely to be the same Zhang Qian, presumably, of Songjiang. See Wang Deyi et al eds., *Yuanren zhuanji ziliao suoyin* (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1979-1982), 1101.

class (*shidai fu* 士大夫), and especially scholar recluses (*chushi* 處士).³⁹ The verse means that the twinkling light of the Star of Shaowei (i.e. the scholar recluses), however faint, is one thing that keeps darkness at bay. Certainly, in the 1360s it was a time of darkness. Yet the vagueness of this particular verse serves more to include Mr. Du as one of the scholar recluses than assign him as “the” Star of Shaowei.

The two poems by Wan Yi and Zhang Qin address the recipient directly by name, thus creating the illusion of a personal relationship. By contrast, some of the poems are completely devoid of any personal reference. Although it is not unusual in Chinese poetry to omit pronouns, the practice certainly leads to much ambiguity. In the present case, this ambiguity may very well be a result of the lack of personal relationship and thus intimate knowledge of the recipient. For example, the poem by Lü Lin (dates unknown) is such a vague patchwork of eremitic rhetoric that it makes us wonder: whose reclusion is this?

The isolated place is seldom trod by hooves or wheels;	僻境輪蹄寡，
The quiet dwelling is secluded among water and bamboo.	安居水竹幽。
At times, [I/he] express [my/his] defiance by the studio window;	軒窗時寄傲，
Or, [I/he] roam with [my/his] staff and sandals.	杖履或遨遊。
Under the pine tree [I/he] listen to the black cranes;	松下聽玄鶴，
By the river, [I/he] befriend the white gulls.	江邊友白鷗。
In this life nothing really troubles [me/him];	此生無一事，
Other than singing joyfully after wine.	醉後更歡謳。

³⁹ Sima Qian (ca. 145-ca. 86 BCE), *Shiji*, *juan* 27.

The references to a secluded dwelling, a close affinity to Nature, and a disengaged state of mind are so general that they could be applied to almost any recluse. The lack of pronouns means that the reader has to supply the subject, and anyone could be the subject. The intentional vagueness could have been an artistic choice. More likely, Lü Lin composed the poem to fulfill a social obligation for a man he did not know very well. The general praise of the reclusive life would have pleased a broad audience as well as the patron.

Within the first group there is another set of poems that demonstrates a different approach to the dedicative poetic inscription. The poems by Ang Ji (dates unknown), Xu Shiquan (dates unknown), Gao Yu (dates unknown) and Li Mingfu (dates unknown) all touch upon the subject of war, and reclusion as a means to escape the consequences of war. They are the third, fourth, fifth and sixth poems respectively in the scroll, all inscribed on the same piece of paper. Since none of the poems is dated, it is unclear who first came up with the subject of war – their sequence on paper as we see it today does not necessarily reflect their chronological order. Reading closely, it seems that Ang Ji's first verse may have given rise to the whole discussion about war and reclusion. He wrote, "Throwing [myself/himself] away in idleness, [I/he] hide from the time of danger by living on the river." Although in the following verses Ang did not further discuss what he meant by "time of danger," the other poets seemed to have held on to the concept and expanded upon it. In his poem Xu Shiquan furthered the discourse on escapism:

Riches and honor are not my wishes;

富貴非吾願，

Lingering or wandering, I submit to my fate.

棲遲任此身。

Battles and skirmishes are like lodgings punctuating my travel;	兵戈皆逆旅，
Between Heaven and Earth, I am a leftover subject.	天地一遺民。
Under the verdant hills is a thatched hut;	茆屋碧山下，
On the waters of the autumn river [I cast my] fishing lines.	釣絲秋水濱。
The one who merely plants a peach tree;	區區種桃者，
Cannot speak of “Spring in Wuling.”	莫話武陵春。

First of all, the poet unequivocally spoke of himself as the recluse in question. Although the poem shares many common allusions to eremitism with others in the scroll, it is no longer about Mr. Du or his particular concerns. Secondly, Xu’s tone of voice is permeated with fatalist pessimism. In the first half, Xu described himself as a traveler wandering aimlessly through life, and war was just an inevitable part of his journey. Without an official career a scholar’s life can certainly be seen as aimless. He was a “leftover subject” not left behind by the previous dynasty, but by the present government which had no use for his talent. In the second half, Xu described his reclusive life in terms that by now sound very familiar to us. Still, he bitterly likened his “escape” to planting a single peach tree, which bears no comparison to the true Utopia in Tao Qian’s *Peach Blossom Spring*.⁴⁰

Gao Yu and Li Mingfu also elaborated on the contrast between war and reclusion, with a more positive emphasis on the pleasure of a reclusive lifestyle. Not only do their poems follow a similar line of argument, their choices of words and phrases are at times strikingly similar. For example, they both used the term “yellow dust (*huangchen* 黃塵)” to refer to the chaos of war:

⁴⁰ For a translation of Tao Qian’s *Peach Blossom Spring*, see Hightower, *The Poetry of T’ao Ch’ien*, 254-258.

The yellow dust of war clouded the eyes;

Under the scorching sun [laborers] toil in the fields. (Gao Yu)

滿目黃塵迷戰伐，

當天赤日苦耘耔。

The worldly paths are buried under ten fathoms of yellow dust;

Futile is the mind occupied with fame and eminence, on half a sheet of paper. (Li

Mingfu)

世路黃塵十丈深，

功名半帋徒縈心。

Also, they both used the phrase “idle solitude (*xiaosan* 蕭散)” to describe the recluse’s state of mind:

Do you not know there is lofty sentiment in idle solitude?

Like singing “Plucking Irises” in the wind. (Gao Yu)

不知蕭散高情在，

彷彿風前詠采芝。

[My/his] mind, calm and composed, with books [occupying] half of the bed.

[My/his] life in idle solitude, [accompanied] by a jar of wine. (Li Mingfu)

從容心事半牀書，

蕭散生涯一壺酒。

Individually, these repeated phrases may only be coincidental. However, while the poems throughout the scroll share the general rhetoric of reclusion and many poetic allusions, it is particularly striking that poems inscribed on the same piece of paper tend to share the exact same phrases. As the four poems discussed here demonstrate, the poets not only built on the same concept that does not, strictly speaking, directly relate to the subject (i.e. Mr. Du's reclusion), but also their choice of words is greatly influenced by the ones inscribed beforehand. The practice, indeed, does not seem to speak well of the poets' creativity; nevertheless, we are to bear in mind that such writing has a strong social dimension. In that case, conformity is seen as a virtue rather than vice.

This first group of poetic inscriptions, consisting of the first eight poems, epitomizes the rest of the scroll. The poems within this group, presumably composed close in time, show three distinct patterns that are not uncommon in late Yuan dedicative poetry. The poems by Wan Yi and Zhang Qian address Mr. Du by name, thus honoring the personal relationship between the poets and the recipient. The tone of voice is more intimate and flattering. By contrast, the complete absence of any personal pronoun or specific reference in Lü Lin's poem, as well as in those by Zhang Junde (dates unknown), Ang Ji, Gao Yu and Li Mingfu, raises questions about whose reclusion is being celebrated. The generalization of the language of reclusion may appeal to a broad audience, but it lacks the intimate specifics that indicate a close personal relationship. Last but not least, a small group of poets, very likely influenced by each other, follows a different thread of thought that drifts away from the main subject. This reference to the disturbance of war is indeed a telling sign of deepening chaos. Maybe these poets are like "the one who merely plants a peach tree" in Xu Shiquan's poem. By repeatedly evoking the rhetoric of reclusion they not only assured each other about their choice of reclusion, but also created a

refuge from the worldly trouble threatening Songjiang and southeast China at the time.

2.1.4 Group two: a literary contest

The second group of poetic inscriptions, which consists of four compositions on the fourth piece of paper, is the most diverse in terms of literary formats. When first approaching this group, the viewer may be struck by the difference in color and texture of the paper. This piece of paper is significantly darker and of smoother texture. It stands out conspicuously in comparison to the rest of the scroll, which suggests the paper may have come from a different source. The inscriptions are even more unusual: instead of the standard five- or seven-character poems, each of the four inscriptions is in a different poetic format. The first one by Tao Tangwen (dates unknown) is a *fu*-rhapsody, an ancient literary format somewhat between prose and poetry. The second inscription by Wu Yuangui (dates unknown) is a song-lyric (*ci* 詞) to the tune of *Baliuzi* 八六子. And the third is a four-character poem after the format commonly used in the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing* 詩經), the most ancient form of Chinese poetry. Only the last inscription by Wang Zao (fl. ca. 1341-1370) is a five-character regulated poem (*lüshi* 律詩).⁴¹ Clearly, after Tao Tangwen wrote a *fu* instead of a regular poem for the occasion, the following authors were reminded of their options or perhaps challenged to come up with atypical formats for their own compositions. The literary exercise or “contest” is confined to this piece of paper, which is another indication that these authors only saw inscriptions written on this same piece of paper. Presumably, this section was not circulated among the others until the whole scroll was assembled.

⁴¹ Wang Zao was a native of Jiangning (present-day Nanjing), and was an Assistant Magistrate (*zhubu* 主簿) of the Wu region at some point during the Zhizheng reign (1341-1368). See Wang, *Yuanren zhuanji*, 109.

Tao Tangwen's *fu*-rhapsody is also the only composition within the scroll that makes an affirmative connection between Mr. Du and his role model in rustic reclusion, Tao Qian. Sharing the same surname with the famous recluse may have given the poet a sort of pride in the familial tradition, however remote, and a certain right to comment on the connection. The *fu*-rhapsody reads:

Who is that virtuous man? He loves antiquity, and he lets things take their own course. He admires the elegant delights of the man of Jin, so he has taken his (Tao Qian's) good name for his dwelling.

彼媿人兮伊誰羨，好古而無為。慕晉人之雅趣，托令名於齋居。

Here, the "virtuous man" refers to Mr. Du, and the "man of Jin" Tao Qian. As mentioned previously, Tao Tangwen's inscription is the only indication throughout the scroll that Mr. Du had taken the phrase "leisure enough to spare" for the name of his dwelling. Then Tao continued:

[His] gates and windows are simple and bare; pine and bamboo flourish. Before him is the lute, and behind him the wine jar. To his left are picture scrolls, and to his right books. Sitting amongst green hills, he forgets his weariness; singing to the white clouds, he amuses himself. Making light of worldly desires, his mind is in peace; his pure delight in leisure is abundant enough to spare. People say that his refusal to serve makes him no man of character; I say his lofty reclusion makes him a true gentleman. Why! Who else would I rather abide with? Who

else would I rather abide with!

戶牖兮清虛，松竹兮扶疎；前琴兮後壺，左圖兮右書。坐青山兮忘疲，詠白雲兮自怡。澹世欲兮恬如，樂清閒兮有餘。人謂先生之不仕兮非丈夫，余謂先生之高隱兮君子儒。噫！非斯人吾誰與歸？非斯人吾誰與歸！

Not only did Tao repeat the phrase “leisure enough to spare” to clarify his subject, but he also used the phrase “*wushui yugui* 吾誰與歸 (with whom would I abide)” as a pun to refer to Tao’s *Returning to Dwell on the Farmstead*. Although it is an expression of intense admiration particularly to a role model, as given in translation above, the phrase “*wushui yugui*” literally means “who shall I return to/with.” In its literal meaning, this is clearly another reference to Tao’s famous “Return” works. Therefore, this “lofty gentleman” can either mean Tao Qian or Mr. Du, which strengthens the bond between the two men.

It is also worth mentioning that the poem by Wang Zao introduces another eremitic figure often evoked in late-Yuan reclusion language. Wang’s poem reads:

The lofty man never enters the city;	高人不入城，
In his hand he holds a book of tree planting.	手把種樹書。
In his life there is leisure enough to spare;	平生閒有餘，
Taking what is sufficient, he cares not for the superfluous.	取足不願餘。
He has always harbored the intent [to dwell in] hills and valleys.	嘗存丘壑志，
He will not accept a place in lofty halls or official caps.	不受軒冕居。
Perhaps he is [like] the nest-dwelling hermit;	恐是巢隱客，

Fame and fortune have no hold over him.

富貴將焉如。

The “nest-dwelling hermit” refers to Chaofu, a hermit contemporary to the legendary sage ruler Yao. His name literarily means “nest-dwelling father,” because he was said to have built nests in trees to live in the wild. The legend of Chaofu is often intertwined with another recluse figure, Xu You. One version of the story tells that the sage ruler Yao heard of the virtue of Xu You, sought him out in his reclusion, and offered to abdicate in favor of Xu. Xu You was so much offended by hearing the offer that he washed his ears in a stream. His friend and fellow hermit Chaofu saw this peculiar behavior and asked for its cause. Upon hearing Yao’s offer to Xu, Chaofu indignantly led his oxen further upstream to ensure that they would not drink the now fouled water.⁴² Yao was the sage ruler that none should find objection to, but Xu You and Chaofu shunned politics as something filthy and contagious altogether. Alan Berkowitz termed recluses like Xu You and Chaofu as “Paragon[s] of Extraordinary Conduct,” who did not serve not because the time was dark, but by nature disdained politics.⁴³ It is a mode of reclusion different from that of Tao Qian, but equally highly revered. The paragon is, however, somewhat ironic within the late Yuan context: most Chinese literati did not serve because of the lack of opportunity as well as corruption in officialdom. The archetype of Chaofu is invoked here to describe the “lofty man’s” unwillingness to be fettered by officialdom. Chaofu’s character as an untrammelled cattle herder also adds to the romance of rustic reclusion that is the underlying subject. It shows that the various archetypes of reclusion were adapted and appropriated in a fairly liberal manner by the late Yuan writers.

⁴² Ji Kang (223-262), *Gaoshi zhuan*, in Dai Mingyang ed., *Ji Kang ji xiaozhu* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1962), 399.

⁴³ Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement*, 44.

2.1.5 Groups three and four: contrast between the peaceful illusion and the undeniable reality

The third and fourth groups of poems present a stark contrast in terms of their thematic focuses. The third group, perpetuating the theme of rustic seclusion, gives every effort to praise the lofty sentiments and rustic delights of seclusion; the fourth, however, raises the voice of dissent and even questions the morality of seclusion. The divergence is again evidence that the poets only saw what was written before them on the same piece of paper, and they tended to follow the same thread of argument. It is interesting to note that, in the case of the fourth group, the poets seemed more eager to show conformity with their peers than regard for the recipient.

The third group consists of four poems written on the fifth piece of paper. More than any other poems in the scroll, these poems highlight the pleasure of a rustic seclusion in contrast to the slavish burden of officialdom. For example, Lin Yizhuang (dates unknown) mused:

In the morning, one deals with crafts of administration,	朝陳經濟術，
In the evening, one devises strategies of war.	夕運攻伐籌；
How does that compare to a reclusive gentleman,	何如隱君子，
Who sleeves his hands, untroubled by any care?	袖手百不憂。
His nature delights in a carefree life,	居閒樂天性，
Setting a virtuous example to benefit posterity.	樹德貽孫謀。
When his mood rises, he sings in a clear voice;	興來足清唸，
When tipsy, there are cups filled with tea.	醉來茶滿甌。
The dusty world stirs on and on,	塵氛自擾擾，

This is not like the time of Chaofu and Xu You,	何時及巢由。
[Xu You] hung his ladle on a tall tree,	引瓢挂高樹，
[Chaofu] led his oxen away from downstream.	牽犢避下流。
They would not even serve Yao or Shun,	堯舜且不事，
Let alone anyone else.	況復為他求。

Lin again invoked the paragon of Chaofu and Xu You, but affirmatively acknowledged that he and his friends were in a much worse time than the one under the rule of Yao and Shun.⁴⁴ Still, the disturbances of the “dusty world” seem to have no effect on the recluse. In this poem, reclusion is portrayed as a means of self preservation in troubled times, which is perhaps not too far away from the truth. Gu Shunju (dates unknown) also followed the same line of thought:

A life of idle solitude is truly enviable;	人世蕭閒真足羨，
Riches and honor, like passing clouds, are not worth mentioning.	浮雲富貴不須論。
Just entertain the guests with wine and poetry;	但將詩酒娛賓客，
Do not acquire farmlands for the children.	莫買田園遺子孫。
The mind is removed enough to forget worldly cares;	心遠已能忘俗慮，
The sun is already high in the sky, but the wooden gates are still closed.	日高猶自掩柴門。
Alas! I have rushed about in the red dust for so long,	嗟余奔走紅塵久，

⁴⁴ Shun, the successor to Yao, is another sage ruler of China’s mythical past. Shun is not part of the Chaofu-Xu You legend, but merely mentioned here to complete the poetic meter.

I would also like to dwell in seclusion and escape the
discord.

亦欲幽棲且避喧。

According to Gu, the key to “a life of idle solitude” is a mind far removed from the troubles of the world. The escapism is portrayed as something enviable. Gu, who was probably not a recluse himself, diplomatically made his contribution to the scroll by emphasizing his envy of a reclusive lifestyle. In any case, these poems in the third group, like many discussed above, celebrated seclusion in a positive light. The poets considered a reclusive lifestyle not only superior to the burdens of officialdom, but also a perfect escape from a distressing reality. Did the reality really hold no power over the recluses? Poetry is not meant to be taken literally; and poetry written for social purposes, as these poems are, should be taken with a large grain of salt. The peaceful pictures painted by the poets are probably wishful illusions, built to comfort each other and to keep the deepening chaos at bay, even if just in words.

The last group, however, takes a completely different stand on the issue of seclusion. Out of the five poems inscribed on the sixth piece of paper, three of them directly depict the so-far unspecified “worldly cares” with a sharp, criticizing, and almost hostile tone. The mildest of the three is the poem by Gao Zhidao (fl. mid-fourteenth century):

In Autumn, the border camps prepare for war;

邊亭備冠纓營壘，

In the night, official tax collectors bang on the doors.

官府徵租夜打門。

It is better to be like the graybeard under a thatched roof,

爭似老翁茅屋底，

Who annotates his books to teach his grandchildren.⁴⁵

自批文選教兒孫。

⁴⁵ Gao Zhidao was a native of Jiexiang, Shandong province. A poem by Gao titled *After Yang Tieshi's*

Gao pointedly presented one source of their “worldly cares”: the heavy taxation due to the demands of war. Reclusion, or more precisely the poverty brought by reclusion, became an ironic solution to this problem. An impoverished old man has nothing to lose, and thus no fear from the tax collectors. The poem certainly can be seen as a form of social criticism with a Confucian humanitarian concern. Within the present context as a social exchange, however, it seems oddly out of place. The subject is far removed from what Mr. Du might have expected, and the tone is certainly unflattering. Even more startling is the poem by Meng Weicheng (dates unknown), which takes a critical and sarcastic stance toward the whole obsession with reclusion:

Creatures of the world are in dire adversity;	大地生靈方至厄，
Who, I wonder, has leisure enough to spare?	何人自詫有餘閒。
In this fiery inferno, there may still be tranquil refuge,	炎州自有清涼域，
Only to be found half a step from the lofty man.	只在高人跬步間。

Meng questioned directly the morality of reclusion—how could anyone have “leisure enough to spare,” when there is so much suffering in the world? Those who took refuge in reclusion, Meng implied, were merely creating the illusion of tranquility around themselves, while the chaos of the world raged on. The voice of dissent certainly reminds us that not every member of the late Yuan literati believed in reclusion wholeheartedly.⁴⁶ They were still bound

(Yang Weizhen) *Drinking in the West-Lake Pavilion* can be found in a contemporary poetry collection edited by Yang Weizhen, which suggests Gao was an acquaintance of Yang Weizhen. See Lai Liang (fl. fourteenth century) et al eds., *Daya ji, juan 7*.

⁴⁶ For a discussion on the changing attitudes toward the choice between reclusion and government service under the alien Mongol regime throughout the Yuan dynasty, see Jerome Silbergeld, “In Praise of

by the Confucian principle of engagement, and from time to time they still looked upon public office not only as a means of self fulfillment but also a moral responsibility. Whether or not they acted upon this sense of moral responsibility is beyond the concern of this study. What is significant to the present discussion, nevertheless, is its implication about the relationship between these indignant poets and the recipient, Mr. Du. On the one hand, the poets were quick to pick up the thread of discourse raised by their fellow poets and build on each other's arguments. This display of camaraderie within the immediate context voices their regards for each other that is almost mandatory in the case of social intercourse. On the other hand, these blatant comments do not speak well of the poets' regard for Mr. Du. This is further evidence that at least some of the poets did not consider Mr. Du their social equal and were not completely willing to comply with his request on an appointed subject without misgivings. How Mr. Du received these comments cannot be known for certain. From the fact that these unflattering poems still remain in the scroll (when they could have been easily removed during the mounting process), we may infer that these poems were still valued, if not for the content, then for their literary merit and social symbolism.

2.1.6 Yao Tingmei's visual rhetoric of rustic reclusion

As mentioned previously, Yao Tingmei's contribution of a landscape painting to the *Leisure Enough to Spare* assemblage is dated the first month of the twentieth year of the Zhizheng reign (1360), probably a few days earlier than Yang Weizhen's essay. Meng Weicheng's poem is dated between the fifteenth and the twenty-third of August, 1359. Although the placement of Meng's

Government: Chao Yung's Painting, Noble Steeds, and Late Yuan Politics," *Artibus Asiae* 56, no.3 (1985), especially 189-192.

poem at almost the very end of the scroll does not mean it was the latest poem composed, its date gives us an approximate timeframe for the assembling process nevertheless. That is to say that most of the poems in the scroll probably predate Yao's painting. It is also evident that none of the poems functions as a "painting inscription," since none of them reveals even the slightest awareness of the painting. Similarly, Yang Weizhen's preface to the poems makes no reference to Yao's painting, either. So the question remains: did Yao Tingmei read some of the poems before he conceived the composition, and did he adapt any poetic motifs into his painting? By deciphering Yao's pictorial interpretation of the theme "leisure enough to spare" it seems quite likely that Yao had indeed taken cues from his fellow poets and designed the landscape painting to fit the rhetoric of reclusion echoed in some of the poems.

Yao's landscape painting is typical of the tripartite composition prevalent during the late-Yuan period: a body of water separates the foreground and the distant mountains. The emphasis in the painting falls mostly on the foreground section. In the middle of the composition, a towering pine tree dominates the composition. Framed by the trees are a couple of "thatched huts," with the gates wide open to reveal the interior space. The proportion of the buildings to the landscape and the amount of detail shown by the artist, including the woven fence and the indoor furniture, are quite remarkable. To the left is a scholar figure sitting by a small waterfall. It seems that the scholar is distracted from his book, perhaps by the sound of the waterfall, as he inclines his head toward the waterfall in contemplation. Behind the huts are wispy clouds depicted in archaic iron-wire lines. This modest scene is constructed with modular build-up. The moist moss dots that seem to bore into the lighter sides of the rocks are particularly characteristic of Yao Tingmei's style. Even though there is no color in the landscape, and the ink tonality throughout the composition is quite light and even, Yao's painterly

brushwork gives it a sense of liveliness.

In addition to the landscape painting, Yao Tingmei also contributed a poem inscribed at the end of his painting:

At the remote and solitary [hermitage,] the wooden gates	地偏人遠閉柴關，
are closed;	
Shadows of the pine tree fill the yard; the day time is	滿院松陰白晝閒。
[spent] in leisure.	
The dusty world is beneath notice and completely	眼底風塵渾忘却，
forgotten;	
[He] sits to watch the flowing water, or reclines to watch	坐看流水卧看山。
the mountains.	

At the first glance, Yao's poem is a very literal annotation to his painting. However, there is one significant discrepancy between text and image: the "wooden gates" are wide open in the painting. Yao Tingmei intentionally left the gates open to reveal the unoccupied room inside the thatched hut. A thatched hut is not an unusual motif in Yuan landscape painting or poetry: it has also been repeatedly (and rhetorically) used in the poems discussed above. What is unusual about the hut in the present composition is its proportion to the rest of the composition. The large size of the building, the detailed delineation and its centralized position all call for the viewer's attention. Here, Yao Tingmei adopted an unusual treatment of a common motif to allude to a couplet in Tao Qian's *Returning to Dwell on the Farmstead*, "Within my doors there is no dust or clutter; in the bare rooms I have leisure enough to spare." Thus, the image of a "bare

room (*xushi* 虛室)” serves as a visual pun to invoke the phrase “leisure enough to spare.” Yao’s rendition of a “bare room” also conveys the dual meaning of the poetic allusion: the material austerity and the psychological solitude of a “bare room.” With this indirect device Yao cleverly pointed out the underlying subject of the entire commission without literally spelling it out. Also, it brings Tao’s poetic persona as a scholar-farmer into the composition without actually depicting any agricultural activity.

Tao Qian’s *Returning to Dwell on the Farmstead* may not have been the only source of inspiration for Yao’s landscape painting. The dominating pine tree, for example, is a motif repeatedly used in several of the poems, such as Li Mingfu’s “watching clouds under the pine tree,” Lü Lin’s “listening to the black crane under the pine tree,” or Zhang Qian’s “playing chess under the pine tree.”⁴⁷ Certainly, the pine tree is a fairly generic motif associated with the virtues of a Confucian gentleman. This repeated occurrence in both text and image, however, may not be a mere coincidence. It is possible that it has certain biographical significance to Mr. Du or his actual dwelling place; and Yao Tingmei had seen some of the poems and adopted the pine tree as the dominating motif of his composition.

Another example can be found in Yao’s depiction of the clouds in the landscape. Yao’s landscape painting style, as is common to literati landscape of his era, makes little emphasis on atmospheric effects. The depiction of clouds in the archaic iron-wire line technique seems out of place in contrast to the loose, lively calligraphic brushwork in the rest of the composition. Tucked away behind the buildings and foliage, their placement also seems like an afterthought. In short, it is, pictorially speaking, not an indispensable addition to the composition. However, “watching clouds” is another frequently repeated phrase in the poems.⁴⁸ Yao’s inclusion of the

⁴⁷ The other two poems by Wang Jing and Lin Shouchang (dates unknown) also featured pine trees.

⁴⁸ “Watching clouds” is used in poems by Li Mingfu, Zhang Qian and Tao Tangwen. And “cloud” is mentioned in other capacities in several other poems. The phrase “watching clouds” can be traced to

cloud motif is further evidence that Yao not only had knowledge about at least some of the poems, but he also actively incorporated these motifs into his landscape in order to accommodate the poems. The position of the scholar figure next to the waterfall, again, alludes to Mr. Du's waterfront dwelling. And the opened book on the scholar's lap echoes the possession of books and enjoyment of reading in some of the poems. Indeed, even if Yao Tingmei did not intentionally make his painting an accommodating illustration for the poems, at least his choice of pictorial motifs reveals the commonality of the rhetoric of reclusion in both text and image.

2.2 Painting of a scholar's retreat

Yao Tingmei's *Leisure Enough to Spare* is considered a typical example of the painting of a scholar's retreat. The painting of a scholar's retreat has been discussed under various labels by many modern scholars, such as eremitic landscape,⁴⁹ landscape of property,⁵⁰ painting of a

Wang Wei's poem *Villa at Mt Zhongnan* (*Zhongnan beiye* 終南別業). For a translation of the poem, see Tony Barnstone, Willis Barnstone and Xu Haixin trans., *Laughing Lost in the Mountains: Poems of Wang Wei* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1991), 3.

⁴⁹ Chu-tsing Li, *The Autumn Colors on the Ch'iao and Hua Mountains: A Landscape by Chao Meng-fu* (Ascona, Switzerland: Artibus Asiae, 1965). Strictly speaking, Zhao Mengfu's *Autumn Colors on the Qiao and Hua Mountains* does not fall into the category of "the painting of a scholar's retreat." However, the depiction of a specific site with strong personal significance to both the artist and the recipient, as well as its archaic allusions and eremitic symbolism, set a crucial precedent for later development of the depiction of the scholar's retreat. With regard to style, *Autumn Colors* also marks the transformation from the multi-scene *Wangchuan Villa* to the condensed, single-scene depiction of scholar's retreat in the mid-fourteenth century.

⁵⁰ Richard Vinograd, "Family Properties: Personal Context and Cultural Pattern in Wang Meng's Pien Mountains of 1366," *Ars Orientalis* 13 (1982): 1-29. Vinograd proposed the term "landscape of property" in contrast to "naturescape": the naturalistic landscape that addresses a universal audience. He defined "landscape of property" as a type of landscape derived from the early scholar-amateur tradition, from artists such as Wang Wei, Lu Hong and Li Gonglin, and addresses an elite and private audience. The predominant subjects of Yuan literati landscape are familiar local scenes closely tied to the artist and his private audience by bonds of ownership, personal association, or family history. The artistic idiom of abbreviations, distortions and personalizations derived from the earlier tradition transformed natural landscape into a private vision that asserts ownership.

scholar's retreat,⁵¹ thatched hut picture (*caotang tu* 草堂圖),⁵² and studio in a landscape (*shuzhai shanshui* 書齋山水).⁵³ Concisely speaking, the painting of a scholar's retreat in the fourteenth-century context is a depiction of a specific site, usually a scholar's studio or villa closely tied to the artist or the recipient, sitting in a tripartite landscape. Furthermore, the "scholar's retreat" becomes the focus of the composition, and the genre serves to eulogize eremitism in its various shades and forms. Paradoxically, these supposedly "specific sites" are oftentimes generically represented, and the landscape composition formulaic.⁵⁴ The only indication of their identity lies with the dedicative inscription, which gives the details of the site as well as the persons involved. As previous discussions on the inscriptions in the *Leisure Enough to Spare* scroll reveal, the painting itself is only part of a larger assemblage, and the painting is by no means the center focus of the assemblage. For lack of a better term I continue to refer to text-image objects of this kind as a "painting" of a scholar's retreat, but we should bear in mind its indispensable dependence on textual elements for individual identity and personalization.

The genre's dependence on textual elements does not come as a surprise: from the onset the genre developed alongside poetry and literature, and by the fourteenth century it had

⁵¹ Choon Sang Leong, "Wang Meng's Development as an Artist as Seen through His Depiction of Scholars' Retreats," PhD diss., University of Kansas, 1988. Leong used the term "painting of scholar's retreat" as a translation for "thatched hut picture (*caotang tu*)," interchangeable with "landscape of studio (*shuzhai shanshui*)." "Thatched hut picture (*caotang tu*)" is the most frequently used term in painting titles from the fourteenth century onward, judging from the surviving examples. However, I adopted the term "painting of [a] scholar's retreat" to better encompass the type of landscape painting involved in the present discussion.

⁵² David Sensabaugh, "Chao Yüan and Late Yüan-Early Ming Painting" (Ph.D. diss. Princeton University, 1990).

⁵³ Ch'iu Shih-hua, "The Elegant Gathering Mode of Studio Painting: A Study of Wang Meng's the Orchid Chamber," *Gugong xueshu jikan*, vol. 22, no. 4 (Summer 2005): 61-82. The article is in Chinese with English abstract.

⁵⁴ In "Family Properties: Personal Context and Cultural Pattern in Wang Meng's Pien Mountains of 1366," Vinograd discussed "landscape of property" as oppose to "naturescapes" for its lack of concerns for naturalism. David Sensabaugh also observed the high degree of homogeneity in the depiction of scholar's retreat in terms of composition. See Vinograd, "Family Properties," 11-12; Sensabaugh, "Chao Yüan," 195.

become emblematic of literati culture. The fourteenth-century depictions of a scholar's retreat can be traced back to the legendary *Pictures of Wangchuan Villa* by Wang Wei (701-761),⁵⁵ and *Ten Views from a Thatched Hut* by Lü Hong (fl. eighth century).⁵⁶ Li Gonglin's (1049-1106) *Mountain Villa* is considered the direct descendent in this tradition and a more accessible model for fourteenth-century artists.⁵⁷ David Sensabaugh remarked that while fourteenth-century literati painters claimed their artistic lineage from those semi-legendary figures, the single-scene thatched hut pictures were a fourteenth century creation.⁵⁸ Yao Tingmei's *Leisure Enough to Spare* has been considered a typical example of the painting of a scholar's retreat on account of its format, composition, and its eremitic message.⁵⁹ Indeed, if the format, composition, and eremitic symbolism are our only concerns, the majority of fourteenth-century paintings of a scholar's retreat can seem repetitive and monotonous, and *Leisure Enough to Spare* is no exception. However, as the painting only tells half the story, as previous discussions reveal, we must consider also the mode of production and the complex social dimensions embedded in the inscriptions of a text-image object such as *Leisure Enough to Spare*. Case in point, *Thatched Hall of Zhuxi* is an example of a picture of a scholar's retreat that is similar in composition and format to *Leisure Enough to Spare*, inscribed also by Yang Weizhen, but produced in completely different circumstances. A further study of the scroll brings to light the complex modes of assemblage of these seemingly generic text-image objects, and the social prestige such objects

⁵⁵ The original painting by Wang Wei does not survive.

⁵⁶ A copy of Lu Hong's *Ten Views from a Thatched Hut* is now in the collection of the National Palace Museum. Although scholarly opinions vary concerning the dating of this copy, it is quite certain that this version is not the eighth-century original. The painting is reproduced in *Gugong shuhuatu lu* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1995), vol. 15, 39-44.

⁵⁷ The painting is the collection of the National Palace Museum, reproduced in *Gugong shuhua tulu*, (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1995), vol. 15, 283-286. For a discussion on the historical development of painting of scholar's retreat up to the fourteenth century, see Sensabaugh, "Chao Yüan," 200-209.

⁵⁸ Sensabaugh, "Chao Yüan," 171.

⁵⁹ Yao Tingmei's *Leisure Enough to Spare* has been considered a "typical" example of the painting of a scholar's retreat in handscroll format in Sensabaugh, "Chao Yüan," 192-195. See also Ch'iu, "Elegant Gathering," 67.

engender.

2.2.1 *Thatched Hall of Zhuxi: An Elite Production*

At first glance, the *Thatched Hall of Zhuxi* (*Zhuxi caotang tu* 竹西草堂圖) is yet another “painting of a scholar’s retreat” that is all too familiar.⁶⁰ This unsigned landscape by Zhang Wo (fl. ca. 1340-1365) has all the hallmarks of a fourteenth-century painting of a scholar’s retreat: a prominent “thatched hall” is featured in the foreground, overlooking a wide body of water with distant hills beyond.⁶¹ True to the artist’s fame as a figure painting specialist, the scholar figure within the thatched hall is delineated in great detail. Accompanying the painting is the usual assembly of paratexts: a frontispiece in seal script, a dedicative essay, also by Yang Weizhen, followed by inscriptions by several contemporary scholars as well as later collectors and connoisseurs.⁶² The painting was commissioned by Yang Qian (b. 1283), a scholar-recluse from

⁶⁰ Zhang Wo’s *Thatched Hall of Zhuxi* is in the collection of Liaoning Provincial Museum; reproduced in *Qinggong sanyi guobao teji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 2004), painting volume, 355-362. This painting is discussed, along with some of its inscriptions, in David Ake Sansabaugh, “Fashioning Identities in Yuan-dynasty Painting: Images of Men of Culture,” *Ars Orientalis* 37 (2009), 118-139. In this article, Sansabaugh considers the assembling of texts and images (portraits and painting of a scholar’s retreat) by Yuan literati like Yang Qian and Gu Ying (Gu Dehui) as a form of self-expression and a means of constructing self-image.

⁶¹ The painting is unsigned but a seal impression that bears Zhang Wo’s style name “Zhenqi” can be found in the lower left corner of the composition. Zhang Wo was a member of the Southern literati active in the Wu (Jiangsu) region, associated with Yang Weizhen and Gu Ying. He is known particularly for his figure painting, and the *Thatched Hut of Zhuxi* is a rare example of his landscape painting. For a detailed discussion of Zhang Wo’s life and artistic career, see Deborah Del Gais Muller, “Chang Wu: Study of a Fourteenth-Century Figure Painter,” *Artibus Asiae* vol. 47, no. 1 (1986): 5-52.

⁶² In addition to the frontispiece, there is an ink bamboo painting with a poem mounted before the landscape painting. The ink bamboo painting is signed as “by Zhao Yong (1289-ca. 1360),” but the signature is not very credible, nor is it likely a part of the original assemblage. The Yuan and early-Ming inscriptions made no mentioning of this ink bamboo painting. It appears that only when the painting entered Xiang Yuanbian’s (1525-1590) collection did the ink bamboo become part of the scroll. By then, the landscape painting as well as the frontispiece were thought to be “by Zhao Yong,” since Zhang Wo did not sign or inscribe the painting.

an eminent family in Songjiang, whose style name was Zhuxi (Bamboo-west).⁶³ It is interesting to note that, although the composition may seem generic at first, it is not without some subtle personalization: on the far shore of the river, Zhang Wo included a groove of bamboo as a reference to the style name of the patron.⁶⁴ The name “Zhuxi” literally means “west of bamboo.” The scroll celebrates Yang Qian’s style name as well as his reclusive dwelling, the Thatched Hall of Zhuxi. The painting was then shown to many of Yang Qian’s friends and acquaintances, including Yang Weizhen, to solicit their inscriptions.

Despite its formalistic composition and typical format, which it shares with *Leisure Enough to Spare* and many other depictions of scholars’ retreats, the individuality of *Thatched Hall of Zhuxi* derives from the content of its inscriptions and the relationship between the patron and the inscribers. When examined in this light, it is evident that *Thatched Hall of Zhuxi* is an elite-level production. First, Yang Qian was a scholar-recluse of substantial social standing. He was also a native of Songjiang who frequently socialized with, and possibly patronized, many notable scholars, poets and artists in or passing through the region.⁶⁵ A few of his poems have survived in two major Yuan poetry anthologies.⁶⁶ He entertained his distinguished guests in his scenic villa, located south of Songjiang overlooking the Bay of Hangzhou.⁶⁷ Yang Weizhen was

⁶³ For additional biographical information of Yang Qian, see Sansabaugh, “Fashioning Identities,” 120.

⁶⁴ The painting is identified as one of the earliest examples of *hao* painting – painting incorporating the recipient’s style name (*hao*), a sub-genre of commemorative paintings prevalent among the mid-Ming Suzhou artists – in Anne De Coursey Clapp, *The Painting of Tang Yin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 61-66.

⁶⁵ More of Yang Qian’s association with contemporary scholars and artists will be further discussed in the fourth chapter of this dissertation in relation to Yang Qian’s portrait.

⁶⁶ See Chen Yen (1856-1938) ed., *Yuanshi jishi* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), 502-503, and Gu Sili (fl. 1712) ed., *Yuanshi xuan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987).

⁶⁷ The location and many attractions of Yang Qian’s villa are recorded by Yang Weizhen in “Buai yunshan louji 不礙雲山樓記,” *Dongweiziji*, *juan* 19. The several other compositions dedicated to Yang Qian’s Buai yunshan lou, or the “Cloud and Mountain Unhindered Pavilion,” by contemporary poets have also survived, which suggests Yang Qian entertained his literati friends frequently at his estate. See Bei Qiong, “Buai yunshan loufu 不礙雲山樓賦,” *Qingjianji*, *juan* 1, Dong Ji (fl. fourteenth century), “Ti Yang Zhuzi Buai yunshan lou 題楊竹西不礙雲山樓,” *Xijiao xiaoduan ji*, *juan* 1, and Feng Yimo (fl. fourteenth century), “Yunshan lou wei Yang Zhuxi fu 雲山樓為楊竹西賦,” in Lai Liang (fl. fourteenth

one of Yang Qian's guests, and he seems to have been on intimate terms with Yang Qian since the late 1340s.⁶⁸ Attesting to their friendship, Yang Weizhen's *Record of Zhuxi* (*Zhuxi zhi* 竹西志), which accompanies Zhang Wo's painting, represents an outstanding example of the genre of "studio record" and is certainly no common social favor.⁶⁹ The *Record* starts with a possibly fictional conversation between Yang Weizhen and three scholars in the service of Yang Qian:

There were three guests who brought Master Yang Zhuxi's scroll to visit the Teyai Daoist (Yang Weizhen). [As to the origin of the name Zhuxi,] one argued, "West of the Great Xia, there was bamboo growing in the Xie Valley.⁷⁰ Cut between the joints [to make a flute,] and the music [it makes] rivals the phoenix song. This is how our esteemed friend (Yang Qian) acquired his style name." The second argued, "West of the Shouyang [Mountain] dwelled the two princes of Lone Bamboo (*Guzhu* 孤竹).⁷¹ Their pure character can serve as a model for hundreds of generations. This is how our esteemed friend acquired his style name." The third argued, "In the region of Jiangdu (Yangzhou), there was the *Ballad of Zhuxi*, sung by tipsy poets and drunken guests.⁷² This is how our

century), *Dayaji*, juan 7.

⁶⁸ The *Record of Zhuxi* is undated. However, it was probably composed in the same year as *Buai yunshan louji*, dated 1349.

⁶⁹ Yang Weizhen's *Record of Zhuxi* is reproduced in *Qinggong sanyi guobao teji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 2004), calligraphy volume, 469-474.

⁷⁰ The Xie Valley was said to be located in the Kunlun Mountain, where Linglun, the court musician of the Yellow Emperor, "invented" musical temperament. See *Zhongwen dacidian*, 4456.

⁷¹ Lone Bamboo (*Guzhu*) was one of the vassal states of the Shang dynasty (ca. 1600-1045 BCE). The "princes of Lone Bamboo" refers to Boyi and Shuqi, who lived in Shouyang Mountain after the fall of the Shang dynasty and starved to death because they refused to eat anything belonging to the conquering Zhou dynasty. See *Zhongwen dacidian*, 3788.

⁷² The "Ballad of Zhuxi" refers to the poem *Written at Zen-Wisdom Temple, Yangzhou* by the Tang poet Du Mu (803-852). The last couplet of the poem reads, "Someone who knows the trail that goes off to the west of bamboo/is singing the perfect song outside this lucky city (Yangzhou)." Since then, the term "west of bamboo" has been used sometimes to refer to the city of Yangzhou. Translation by David Yang and Jiann I. Lin, in *Out on the Autumn River: Selected Poems of Du Mu* (Medina, Ohio: Rager Media, 2007), 34-35.

esteemed friend acquired his style name.”

客有二三子，持竹西楊公子卷，來見鐵崖道人者，一辯曰：「大廈之西，有嶰谷之竹，斷兩節而吹之，協夫鳳凰，此吾公子之所以取號也。」一辯曰：「首陽之西，孤竹之二子居焉。清風可以師表百世，此吾公子之所以取號也。」一辯曰：「江都之境，有竹西之歌吹，騷人醉客之所歌詠，此吾公子之所以取號也。」

Reading within the context, the “scroll” mentioned here apparently refers to the painting by Zhang Wo. Therefore, the purpose of this visit to Yang Weizhen was to solicit his response to the painting that depicts Yang Qian’s studio, the Thatched Hall of Zhuxi. In this case, the painting evidently predates Yang Weizhen’s inscription. Nevertheless, the whole essay focuses on the origin of Yang Qian’s style name “Zhuxi,” and makes no further reference to the “scroll” as the companion piece of this essay. An interesting parallel can be drawn here between this opening paragraph and that of Yang’s *Essay on Leisure Enough to Spare*. Here, Yang also listed three possible sources of Yang Qian’s style name Zhuxi, only to refute them one by one in his following arguments:

The Daoist laughed and said, “How far off the mark were where you looked for [the origin of the name] Zhuxi! When Linglun tuned [musical] scales in the Xie Valley, it was not because of the useful bamboo there.⁷³ When the princes of Lone Bamboo starved to death on Shouyang Mountain, it did not conform to the Middle Way. The Ballad of Guangling (Yangzhou) is decadent and vulgar, which is exactly what bamboo detests. Where cannot you find bamboo? It does

⁷³ Linglun was the court musician of the mythical Yellow Emperor. He was credited with the invention of musical temperament. See *Zhongwen dacidian*, 942.

not have to be found at Qi [Garden]⁷⁴ or Wei [River],⁷⁵ at [Mount] Shaoshi,⁷⁶ at Changshi, at [Mount] Luofu⁷⁷ or [Mount] Cilao.⁷⁸ Master Yang dwells by a harbor in Yunjian (Songjiang), where bamboo of all kinds flourishes. He built a pavilion to the right of the bamboo – that is your ‘West of Bamboo.’ Why have you looked at those far away places? ”

道人莞爾而笑曰：「求竹西者，何其遠也哉！伶倫協律於嶰谷，未既竹之用也。孤竹之子餓終於首陽，亦未適乎中庸之道也。廣陵歌吹又淫哇之，靡竹之所嫌也。地無往而無竹，不必在淇、在渭、在少室、在長石、羅浮慈姥文竹之所也。公子居雲之澳，篠簜之所敷籥，籥罟之所叢，結亭一所在竹之右，即吾竹西也。奚求諸遠哉！

As the story continues, Yang Weizhen lectured the three misinformed visitors on their absurd obsession with finding obscure sources for Yang Qian’s style name. He argued that Yang Qian’s lofty character needs no embellishment, implying the visitors’ effort to match the name Zhuxi with literary precedents as mere flattery. Crestfallen and shamefaced, the three visitors took leave of Yang Weizhen to report to their patron. The next day Yang Qian came to visit Yang Weizhen, as an apology for the impertinence of his guests, and pleaded personally for a dedicative inscription for his studio.

⁷⁴ Qi Garden (in present-day Qi county, Henan province) was a place famous for its bamboo, which was first recorded in the *Classic of Poetry*. See *Zhongwen dacidian*, 8270.

⁷⁵ Wei River (in present-day Gansu province) was also a place famous for its bamboo production. See Sima Qian (ca. 145-ca. 86 BCE) et al eds., *Shiji*, juan 129.

⁷⁶ Mount Shaoshi is part of Mount Song, one of the five sacred mountains in China. A particular kind of bamboo growing in Mount Shaoshi is said to be large enough to be used as cooking vessels. See Li Kan, *Zhupu xianglu*, juan 6.

⁷⁷ Mount Luofu is located in Guangdong province. It is also mentioned here as a place famous for its giant bamboo. See Li Kan, *Zhupu xianglu*, juan 4.

⁷⁸ Mount Cilao is located south of Nanjing by the Yangzi River. The bamboo of Mount Cilao is famous for its musical quality, and is immortalized by a poem by Li Bai (701-762) titled *The Bamboo of Cilao*. See Li Bai, *Li Taibai wenji*, juan 19.

The whole story is very likely a fictional account – as mentioned earlier, the painting of Yang Qian’s studio includes a grove of bamboo to the right of the composition, thus placing the studio to the “west of bamboo.” Evidently, “Zhuxi” was meant to be literally “west of bamboo” all along. Therefore, this elaborate discourse on the origin of “Zhuxi” was entirely made up by Yang Weizhen to eulogize Yang Qian’s choice of style name, his reclusive dwelling, and most importantly, his lofty character. The essay was cleverly composed with a liberal use of literary allusions (which may seem ironic to modern readers). It was highly appreciated and valued by its contemporary audience as well as later collectors.⁷⁹ The animated account of the conversation gives the essay a more interesting and personal dimension. It certainly testifies to a close personal relationship and mutual respect between Yang Weizhen and Yang Qian.

In addition, Yang Qian was able to collect inscriptions from other notable scholars, poets, artists and, some of them, former government officials, including Zhang Yu (ca. 1284-1350),⁸⁰ Zhao Su (fl. fourteenth century),⁸¹ Qian Weishan (fl. 1341-1379),⁸² Tao Zongyi (1329-1410)⁸³ and Ma Wan (d. after 1370)⁸⁴ in the years that followed.⁸⁵ Their inscriptions all show some level

⁷⁹ For example, a later inscription in the scroll by Ming scholar Yang Xunji (1456-1544) highly praises Yang Weizhen’s *Record of Zhuxi*. The inscription reads, “Tieyai treated literary endeavors as games all his life. His Zhuxi inscription is most excellent... I once said social writings are not necessarily a malignant thing – this proves it!” The inscription is dated 1494.

⁸⁰ For detailed discussions of Zhang Yu’s life and artistic career, see Zhang Guangbin, “Yuan ruxian Goqu waishi Zhang Yu shengping kaoshu,” in Zhang Guangbin, *Yuanchao shuhua shi yanjiu lunji* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1979), 71-88; see also Zhang Guangbin, “The Life and Calligraphy of the Taoist Scholar of Yüan – Chang Yü,” in *International Colloquium on Chinese Art History* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1991), 239-278.

⁸¹ See Wang, *Yuanren zhuanji*, 1709.

⁸² See Wang, *Yuanren zhuanji*, 1992-1993.

⁸³ Tang Zongyi is the author of *Shushi huiyao* and *Chugeng li*, and the editor of *Shoufu*. See Wang, *Yuanren zhuanji*, 1346-1348.

⁸⁴ See Wang, *Yuanren zhuanji*, 978. For a discussion on Ma Wan as a landscape painter and his relationship with Yang Weizhen, see Fu Shen, “Ma Wan hua Yang Weizhen tide chunsui louchuan tu,” in *Gugong jikan* 7:3 (1973), 31-60.

⁸⁵ Zhao Su’s inscription is dated 1355; Qian Weishan’s inscription is dated 1356. The other two Yuan inscriptions are undated, but from the content it is clear they were later than Yang Weizhen’s inscription.

of personal acquaintance with Yang Qian. Among them, Zhao Su's inscription gives a most detailed account of his friendship with Yang Qian as well as Yang's reclusive dwelling. The others are perhaps less intimate, but nevertheless give enough personalization to leave no doubt that their inscriptions apply to Yang Qian. Interestingly, all the inscriptions more or less follow Yang Weizhen's lead and focus on the discussion of Yang Qian's style name, using the same allusions, even the same wording, highlighted in Yang Weizhen's essay. It is a pattern previously observed in the inscriptions to *Leisure Enough to Spare* and apparently a prevalent social custom practiced in all levels of the literati class.

All things considered, *Thatched Hall of Zhuxi* was produced in a more prestigious circle of southern literati than that of *Leisure Enough to Spare*. Yang Qian was a respected scholar-recluse in Songjiang and a known patron to other scholars and artists passing through the region. He was able to acquire dedicative inscriptions from notable contemporaries. Furthermore, the intimate and decorous tone of the inscriptions speak well of Yang Qian's high social standing in southern literati circles. As an elite-level production, *Thatched Hall of Zhuxi* fulfills its function as a social status symbol: it celebrates Yang Qian's reclusive dwelling and his lofty character, endorsed by other prestigious members of the southern literati. The acquisition of such endorsement was the first and foremost concern in the assemblage of text-image objects of this kind. From the inscriptions following Yang Weizhen's essay, we may infer that Yang Qian showed the scroll to his visiting friends from time to time, and occasionally asked them to contribute to the growing list of inscriptions. In doing so Yang Qian recorded a snapshot of his social network, which may very well be what text-image objects of this kind were intended for. When the scroll passed out of the possession of Yang Qian's family, this record became a commodity for public consumption. As one of the Ming inscriptions exclaims admiringly,

“Master Yang’s style name, Zhuxi, was assessed and remarked upon by so many famous Yuan figures! ...it can last forever!”⁸⁶ “It” refers not only to the physical object of the scroll, but also to Yang Qian’s reputation. Now, this is not to say that we should subscribe to this elitist logic – the scroll is only valuable because the inscribers were “famous” – but we must acknowledge the prevalence of such a view in pre-modern mindsets. Only then we can understand the desirability as well as the social prestige embedded in the ownership of such objects in the fourteenth-century context. A painting of a scholar’s retreat, along with its textual components, eulogizes its owner as well as records the owner’s social network – it shows not only who he was in the most positive light, but also with whom he associated. These two factors decide how a person is to be received by posterity, and that is certainly no trivial matter.

By contrast, *Leisure Enough to Spare* was commissioned by an obscure patron and its inscriptions composed by mostly minor scholars whose works did not survive otherwise. Although Mr. Du was able to acquire an essay from Yang Weizhen for his scroll, the content of the essay vouches no personal relationship or moral endorsement. The ambiguity of the majority of the inscriptions confirms the lack of intimate knowledge and personal relationship between the patron and inscribers. The contrived process of its assembling is particularly telling – the image and texts were commissioned separately and simultaneously to achieve the end product that resembles a “painting of a scholar’s retreat” scroll. Nevertheless, the scroll’s outward resemblance in format serves to confirm the prevalence of the “painting of a scholar’s retreat” scrolls and their emblematic status. By appropriating the format, the scroll also assumes some of the prestige of the genre.

⁸⁶ The inscription is by the Ming scholar Huang Yun (fl. 1488-1505). See *Mingren zhuanji ziliao suoyin* (Taipei: Guoli zhongyang tushuguan, 1965), 658.

2.2.2 Text-image objects as status symbol

A careful analysis of each part of *Leisure Enough to Spare* allows a clearer picture of how the scroll was assembled to emerge. It was commissioned by a certain Mr. Du, a wealthy country gentleman in Songjiang who made his fortune from his farmlands. Wishing to be associated with the literati class, Mr. Du identified himself with the archetypal scholar-farmer, Tao Qian, and took the phrase “leisure enough to spare” from Tao’s *Returning to Dwell on the Farmstead* to name his dwelling place. He sent requests and materials to local poets in and around Songjiang, asking for their poetic composition on the subject of “leisure enough to spare.” From Yao Tingmei he also commissioned a landscape painting to accompany the poems. Furthermore, to give the scroll more prestige he asked the famous scholar-official Yang Weizhen through a mutual acquaintance for a preface to the poems, as was the common practice of the time. The final assemblage mimics a “painting of a scholar’s retreat” prevalent among the late Yuan literati. The assembling process may seem counterintuitive, that the painting should be commissioned after the texts and the “painting inscriptions” are not painting inscriptions after all. Contrary to the typical relationship between text and image in a landscape painting scroll, Yao Tingmei intentionally adopted the motifs of reclusion from many of the poems in order to accommodate the texts. His pictorial interpretation of a “bare room” to allude to the subject “leisure enough to spare” demonstrates especially his fluency in both the visual and literary idioms of rustic reclusion. The assembling of *Leisure Enough to Spare* aimed to appropriate the symbolic and social values of the genre of the painting of a scholar’s retreat. Despite being a commissioned piece, it rather affirms that text-image objects of its type carried such significant and desirable social symbolism that Mr. Du was more than willing to undertake the trouble for

its making.

Within the late Yuan historical context, when officialdom was no longer the norm of self fulfillment for the literati class, the definition of the “literati class” became rather precarious and fluid. When the definition of “literati” no longer rested upon occupation, the anxiety over self image and identity arose. Modern scholars have pointed out that the exponential growth in the number of poetry or literary societies during the Yuan dynasty was a reaction to the need to address this anxiety.⁸⁷ At this time of “identity crisis” the literati reached out to each other through literary exchanges not only for friendship but for assurance as to their common values as a social class. In other words, frequent literary exchanges to some degree supplanted public office as a social status indicator for members of the literati class. Like literary anthologies, literati painting and poetry scrolls are physical evidence of this social status indicator. Now, for someone who aspired after the class superiority of the literati, whether justified or not, the ownership of such objects would indeed seem very desirable.

The *Leisure Enough to Spare* scroll provided Mr. Du’s association with the literati class a certain legitimacy. The poets and artist were well aware of this social symbolism. Some of them happily complied with Mr. Du’s wish with a generous rhetoric of rustic reclusion; some were less enthusiastic and did not fail to voice their dissent, covertly or not. In sum, the diverse and sometimes contradictory voices reflect the mixed feelings late Yuan literati held toward the rise of the farmer and merchant classes due to their growing economic power, as well as their ambivalent sentiments toward reclusion in a time of deepening social and political unrest.

⁸⁷ Ouyang Guang, “Yuan dai shishe yu shuhui 元代詩社與書會,” in *Song Yuan shishe yanjiu congkao* (Guangzhou: Guangdong gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996), 58-60.

Chapter 3. Metamorphosis of a Bird-and-Flower Painting: *Bird and Peach Blossoms* as a Memorial Portrait

The ink-monochrome painting of a single bird standing on a branch known as *Bird and Peach Blossoms* (*taohua youniao* 桃花幽鳥), signed by the Songjiang artist Zhang Zhong (fl. mid-fourteenth century), has been the object of curious remarks not because of anything extraordinary in the composition itself, but the density of inscriptions covering every available surface of this small hanging scroll.¹ While the scroll is at times singled out as evidence of the Yuan literati's "excessive" enthusiasm in inscribing painting, modern scholars have yet to untangle the complex relationship between the painted image and inscriptions in this particular case. Through a thorough analysis of the texts, this chapter aims to establish that the inscriptions on *Bird and Peach Blossoms* literally subverted the subject matter and endowed this otherwise commonplace bird-and-flower painting with a new meaning.

As following the discussion will reveal, *Bird and Peach Blossoms* was transformed into a memorial portrait almost single-handedly by none other than Yang Weizhen. Yang's poetic inscription remembers Zhang Zhong, his young friend and student who had died prematurely. Following Yang's lead, later inscribers also dedicated their poetic compositions to the memories of the artist, thus reinforcing the new interpretation given by Yang Weizhen. By enquiring into Zhang Zhong's *Bird and Peach Blossoms* and its inscriptions, this chapter first addresses the fluidity of meaning in Chinese literati painting, and the role that inscription played in the process of meaning-making. Secondly, the chapter discusses the meaning-making of art as a social practice through which the late-Yuan literati affirmed their social bonds and cultural

¹ For instance, Fu Shen cited the scroll as an example when "excessive" inscriptions unbalanced the composition. See Fu Shen, "Ma Wan hua Yang Weizhen ti de chun sui lou chuan tu 馬琬畫楊維楨題的春水樓船圖." *Gugong jikan* 7:3 (1973), 35. The painting is reproduced in Shih Shou-chieng and Ge Wanzhang eds., *Dahan de shiji: Meng Yuan shidai de duoyuan wenhua yu yishu* (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 2001), 308-309.

identity. Last but not least, the chapter traces the social life of *Bird and Peach Blossoms* as it passed out of its original context to the next generation, in order to discuss the symbolic value of text-image objects of its kind.

3.1 *Bird and Peach Blossoms*, or not – subversion of text over image

The painting conventionally known as Zhang Zhong's *Bird and Peach Blossoms* suffers an identity crisis. The hanging scroll features a single bird standing on a branch of blossoming peach flowers – or so the title tells us. Yet the seemingly simple subject matter is not so simple a matter after all. Among the nineteen inscriptions on the hanging scroll, the bird has been variously identified as a magpie, a cuckoo, a turtledove, or vaguely as a mountain bird, and the flowers as peach, cherry or pear blossoms.² It is thanks to the Qianlong Emperor's (1711-1799, r. 1736-1795) imperial mandate – that is to say, the painting was cataloged as “Bird and Peach Blossoms” when it entered the Qing imperial collection – that the title was finally settled. This simple composition of bird and flowers in monochrome ink was vague enough that from the onset it was subject to open interpretation. Such liberal interpretation is not an unusual fate for a bird-and-flower painting, onto which the literati artists and connoisseurs always eager to endow lofty symbolism. What is truly unusual about the present case is not only the number of responses the painting excited, but also the direction they took.

If we were to remove all the inscriptions from *Bird and Peach Blossoms*, it is immediately evident that the artist had anticipated his work to be filled with inscriptions. The elongated format of the scroll became increasingly common in the mid-fourteenth century in order to

² The count excludes the inscription by the artist and the title probably given by the Qing Imperial cataloger. More on the individual inscriptions will be discussed throughout the chapter.

accommodate inscriptions. The composition is eerily empty without its textual components: while the bird and flower barely occupy the lower left corner of the composition, the upper half was intentionally left blank.³ As remarked by Fu Shen, this half-empty composition is characteristic of late Yuan literati painting in hanging scroll format.⁴ Similar compositional devices can be observed in works by many artists active in the same circle as Zhang Zhong, such as Ni Zan's (1301-1374) *Rongxi Studio*,⁵ Ma Wan's (fl. fourteenth century) *Spring Landscape*,⁶ and Zhao Yuan's (fl. fourteenth century) *Thatched Hall of Hexi*, just to name a few.⁷ In short, hanging scrolls of the late-Yuan period, especially ones by literati artists, were made with the addition of inscriptions in mind.

The anticipation of inscriptions implied by the painting format reveals much about the function of art objects among late-Yuan literati. Firstly, the practice attests to the strongly social nature of art in the circles of the educated elite. Second, it suggests that the meaning-making of art had become a communal activity. By leaving space in the composition in anticipation of inscriptions, an artist relinquished the monopoly of meaning-making and made it an open invitation to liberal interpretation. In most cases, including examples discussed in this dissertation, the interpretations do not stray far from convention. The point of inscribing is,

³ The top one-sixth of the scroll (i.e. the part above Yang Weizhen's inscription) is an additional piece of paper attached to the original composition to accommodate more inscriptions. The addition of this piece of paper results in the scrolls unusually elongated appearance.

⁴ Fu Shen, "Ma Wan hua Yang Weizhen ti de chun sui lou chuan tu 馬琬畫楊維禎題的春水樓船圖." *Gugong jikan* 7:3 (1973), 34-36. Fu Shen observed that the proportion of hanging scrolls had become increasingly elongated since the rise of literati painting movement in the eleventh century. The extra space was left in anticipation of inscriptions, since literati painters inscribed both works of their own and their friends liberally. Fu further divided the hanging scroll composition of the late Yuan period into five sub-categories, which is beyond the scope of the present study.

⁵ *Rongxi Studio* is in the collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei; reproduced in *Gugong shuhua tulu* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1980), vol. 4, 301.

⁶ *Spring Landscape* is in the collection of the Art Museum, Princeton University; reproduced in Shen Fu and Marilyn Fu, *Studies in Connoisseurship: Chinese Paintings from the Arthur M. Sackler Collection in New York and Princeton* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), 73.

⁷ *Thatched Hall of Hexi* is in the collection of Shanghai Museum, Shanghai; reproduced in *Zhongguo huihua quanji*, (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1999), vol. 8, 175.

after all, to honor personal connections, not to engage in scholarly discourses on meaning, symbolism or such. In the case of Zhang Zhong's *Bird and Peach Blossoms*, however, the interpretation of the painting took an unexpected turn when Yang Weizhen came to inscribe the work of his late friend, and in essence turned it into a memorial portrait.

When it was first completed, *Bird and Peach Blossoms* appeared to be nothing more than an ordinary bird-and-flower painting. On the left edge Zhang Zhong simply signed, "Zhang Shouzhong,⁸ from Haishang,⁹ painted for Master Jingchu (dates unknown)." Although none of the inscriptions that followed are dated, they can be divided roughly into three groups chronologically based on their content. It is unclear if there were any inscriptions besides the artist's dedication when Yang Weizhen first came to inscribe the painting. Upon close examination, Yang Weizhen's inscription shows a close affinity with the painted image and Zhang Zhong's signature in terms of the ink tonality and the degree of wear-and-tear. Moreover, it occupies the prime location, the upper right corner, of the scroll – the inscriptions above Yang's are actually inscribed on an additional piece of paper that was added to the scroll later to accommodate more inscriptions. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that Yang was one of the first to inscribe Zhang's painting. Following him shortly are poems by those who were personal friends with Zhang Zhong (and each other), inscribed after the death of the artist.

The second group comprises inscriptions for the early Ming owner, Hu Yan (1361-1443), by scholars who may or may not have personal relationships with Zhang Zhong or Yang Weizhen. The last group includes later inscriptions by people who had no association with either the

⁸ Zhang Zhong appeared to have used the name Shouzhong as a variation of his personal name. Among his contemporary was another Zhang Shouzhong, who was a nephew of Gu Ying and also a student of Yang Weizhen. See Chen Gaohua, *Yuandai huajia shiliao huibian* (Hangzhou: Hangzhou chubanshe, 2004), 839, 845-846.

⁹ Present-day Shanghai region; probably refers to Zhang's native town of Songjiang.

artist or previous inscribers. The first and second groups of inscriptions are the main focus of the present study and will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

Except for his inscription to *Bird and Peach Blossoms*, the only direct evidence of Yang Weizhen's relationship with Zhang Zhong is the essay *Record of the Hall of the Unofficial Statesman* Yang composed at Zhang's request on February 17, 1360.¹⁰ As mentioned in the previous chapter, Yang Weizhen moved to Songjiang to teach at the prefectural college at the end of 1359. It was around this time Yang came into frequent contact with the local coterie, of which Zhang was a member. It is unclear in what capacity Zhang Zhong came to be considered a "student" of Yang Weizhen, since little is known about Zhang's life. Zhang Zhong had studied painting with Huang Gongwang (ca. 1269-ca. 1354), who was a close friend of Yang Weizhen. By extension of their friendship Yang Weizhen may have felt predisposed towards Huang's protégé. Furthermore, a few of Zhang's poems were published in *Dayaji*, which was edited and commented on by Yang Weizhen.¹¹ Therefore, a social obligation was formed between the editor and the young poet, whether they had met in person or not. Yang's preface to *Dayaji* is dated 1361.¹² It is reasonable to assume that in the early 1360s Yang and Zhang were in frequent social contact, which puts the possible date of Yang's inscription to *Bird and Peach Blossoms* to a few years later:

I have not seen Scion Zhang for some years;

幾年不見張公子，

Unexpectedly, I came upon [this picture of] "Spring in

忽見玄都觀裡春。

¹⁰ This essay is discussed in the previous chapter of this dissertation; see pages 71-71.

¹¹ Lai Liang ed., *Dayaji*. In the preface of the poetry collection Lai Liang stated that originally he collected over two thousand poems by contemporary reclusive poets of the Wu (Jiangsu) and Yue (Zhejiang) regions, but Yang Weizhen kept only about three hundred as worth publishing.

¹² Sun Xiaoli, *Nianpu*, 256-258.

Xuandu Temple.”¹³

Reminiscing on the time when we were both guests at 卻憶雲間同作客，
Yunjian, 杏華吹簫喚真真。
[I] play flute among apricot blossoms, calling the name
Zhenzhen.

The first three lines appear to be nothing more than a remembrance of a friend that Yang had not seen for a few years, but nothing suggests that Zhang was no longer living. The “time” that they were “both guests at Yunjian (present-day Songjiang)” probably refers to the time when Yang Weizhen first moved to Songjiang and became acquainted with Zhang Zhong. The last verse, however, delivers a much more complex message. It diverges from the previous narrative so abruptly that it appears quite puzzling at first. Yang Weizhen was known to be an excellent musician and especially for his “Iron Flute.”¹⁴ Therefore, the person playing flute among apricot blossoms is presumably a self reference. “Calling the name Zhenzhen” alludes to a story from Du Xunhe’s (846-907) *Miscellaneous Notes by the Pine Window* (*Songchuang zaji* 松窗雜記).

The story tells that a man named Zhao Yan acquired a painting of a beautiful woman and fell in love with her. The artist told him that if he continued to call her name, Zhenzhen, for a hundred days and a hundred nights, she would come to life. And indeed, after a hundred days,

¹³ The Xuandu Temple was a Daoist temple in Chang’an (present-day Xi’an), famous for its peach blossoms in spring in the ninth century. The peach blossoms of the Xuandu Temple were immortalized by works of the Tang poet Liu Yuxi (772-842). See *Zhongwen dacidian*, 9121; Liu Yuxi, *Liu Binke wenji*, juan 24.

¹⁴ In Yang Weizhen’s *Autobiography of the Iron Flute Daoist*, he claimed to have found an ancient iron sword from Lake Dongting, which he had made into an iron flute. Presumably he acquired the iron flute during his ten years out of office (1339-1349), and had adopted the style name “Iron Flute Daoist” by the early 1350s. See Yang Weizhen, *Autobiography of the Iron Flute Daoist*, in Chen Yujing et al eds., *Yang Tieyai wenji* (preface dated 1501), juan 2.

Zhenzhen came out of the picture and married Zhao Yan. They lived happily together for a few years, and Zhenzhen bore Zhao a son. A friend of Zhao heard of the story and became suspicious of Zhenzhen. The friend warned Zhao that she must be a demon in disguise, and he offered Zhao a demon-quelling sword to kill Zhenzhen. Convinced that Zhenzhen was indeed a demon, Zhao brought the sword home to kill his wife. Upon his return, Zhenzhen was immediately aware of his intention. Indignantly she told him that she was a fairy from the immortal mountain. Offended by Zhao's fickleness and weak-mindedness, Zhenzhen took their son and returned to the painting. No matter how the remorseful Zhao pleaded afterwards, she never came out of the picture again.¹⁵

The name Zhenzhen literally means "real," which poses the philosophical question about the realness of a painted image. The name Zhenzhen has been used as a general reference to beautiful women, and more specifically an unattainable beauty, as the ending of the story dictates. For example, in a poem mourning for a deceased lover, Southern-Song poet Wu Wenyong (ca. 1212-ca. 1272) lamented, "vermilion and azurite (i.e. painting) cannot describe the face of Zhenzhen."¹⁶ Also, during the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127), the allusion of Zhenzhen came to be used as an analogy of flower painting, especially paintings of plum blossoms. Song poets Chen Yuyi (1090-1138) and Zhang Daochia (1202-1268), who were particularly known for their plum blossom poetry, both adopted the story of Zhenzhen to refer to paintings of plum blossoms in some capacity.¹⁷

In his inscription, Yang Weizhen appropriated the story of Zhenzhen in a most peculiar context. He combined the two common references of the allusion – the unattainable beauty and

¹⁵ Du Xunhe, *Songchuang zaji*, reprinted in *Tang ren ba jia duanpian xiaoshuo* (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 1998), 35.

¹⁶ Wu Wenyong, *Mengchuang gao yi gao* 夢窗稿乙稿, juan 2, 10

¹⁷ Sun Shaoyuan, *Shenghua ji* 聲畫集, juan 5, 26; Cao Tingdong (1699-1785), *Song baijia shicun* 宋百家詩存, 30-31.

the flower painting – to forge a new, personal meaning. Here, Yang Weizhen saw a bird-and-flower painting by his young friend, and he connected it with the picture of Zhenzhen. Based on the connotation of the story, we may infer that Zhang was no longer living. The comment is unlikely to be praise for the “realness” of the painting, since realistic representation was not in tune with literati taste of the time. Therefore, we can only conclude that Yang Weizhen saw the bird-and-flower painting *as* his late friend Zhang Zhong. It implies that the painting preserves some essence of the artist, and by calling his name one may bring back the spirit of a deceased friend. In other words, Yang was treating the bird-and-flower painting as if it were a portrait of Zhang Zhong.

It was indeed such a provocative and unexpected interpretation of the painting that it was immediately followed and commented on by his contemporaries. The inscriptions by Yuan Kai (fl. fourteenth century), Gu Wenzhao (fl. fourteenth century), Guan Shimin (1338-1421), and Gu Jinzhong (fl. fourteenth century) all commemorated their late friend Zhang Zhong. They were all members of the Songjiang coterie, and of the same generation as Zhang Zhong.¹⁸ Yuan Kai and Guan Shimin both studied poetry with Yang Weizhen and were considered prominent poets among their peers.¹⁹ In their anthologies we can find poems dedicated to one another.²⁰ In short, they had strong social ties with Zhang Zhong, Yang Weizhen, as well as with each other. Therefore, it is not surprising to find their inscriptions following the interpretation of Yang and echoing the sentiments of each other.

The mournful expression of these four inscriptions confirms the passing of Zhang Zhong

¹⁸ All four inscribers were native of Songjiang. They all survived the dynastic transition in 1368, and with the exception of Gu Jinzhong, they all served in the Ming government.

¹⁹ Yuan Kai's anthology, *Haisouji*, and Guan Shimin's *Yinqianji*, are still extant.

²⁰ See Yuan Kai, *Haisouji*, juan 4, for a poem dedicated to Gu Wenzhao, and Guan Shimin, *Yinqianji*, juan 6 for two poems dedicated to Gu Jinzhong.

by the time they inscribed the painting. The inscription by Yuan Kai borrows not only the sentiment but also the words directly from Yang Weizhen:

I have not seen Scion Zhang,	不見張公子，
How many years more is it now?	于今又幾年？
Spring flowers and spring bird,	春花與春鳥，
I [can only] look with great sorrow.	相對一淒然。

The first couplet cleverly reiterates Yang Weizhen's first verse, "I have not seen Scion Zhang for some years," and thereby acknowledges and honors the poem of Yuan's mentor. The melancholic tone of Yuan's poem is unmistakable: spring flowers and birds are supposed to be a joyful subject, but now they only serve to remind the poet of his late friend. That is to say, following the lead of Yang Weizhen, Yuan Kai was also inclined to see the bird-and-flower painting as a representation of Zhang Zhong.

It is significant that both Yang and Yuan referred to Zhang as Zhang *Gongzi* 公子, or "Scion Zhang." As discussed in the previous chapter, poets often used the same phrases in inscriptions to show conformity. In this case, however, it appears that "Zhang *Gongzi*" was in fact a nickname for Zhang Zhong. In another poem by Yuan Kai inscribed on a landscape painting by Zhang Zhong, he also referred to the artist as "Zhang *Gongzi*."²¹ The phrase "*gongzi*" literally means "son of a duke." Originating in the Western Zhou period (1045-722 BCE), the term was indeed used to refer to the sons of the feudal lords.²² In later times it has been commonly used to refer to not only sons of illustrious families but also young, talented and stylish men.

²¹ Yuan Kai, *Haisouji*, juan 4. The painting was no longer extant.

²² *Zhongwen da cidian*, 1469.

The Zhang family was not royalty, but was not without a claim to aristocracy. Zhang Zhong's great-grandfather, Zhang Xuan (d. 1303) was a powerful pirate and smuggler active in the last years of the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279). He and his partner Zhu Qing (1236-1303) were both recruited by the advancing Mongol army and were rewarded with high government positions after the fall of the Song regime. Zhang Xuan and Zhu Qing instituted the coastal shipping industry for the Yuan government, which was instrumental for the shipping of grain and goods from the wealthy south to the north. Their control over the sea route eventually roused the jealousy and suspicion of some Mongol officials; as a result, Zhang and Zhu were later charged with treason and executed in 1303.²³ Later the charge was redressed, and Zhang's sons and grandsons were again given government posts. Zhang Zhong's father Zhang Lin (ca. 1283-after 1334) once served as an imperial guard, which was an honorific position reserved only for sons of aristocratic families.²⁴ As mentioned earlier, Zhang Zhong had traveled to Dadu in his youth for official appointments.²⁵ His grandfather's rank qualified him for a seventh-rank position, but it appears that his northern sojourn was of limited success.²⁶ As Yang Weizhen put it euphemistically, Zhang "excelled in his studies, but never entered government service (*xueyou er bushi* 學優而不仕)."²⁷

Nevertheless, Zhang Zhong was proud of his illustrious family history. He commissioned memorial essays from his friend Wang Feng (1319-1385) on several occasions for his father, his famous great-grandfather, and even for a family heirloom of a stone table passed down from his great-grandfather. The Zhang family was well-known and well-respected in their hometown

²³ Wang Deyi et al eds., *Yuanren zhuanji ziliao suoyin* (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1979-1982), 1082-1083.

²⁴ Wang Feng (1319-1385), "Zhang xiaozhi," *Wuxiji*, juan 4.

²⁵ A poem dedicated to Zhang by Yuan Hua (1316-1382) as a farewell gift on the occasion, and a poem by Zhang Zhong himself, confirm his northern sojourn. See Yuan Hua, *Gengxuezhai shiji*, jian 3; Lai Liang, *Dayaji*, juan 8.

²⁶ Wang Feng, *Wuxiji*, juan 3.

²⁷ Yang Weizhen, "Unofficial Statesman," *Dongweiziji*, juan 16.

Songjiang, even though by Zhang Lin's time their political power was no longer significant. The nickname Zhang *Gongzi* can certainly be understood in the light of Zhang Zhong's family background. Moreover, the phrase *gongzi* also has a romantic connotation, referring to young men of talent, taste and style. It is possible that the nickname Zhang *Gongzi* was evoked by both Yang Weizhen and Yuan Kai to allude to Zhang's untimely death.

Since we have no clear information of the birth date of Zhang, we cannot be certain at what age he died. From Yang Weizhen's inscription we may infer that he died between 1360 and 1370.²⁸ Many of Zhang's friends, with whom he seemed to be on equal terms and of the same generation, were born around 1320. Assuming that Zhang was about the same age as these friends, he was at least forty years of age when he died and was no longer a "young man" by pre-modern standards. In fact, in a poem by his friend Zhu Fu (fl. fourteenth century), Zhang was referred to as the "Old Unofficial Statesman."²⁹ Nevertheless, the romance of an untimely death is irresistibly poetic, and in the present case it suits the poets' purpose to remember their departed friend as a young man talented in letters, romantic in sentiments, and stylish in appearance, as implied by the nickname *Gongzi*.

Yang Weizhen and Yuan Kai's effort to romanticize the image of their late friend was not lost on their fellow inscribers. Gu Jinzhong, Gu Wenzhao and Guan Shimin all used the phrase "*fengliu* 風流" in their poetic inscriptions, albeit with slightly different connotations. The choice of words is by no means coincidental. "*Fengliu*" is a term with a wide range of meaning, from the "propagation of the *feng*-poetry (ancient folksongs)" at its most ancient root, to "erotic dissipation" in popular fiction and drama.³⁰ In the present context, the term refers to an air of

²⁸ Yang Weizhen died in 1370; therefore, the inscription can be no later than 1370.

²⁹ Zhu Fu, "To Zhang Zizheng," in Lai Liang ed., *Dayaji*, juan 6.

³⁰ *Zhingwen da cidian*, 16160.

romantic elegance in a cultured manner. For example, Gu Wenzhao connected “*fengliu*” with Zhang Zhong’s artistic style as well as his personality:

Master Zhang put his brush [to paper] with <i>fengliu</i> (elegant gusto);	張公落筆最風流，
[I] recall him drawing pear blossoms and turtledoves.	憶向梨花寫鵝鳩。
Ten years later, I again see his painting in the capital;	十載都門重見畫，
How it grieves me to hear the flute song near by.	忽聽隣笛使人愁。

The ambiguity of the phrase *fengliu* in combination with the poetic vagueness renders the meaning of the first verse quite elusive. Does *fengliu* refer to Zhang’s artistic style, his act of painting, or his personality? It could have been all of the above. The verse may be ambiguous, but clearly the poet capitalized on the many shades of the phrase *fengliu* to romanticize the artist’s image.

In the last verse, Gu pointed out that it was the “flute song” that brought on the sorrowful sentiments associated with the scroll. It does not literally mean the music he happened to hear as he viewed the painting. The “flute song” refers to the inscription by the revered Iron Flute Daoist, Yang Weizhen. Gu Wenzhao’s poem attests to the powerful presence of Yang Weizhen’s inscription. Not only is it inscribed most prominently in the center of the entire composition, but its aggressive style also demands attention. Yang’s interpretation is indeed impossible to ignore, least by those who personally knew him. From the moment Yang inscribed the painting, it ceased to be just “a bird-and-flower painting by Zhang Zhong,” but became “a bird-and-flower painting *representing* Zhang Zhong, as commented upon by Yang Weizhen.” Each of the subsequent inscriptions builds on and reinforces this new identity of the scroll by

reiterating the words and sentiments of Yang Weizhen. The inscription by Gu Jinzhong, for example, can be read as a response to Yang's inscription alone:

Inscribed on the painting... is regrettable; ³¹	畫中題□□堪憐，
[I] adore only the <i>fengliu</i> (romantic) Old Iron Immortal. ³²	只愛風流老鐵仙。
Pity that the pure spirit cannot be called back.	可惜貞魂呼不起，
Year after year, the bird sings as the petals fall.	鳥啼花落自年年。

In other words, the poem sings Yang's praise, "how romantic an idea it is, to see the bird-and-flower painting as the late artist, and to wish that the departed spirit can be called back!" The idea is admirable not just because it is romantic, but especially because it is novel and unexpected. Except for the last verse, which adopts the bird and flower motif to reference the passage of time, the poem comments solely on Yang's romantic fancy, not the subject or even the artist anymore. It seems that with the addition of each inscription, the significance of the subject and the artist diminished. When the new inscriber approached the scroll, he reacted to the painting and all the previous inscriptions as a whole. In turn the new inscription inserted itself into the sequence and became part of the assembly. The scroll thus became a forum of meaning making as well community building. Guan Shimin's inscription, which appears to be the last of his generation, particularly addresses this sense of community:

³¹ Two characters are missing from the first verse. Judging from the following lines, the first verse probably comments on the sorrowful reflections of all the previous inscriptions to date, in order to set a context for his praise of Yang's inscription in particular.

³² "Old Iron Immortal" refers to Yang Weizhen, who signed his nickname "Old Iron" after his inscription.

I have not seen spring in my homeland for ten years;	十年不見故園春，
Half of those who inscribed this painting have passed away.	畫裡題詩半古人。
With old age, <i>fengliu</i> (romance) withers;	老去風流渾減盡，
Eastern Wind, flowers and bird, [only] sickens my heart.	東風花鳥易傷神。

Instead of commemorating the artist, Guan Shimin's poem laments the passing of the whole generation – the Songjian literati born under the Yuan regime. The phrase *fengliu* here no longer adheres to any particular person, but to the dying generation. The bird-and-flower painting and the previous inscriptions reminded Guan of the ravages of time on his old friends from his hometown Songjiang. Therefore, the poem transcends personal grievance to a collective one. The inscription is further removed from the original context of a bird-and-flower painting. Guan's inclusive approach to inscribing *Bird and Peach Blossoms*, though derived from the sentiment of previous inscriptions, marks the end of an era and another turning point of interpretation. As the discussions on later inscriptions will demonstrate, the distance of space and time diminished the display of personal feelings toward the artist. Instead, later inscribers adopted Yang Weizhen's interpretation of Zhang Zhong's painting as a point of departure, upon which they overlaid their own social network and addressed the concerns of their own time.

As Maurice Halbwachs argued, memories, even those we consider autobiographical and private, are socially constructed.³³ The construction of *collective memory*, albeit selective, strengthens the bond within a social group. The inscriptions to *Bird and Peach Blossoms* illustrate the selective process of reconstructing collective memory. Here, members of the Songjiang

³³ Maurice Halbwachs, Francis J. Ditter, Jr., and Vida Yazdi Ditter trans., *Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 22-23. See also Maurice Halbwachs, Lewis A. Coser trans., *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 38.

coterie recalled the Zhang Zhong they chose to remember. Their remembrance was evoked by that of Yang Weizhen, one of the most revered figures within their group, and their remembrance all agreed with his romanticized version of the deceased. In doing so, the group members were reassured of the harmony of their sentiments and their group identity. Another point central to Halbwachs's theoretical framework is that once a member is separated from the group in space or time, he or she tends to forget events associated with the social group.³⁴ Intriguingly, Guan Shimin's inscription is just such a case in point.

Guan Shimin was another of Yang Weizhen's prominent students who was a notable poet in his own right. After the founding of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), Guan was recruited by Zhu Zhen (1364-1424), the Prince of Chu, to join his personal staff.³⁵ Guan followed the Prince to his fiefdom in Hubei in 1376, and there he remained in the provincial capital of Wuchang until the end of his life.³⁶ Presumably, the first verse of the poem refers to Guan's absence from Songjiang, and it had been quite some time since he last saw his homeland – we may even date the inscription to 1386, if the "ten years" is to be taken literally.³⁷ The verse also suggests that the scroll had travelled from Songjiang to the capital Nanjing, where Gu Wenzhao inscribed the scroll, and then to Wuchang.³⁸ His separation from the Songjiang coterie in both space and time resulted in a very different kind of remembrance. Upon his encounter with the scroll, Guan Shimin did not recall any specifics of the artist or any of his former friends; instead, the scroll

³⁴ Halbwachs, *Collective Memory*, 24-30.

³⁵ Zhu Zhen was the sixth son of the founding emperor Zhu Yuanzhang (1328-1398, r. 1368-1398), and was made Prince of Chu in 1370.

³⁶ Editorial preface of the *Siku quanshu* edition of Guan Shimin's anthology, *Yinqiao ji*.

³⁷ The "ten years" in the first verse is most likely to be an approximate estimation of time. Moreover, Gu Wenzhao also used the phrase "ten years" in his inscription. Therefore, the phrase here could also have derived from Gu's inscription. Since Hu Yan could have only acquired painting after 1387 (see following discussion), it was probably more than "ten years" of absence from Songjiang when Guan Shimin inscribed the painting.

³⁸ In Gu Wenzhao's inscription he stated, "Ten years later I again saw his painting in the capital." The "capital" here refers to Nanjing, the first capital of the Ming dynasty. Therefore, we may infer that the painting was sent to Nanjing for Gu to inscribe.

was a reminder of his separation from his former social group. The sentiment expressed in Guan's inscription, therefore, is twofold: externally, he lamented the passing of his old friends; on a personal level, he was also grieved by the loss of contact with his former social group.

The fact that Guan Shimin was asked to inscribe the scroll while serving in Wuchang is also significant. It appears that the owner of the scroll intentionally sought out members of the Songjiang coterie to ask for inscriptions, even when they were far away from their hometown. The act of seeking out the friends of the subject of a memorial portrait for inscription was also a practice common of the time, which will be discussed in the following section.

In sum, the poetic inscription by Yang Weizhen commemorates the untimely death of Zhang Zhong. By evoking the story of Zhenzhen, Yang transformed the bird-and-flower painting into a memorial portrait. Yang's romantic interpretation was followed by four other contemporaries of the artist. All four poems credit Yang Weizhen for this innovative interpretation by directly or indirectly quoting Yang's inscription. All four poems reference the passage of time to emphasize the sense of loss. In addition to remembering a deceased friend, their inscriptions also honor their friendship and a sense of community shared by the members of the Songjiang coterie. Still, just as "old romance withers," personal feelings fade. Once the scroll passed out of the circle of the Songjiang literati, new inscriptions were added following a very different agenda: the agenda of a connoisseur and art collector.

3.2 The next generation: old social network as collectables

The collector who owned *Bird and Peach Blossoms* when Guan Shimin inscribed it was Hu Yan (1361-1443). Evidence of his ownership comes from two of the early Ming inscriptions by

Fan Gongliang (fl. fourteenth century) and Wu Mengqin (fl. late fourteenth to early fifteenth century). Both are dedicated to Hu and named him as the owner of the scroll.³⁹ Hu Yan was a man of many talents. In addition to his literary and scholarly achievements, he was interested in astronomy, astrology, geography, medicine and other miscellaneous studies. He had an illustrious political career: while holding an honorary position as Chancellor (*jijiu* 祭酒) of the National University (*guozixue* 國子學), he served as a political advisor to the Yongle Emperor (r. 1402-1424) and tutor to the crown prince for over twenty years.⁴⁰ What Hu's official biography failed to mention is that he was also greatly interested in connoisseurship and art collecting. During his tenure at the capital in Beijing, Hu appeared to have ample access to great art collections.⁴¹ A series of his inscriptions for masterpieces of calligraphy by Chu Suiliang (596-658), Yan Zhenqing (709-785), Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072), Cai Xiang (1012-1067) and Su Shi (1037-1101), and for paintings by Li Gonglin (1049-1106) and Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322), can be found in Bian Yongyu's (1645-1712) *Shigu tang shuhua huikao* 式古堂書畫彙考. He even wrote an essay comparing the different copies of Wang Xizhi's (303-361) *Orchid Pavilion Preface* he had seen.⁴² What concerns the present study, however, is Hu's art collecting activity before he reached the pinnacle of his political career in Beijing.

Hu Yan was a native of Nanchang, Jiangxi province. In 1387 he moved to Songjiang to hold the position of instructor (*jiaoyu* 教諭) at the prefecture college. He soon found his way into the social circles of local elites through literary and artistic exchange. Two painting inscriptions

³⁹ Fang Gongliang dedicated the inscription to "Hu Tongwen," and Wu Mengqin to "Hu Guangwen." Since the two inscribers were contemporaries, "Hu Tongwen" and "Hu Guangwen" were presumably the same person. What we know for certain is that Guangwen was one of Hu Yan's sobriquets. A poem by Tao Zongyi dedicated to Hu Yan refers to him as "Hu Guangwen." See Tao Zongyi, "Xiaoyuan jishi ciyun Hu Guangwen Ruosi 小園即事次韻胡廣文若思," *Nancun shiji*, juan 3.

⁴⁰ Hu's biography is included in the official Ming history, *Mingshi*. See Zhang Tingyu (1672-1755) et al eds., *Mingshi*, juan 147, 17-18

⁴¹ The Ming capital was moved from Nanjing to Beijing after the *coup d'etat* of the Yongle Emperor in 1402.

⁴² See Bian Yongyu (1645-1712) ed., *Shigu tang shuhua huikao*, juan 5, 113-115.

attest to his artistic activity in Songjiang: one is an inscription for Ma Yuan's (1190-1279) *Four Hoary-Heads of Shangshan* (*Shangshan sihao* 商山四皓);⁴³ the other is an essay titled *Record of the Thatched Hall of Nancun*, inscribed on Wang Meng's (1308-1385) *Picture of the True Hermitage of Nancun* (*Nancun zhenyi tu* 南村真逸圖).⁴⁴ The former inscription is dated 1392, and the latter 1393. In addition to the fact that Hu was teaching in Songjiang at the time he inscribed these paintings, both scrolls were liberally inscribed by members of the Songjiang coterie. Ma Yuan's *Four Hoary-Heads of Shangshan* was inscribed by Yang Weizhen as well as many other notable figures of Songjiang literati, including those who also inscribed *Bird and Peach Blossoms*: namely, Guan Shimin, Yuan Kai, Fan Gongliang and Gu Jinzhong.⁴⁵ The *Picture of the True Hermitage of Nancun* is a "painting of a scholar's retreat" representing the reclusive dwelling of Tao Zongyi, who also lived in Songjiang after the dynastic transition.⁴⁶ In other words, these inscriptions recorded Hu's active role both socially and artistically among the local literati.

Hu's artistic activities in Songjiang also extend to art collecting. Fan Gongliang, a local artist, dedicated his inscription on *Bird and Peach Blossoms* to Hu, saying, "Mr. Hu Tongwen newly purchased this painting, and asked me to inscribe it." Not only does it point out that Hu Yan acquired the scroll through purchase, but Fan's poetic inscription also suggests what might be the most valued element in the scroll:

⁴³ Ma Yuan's painting is in the collection of Cincinnati Museum of Art; reproduced in Avril, Ellen B., *Chinese art in the Cincinnati Art Museum* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 84-85.

⁴⁴ There were two versions of Tao Zongyi's studio by Wang Meng, but neither survived. See Choon Sang Leong, "Wang Meng's Development as an Artist as Seen through His Depiction of Scholars' Retreat" (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 1988), 194-195.

⁴⁵ The scroll contains thirty-seven inscriptions by late Yuan and early Ming literati from Songjiang and surrounding regions.

⁴⁶ Tao Zongyi's style name is Nancun, which literally means "South Village." For Hu Yan's inscription in the scroll, see Bian Yongyu, *Shigutang*, juan 14, 81-82.

The vigorous ink trace of the Old [Iron] Immortal is	老仙遺墨健如龍。
comparable to the dragons;	
Spotty red [flowers] like the scarlet lips breaking into a	笑破朱唇幾點紅。
smile.	
Left behind are the peach blossoms and the wild bird;	留得桃花與幽鳥。
So I shall not resent the wind at daybreak.	不教人恨五更風。

Instead of the subject or the artist, the very first thing Fan commented on was the “ink trace of the Old Iron Immortal (i.e. Yang Weizhen).” The bird-and-flower painting thus became secondary. It suggests that the most valuable element of this scroll, to an early Ming audience, is Yang’s inscription. Also, Fan’s inscription is far less sentimental compared to the ones by personal friends of the artist. Rather it celebrates the local artistic tradition of the previous generation. The “wind at daybreak” derives from a poem by Tang poet Wang Jian (766-ca. 831), referring to the wind ruthlessly blowing down the peach blossoms.⁴⁷ Therefore, the last couplet implies that although Yang Weizhen and Zhang Zhong had passed away, their ink traces, unlike vulnerable peach blossoms, will remain forever. Moreover, Fan’s praise of the scroll is more than an expression of pride in the local artistic tradition. As a dedicative inscription, it serves to congratulate the new owner of a worthy acquisition.

By contrast, while Fan Gongliang, being a native of Songjiang, may have felt qualified to comment on the legacy of Yang Weizhen and Zhang Zhong, there were others who approached the scroll solely as a possession of Hu Yan; therefore, their inscriptions reflect only their own relationship with the owner. For instance, Ye Jiantai’s inscription reads,

⁴⁷ See Wang Jian, *Wang Sima ji*, juan 8, 24.

Under the leaves are little plump red [fruits],	葉底小紅肥，
The spring bird speaks to the evening glow.	春禽語夕暉。
When its feathers are finely nurtured,	養成毛羽好，
[It shall] take flight, to the Shanglin [Park].	去向上林飛。

Ye's inscription is situated on the same piece of additional paper as that of Fan Gongliang. It is very likely that Hu Yan himself had this addition mounted to the scroll in order to collect more inscriptions. The inscription appears impersonal at first glance. The first couplet comments on the subject matter in a very general tone, describing what Ye Jiantai took to be the subject. In the second couplet, Ye offered his interpretation of the subject. The reference to the Shanglin Park, the name for the imperial park dating back to the Western Han dynasty (206 BCE-9 CE), makes the inscription a fitting gift for someone who may be seeking a government position.⁴⁸ The sentiment is echoed in another inscription by Shi Guangji (fl. fourteenth century), which reads,

The bird tucks its wings among the flowers;	斂翮花間鳥，
This early rest is but temporary.	早栖且暫時。
In the Shanglin [Park] are trees [adorned with] brocade,	上林羅綺樹，
Waiting for you, with their lofty branches.	待汝有高枝。

Shi's comment is more specific. His inscription is dedicated to someone who aspired to government service but did not find opportunities at the moment. Both inscriptions comforted

⁴⁸ The Shanglin Park was established by Emperor Wudi (156-87 BCE, r. 141-87 BCE) of the Western Han Dynasty (206 BCE-9 CE), expanding on the original site of the Qin (221-206 BCE) imperial park. The park was located near the capital Chang'an (present-day Xi'an) See *Zhongwen dacidian*, 316.

and encouraged the recipient to cultivate himself in anticipation of high office. On the one hand, Ye Jiantai and Shi Guangji have no personal ties with the Songjiang coterie; on the other hand, like Hu Yan, they both served in the early-Ming government. Their interpretation of the painted image, therefore, can be read as an optimistic reference to their present political situation and perhaps on the political ambition of Hu Yan.⁴⁹ Since the two inscriptions are undated, we cannot be certain of the specifics of the “Shanglin Park” allusion. Still, given Hu Yan’s eventual political success and eminent position in the Yongle Emperor’s court, we may infer that these two inscriptions are later in date, concerning events long after Hu Yan left his Songjiang post.

With regard to Hu Yan’s artistic activities in Songjiang, his approach to collecting inscriptions reveals an intriguing pattern. As mentioned earlier, the other inscription dedicated to Hu by name is the one by Wu Mengqin. Personally, Wu had no connection with the Songjiang coterie. However, Wu and Hu were both natives of Jiangxi province and they probably made their acquaintance before Hu moved to Songjiang. Most importantly, Wu Mengqin also served as a staff member of the Prince of Chu.⁵⁰ Serving the Prince of Chu at the same time were Guan Shimin, as mentioned earlier, and Bei Ao (fl. 1368-1398). Bei Ao was the second son of Bei Qiong (1297-1379), student, life-long friend, and biographer of Yang Weizhen. Bai Ao was also asked to inscribe *Bird and Peach Blossoms*.

Now these seemingly random inscriptions are all connected in a traceable social network: upon acquiring *Bird and Peach Blossoms* in Songjiang, a painting heavily inscribed by the local

⁴⁹ He Chuanxin discussed these two inscriptions as examples of early-Ming literati expressing their optimistic expectation towards the newly founded dynasty, based on the fact that both Ye Jiantai and Shi Guangji both served in the Ming government. See He Chuanxin, “Yuan dai shu hua ti yong wen hua – yi Li Shixing jiang xiang qiu wan juan wei li 元代書畫題詠研究 – 以李士行江鄉秋晚卷為例,” *Gugong xueshu jikan* 19:4 (2002), 18.

⁵⁰ Li Xian (1408-1466), *Ming yitong zhi* 明一統志 (reprinted in *Jinyin Wenyuange siku quanshu*, vols. 472-473. Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshu ju, 1983-1986), 39.

elites, Hu Yan was compelled to follow the preexisting “theme” and actively sought out persons connected to Zhang Zhong and, more importantly, Yang Weizhen, for inscriptions. Not satisfied merely with his own local acquaintances, Hu looked further afield for potential inscribers. It may have been suggested to him, perhaps by Wu Mengqin himself, that Wu had several colleagues with close social ties with Yang Weizhen and the Songjiang coterie. Therefore, Hu sent the scroll all the way to Wuchang, Hubei province, in order to acquire inscriptions by Guan Shimin and Bei Ao.⁵¹

On the one hand, Hu’s deliberate approach to collecting inscriptions conforms to the custom of the making of memorial portraits. Memorial portraits were often commissioned by the descendents or students of the deceased and circulated among friends to collect memorial essays and inscriptions. For instance, after his death, Yang Weizhen’s student Liu Yi (fl. fourteenth century) commissioned a half-length portrait and personally visited many of Yang’s friends to solicit eulogies.⁵² Within a year or two after Yang’s death, Liu travelled to Wuxi, Hangzhou (Qiantang), Jiaxin, Kuiji and other southern cities to collect inscriptions from Yang’s friends or scholars Liu deemed worthy of commenting on his late mentor.⁵³ *Portrait of Yang Weizhen*, now in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, is a rare surviving

⁵¹ In Wu Mengqin’s inscription he mentioned “spring in Chucheng.” Chucheng (the capital of Chu) refers to Wuchang; therefore, we may infer that the inscriptions by the staff members of the Prince of Chu were most likely executed in Wuchang rather than Songjiang.

⁵² The painting is unsigned and possibly by a professional artist. It is in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei, reproduced in *Gugong shuhua tulu* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1989-1995), vol. 20, 107-114. In addition to assembling the memorial portrait scroll to commemorate Yang Weizhen, Liu Yi also travelled from Songjiang to Jiaxin to ask Bei Qiong, Yang’s early student and life-long friend, to write a biography of Yang. See Bei Qiong, “*Song Liu Xingchu gui Yunjian xu 送劉性初歸雲間序*,” *Qingjiang wenji*, juan 11.

⁵³ The scroll contains thirteen inscriptions; the last one by Fan Weiyi (dates unknown) is dated 1581 and clearly not part of the original group. Only one of the twelve early-Ming inscriptions is dated: the one by Yang Ming (fl. fourteenth century) is dated 1372, approximately two years after Yang Weizhen’s death. The other inscription that gives some indication of the date of the scroll is that of Zhang Yi (1289-1371). Since Zhang died in 1371, the date of his inscription can be no later than that. Therefore, we may infer that the majority of the inscriptions were collected not long after Yang’s death in 1370. Three of the inscribers mentioned that Liu Yi personally visited them to solicit eulogies.

example of a once common social practice: although extant examples of memorial portrait are few, large numbers of eulogistic inscriptions to memorial portraits survived in contemporary literary sources. In short, *Portrait of Yang Weizhen* is a deliberate assembly of texts and image to commemorate a deceased literary legend. By contrast, Zhang Zhong's *Bird and Peach Blossoms* was transformed into a memorial portrait by the collective effort of its inscribers; nevertheless, this existing interpretation was so enticing that Hu Yan was compelled to follow suit. He also set out to collect inscriptions from people who had strong ties with the Songjiang coterie, as the previous owner(s) had done before him.

On the other hand, Hu had no personal connection with Zhang Zhong or Yang Weizhen. He may have come to admire the Songjiang artistic tradition, but strictly speaking he was not part of the tradition. His role as an outsider makes his approach even more intriguing. The inscriptions were treated as collectables, but it was more than inscriptions that Hu collected. Seeking out surviving members of the old Songjiang coterie for their inscriptions, Hu traced the old social network in order to not only preserve it but also to enlarge his own social connections. In this case, Hu's artistic and social interests converged in one work of art, which again attests to the strong social dimension of text-image objects to the literati class.

To modern eyes, Zhang Zhong's *Bird and Peach Blossom* appears to be a modest bird-and-flower painting that somehow suffered the "misfortune" of being overpowered by a chaotic flood of inscriptions. Yet the inscriptions are the key to understand how the scroll was perceived by pre-modern audiences and how it functioned in their social milieu. Upon further investigation, patterns of social exchange emerge out of the seeming chaos. Firstly, the meaning of the painting changed with each addition of inscriptions. The scroll started its life as probably a well-wishing gift, until Yang Weizhen's inscription transformed it to a memorial portrait.

Each of the later inscribers reacted to both text and image as a whole, meanwhile adding new layers of meaning with his composition. Granted, the practice of inscribing painting allows the audience to participate in the meaning-making process of a work of art. It must be acknowledged that, nevertheless, the overwhelming responses toward Zhang Zhong's *Bird and Peach Blossoms* were a direct result of Yang's unexpected interpretation and a testimony to his social prestige among the southern literati.

Secondly, the meaning-making process via inscriptions is socially driven: an awareness of the social relationship (or the lack of) between the inscriber and the artist, previous inscribers or the recipient is always present just beneath the surface. Particularly in the case of inscriptions by members of the Songjiang coterie, the scroll was for them a forum of community building, in which they affirmed their social bonds. By reiterating the words and sentiments of each other, members of the Songjiang coterie were reassured of their collective memory which shaped their identity. This assembly of texts and image evidently holds great symbolic and value beyond a simple bird-and-flower painting: Hu Yan's active role in soliciting inscriptions from members of the Songjiang coterie demonstrates his appreciation of this symbolic value. *Bird and Peach Blossoms* and its inscriptions again illustrates the social functions of art objects among the late-Yuan literati, whose socially-driven approach to painting inscriptions continued to be expanded and explored by later generations.

Chapter 4. The Social Art of Painting Inscriptions in Historical Perspective

The three previous chapters discuss the text-image relationship of three works of art produced in the last years of the Yuan dynasty. Zou Fulei's *A Breath of Spring*, Yao Tingmei's *Leisure Enough to Spare*, and Zhang Zhong's *Bird and Peach Blossoms* differ not only in their subject matter and format, but also in the circumstances in which the painted images and the inscriptions were produced. While the text-image relationship varies from one work to the other, a constant theme, nevertheless, emerges: the inscriptions of these three works of art, and by extension many others produced in this particular historical context, reveal the socially-oriented nature of painting and painting inscriptions in the mid-fourteenth century. In each case, the social relationship between the artist or the owner and the inscriber, and oftentimes that of the previous inscribers and the later ones, comes to the forefront, while the artistic merits of the painted image become secondary. The approach may seem drastic and counterintuitive at first; however, it was neither revolutionary nor unique to painting inscriptions produced in the late Yuan period. We may even argue that inscribing painting is inherently a social act. This social dimension, however, has not been fully explored in previous studies of painting inscriptions.

This chapter traces the development of painting inscriptions from the fourth to the fourteenth century in order to place the late Yuan practice in a historical context. Firstly, the chapter establishes that painting inscriptions evolved along with the increasing participation of the literati class in the art of painting. Furthermore, as a literary genre, painting inscription was informed by the current literary trends. Last but not least, the shifting relationship between text and image was largely determined by the function and value of works of art as perceived by the literati class. The present study makes no pretense to a comprehensive survey of the history of painting inscriptions; rather, through a series of case studies the chapter aims to highlight the

social dimension that has been overlooked in previous scholarship.

4.1 Plural histories of painting inscriptions

To examine the social dimension of painting inscriptions, the first question we need to address is the definition of “painting inscription.” The seemingly simple question is surprisingly difficult to answer. If we consider any kind of texts accompanying imagery as “painting inscription,” we have to allow archaeological evidence to argue that the crudest scribbles next to any primitive imagery would be a sort of “painting inscription,” and we may find that there was “painting inscription” as early as there was written language in China. However, the painting inscriptions of the fourteenth century discussed in this dissertation clearly share little in common with the mythical writings on a Warring-States silk painting, or the identification cartouche next to a Han tomb mural.¹ The present study is not concerned with the “origin” or the “earliest example” of painting inscriptions; rather, it focuses on how

¹ The “origin” or the “earliest example” of painting inscriptions is an issue of great scholarly interest, and opinions on the question vary widely. On the one hand, pre-modern studies tend to rely on historical documentation. For example, some trace the “earliest” reference of “painting inscriptions” to Wang Yi’s (ca. 89-158) *Chuci zhangju*, the earliest annotated commentary on Qu Yuan’s (ca. 340-278 BCE) *Chuci*. Wang Yi stated that Qu Yuan inscribed his poetry on the painted walls of the ancestral shrine of the King of Chu. For more discussion of pre-modern views of the issue, see Yi Ruofen, *Su Shi tihua wenxue yanjiu* 蘇軾題畫文學研究 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1999) 13-15. Some modern scholars also adopted this approach. For example, in his pioneering study on painting inscriptions, Aoki Masaru (1887-1964) identified Cao Zhi’s (192-232) *Huazan* 畫讚 as the earliest example of an painting inscription. See Aoki Masaru, “*Daiga bungaku no hatten* 題画文学の発展,” reprinted in *Aoki Masaru zenshū* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1969-1975), vol. 2, 491-528. On the other hand, discoveries of modern archaeology continue to reshape the definition and history of painting inscriptions. Warring-States silk painting, for example, is often discussed as a precursor of later painting inscriptions. For studies on Warring-States silk painting, see Shang Chengzuo 商承祚, “Zhanguo Chu boshu shu lue 戰國楚帛書述略,” *Wenwu*, 1964: 9, 8-20; see also Li Xueqin 李學勤, “Shi lun Changsha zidanku Chu boshucan pian 試論長沙子彈庫楚帛書殘片,” *Wenwu*, 1992: 11, 36-39. The main divergence of opinions lies on the definition of painting inscriptions – whether any writing that accompanies images can be considered a form of painting inscription, and whether these early writings bear any direct relation with later painting inscriptions. In the present study, I discuss “early” painting inscriptions only when they are directly related to later literati inscriptions in format and content.

painting inscriptions of the fourteenth century evolved into their distinctive shape, and how they furthered the development of the practice in the following centuries.

For the benefit of the present discussion, I will define “painting inscriptions” as literary compositions made for and inscribed on paintings. Admittedly, this definition emphasizes the physical connection between text and image and excludes other literary genres closely associated with the practice of inscribing paintings—especially the genre of “poetry *on* painting (*yonghua* 詠畫).” The genre of “poetry on painting” and its impact on the practice of inscribing paintings will be discussed below.

While painting inscriptions come in numerous forms and formats, their content can be categorized into three types: aesthetic, interpretive and social. A painting inscription functions in one or more of these categories. First, as painting inscriptions are made to accompany painted images, they can describe the visual experience of the viewer and offer aesthetic judgments based on this visual experience. Sometimes this kind of aesthetic judgment goes beyond simple appreciation and enters the realm of connoisseurship. Secondly, painting inscriptions can interpret the painted image, which is not necessarily to say they interpret the artists’ intention. More than often these derivative interpretations go beyond what is actually in the painted image and infuse it with didactic, moralistic or political messages. Last but not least, as established in the previous chapters, painting inscriptions can comment on and celebrate social relationships. It must be understood that there is no clear dividing line between the three; quite the contrary, often they overlap each other.

Earlier studies on painting inscriptions have often overlooked the significance of the social dimension of painting inscriptions. It is evident in their definition of the function or value of painting inscriptions. For example, in his pioneering study of painting inscriptions, Yu Junzhi

suggested that painting inscriptions are to “appreciate, criticize and authenticate” the painted images.² Xu Haiqin highlighted the “artistic, historical and connoisseurship” values of painting inscriptions in his book titled *Tibaxue* (Studies of Inscriptions).³ Similar views are echoed in more recent studies, such as Gao Wen and Qi Wenbang’s “*Xiancun zuizao de yishou ti hua shi* (the earliest extant example of painting inscriptions),” in which the authors define painting inscriptions as literary compositions about painted images, which describe “the composition, the biographical background of the artists and their artistic achievement, as well as reveal the artistic thoughts and ideals of the painting.”⁴ From these statements we may conclude that earlier studies on painting inscriptions focus almost exclusively on the aesthetic aspect. Although social relationships, in the form of biographical or historical information found in painting inscriptions, have been used as a tool to establish the authenticity of a painting, they have never been seen as a significant focus of study.

As the studies of painting inscriptions gained momentum in the past two decades, more scholars became interested in painting inscriptions as a literary genre, and the literary merits of painting inscriptions, especially poetic inscriptions by major authors, have been widely discussed in the field of Chinese literature.⁵ In the field of art history, the interpretive potential of inscriptions has also received significant scholarly attention in recent years. For example, in her study of Northern Song landscape painting and its poetic counterparts, Alfreda Murck

² Yu, Junzhi 虞君質, “Zhongguo hua tiba zhi yanjiu 中國畫題跋之研究,” *National Palace Museum Quarterly*, vol. 1 no. 2 (1966), 14.

³ Xu, Haiqin 許海欽, *Tibaxue: Zhongguo wenhua yishu shi* 題跋學—中國藝術文化史 (Taipei: Haofeng chubanshe, 1985), 167-174.

⁴ Gao Wen, Chi Wenbang, “Xiancun zuizao de yishou ti hua shi,” *Wenxue yichan*, 1992:2, 93-94.

⁵ These studies are by and large published in Chinese, with major efforts focusing on important literary figures of the Tang and Song dynasties. For a summary of recent studies of painting inscriptions, see Yi Ruofen, “Tihua wenxue yanjiu gaishu,” in Yi Roufen, *Guankan, xushu, shenmei: Tang Song tihua wenxue lunji* 觀看·敘述·審美：唐宋題畫文學論集 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiusuo, 2005), 29-44. However, as these studied focus almost exclusively on poetic painting inscriptions, inscriptions in prose format are not part of the scholarly discourse.

demonstrated how Northern Song writers encoded covert political messages in painted images via painting inscriptions.⁶

With regard to the social aspect, while scholars generally acknowledge painting inscriptions as a form of social writing, its historical development and exact mechanism have not been systematically explored. Moreover, while inscribing painting is inherently a social act, social relationships have not always been the main focus of painting inscriptions as they were in the cases discussed in the previous chapters. Social relationships, however, did not suddenly become the main subject of painting inscriptions in the fourteenth century. Through a series of case studies, the following discussion will trace the development of the social aspect of painting inscriptions. Furthermore, I will investigate the historical context under which it came to the foreground and became the guiding principle of the aesthetic and interpretive comments expressed in later painting inscriptions.

4.2 Painting inscriptions from the Tang dynasty and earlier

The practice of inscribing painting was at its formative stage during the Six Dynasties period (222-589) and the Tang dynasty (618-907). It is no coincidence that during those time periods we also witness the germination and first flowering of the literati culture. The practice of artists inscribing their paintings with their own literary compositions and inviting friends to inscribe their paintings arose alongside with the participation of the educated elite in the art of painting. An early example of this practice, though the painting no longer extant, is recorded in a poem by Zhi Dun (314-366) of the Eastern Jin dynasty (316-420). The preface to the poem

⁶ Alfreda Murck, *Poetry and Painting in Song China: The Subtle Art of Dissent* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

states that it was composed for and inscribed on a portrait painting by Zhi's friend Sun Chou (320-377):⁷

Sun Changle (Sun Chou) made an image of the Daoist sitting in meditation, and he composed an encomium for it. So he may bow to it with wholeheartedness, and seek the divine secret with measurements [of the mind.] He pictured the precipitous mountains and forests, and he visualized the Daoist in them. I marvel at his refined work, and I admire his excellent [literary] composition—I cannot remain silent. Therefore, I composed this poem to add to the left [of the painting].

孫長樂作道士坐禪之像，並而贊之。可謂因俯對以寄誠心，求參焉於衡軛。圖巖林之絕勢，想伊人之在茲。余精其制作，美其嘉文，不能默已。聊著詩一首，以繼於左。

Clearly, this portrait of a Daoist priest by Sun Chou was inscribed by the artist himself and was presented to Zhi Dun to solicit an inscription. Although such an unequivocal case is rare—in most cases, we cannot tell if an early text about a painting was actually inscribed on a painting by its title or content—Zhi Dun's inscription demonstrates that, as early as the fourth century, the prototype of painting inscriptions as we know it had already taken shape. Zhi Dun and Sun Chou were both distinguished members of the Eastern Jin elite society: Zhi Dun was an eminent Buddhist monk and philosopher;⁸ Sun Chou was a high government official and talented literatus. They moved in the same circles as Xie An (320-385), Wang Xizhi (303-361),

⁷ The poem is discussed as the "earliest example" of painting inscriptions in Gao and Chi, "Xiancun zuizao de yishou ti hua shi," 93-94.

⁸ For biographical information on Zhi Dun, see Fang Xuanling (579-648) et al eds., *Jinshu*, juan 67, 27-28.

and many other Eastern Jin elites.⁹ Zhi Dun's inscription on Sun Chou's painting demonstrates that presenting painting inscriptions as gifts was already part of the social fabric among the educated elite of the Eastern Jin period.

With further examination of its content, however, the poetic inscription reveals a rather indifferent attitude toward the painted image. The poem that followed the preface is a five-character, ancient-style poem of twenty-eight verses. The first part reads,

Cloudy peaks rise from the great wilderness;	雲岑竦太荒，
Here and there, beautiful mountains scatter.	落落英山布。
Fragrant springs issue from winding ravines;	回壑佇蘭泉，
Elegant trees cluster atop scenic summits.	秀嶺攢嘉樹。
Among the dense vegetation tarry wandering birds;	蔚蒼微游禽，
At the end of streams and trails, steep cliffs stand—	崢嶸絕溪路。
Amidst them, is Chongxizi;	中有沖希子，
There he sits upright, contemplating the Beginning of all	端坐摹太素。

things.

The poem continues to praise the refined character of the subject, the forenamed “Chongxizi,” and elaborate on Zhi Dun's view on the meditative state of mind. The main focus of the poem is on philosophical ideas, and it falls into the greater trend of “pure talk (*qingtan* 清談)” popular among the Six-dynasties elites. The poem made no further mention of the artist or the relationship between Sun Chou or Zhi Dun. Had the preface to the poem been lost, we would never be able to identify the poem as a painting inscription, let alone the parties involved

⁹ Fang, *Jinshu*, juan 80, 8.

in its composition. However, it is important to note that the preface was once inscribed on the painting as well (“Therefore, I composed this poem to add to the left [of the painting]”). The practice signifies that recording the social circumstance that led to the dedication of the inscription is an integral part of inscribing, which demonstrates that inscribing painting is inherently a social act.

Furthermore, the inscription never alludes to the subject of Zhi Dun’s commentary as a painted image and an aesthetic object. While the flattering description of the landscape can be read as a compliment to the artist, Zhi Dun made no direct comment on the skill or ingenuity of the artist. In other words, Zhi Dun made no effort to distinguish the painted landscape from the real landscape, nor the portrait from the real person. The approach is similar to that of a *huazan* 畫贊, or encomium on a portrait, one of the ancient precursors of painting inscriptions. *Huazan* is an inscription composed to accompany a memorial portrait that can be traced back to the Spring-and-Autumn period (770-476 BCE) and became prevalent during the Western Han dynasty (206 BCE-9 CE).¹⁰ The format, with few exceptions, is rhymed poetry of four-character verses; it is usually short – from four to ten verses – and therefore very concise.¹¹ As the format developed during the time when the sole function of painting was didactic, so the content of *huazan* is highly moralistic: it sums up the achievement of the subject and the moral lesson to be learned from the person. The portrait itself serves as a reminder of the subject; therefore, a *huazan* is not concerned with the painted image but the person represented by it only. Similarly, Zhi Dun’s inscription comments only on the person represented in the portrait, not the painting itself. The painted image itself did not commonly become the main focus of inscriptions until

¹⁰ Zhang Kefeng 張克鋒, “Lun Wei Jin nanbei chao huazan 論魏晉南北朝畫贊,” *Dongnan wenhua*, 2007: 3, 83.

¹¹ Sun, Yaobin 孫耀斌, “Liu Xie lun songzan zhi liubian—jian lun huazan he tihuashi 劉勰論頌、贊之流變—兼論畫贊與題畫詩,” *Zhongshan daxue yanjiusheng xuekan*, 2001: 2, 85.

the Tang dynasty.

The most significant development in the history of painting inscriptions during the Tang dynasty is the emergence of “poetry on painting (*yonghua* 詠畫)” as a fledgling genre of literature. Poetry on painting is not necessarily painting inscription: the genre includes poems about an artist, a particular painting, or sometimes the art of painting in general. Despite the frequent use of “inscribing painting (*tihua* 題畫)” as part of the title, it is not always clear whether a poem was actually inscribed on a painting. Nevertheless, poetry on painting had significant impact on the development of later painting inscriptions in terms of the format and content. More specifically, poetry on painting treats painting as aesthetic objects and emphasizes the aesthetic experience of the viewer, which departs greatly from the earlier practice derived from ancient *huazan*.

Poetry on painting has garnered much scholarly attention for literary merit as well as aesthetic ideas. For example, Du Fu’s *A Song on Painting – to General Cao Ba* has been discussed widely both as a literary masterpiece and an important piece of aesthetic criticism.¹² Although not a poem composed to inscribe on a specific painting, Du Fu’s *A Song on Painting*

¹² Du Fu’s poetry on painting has garnered intense scholarly interest in the past few decades. For some of the general discussions of Du Fu’s poetry on painting, see Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, “Du Fu de tihuashi 杜甫的題畫詩,” in Xu Fuguan, *Zhongguo yishu jingshen* (Taizhong: Donghai daxue, 1966), 259-261; Liu Jicai 劉繼才, “Du Fu bushi tihuashi de shouchuang zhe – jianlun tihuashi de chansheng yu fazhan 杜甫不是題畫詩的首創者 – 兼論題畫詩的產生與發展,” *Liaoning daxue xuebao*, 1982: 2, 66; Cheng Songliu 成松柳, “Du Fu tihuashi jiqi shenmei guan 杜甫題畫詩及其審美觀,” *Caotang*, 1985: 2, 52. He Genhai 何根海, “Du Fu tihuashi huihua meixue sixiang chutan 杜甫題畫詩繪畫美學思想初探,” *Du Fu yanjiu conkan*, 1991: 4, 46-50. Li Qi 李栖, “Du Fu de tihuashi 杜甫的題畫詩,” *Zhongguo wenhua yuekan*, no. 145 (November, 1991), 94-104. Specifically on *A Song on Painting – to General Cao Ba*, see Li Yunyi 李雲逸, “Tan Danqing yin zhen Cao jianjun Ba 談丹青引贈曹將軍霸,” *Xibe daxue xuebao*, 1980: 2, 47-52; Shih Shou-chien 石守謙, “Gan wei huagu bu huarou’ biejie – jianlun ganshen tongling guan zai Zhongguo huashi shang de moluo 幹惟畫骨不畫肉別解 – 兼論感神通靈觀在中國畫史上的沒落,” *Yishuxue* vol. 4 (March 1990), 165-192; Li Qi 李栖, “You Du Fu de jianshang guan kan ‘Gan wei huagu bu huarou, renshi hualiu qi diaosang 由杜甫的鑑賞觀看「幹惟畫骨不畫肉，忍使驂騮氣凋喪」,” *Gaoxiong shida xuebao*, no. 3 (March, 1992), 127-139; Yang Li 楊力, “Lüe lun Du Fu tihuashi de huihua meixue sixiang 略論杜甫題畫詩的繪畫美學思想,” *Zhongguo yunwen xuekan*, 1997: 2, 99-103.

encompasses many of the major themes of later painting inscriptions:

The General is descended from Emperor Wu of Wei,	將軍魏武之子孫，
Now a commoner of humble means.	於今為庶為清門。
Conquerors and their valor perish,	英雄割據雖已矣，
But the beauty of their cultured bearing remains.	文彩風流猶尚存。
He first studied calligraphy after Lady Wei,	學書初學衛夫人，
He only regrets not surpassing Wang Xizhi.	但恨無過王右軍。
In the art of painting he forgets old age;	丹青不知老將至，
Wealth and fame drift by like clouds.	富貴於我如浮雲。
During the Kaiyuan years, he was often summoned by the Emperor,	開元之中常引見，
With imperial favor, he ascended the South-Wind Palace.	承恩數上南熏殿。
When the mural of the Lingyan Pavilion faded,	凌煙功臣少顏色，
The General, wielding his brush, refreshed the faces of the eminent statesmen.	將軍下筆開生面。
He crowned loyal ministers with coronets of office;	良相頭上進賢冠，
He furnished mighty marshals with arrows at their girdles.	猛將腰間大羽箭。
Every hair of Duke Bao and Duke E came to life;	褒公鄂公毛髮動，
He captured their valiant bearing in a heroic battle.	英姿颯爽猶酣戰。
The late Emperor had a horse, known as Jade Flower,	先帝天馬玉花驄，

Numerous artists had portrayed it in various appearances.	畫工如山貌不同。
One day, the horse was led to the red palace stairs, There it stood, and swift wind blew through the palace gates.	是日牽來赤墀下， 迴立闔闔生長風。
The General was summoned to brush the silk, With strenuous effort, he concentrated his spirit and craft.	詔謂將軍拂絹素， 意匠慘澹經營中。
Moments later, the dragon-horse was born of the ninth-level sky, Banishing earthly horses of ten thousand generations.	斯須九重真龍出， 一洗萬古凡馬空。
The [painted] Jade Flower was presented to the imperial throne, A mirror image of the horse in the courtyard.	玉花卻在御榻上， 榻上庭前屹相向。
With smiles, Emperor rewarded him with gold, While the grooms and servants marveled with envy.	至尊含笑催賜金， 圉人太僕皆惆悵。
His student Han Gan understood the secret of his master's art early; He too can portray horses in their various attitudes.	弟子韓幹早入室， 亦能畫馬窮殊相。
But picturing the flesh, he fails to draw the bone, So that even the finest are deprived of their spirit.	幹惟畫肉不畫骨， 忍使驂騮氣凋喪。
The General's art is excellent because he captures the spirit;	將軍畫善蓋有神，

Only when met with a distinguished gentleman did he draw his likeness;	必逢佳士亦寫真。
Now, wandering in a world of disorder,	即今飄泊干戈際，
He sketches the petty passerby from time to time.	屢貌尋常行路人。
At the end of road, he is eyed with disdain by the vulgar.	途窮反遭俗眼白，
There is none so unfortunate like him in this world.	世上未有如公貧。
Just look at those with great fame since ancient time;	但看古來盛名下，
They too were haunted by hardship and frustration. ¹³	終日坎壈纏其身。

The poem starts with recounting the illustrious pedigree of Cao Ba (fl. eighth century), legendary artist of the High Tang period. Next Du Fu related the two glorious episodes in Cao Ba's career as an artist – the Lingyan Pavilion murals and the portrait of Emperor Xuanzong's (685-762, r. 712-756) favorite horse. The two imperial commissions testify to Cao Ba's artistic achievement in two of the most important genres of Tang painting – figure and horse painting. The imperial favor, however, is described in stark contrast with Cao Ba's present predicament: an impoverished artist making his living by painting the “petty passerby.” In this poem Du Fu expressed his great admiration and sympathy for the artist by making Cao Ba's art and career the focus of his composition.

In addition to its literary merit, the poem is of great interest to art historians because of Du Fu's controversial comparison between Cao Ba and his student Han Gan (d. 780), and the aesthetic value underlying this comparison. With regard to the development of painting

¹³ Translation by author. For alternative English translations, see David Hawkes, *A Little Primer of Tu Fu* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 133-144, and Witter Bynner, *The Jade Mountain: A Chinese Anthology, being Three Hundred Poems of the Tang Dynasty, 618-906* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1951), 163-165.

inscription, the significance of Du Fu's poetry on painting, and by extension those by other Tang authors, is that it established the paradigm for later painting inscriptions both in terms of format and content.

First, as seen in Du Fu's *A Song on Painting*, the artist and his achievement come to the forefront of poetry on painting. Compared to Zhi Dun's inscription, *A Song on Painting* gives greater details of the artist's life and personality in the most flattering terms. By praising the artist's skill the poet recognized the artistic merits of his work. This new development coincides with the increasing number of the educated elites taking up paint brushes and therefore elevating the social status of painters. These precursors of literati artists were social equals of the scholar officials, and for that reason some of their names and deeds survive today, even when their works do not. By the words of the great poets artists like Cao Ba achieved legendary status in history, and Du Fu's praises for Cao, especially those on his horse painting, have been echoed again and again in later painting criticism and inscriptions. Nevertheless, the poem should also be read in a social context—it was intended as a gift, and as a social gift it cannot be expected to be an objective statement of criticism. Exchanging poetry as gifts, of course, is a common element of social intercourse among the literati. Later painting inscriptions are but an extension of this practice.¹⁴

Second, Tang-dynasty poetry on painting also created a wealth of vocabulary for describing painted images and painting techniques, from which later painting inscriptions often drew their inspiration. In fact, the influence of Tang poetry, not just poetry on painting, on the development of both painting and painting inscriptions is so profound and far-reaching that it

¹⁴ The exchange of poetry as social gifts was already a common practice by Tang times. For example, Eva Shan Chou discussed a series of poems by Du Fu composed as a social obligation to his host in "Tu Fu's 'General Ho' Poems: Social Obligations and Poetic Response," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (Jun., 2000), 165-204.

is impossible to discuss in any detail in the present context. Suffice it to say that the romantic and imaginative language of Tang poetry on painting truly brings the aesthetic experience of appreciating a painted image to the forefront. This sensuous delight in painted images can be found in many Tang poems on painting, such as Du Fu's *The Painted Hawk*:

Wind and frost swirl up from the white silk surface,	素練風霜起，
So superb, this painting of the gray hawk!	蒼鷹畫作殊。
Shoulders hunched, he schemes to outwit the wily hare;	攬身思狡兔，
Glaring to one side like a scowling barbarian.	側目似愁胡。
Foot cord and ring, a gleam bright enough to grasp;	條鏃光堪擿，
By pillar and eaves, poised to come if you should call.	軒楹勢可呼。
When will he swoop down on those lesser birds,	何當擊凡鳥，
Feathers and blood splattered over the barren plain? ¹⁵	毛血灑平蕪。

In the compact format of a five-character regulated poem, Du Fu described what is pictured in the painting – most likely a hawk standing on a perch. Yet the painted hawk, by Du's description, is anything but static: the rushing sound of frosty wind assails the viewer's senses when the painting is unrolled; and the hunched hawk, glaring at its pray, is poised to strike at any moment. Du Fu evoked the senses of sound and speed to stress the vividness of the painted image, which is in itself a great compliment to the skill of the artist. As one of Du Fu's earlier works, the tone of *The Painted Hawk* is imaginative, daring and idealistic: particularly in the last couplet, the poet expressed a wish for the fierce hawk to "swoop down on those lesser

¹⁵ Translation by Burton Watson, with minor modifications; see Burton Watson, *The Selected Poems by Du Fu* (New York: Columbia, 2002), 3.

birds,” which can be read as his own ambition to challenge the corrupted political system.¹⁶ In describing this imaginary action, Du Fu gave meaning to the painted hawk beyond what was physically present in the painting. Du Fu is known to be the first writer to have extensively used this interpretive approach – likening the painted image to the real thing itself, and then introducing social or political issues relating to the subject of the painting.¹⁷ For this reason Du Fu was considered the “originator” of poetry on painting by traditional critics.¹⁸ While modern scholarship continues to push the search for the “original” painting inscriptions to earlier dates, this old-fashioned notion indeed has some ring of truth: Du Fu is certainly the most crucial figure in the development of poetry on painting and later painting inscriptions.¹⁹ As one of the most revered literary figures of the Northern Song literati, Du Fu’s poetry had a defining impact on works of the Northern-Song writers, and they further explored and expanded Du’s interpretive approach.²⁰

4.3 Painting inscriptions of the Song dynasty

The Song dynasty (960-1279) is the most crucial point in the history of painting inscriptions.

There are, however, distinctly different approaches to composing inscriptions for painted

¹⁶ For a discussion of the poem, see Zhang Baoshi 張寶石, *Souqi jueao bibu zhaohua – Du Fu Huayin jiedu 搜奇抉奧 筆補造化 – 杜甫《畫鷹》解讀*, *Mingzhuo xinshang*, 2006:7, 69-72.

¹⁷ Ronald C. Egan, “Poems on Paintings: Su Shih and Huang T’ing-chien,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 43, no. 2 (Dec., 1983), 418.

¹⁸ Du Fu was considered by early Qing critic Shen Deqian (1673-1769) as the originator of the genre of poetry on painting for Du’s poems “discussed issues far beyond the painting images.” Shen’s remark was adopted by Aoki Masaru in his pioneering treatise, “*Daiga bungaku no hatten 題画文学の発展*,” published in 1937, and this view was accepted rather without question by many other scholars. See Shen Deqian 沈德潛, *Shuoshi zuiyu 說詩碎語* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1979), 245.

¹⁹ Judging from the number of surviving works, Du Fu was the most prolific author in the genre of poetry on painting of the Tang dynasty. For a comprehensive bibliography of studies on Du’s poetry on painting, see Yi Roufen, *Guankan, xushu, shenmei: Tang Song tihua wenxue lunji* (Taipei: Zhong yang yan jiu yuan Zhongguo wen zhe yan jiu suo, 2005), 387-392.

²⁰ Li Qi 李栖, *Liang Song tihuashi lun 兩宋題畫詩論* (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1994), 72-74.

images in the Northern and Southern Song periods. The Northern Song literati, particularly the literary giants of the eleventh century – namely, Su Shi (1037-1101), Huang Tingjian (1145-1105) and company – played a decisive role in the evolution of literati painting and painting theories. As they sought to establish a distinct aesthetics for “scholar’s painting (*shifu hua* 士夫畫),” they also redefined the relationships between text and image. Their Southern-Song counterparts, on the other hand, began to consciously explore the social potentials of art objects through the use of inscriptions. The following discussion examines examples from both the Northern and the Southern Song periods in order to illustrate the shift of focus of painting inscriptions from the aesthetic experience to social relationships.

The Northern Song dynasty (960-1127) is considered by many the golden age of poetry on painting both in terms of quantity and quality. According to a survey of extant poetry on painting of the Tang and Song dynasties by Yi Roufen, there are 1,368 poems on painting (mostly painting inscriptions) composed by one hundred eighty nine authors during the one-hundred-sixty-seven-year period of the Northern Song dynasty, contrasting to the two hundred fifty five poems produced in the three and a half preceding centuries of the Tang and Five Dynasties periods.²¹ The exponential growth in the number of authors and works reflects the growing significance of the art of painting in the cultural life of the educated elite. Furthermore, as noted by Ronald Egan, the most important difference between Tang and Northern Song poetry on painting is their relative attitude towards the painted images: in a Tang poem on painting, the painted image is seen as a reminder of the real object; therefore, the “realness” of the painted image and the artist’s reality to faithfully capture the subject are emphasized, albeit in grandiose and fantastic language. On the other hand, the Northern Song

²¹ Yi Roufen, “Tang Song tihua wenxue,” 92.

poets began to treat the painted images as aesthetic objects “encrusted with layers of literary and artistic associations” and, in the case of literati painting, a reflection of the inner character of the artist.²² As a result, the Northern Song poetry on painting covers a wider range of artistic themes in greater depth than ever before.

4.3.1 In search of a friend who “understands the music”

Among various artistic issues, the Northern Song scholar-officials were particularly keen to distinguish “scholar’s painting (*shifu hua* 士夫畫)” from paintings by professional artists with extensive discussion. It is a subject well discussed elsewhere.²³ Their ideals of “scholar’s painting” set the course for later development in literati painting and the tone of aesthetic criticism for generations that followed. Nowhere is this passion more apparent than in their painting inscriptions concerning the qualities of scholar’s painting and their moral and symbolic significance. One of the most well-known cases is the series of poems commentating on a horse painting by Han Gan in Li Gonglin’s (ca. 1041-1106) collection by five Northern Song authors: the first of the series was composed by Su Che (1039-1112), possibly at the request of Li Gonglin, on a painting known as *Three Horses* by Han Gan.²⁴ In the poem Su Che first described the three horses, seemingly competing with each other in strength and speed. He further praised Han Gan’s ability to endow the horses with character and spirit. When he made this observation to Li Gonglin, he related Li’s response, “Boshi (Li Gonglin) smiled upon reading my comments, and told me that Han Gan was no ordinary craftsman.” This last couplet touches upon one of

²² Egan, “Poems on Paintings,” 419-420.

²³ See Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037-1101) to Tung Ch’i-ch’ang (1555-1636)* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1971), 29-74.

²⁴ Su Che, “Han Gan sanma (Three Horses by Han Gan),” in Su Che, *Luanchengji*, juan 15, 13.

the favorite subjects in aesthetic criticism of the Northern Song literati: the distinction between a scholar artist and a professional artist (“ordinary craftsman”). After Su Che’s poem, a friendly competition of poetry in the same theme ensued. Su Shi, Huang Tingjian, Liu Shugan (Liu Ban, 1023-1089) and Wang Zhongzhi (fl. eleventh century) each composed at least one poem, using the same rhyme characters as Su Che’s poem, on Han Gan’s *Three Horses* as well as Li Gonglin’s copy of it.²⁵ In this series of poems, the poets voiced their opinions on a wide range of issues, from the relative artistic merits of Han Gan and Li Gonglin, to the concept of horses as a metaphor for the scholar-official class.

Underlying the zeal in aesthetic criticism shown in the poetic discourses is also a strong sense of camaraderie. Using the story of the legendary musician Bo Ya and his friend Zhong Ziqi as an example, Susan Bush made the insightful remark that “a sympathetic listener was an essential requirement for [Chinese literati] art.”²⁶ It certainly is the case when it comes to Northern Song poetry, and by extension painting inscriptions. A casual glance at any poetry anthology from the period will reveal numerous poems titled “after the rhyme of,” “answering the poem of,” “as a [farewell] gift to,” “at the gathering of,” and many other standard phrases indicating the poems were composed as part of social exchange. Painting inscriptions composed as gifts were part of this established social decorum. Moreover, as noted by Li Qi in her study of

²⁵ Su Shi “Ciyun Zhiyou shu Li Boshi suocang Han Gan ma (After the rhyme of Zhiyou, on Han Gan’s horse painting in Li Boshi’s collection),” in Su Shi, *Dongpo quanji*, juan 16, 21. Huang Tingjian contributed two poems to the series, both on Li Gonglin’s copy rather than the original Han Gan painting. See Huang Tingjian, *Shangjuji*, juan 2, 8-9. Liu Ban, “Ciyun Su Zizhan Han Gan ma zeng Li Boshi (After the rhyme of Su Zizhan, on Han Gan’s horse painting, as a gift to Li Boshi),” in Sun Shaoyuan, *Huashengji*, juan 7, 15. Wang Zhongzhi, “Ciyun Su Ziyong Li Boshi suocang Han Gan ma (After the rhyme of Su Ziyong, on Han Gan’s horse painting in Li Boshi’s collection),” in Sun Shaoyuan, *Huashengji*, juan 7, 17-18.

²⁶ Bush, *Chinese Literati on Painting*, 8. The earliest record of the story of Bo Ya and Zhong Ziqi can be found in *Liezi*: Bo Ya, the legendary musician of the Spring and Autumn period (722-481 BCE), is said to have found a true friend in Zhong Zhiqi, who could read Bo Ya’s thoughts in his music. See Lie Yukou, *Liezi*, juan 5, 16. For an English translation of the story, see A. C. Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzū* (London: Murray 1973), 109-110. In later versions of the story, Bo Ya destroyed his zither and never played music again after the death of Zhong Zhiqi. See Han Yin, *Hanshi waizhuan*, juan 9, 2-3.

Song poetry on painting, the number of Northern Song painting inscriptions composed for others greatly exceeds that of artists' self-inscription; it was not until the early Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279), particularly in the case of Mi Youren (1074-1151), that it became more common for artists to inscribe their own paintings.²⁷ In other words, a Northern Song scholar painter would prefer to have his friends speak for him rather than commenting on his own work. The story of Bo Ya and Zhong Ziqi resonates in this practice – a painting is not complete until it finds a sympathetic viewer in the poet, who understands what is in and beyond the painted image and expresses it for the artist in poetry. Their earnest discussion of aesthetics, therefore, is also a display of friendship and mutual understanding.

4.3.2 Painting and calligraphy as imprints of the mind

While personal relationship is not frequently the focus of Northern-Song painting inscriptions, occasionally it does come to the forefront. Huang Tingjian (1045-1105), one of the most prolific authors of poetry on painting, composed a poem to be inscribed on a painting by Huaguang Zhongren (d. 1123) with a lengthy title that records the occasion: *Huaguang Zhongren showed me a poem scroll by Su Shi and Qin Guan (1049-1100); unrolling the scroll, I sighed gravely, for the two noble gentlemen are no longer to be seen. Then Huaguang painted me a few branches of plum blossoms and distant mountains in mists, so I composed this poem after Shaoyou's (Qin Guan) rhyme to inscribe at the end of the scroll.*²⁸ From the content it appears that Huang's poem was inscribed after Zhongren's painting, not the poem scroll that was shown to him; however, the inscription

²⁷ Li Qi, *Liang Song tihuashi lun* (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1994), 16.

²⁸ For a discussion on the relationship between Huang Tingjian and Huaguang Zhongren, see Maggie Bickford, *Ink Plum: the Making of a Chinese Scholar-painting Genre* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 116-118.

weaves the two works of art and the four friends involved into a complex tapestry:

The face of the Daoist dreaming of a butterfly is yellow and thin. ²⁹	夢蝶真人貌黃稿，
By the bamboo fence, during the flower season, he is often drunk. ³⁰	籬落逢花須醉倒。
I heard that Huaguang can paint plum blossoms, So I begged him for a few branches to wash away my cares.	雅聞花光能畫梅， 更乞一枝洗煩惱。
Holding lovely plum blossoms he preached the Way, Like the master of the Ox-Head Mountain, he had long comprehended the profound truth. ³¹	扶持愛梅說道理， 自許牛頭參已早。
Cold wind and rain beat down on the one who now sleeps under the Tangerine Shoal;	長眠橘洲風雨寒，
For whom do the beautiful plum blossoms bloom?	今日梅開向誰好？
The Eastern Slope is now an ancient hill;	何況東坡成古丘，
No longer can I see [him] wielding a brush, sweeping like dragons and snakes.	不復龍蛇看揮掃。
[In my exile] I headed from Hunan to Lingnan;	我向湖南更嶺南，
When I moored my boat here I saw that Huaguang is also aged.	繫船來近花光老。

²⁹ The “Daoist” refers to Zhuangzi. For Zhuangzi’s dream of a butterfly, see Guo Qingfan ed., *Zhuangzi jishi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), 112-114. For an English translation of the fable, see Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 49.

³⁰ The poem referred to is Tao Qian’s *Drinking Wine*; see Tao Shu (1779-1839) ed., *Jingjie xiansheng ji* (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 27.

³¹ “The master of the Ox-Head Mountain” refers to Farong, a disciple of the fourth patriarch of the Chan school, Daoxin (580-651). Farong lived on the Ox-Head Mountain, near present-day Nanjing. See Puji (fl. thirteenth century), *Wudeng huiyuan*, juan 2, 1-7.

Sighing for those who we can no longer see,	歎息斯人不可見，
Heartened that I am not yet like the grass covered in frost.	喜我未學霜前草。
After he painted the southern and northern branches,	寫盡南枝與北枝，
He further painted a thousand peaks basking under sunny skies.	更作千峯倚晴昊。

The poem is puzzlingly fragmented and disjunctive: the poet mixed allusions and events with such sudden twists and turns that it is difficult to follow any coherent line of narrative. It may not have been one of Huang Tingjian's best, but some may argue the incoherence of time and space attests to the depth and complexity of the poet's feelings toward his friends, dead and alive.³² The first verse, at first glance, refers to Zhuangzi, who dreamed of himself becoming a butterfly and woke up wondering whether he was a butterfly dreaming of being a man. The second verse alludes to Tao Qian, whose love for chrysanthemums ("by the Eastern bamboo fence") and drinks are equally legendary. In the present context the "Daoist" and the "drunk" refer to Qin Guan and Su Shi respectively. The melancholy thoughts of his deceased friends, as the poem continues, can only be consoled by Zhongren's painting of plum blossoms. It is, of course, a poetic conceit. In the following couplet, Huang revealed his reverence for Zhongren not only as an accomplished painter but also an enlightened Chan master. Next, Huang's thoughts again turned to Qin Guan and Su Shi. With the desolate imagery of their past dwelling and final resting places, Huang lamented that they will never appreciate works of art together, as he was doing with Zhongren at present. Lastly, the focus shifts to the present and the living. It appears that Huang was visiting Zhongren on his road of exile to the far south. Even with this dreary prospect, Huang ended the poem with the uplifting image of "a thousand peaks basking under sunny skies," attesting to the great value he assigned to the power of

³² Li Qi, *Liang Song tihuashi*, 284.

Zhongren's art, and more importantly, Zhongren's companionship, to "wash away his cares."

Similar to the cases discussed in the previous chapters, in this poetic inscription by Huang Tingjian, personal relationship transcended the painted image and became the main subject of the inscriber's commentary. This approach is consistent with one of the leading principles of literati artistic theories: a work of art, in this case painting and calligraphy, is the physical manifestation of the inner qualities of the artist.³³ Seeing the calligraphy of Su Shi and Qin Guan, therefore, is to see something of the men themselves. Under the premise of "style equals personality," for Huang to comment on his friendship with Su Shi, Qin Guan and Zhongren is by no means irrelevant to the subject.

4.3.3 Invitation to reclusion

Another well-known example of Northern Song poets using painting inscriptions as a testimony of friendship is the series of four poems inscribed on Wang Shen's (1036-after 1099) painting *Misty River, Layered Peaks*.³⁴ The landscape painting was in the collection of Wang Dingguo (1048-after 1104), Wang Shen's close friend and political ally. Sometime in late 1088 to early 1089, Su Shi saw this painting and composed a poetic inscription in *yuefu*-style for the landscape, addressing both the artist and the owner. Wang Shen replied with a poem adopting the same rhyme characters of Su's poem. Following Wang's response, Su composed another

³³ For the views of Northern Song literati on the equation of artistic style and personality, see Amy McNair, *The Upright Brush: Yan Zhenqing's Calligraphy and Northern Song Literati Politics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 10-15.

³⁴ There is more than one copy of this painting extant. In the collection of the Shanghai Museum are two versions of *Misty River, Layered Peaks*, both attributed to Wang Shen, but only one contains the complete set of the poetic inscriptions. Wang Shen seems to have painted more than one version of *Misty River, Layered Peaks*, and the painting and its inscriptions have been copied, separated and remounted throughout the centuries. For a detailed discussion, see Sheng Shilan 盛詩瀾, "Zhao Mengfu Yanjiang diezhang tu shijuan santi 趙孟頫煙江疊嶂圖詩卷三題," *Zhongguo shufa*, 2005:4, 24-26. Both paintings are reproduced in *Zhongguo huihua quanji* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1997-2001), vol. 2, 114-117.

poem in the same format and rhyming characters, and lastly the series is concluded with yet another poem by Wang Shen. The series of four poems covers a wide range of issues near and dear to the hearts of the Northern Song literati, from the art of landscape painting to the appreciation of nature, and from the precarious political reality to the desire for retirement and reclusion. These four poems have been discussed in great detail in Afreda Murck's *Poetry and Painting in Song China*.³⁵ Murck convincingly established that the four poems all follow the format and rhyme characters of Du Fu's *Autumn Day in Kui Prefecture*, a poem that criticizes the disorder of Tang imperial government. On the overt level, the four poems are a literary game played between friends, and the content surrounding the art of landscape painting and their enjoyment in nature. On the covert level, Du Fu's *Autumn Day* became a subtext upon which Su and Wang expressed their complaints and laments of their previous exile during Emperor Shenzong's (1048-1085, r. 1067-1085) reign.

Su Shi, Wang Shan and Wang Dingguo all suffered disgrace and exile in the early 1080s due to their opposition to the political reform. Even when their political fortune was on the rise during the regency of Empress Dowager Xuanren (1032-1093), known as the Yuanyou era (1086-1093), they were still subject to political attacks from the opposition. They were cautious even in sharing their feelings with sympathizing friends; they definitely took pride in their ability to encode and decode subtle messages in painting and painting inscriptions, and through this coded means of communication they strengthened their personal and political bonds. A particular subject emerged towards which the Northern Song literati gravitated and with which they shared their sense of fellowship: the idea of reclusion, especially the "invitation to reclusion (*zhaoyin* 招隱)." For example, in the first poem Su Shi composed for Wang Shen's

³⁵ Afreda Murck, *Poetry and Painting in Song China: The Subtle Art of Dissent* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), see especially chapter 6, "Su Shi and Wang Shen: 'Misty River, Layered Banks,'" 126-156.

Misty River, Layered Peaks, Su considered the landscape painting an invitation to reclusion:

On the river, anxious mind, a thousand layered mountains,	江上愁心千疊山
Patches of green float in space like clouds and mist;	浮空積翠如雲煙
Are they mountains? Are they clouds? Too far to tell;	山耶雲耶遠莫知
When mist parts and clouds scatter, the mountains are just as	煙空雲散山依然
always;	
We only see two rugged green cliffs shading a deep valley,	但見兩崖蒼蒼暗絕谷
In it hundreds of springs cascade in waterfalls,	中有百道飛來泉
Winding through woods, wrapping around rocks, lost and	縈林絡石隱復見
seen again,	
Falling to form swift streams at the valley's mouth,	下赴谷口為奔川
The river calms and mountains part, the foothill forest ends,	川平山開林麓斷
A small bridge and country shops nestle before the	小橋野店依山前
mountain;	
Few travelers cross beyond the tall trees;	行人稍渡喬木外
A fishing boat like a leaf where the river swallows the sky,	漁舟一葉江吞天
Tell me, sir, what was your source?	使君何從得此本
Delicately detailed with brush tip, painted with purity and	點綴毫末分清妍
beauty;	
I don't know where in the world there is such a scene,	不知人間何處有此境
Or I would go at once and buy two acres [of farmland],	徑欲往買二頃田
You, sir, have not seen Wuchang and Fankou, the remote and	君不見武昌樊口幽絕處

inaccessible places,	
Where Master Dongpo lived five years.	東坡先生留五年
Spring rain shook the river, the sky was boundless,	春雨搖江天漠漠
Evening clouds rolled up rain, the mountains were lovely,	暮雲卷雨山娟娟
In scarlet maples crows fluttered, companions to a waterside dwelling,	丹楓翻鴉伴水宿
From tall pines snow fell, startling my drunken sleep,	長松落雪驚醉眠
Peach Blossom stream is in the world of men,	桃花流水在人世
How could Wuling be only for immortals?	武陵豈必皆神仙
River and mountains are pure and vast: I am in the dust,	江山清空我塵土
Although roads lead there, it is not my fate to follow them;	雖有去路尋無緣
Returning your painting, I sigh three times,	還君此畫三嘆息
Friends of the mountains should summon me with poems of <i>Return</i> . ³⁶	山中故人應有招我歸來篇

After describing the scenery of Wang's painting, Su Shi exclaimed that he would "go at once and buy two acres [of farmland]" as his place of retirement. And he concluded the poem by comparing the otherworldly landscape painting with the Utopian paradise of Wuling of Tao Qian's creation. By referring to Tao Qian's *Returning Home* (*Guiqu laixi ci* 歸去來兮辭) and *Returning to Dwell on the Farmstead* in the last verse, Su Shi treated the landscape painting as an invitation to reclusion from the artist.³⁷ He had to return the painting with sighs, because it was not his time to lay down his political responsibilities yet. Similar sentiments can also be found in

³⁶ Translation by Alfreda Murck, in Murck, *Poetry and Painting in Song Chin*, 130-131, with minor adaptations.

³⁷ For discussions on Tao Qian's "Return" works, see chapter 2.

a painting inscription composed by Su Shi's brother, Shu Che, also inscribed on a landscape painting by Wang Shen:

Returning your scroll, I sigh gravely in vain;	還君橫卷空長歎，
When, you asked me, will I retire?	問我何年便退休？
I would like to build a thatched hut on <i>that</i> cliff,	欲借巖阿著茅屋，
And moor my fishing boat at the mouth of <i>that</i> stream.	還當溪口泊漁舟。
My heart is wearied of the Road to Shu, with clouds beneath the feet.	經心蜀道雲生足，
[Now I have to] mount the horse under the barbarian skies, with snow filling my fur coat.	上馬胡天雪滿裘。
When I return to court from ten-thousand miles away,	萬里還朝徑歸去，
I shall be a carefree gull, roaming the vast rivers and lakes.	江湖浩蕩一輕鷗。

Again, the painting is treated as an invitation to retirement by the artist in this inscription. Apparently, it was composed at the eve of Su Che's diplomatic mission to the "barbarian" nation of Khitan.³⁸ The daunting prospect of the journey perhaps made the idea of reclusion even more alluring. Between friends, Shu Che answered Wang's question about his retirement by playfully pointing to the painting as the kind of place to where he would like to retire. As the political situation of the Song regime deteriorated and the power of the scholar-official waned, reclusion and eremitism featured more and more frequently in the art of painting and painting

³⁸ Shu Che was assigned a diplomatic mission to Khitan in the autumn of 1089, at age fifty-one. The trip was three month long throughout the winter of 1089, and the harsh conditions can be read in some of his poems composed during this period. See Zeng Zaozhuang ed., *Su Che nianpu* (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1986), 131-134

inscriptions. In contrast to the Western idea of eremitism as a solitary way of life, the literati idea of reclusion or retirement is highly social: their retirement means freedom from the responsibilities of office and freedom to enjoy life and nature with like-minded friends. Therefore, the idea of eremitism was frequently entertained in conjunction with social relationships.

4.3.4 Southern Song dynasty – the turning point

Parallel to the development in literature, the poetry on painting of the Southern-Song period is considered conservative or even in decline.³⁹ If the quality of Southern-Song poetry on painting is up for scholarly debate, the Southern-Song literati's enthusiasm for inscribing painting certainly is not. For example, the first anthology of poetry on painting, *Huashengji* 畫聲集, was edited by the Southern-Song scholar Sun Shaoyuan (fl. 1180s) and published around 1187.⁴⁰ The publication of *Huashengji* reflects a growing interest in poetry on painting as an independent genre and the demand for earlier examples of the genre.

Nevertheless, there are significant differences in the format and content compared to Northern-Song works. Generally speaking, Southern-Song poetry on painting is shorter in format and more romantic in style.⁴¹ Furthermore, as observed by Feng You-heng, the Southern-Song literati, compared to their Northern-Song counterparts, showed little interest in discussing the artistic merits of the painted imagery.⁴² Most intriguingly, social relationships

³⁹ Li Qi, *Liang Song tihuashi*, 127.

⁴⁰ For discussions on *Huashengji*, see Li Qi, *Liang Song tihuashi*, 322-350

⁴¹ Li Qi, *Liang Song tihuashi*, 124-126.

⁴² Feng You-heng, "Cong xisai wushe tu de tiba kan Li Jie shengping yu nan Song shidaifu de shufa 從〈西塞漁社圖〉的題跋看李結生平與南宋士大夫的書法," *Gugong xueshu jikan*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Winter 1999), 67.

emerged as a vital part of painting inscriptions; the recording of personal relationships and the circumstances that led to the inscription became almost a mandatory part of inscribing paintings. The Southern-Song inscribers recorded their personal relationships not necessarily in poetic forms, however. Another notable development of the period is the rise of prose as a major format of painting inscriptions. By contrast to the suggestiveness of poetry, prose inscriptions tend to be more specific and narrative. Therefore, they often serve as a preface to poetic inscriptions or at times stand alone, recording the circumstances that led to their composition.

Prose inscriptions are the ideal platform for recording and honoring personal relationships, none so evidently as the inscriptions following Li Jie's (1124-before 1197) *Fishing Society at Xisai Mountain*, now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.⁴³ Li Jie painted *Fishing Society at Xisai Mountain* in 1170, depicting his ideal place of retirement. For about twenty years he carried the painting with him while still serving office, and requested inscriptions from eight friends: Wu Renjie (fl. late twelfth century), Fan Chengda (1126-1193), Hong Mai (1123-1202), Zhou Bida (1126-1204), Wang Lin (1128-1192), Zhao Xiong (1129-1193), Yan Cangshu (fl. 1157), and You Mao (1124-1193), all of them eminent Southern-Song scholar officials.⁴⁴ They were the first generation of Southern-Song scholar officials who personally experienced the traumatic dynastic transition and the drastic change in political atmosphere in the early years of the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279).⁴⁵ All of the extant colophons are in

⁴³ The painting and its inscriptions are reproduced in Nakata Yūjirō, and Fu Shen eds., *Ō-Bei shūzō Chūgoku hōsho meisekishū* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1981-1982), vol. 2, 44-53.

⁴⁴ According to Ming collector Zhang Chou (1577-1643), there were nine inscriptions attached to the scroll. The last of the Southern-Song inscriptions, dated 1275, was by Wong Ye (dates unknown), who was not a contemporary of Li Jie. Of the nine Southern-Song inscriptions, only eight survive today: the inscription by Wu Renjie is lost. See Zhang Chou 張丑 (1577-1643), *Zhenji rilu* 真跡日錄, juan 4, 13.

⁴⁵ The painting and the series of inscriptions are discussed in Feng You-heng, "Cong xisai wushe tu de tiba kan Li Jie sheng ping yu Nan Song shidaifude shufa," *Gugong xueshu jikan*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Winter 1999), 65-122. The article in Chinese is a summary of Feng's doctoral dissertation, "Fishing Society at

fairly lengthy prose format.

As discussed by Feng You-heng, the series of inscriptions reflects the relatively passive role played by these Southern-Song scholar officials and their internal conflicts of the choice between an official career and reclusion. Their colophons follow a similar pattern: first they recount how they knew Li Jie and when and where their inscribing the scroll took place, and then they comment on the subject, especially on the idea of eremitism.⁴⁶ For example, Fan Chengda's colophon, inscribed in early 1185, started with an account of his thirty-year long friendship with Li Jie:

When I first served as an official in Shexian (southern Anhui), my desire for officialdom was already slackened, and I was always thinking of my native land. Cishan (Li Jie), who was serving as the Assistant Magistrate in Xiuning (southern Anhui), often heard this from me. Ten years later, I resigned from my post as an Assistant Minister and returned home to build a villa at Stone Lake (near Suzhou). Cishan, who was then Magistrate of Kunshan (near Suzhou), so much envied my retirement that he said, "I will also build my retreat between the Tiao and Zha Rivers." Another twenty years passed, and now he brought me the *Picture of the Fishing Society*.⁴⁷

始余筮仕歙掾，宦情便薄，日思故林；次山時主簿休寧，蓋屢聞此語。後十年，自尚書郎歸故郡，遂卜築石湖；次山適為昆山宰，極相健羨，且云：亦將經營苕霅間。又二十年，始以《漁社圖》來。

Hsi-sai Mountain by Li Chieh (1124-before 1197): A Study of Scholar-Official's Art in the Southern Sung Period" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1996).

⁴⁶ Feng, "Xisai yushe tu," 67.

⁴⁷ Translation by Richard Kent, in Feng You-heng, "Fishing Society at Hsi-sai Mountain," 324-326, with minor adaptations.

Fan pointed out the two intersections of the two friends' lives, first in southern Anhui and later in Suzhou, to highlight the treasured longing for retirement shared by both for over thirty years. Next, Fan compared his own retirement with that of Li Jie:

Alas! Although I built my house for retirement at Stone Lake earlier [than Li Jie], I continued to serve against my wishes; travelling here and there, my mind is fatigued and my body worn out. In all, I have only lived at Stone Lake for four or five years. Now, in my old age, I am fully retired and at last able to roam the hills and valleys freely, enjoying breeze and the dew. Yet I am old and ill. Even though I have been home for more than a year, I have not been able to walk about my estate. I can only ask my servants to tend the pine trees and chrysanthemums for me. Although Cishan obtained his "Fishing Society" later, he remains healthy enough to serve his mother with filial piety. Oftentimes he accompanies her to linger at scenic spots or celebrate her longevity with a household full of children and grandchildren. What blessings in life can surpass this? I am ten thousand times more envious of Cishan than he once was of me.

噫！余雖蚤得石湖，而違已交病，奔走四方，心剿形瘵，其獲往來湖上，通不過四、五年。今退閑休老，可以放浪丘壑，從容風露矣。屬抱衰疾，還鄉歲餘，猶未能一跡三徑間，令長鬚檢校松菊而已。次山雖晚得漁社，而強健奉親，時從板輿，徜徉勝地，稱壽獻觴，子孫滿前，人生至樂，何以過此？余復不勝健羨，較次山疇昔羨余時，何止相千萬哉！

The emphasis on Fan's long struggle between service and retirement and his present ill

health is perhaps exaggerated to comfort Li in his much belated retirement. Lastly, Fan ended the inscription with the bright hope of a future visit to Li Jie's Fishing Society in Xisai Mountain:

I am still hopeful that my health will improve – then, when the peach blossoms bloom and the streams fill with water, perhaps I can sail to Xisai and ask the host to buy fish and wine. Leaning on the oar, we will sing and compose poetry while sailing along the stream, and we will invite the young fishermen and woodcutters to sing along with us. We will return after enjoying the clear breeze, our spirits high and satiated. [Between] Songling and Juqu, skies float on emerald waters; rain falls on the thatched awning – perfect timing for a nap after drinking. What a marvelous event should this meeting between us occur! For now, I write this at the end of your scroll as the plan for the future trip.

尚冀拙恙良已，候桃花水生，扁舟西塞，煩主人買魚沽酒，倚棹謳之，調賦沿溪，詞使漁童樵青輩，歌而和之。清飆一席，興盡而返。松陵具區，水碧浮天，蓬窗雨鳴，醉眠正佳，得了此緣，亦一段奇事。姑識卷末，以為茲游張本。

The last part is a lovely description of how the literati envision their retirement, with nature, poetry, wine, music and friendship. The inscription was made to accompany a painting, yet the painting was never the subject of the inscription. Fan Chengda made no reference to the style or technique of the artist or the art historical significance of the subject, as his Northern Song predecessors were so apt to elaborate. Their life-long friendship and shared ideal in eremitism is the real subject of his inscription. The other colophons in the scroll echo this pattern, and they are all in prose form following Fan's lead. Since Fan Chengda's inscription is the earliest of all the colophons, and Fan the most celebrated literatus among the inscribers, it is

conceivable that his approach was emulated by the following inscribers – a pattern which has been observed in the Yuan examples discussed in the earlier chapters.

In short, Southern Song literati consciously treated painting, particularly those by literati artists, as not only artistic but also social objects; while they were no longer compelled to discuss artistic merits of the painted image, recording the social circumstances that led to their appreciating and inscribing the paintings, usually in prose, became almost mandatory. The social function of painting was, by the late twelfth century, no longer only an implied dimension; it came to the forefront, just as the political role played by the literati class began to shift.

In contrast to their Northern-Song counterparts, Southern-Song scholar officials took very little part in policy-making, only administrative work.⁴⁸ From the reign of Emperor Gaozong (1107-1187; r. 1127-1162) onward, the real power was often held by the prime ministers, who controlled the emperors and suppressed criticism from scholar officials. Facing political disillusion, the literati class turned to eremitism for spiritual comfort, to the arts for intellectual and emotional outlets, and to each other for moral support. The increasing social significance of painting and painting inscriptions is a result of this political reality. As the inscriptions of Li Jie's *Fishing Society at Xisai Mountain* have demonstrated, the idea of painting as a social medium did not emerge with the Mongol conquest and the so-called "revolution" in literati painting; rather it was a continuation of previous practices long in formation.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ James T. C. Liu, *China Turning Inward: Intellectual-Political Changes in the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 14.

⁴⁹ The concept of a Yuan "revolution" in literati painting, formulated by the pioneering scholars in field including James Cahill and Wen Fong, is reevaluated in several recent studies. See Jerome Silbergeld, "The Yuan 'Revolutionary' Picnic: Feasting on the Fruits of Song (A Historiographic Menu)," *Ars Orientalis* 37 (2009), 9-31; ; Robert E. Harrist, Jr., "I Don't Believe in the Literati But I Miss Them: A Postscript," *Ars Orientalis* 37 (2009), 213-217; and Richard Vinograd, "De-centering Yuan Painting," *Ars Orientalis* 37 (2009), 195-212.

4.4 Painting inscriptions of the Yuan dynasty

The Mongol conquest of 1279 brought drastic changes in the social and political lives of Chinese literati. The effects of the dynastic transition upon literati painting have been well discussed elsewhere.⁵⁰ With regard to the development of painting inscription, the *yimin*, or left-over subject, generation under Yuan rule was keen to explore new ground in text-image relationships. On the one hand, self-inscription by the artist became a mandatory practice that distinguishes a literati painter from a professional craftsman. These amateur artists drew heavily upon literary sources to enrich the interpretive potential of their paintings. As a result, painting inscription became an intrinsic part of literati painting that more than often directs the viewer's perception and interpretation of the painted image. On the other hand, while the artist may assign certain meaning to his or her work through the combination of text and image, the "meaning" is by no means final and definite. Yuan artists and particularly owners of artworks requested inscriptions from contemporaries with unprecedented enthusiasm. The participation of the literati audience in the meaning-making process grew in unprecedented scale. Nevertheless, the direction of the interpretation, as the following discussion will demonstrate, is rather dominated by social relationships than any artistic considerations; through inscriptions Yuan literati incorporated works of art in their social life in ingenious ways.

⁵⁰ For discussions on the impact of Mongol conquest on literati arts, see Sherman E. Lee, et al. eds., *Chinese Art Under the Mongols: The Yüan Dynasty, 1279-1368* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1968); Chu-tsing Li, "The Role of Wu-hsing in Early Yuan Artistic Development Under Mongol Rule," in John Langlois ed., *China Under Mongol Rule* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 331-369; Marilyn Wong Fu, "The Impact of the Re-Unification: Northern Elements in the Life and Art of Hsien-yu Shu and their Relation to Early Yuan Literati Culture," in *China Under Mongol Rule*, 371-433; and Peter Sturman, "Confronting Dynastic Change: Painting after Mongol Reunification of North and South China," *Res* 35 (Spring 1999): 142-169.

4.4.1 The *yimin* generation

The *yimin* generation of Yuan literati artists in essence revolutionized the relationship between painting and painting inscriptions. *Yimin*, or a “leftover subject,” describes anyone who lived through a dynastic transition and chose to remain loyal to the previous dynasty. The term *yimin* is often reserved for the members of the scholar-official class, who had served in public office under the previous dynasty and is subject to the highest standard of loyalty by the Confucian code of ethics. The Yuan *yimin* artists expressed their lamentation for the fallen Song dynasty and resentment toward the foreign regime with their painting, and more importantly, by reinventing existing subject matter with their painting inscriptions to address issues of their time.

The *yimin* artists endowed all types of subject matter with political messages; nevertheless, figure painting of historical or literary subjects proven to be the most favorable for loyalist expression because of the rich literary tradition the artist may draw from. Gong Kai’s (1222-1307) rendering of a historical (and somewhat folklore) subject, *Zhong Kui’s Outing*, is a typical example.⁵¹ The painting features Zhong Kui, a demon queller, and his sister followed by a procession of tamed demon attendants.

The legend of Zhong Kui tells that Emperor Xuanzong (685-762, r. 712-756) of Tang fell ill and had a dream that an imp demon was wreaking havoc in his palace, stealing his jade flute and the purple silk pouch of his favorite concubine, Yang Guifei (719-756). The Emperor was greatly annoyed but helpless; but then he saw that a large demon with bulging eyes and a full beard appeared and devoured the imp demon. When asked who he was, the large demon

⁵¹ The painting and its inscriptions are reproduced in Nakata Yūjirō, and Fu Shen eds., *Ō-Bei shūzō Chūgoku hōsho meisekishū* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1981-1982), vol. 3, 9-13.

replied his name was Zhong Kui, a civil service examination candidate who was stripped of his *jinshi* title due to his terrifying appearance. In his shame he committed suicide in front of Emperor Gaozu (566-635, r. 618-626), the founding emperor of the Tang dynasty. Emperor Gaozu took pity on him and restored his title posthumously. Therefore, Zhong Kui vowed to protect the Tang Empire and rid it of preying demons. When the emperor woke from the dream his illness was gone, so he ordered Wu Daozi (fl. eighth century) to paint the image of Zhong Kui in order to repel demons.⁵² It has since become a folk practice to hang Zhong Kui's image to protect people from evil spirits.⁵³

Gong Kai's rendering of this folklore subject seems quite innocent, even comic, at first glimpse. The overt reference to a Tang dynasty story may be seen as a reference to the "Golden Age" and a longing for the past glory. An informed viewer may suspect that the "demons" are intended to represent of the Mongols, and the painting may convey the wish that Zhong Kui would come again and rid China of the alien demons. However, the sarcastic undertone of the painting cannot be fully explained, unless one reads Gong Kai's poetic inscription:

The home of the Bearded Lord is in the Central Mountain.	髯君家本住中山，
Mounting a carriage for an excursion, where might he be going?	駕言出遊安所適，
If it is to be a hunt, there is no falcon or dog;	謂為小獵无鷹犬，

⁵² Although the story of Zhong Kui originated in the Tang dynasty, the original source cannot be known for certain. The earliest account extant can be found in Chen Yaowen's (1573-1619) *Tianzhongji*, which according to the author is itself a transcription from an earlier Tang source, *Tang yishi* (now lost). For a translation of the account, see Mary H. Fong, "A Probable Second 'Chong Kuei' by Emperor Shun-chih of the Ch'ing Dynasty," *Oriental Art* 23, no. 4 (1977), 423-437.

⁵³ For a comprehensive discussion on the Zhong Kui theme in Chinese painting, see Stephen Little, "The Demon Queller and the Art of Qiu Ying (Ch'iu Ying)," *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 46, no. 1/2 (1985), especially 22-41.

If it is to be for pleasure, there are womenfolk with him.	以為意行有家室。
Little sister wants her lovely face to be seen at its best;	阿妹韶容見靚妝，
Of the various colors for makeup, black is most appropriate.	五色胭脂最宜黑，
On the road they come to a post house; they need to take a rest,	道逢驛舍須小憩，
But who, in this ancient chamber, can serve wine and food?	古屋何人供酒食。
Red Turban and Black Shirt are certainly good cooks,	赤幘烏衫固可烹，
Yet in the end fresh blood from a beauty is hard to obtain.	美人清血終難得，
Better to return and drink the Central Mountain brew;	不如歸飲中山釀，
Once drunk, for three years one's myriad cares retreat.	一醉三年萬緣息。
But the sorrow is there are creatures coveting the high and mighty;	卻愁有物覩高明，
Bayi used her wealth to buy other people's homes.	八姨豪買他人宅，
We await the Beard Lord to awake and make a clean sweep,	□□君醒為掃除，
At Mawei the "Golden Burden" disappeared without a trace. ⁵⁴	馬嵬金馱去无跡。

The first half of the poem refers directly to the painting and comments on the oddities of this procession. They seem to call attention to the unusual characteristics of this painting and remind its audience not to mistake it to be a common rendering of a "vulgar" subject. In the second part, however, Gong Kai reveals his true intention by alluding to the story of Emperor Xuanzong and Yang Guifei. The reign of Emperor Xuanzong was seen in later generations as

⁵⁴ Translation by Peter Sturman, in Sturman, "Sung Loyalist Calligraphy in the Early Years of the Yuan Dynasty." *Gugong xueshu jikan* 19:4 (2002), 80, with some adaptation.

the paramount of Tang power and culture, but it was also the beginning of the end – Emperor Xuanzong’s infatuation for Yang Guifei clouded his judgment, allowed the Yang family to abuse the imperial power, and eventually caused the An Lushan Rebellion (755-763), which was the downfall of the Tang Empire. The “Bayi (Eighth Sister)” mentioned in the poem was one of the sisters of Yang Guifei, all of whom enjoyed limitless power and wealth in the heyday of imperial favor. The “Golden Burden” refers to Yang Guifei, who was put to death under the demand of the military leaders at Mawei, when the Emperor was fleeing to Sichuan during the Rebellion. It is clear that Gong Kai wished Zhong Kui to wake from his drunkenness and sweep away wicked creatures like Yang Guifei and her sisters. The wicked creatures, as Sturman convincingly argues, refer not to the Mongols, but rather symbolize the corruption of the Southern Song court – their self-indulgence, incompetence and disregard for the nation’s peril which caused the fall of the dynasty.⁵⁵ In his other writings, Gong Kai criticized openly the Song court and held them responsible for the loss of the country; and this interpretation certainly agrees with Gong’s political view.⁵⁶ But Gong Kai also shared the blame, for his Zhong Kui was an analogy for the scholar-official class, who had been “drunk” and did nothing to prevent the tragedy.⁵⁷ Gong Kai was known to be a man of heroic stature with an impressive full beard; therefore, this comic, clumsy Zhong Kui was possibly a bitter ridicule directed at the artist himself.

Standing alone, Gong Kai’s *Zhong Kui’s Outing* does not have the same complex layering of meaning as when it is read with the artist’s inscription. It becomes more evident if we look at another painting of a similar subject, Yan Hui’s (fl. late thirteenth-early fourteenth century) *New*

⁵⁵ Sturman, “Sung Loyalist Calligraphy,” 83.

⁵⁶ Yu Hui, “Yimin yishi yu nan Song yimin huihua.” *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan*, 1994:4, 62.

⁵⁷ Sturman, “Sung Loyalist Calligraphy,” 83.

Year's Eve Excursion of Zhong Kui in the Cleveland Museum of Art.⁵⁸ Yan Hui was Gong Kai's contemporary who also witnessed the fall of the Southern dynasty. Yet as a professional painter, little of Yan's life is known, and certainly there is no account of his loyalist feelings, if any, surviving. Sherman Lee identifies the subject of Yan's Zhong Kui painting as a "New Year's Eve excursion" because it matches literally the textual description of the folk festivity practiced in Hangzhou in the thirteenth century.⁵⁹ In the days before the New Year, people dressed in grotesque costumes as Zhong Kui and his demon helpers parading the city to ward off evil spirits before the coming of a new year. In this scroll the artist showcases one demon helper at a time, all of them performing some crowd-pleasing martial art or acrobatic tricks. Their shabby costume contrasts Zhong Kui's assumed air of dignity, being carried by three demons under a tattered parasol, giving a hint of humor that turns what is supposed to be terrifying to something comical and amusing. Again, the viewer may project loyalist feelings to the subject and ridicule the Mongols as demons. Yet there is no pictorial or textual evidence to support this interpretation. Gong Kai's painting, without its pointed inscription, would not have been seen as very different from Yan's version of the same subject. Indeed, Gong Kai was more a scholar than painter, he also seems more comfortable and eloquent expressing himself in words. Thus, his inscription is the key element to complete the metaphorical message of his painting.

Zhong Kui's Outing was inscribed by sixteen Yuan authors—a significant number by any standard that suggests the painting was widely circulated. Although none of the colophons were dated, they speak of Gong Kai as someone already passed away. Therefore, the colophons

⁵⁸ The painting is reproduced in Wai-kam Ho, et al eds., *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting: The Collections of the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, and the Cleveland Museum of Art* (Cleveland: The Museum, 1980), 111-112.

⁵⁹ Sherman Lee, "Yan Hui, Zhong Kui, Demons and the New Year," *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 53, no. 1/2 (1993), 211. Lee's source of this information is Wu Zimu's *Mengliang lu*, a late thirteenth century text written after the fall of the Song dynasty, recording the city life of Hangzhou during Song time in a nostalgic tone. Of course, folk festivities like this probably did not stop because of the dynastic transition, and probably was not limited to Hangzhou either.

were probably composed for the unnamed owner at a later date. Curiously, none of the colophons elaborate openly on the hidden meaning and loyalist message of Gong's painting and inscription. Neither do any of them allude to any personal relationship with the artist or the owner. In most cases, the inscriptions reiterate Gong Kai's inscription, and limit themselves to admiring the artist's innovative handling of a folk subject and his upright character. They speak of the legend of Zhong Kui and Emperor Xuanzhong in detached historical terms without any allusion to contemporary events. A cautious and reserved attitude prevails. In other words, if they had read the loyalist message, which is only thinly veiled, the inscribers chose not to dwell on the point.

The most provocative of the colophons was inscribed by someone who signed as "Boshiweng," which means "old man in a hemp-raincoat." He was the only one among the inscribers who did not sign his real name, which was not the common practice of the time. He had good reasons to be evasive about his true identity, for his inscription reads:

Whenever *Zhong Kui's Outing* is unrolled, anyone who sees it cannot help but be amazed. All the strange shapes and unusual forms of the age – the fierce and cruel or wily and cunning, the strong and the weak gulping and gnawing – appear in the hundreds, changing deceitfully. But it has gone so far that many people do not consider even such evil demons to be odd, and the reason is probably because they have heard them and seen them around for so long that they have been completely assimilated as well, and therefore view [such apparitions] as normal. Oh, how profound is the meaning of this painting of Old Bearded Man (Gong Kai)! The only part of the Zhong Kui story that some people consider doubtful is that he appeared in Emperor Minghuang's

dream. But I say that from past to present [time has passed] like a shooting star or bolt of lightning, and glowing reputations and forlorn sorrows have sprouted like fungus and burst like bubbles, so that the only thing there is left to doubt is what is not a dream. In appending some words now at the end of the scroll, couldn't this also be talking of dreams while in a dream?⁶⁰

《中山出遊圖》，凡一展翫，見者無不驚訝。世之奇形異狀，暴戾詭譎，彊弱吞陷，變詐百出，甚於妖魅者，不少人不以為恠而何，蓋耳聞目接，久而與之俱化，故眎為常也。吁，髯翁之畫，深有旨哉。或以鍾馗事，祇見明皇夢中為疑。余謂往古來今，星流電掣，烜赫淒涼，菌生漚滅，何事非夢，獨於是疑焉。今贅數語于卷末，又豈非夢中說夢邪？

The evil characters of the present age in Boshiweng's inscription are an unmistakable reference to current political situation. He mocked those who do not see the "strange shapes and unusual forms of the age" as odd are "completely assimilated" by such evil of their time. The inscription attacks both the Mongol rulers as well as those who chose to collaborate with them. He concealed his identity, however, not so much for the fear of government persecution—as a matter of fact, the Yuan government was relatively lenient toward loyalist writings and rarely exercised literary censorship or inquisitions commonly seen in later dynasties. On the contrary, the Mongols admired and valued loyalty. Since loyalist writings did not constitute realistic threat politically or militarily, the Mongol authorities simply ignored them.⁶¹ Rather he used the generic name of "Boshiweng" so not to openly affront his fellow

⁶⁰ Translation by Stephen Allee, with minor adaptation.

⁶¹ Jennifer W. Jay, "Memoirs and Official Accounts: The Historiography of the Song Loyalists," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 50, no. 2 (Dec. 1990), 588-589. Mongol government only forbade ethnic Han Chinese from congregating in fear of armed rebellion. Rightly or wrongly, they did not consider artistic expression of loyalism a serious threat. See also Herbert Franke, "Some Aspects of Chinese Private

Chinese scholars, many of them did choose to serve in the Yuan government. Indeed, out of ten identifiable inscribers, at least four of them had held government positions.⁶² For most of their generation, loyalist feelings were already a thing of the past that was best left unsaid.

4.4.2 Literati audience in the early fourteenth century

By the beginning of the fourteenth century, self-inscription by the artist was already a requisite part of literati painting. That said, the intention of the artist as revealed in his inscription was not necessarily the defining interpretation of the painted image. Quite the contrary, as painting became increasingly a social medium among the literati, the audience played an even greater role in the meaning-making process.⁶³ Large numbers of inscriptions were often assembled after the completion of the painted image, and multiple interpretations, often driven by social relationships, were offered by the inscribers. Furthermore, it was often the owner, not the artist, of an artwork who was most keen on exploring the social potential of

Historiography in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries," in *Historians of China and Japan*, ed. Beasley and Pulleyblank (London: Oxford University Press, 1961); Fredrick W. Mote, "Confucian Eremitism in the Yüan Period," in *Confucianism and Chinese Civilization*, ed. Arthur F. Wright (New York: Anthenum, 1965).

⁶² The ten identifiable authors are Li Mingfeng (late 13th-early 14th century), Wang Xiaoweng (1272-1336), Han Xing (1266-1341), Chen Fang (d. 1367), Zongyan (1309-1351), Qian Liangyou (1278-1344), Song Wu (1260-after 1340), Liu Hong (fl. fourteenth century), Gong Su (1266-1331), and Bai Ting (1248-1328). Among them, Li Mingfeng, Wang Xiaoweng, Liu Hong and Bai Ting had held Yuan government positions. See Wang Deyi, *Yuanren zhuanji ziliao suoyin* (Taipei: Xinwe feng chuban gongsi, 1979-1982), 550; 178-179; 1781; 263.

⁶³ Although this dissertation focuses on the activities of southern literati, it must be acknowledged that the enthusiasm for painting inscription as a means of artistic expression as well as social exchange was never a phenomenon limited to the southern literati. Before the Mongol conquest, the northern half of China was under the rule of the Jurchen Jin dynasty (1115-1234), whose ruling class were ardent admirers of the Northern Song literati culture. Among other aspects of Northern Song literati culture, literati painting and painting inscription were practiced in the north by the educated elite of both Chinese and foreign descent. After the reunification, the Mongol rulers, in a relative short period of time, also developed an appreciation for the arts of China, and adapted painting inscription as a means of conveying political messages. For a discussion on the Yuan court's use of painting and painting inscription as political propaganda, see Ankeney Weitz, "Art and Politics at the Mongol Court of China: Tugh Temür's Collection of Chinese Painting." *Artibus Asiae* 64, no. 2 (2004): 243-280.

painting and painting inscriptions. The following discussion analyzes Zhao Mengfu's (1254-1322) *Water Village* and its inscriptions as a case in point to demonstrate the involvement of the literati audience in the meaning-making process and the social complexity of an art object in the early fourteenth century.⁶⁴

Zhao Mengfu is arguably the most influential figure in the development of literati painting and calligraphy of the Yuan period.⁶⁵ Furthermore, as a descendent of the Song royal family and an advisor for five of the Yuan emperors, Zhao Mengfu's social writing was in high demand. As Dai Biaoyuan (1244-1310) flatteringly related in the preface to Zhao's anthology, *Songxuezhai wenji* 松雪齋文集, "[people from] four directions and ten-thousand miles away came for his priceless writings. Their horses and carriages blocked his door and overwhelmed the city gates. With even just a slip of paper and a few words, they came away overjoyed."⁶⁶ In *Songxuezhai wenji*, there are fifty-three entries of poetic painting inscriptions, not including the nine *huazan*, official portrait encomia, composed mostly under imperial command.⁶⁷ The casual,

⁶⁴ The painting is in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing; the painting and its inscriptions are reproduced in *Gugong bowuyuan canghuaji* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1978-1989), vol. 4, 22-27, appendix 6-11.

⁶⁵ Modern scholarship on Zhao Mengfu's painting and calligraphy is indeed too extensive to recount in present discussion. For some of the studies particularly concerning Zhao's influence on Yuan literati painting and calligraphy, see Chu-ting Li, "The Freer Sheep and Goat and Chao Meng-fu's Horse Paintings," *Artibus Asiae* 30 (1954): 279-346; *The Autumn Colors on the Ch'iao and Hua Mountains: A Landscape by Chao Meng-fu* (Ascona, Switzerland: Artibus Asiae, 1965), and also "The Role of Wu-hsing in Early Yuan Artistic Development Under Mongol Rule," in John Langlois ed., *China Under Mongol Rule* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 331-369. See also Richard Vinograd, "Family Properties: Personal Context and Cultural Pattern in Wang Meng's Pien Mountains of 1366," *Ars Orientalis* 13 (1982): 1-29; Shih Shou-chien, "The Mind Landscape of Hsieh Yu-yu by Chao Meng-fu," in Wen Fong ed., *Images of the Mind* (Princeton: The Museum, in association with Princeton University Press, 1984), 237-254; Chen Pao-chen 陳葆楨 and Chu Hung-lam 朱惠良, "The Impact of Chao Meng-fu in Late Yuan and Ming," in Frederick W. Mote et al., *Calligraphy and the East Asian Book*, *Gest Library Journal* 2 (1988), 111-132. Shane McCausland, "Private Lives, Public Faces: Relics of Calligraphy by Zhao Mengfu, Guan Daosheng and Their Children," *Oriental Art* 46, no. 5 (2000), 38-47.

⁶⁶ Dai Biaoyuan, "Preface to *Songxuezhai wenji*," in Zhao, *Songxuezhai*, 1.

⁶⁷ The preface of *Songxuezhai wenji* is dated 1298. See Zhao Mengfu, *Songxuezhai wenji* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1922). Also, although there are fifty-three entries of poetic inscriptions in

prose-format inscriptions, which probably outnumber his poetic inscriptions by many times, are not included in the anthology.⁶⁸ As an advocator for archaism in the arts, Zhao Mengfu at times expressed his artistic ideas in his painting inscriptions.⁶⁹ These snippets of critical ideas, however, are relatively rare among his writings. A review of his painting inscriptions from *Songxuezhai wenji* reveals that most of them were composed for social occasions and rarely concerns the artistic value of the works at hand: they address the literati audience, not painting specialists; therefore, they focus on the subject matter often with an emphasis on its literary associations, not artistic traditions or aesthetic ideas.⁷⁰ At times they can even be quite insipid and clichéd, such as this poetic inscription titled *The Red Cliff*:⁷¹

Master Zhou (Zhou Yu, 175-210) defeated Duke Cao (Cao	周郎赤壁走曹公，
Cao, 155-220) at the Red Cliff;	
On the river of ten-thousand miles, the two heroes battled.	萬里江流鬪兩雄。
The <i>Odes [on the Red Cliff]</i> of Su Shi are even more	蘇子賦成奇偉甚，
marvelous and glorious;	
Always remind me of the bearings of the Banished	長教人想謫仙風。

Songxuezhai wenji, Zhao sometimes composed more than one poem for each painting; therefore, the actual number of poems is higher than fifty three.

⁶⁸ Unless a prose inscription is in the *zhi* or *ji* format, it would not be considered a formal literary work and would not be included in the author's anthology.

⁶⁹ Zhao Mengfu's artistic theories have been discussed in great detail in previous scholarship. See Chu-ting Li, *Autumn Colors*, 70-80; Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037-1101) to Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555-1636)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 121-124; and Xue, Yongnian 薛永年. "Zhao Mengfu gu mu zhu shi tu yu shu hua guan xi 趙孟頫的古木竹石圖與書畫關係," *Zhongguo shuhua* 2004:11, 45-48, for some of the discussions.

⁷⁰ In a recent article, Eugene Wang refers to this approach as the "customary generic convention of colophon writing" that the inscriber takes the subject matter as a cue to evoke poetic or literary associations. See Eugene Wang, "The Elegiac Cicada: Problems of Historical Interpretation of Yuan Painting," *Ars Orientalis* 37 (2009), 181.

⁷¹ Zhao Mengfu, *Songxuezhai*, juan 4, 33. The recipient of this poem is unknown.

Immortal.⁷²

The rewording of the commonly known historical event and literary allusions offers neither the author's insight on the subject matter or his artistic opinion on the painted image. Even when it comes to his own works, Zhao Mengfu seemed reluctant to offer any strong statement on his own artistic approach. On his most celebrated *Autumn Colors on the Qiao and Hua Mountains*,⁷³ Zhao simply put: "The venerable Gongjin (Zhou Mi, 1232-1298) is a man of Qi (Shandong province).⁷⁴ After I resigned from my post at Tongzhou (in Shandong) to return home, I told Gongjin about the mountains and rivers of Qi. Among them, Mount Huabuzhu is the most famous, having been mentioned in *Zuozhuan*. Its shape is lofty and precipitous, rising isolated in a most unusual way. So I painted this picture for him, setting Mount Qiao on the east; which is why I call it *Autumn Colors on the Qiao and Hua Mountains*."⁷⁵ The factual and nonchalant tone of this brief passage is typical of Zhao's inscriptions to his own paintings. Only when he addressed his artist friends, such as Xianyu Shu (1256-1301), Li Kan (1245-1320) and Gao Kegong (1248-1310), did he occasionally comment on artistic issues.

Furthermore, Zhao did not seem particularly enthusiastic about collecting inscriptions from his contemporaries, either on his own painting or on those in his collection. While it may have been a personal preference and perhaps a testimony to his modest reputation, the fact

⁷² The "Banished Immortal" usually refers to the Tang poet Li Bai (701-162), although it can also be used to refer to a scholar official in exile. Since Su Shi composed his Red Cliff works in exile, the "Banished Immortal" can be a double-sided allusion to both Su Shi and Li Bai.

⁷³ The painting is reproduced in *Gugong shuhua tulu* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1989-1995), vol. 17, 77-84.

⁷⁴ While Zhou Mi's family was originated in Qi, Zhou Mi was born in the south and never visited his ancestral home. See Chu-tsing Li, *The Autumn Colors on the Ch'iao and Hua Mountains: A Landscape by Chao Meng-fu* (Ascona, Switzerland: Artibus Asiae, 1965), 21-22.

⁷⁵ Translation by Chu-tsing Li, *Autumn Colors*, 17, with minor adjustments.

remains that a man of Zhao's stature is more likely to grant social favor than receive one. By contrast, those who receive paintings from Zhao Mengfu evidently regarded the gift of great artistic as well as social value. For instance, following Zhao Mengfu's *Water Village*, dated 1302, are over fifty inscriptions by forty-three Yuan authors.⁷⁶ Qian Zhongding (fl. mid thirteenth-early fourteenth century), the recipient of the painting, not only inscribed the scroll with three of his own compositions, but he also invited a large number of his acquaintances to inscribe his precious scroll.⁷⁷ The inscriptions of *Water Village* reveal the complex roles an art object played in the social life of the southern literati.

The inscriptions following Zhao's *Water Village* demonstrate the two characteristics of Yuan painting inscriptions: first, the inscriptions play a determinant part of the interpretation of the painted images, and second, the content of the inscriptions is driven by the underlying social relationships. According to Zhao Mengfu's inscription, this simply-executed, monochromatic landscape was a "scrawl on the spur of the moment."⁷⁸ The modest claim notwithstanding, Qian Zhongding evidently regarded the gift of the painting a great social favor. Qian Zhongding was a native of Wujun (present-day Suzhou), who had had some success in the civil service examinations under the Song regime but chose not to serve the Yuan government.⁷⁹ He remained in his hometown and earned his living by private tutoring. Qian's

⁷⁶ The scroll is in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing. The painting and its inscriptions are reproduced in *Gugong bowuyuan canghuaqi* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1978-1989), vol. 4, 22-27, appendix 6-11. For a complete transcription of the inscriptions, see *Shiqu baoji*, juan 14, 84-104. The scroll was also inscribed by Ming and Qing critics, but these inscriptions are not part of the present discussion.

⁷⁷ Qian actually inscribed the painting four times; the fourth inscription, however, is a transcription of a poem by his nephew Qian Yidao (fl. fourteenth century), who composed the poem for the scroll, but for some reason did not inscribe it personally.

⁷⁸ Zhao Mengfu inscribed the painting twice. First at the completion of the landscape on December 4th, 1302, when he simply signed and dated the painting. The second inscription reads, "A month later, Dejun (Qian Zhongding) showed me this painting—he already mounted it as a scroll. [It was] a scrawl on the spur of the moment, yet he overvalued it so—I am extremely humbled."

⁷⁹ A short biography of Qian Zhongding can be found in Zhang Chang (1372-1438), *Wuzhong renwuzhi*, juan 9, 13.

standing as a *yimin* does not seem to undermine his regard for Zhao Mengfu, who was serving in the south as the Superintendent of Confucian Schools of the Jiangsu-Zhejiang Provinces at the time of the painting's execution.⁸⁰ Quite the contrary, Qian was so delighted with Zhao's painting that he immediately had it mounted as a scroll in order to solicit inscriptions from Zhao and his other acquaintances.

Originally, the landscape painting was not meant to be a specific place or a "painting of a scholar's retreat."⁸¹ The title *Water Village* derives from Qian's first inscription to the scroll, *Rhapsody to the Picture of Water Village*, dated eight months after the painting's completion.⁸² In this inscription, Qian spoke of the landscape as an ideal but hypothetical place of retirement. Not surprisingly, other earlier inscriptions also follow this general line of interpretation. It was not until 1315, when Qian inscribed the painting for the third time, did he link the painting to his present dwelling.⁸³ In this later inscription, titled *Record of the Retreat at Water Village*, Qian stated that his patron Lu Xingzhi (1275-after 1349) built a place of retirement next to his own villa south of Songjiang for him in the previous year (1314). Qian claimed that the scenery of this retreat was exactly as Zhao had described in the painting ten years prior to its construction, and he marveled at such coincidence. In other words, by adding this inscription, Qian repurposed the generic landscape to a painting of a scholar's retreat. To solidify this connection, Qian invited many local scholars of his acquaintance to inscribe the scroll. The evolution of the painting's identity can be traced, for instance, in the inscriptions of Guo Linsun (fl. fourteenth

⁸⁰ Zhao Mengfu held the office of the Superintendent of Confucian Schools of the Jiangsu-Zhejiang Provinces (5a) from 1299 to 1309. See Chen Gaohua, *Yuandai huajia shiliao huibian* (Hangzhou: Hangzhou chubanshe, 2004), 57.

⁸¹ For discussions on "painting of a scholar's retreat," see chapter two of this dissertation.

⁸² Qian's *Rhapsody to the Picture of Water Village* is dated July 15, 1303.

⁸³ For Qian's second inscription of the scroll, *Record of the Nestling-in-Green Pavilion*, see following discussions.

century).⁸⁴ Guo inscribed the painting three times, but only one of them is dated. The two undated inscriptions describe the scenery of the landscape, but did not make any specific connection to any place or person. Presumably these were from earlier dates. The inscription dated 1316, however, echoes the newly established interpretation of the painting given by its owner:

He built his new retreat by Lake Fen, ⁸⁵	分湖新卜築，
It is just as my [previous] poem described!	適與此詞同。
Now it is not just a painting;	如今不是畫，
He really lives in <i>Water Village</i> .	真在水村中。

The poem is inscribed next to one of Guo's earlier inscriptions; therefore, not only he celebrated the link between Qian's retreat and Zhao's painting, but he also claimed a prophetic vision in his previous inscription. Indeed, the "prophetic vision" of Zhao's landscape painting became the central theme in many of the inscriptions following Qian's *Record of the Retreat at Water Village*. It is worth mentioning that in the early 1310s, Zhao Mengfu was once again called to court, and the following decade was the pinnacle of his political career.⁸⁶ The timing of Qian's renewed enthusiasm in soliciting inscriptions for a painting he received more than ten years ago, therefore, is possibly motivated by both personal circumstances as well as Zhao's political success. To honor his connection with Zhao, Qian actively sought members of the Zhao family who remained in the south to inscribe the scroll, including Zhao Mengfu's brother Zhao Mengyu (fl. late-thirteenth to early- fourteenth century) and his nephews Zhao Youjun (fl.

⁸⁴ Wang, *Yuanren zhuanji*, 1266.

⁸⁵ Lake Fen is a small lake southeast of present-day Wujiang, Jiansu province.

⁸⁶ Chen, *Yuandai huajia*, 57.

fourteenth century) and Zhao Youzou (fl. fourteenth century). Their presence bears witness to the friendship between the artist and the owner, and therefore gives credence to the prestige of the scroll.

Moreover, another motivation of Qian's repurposing the landscape is to express his gratitude towards his patron Lu Xingzhi. Lu Xingzhi was a native of Wujiang (present-day Wujiang, Jiangsu province) who had also considerable degree of success in his political career.⁸⁷ The manner of his patronage to Qian Zhongding is unclear. Most likely, Qian lived in Lu's household and served as both a literary companion for the master and a tutor for the youngsters of the family. In fact, the other inscription by Qian in the scroll commemorates the Nestling-in-Green Pavilion (*Yilüxuan* 依綠軒), a structure within Lu's estate that was given to Qian to use.⁸⁸ The prose inscription is evidently composed for a different occasion and not directly related to the landscape scroll. It makes no reference to the landscape or the artist. The inscription, however, does mention that on one occasion Lu invited Qian on a trip to Lake Fen, presumably to Lu's villa where eventually he built a place of retirement for Qian. The association is roundabout at best. The reason that Qian included *Record of the Nestling-in-Green Pavilion* in the scroll, therefore, is to honor the generous patronage of Lu Xinzhi. By circulating the scroll among local scholars, Qian made Lu's reputation as a gracious host widely known among their common acquaintances. It is also noteworthy that there are seven inscribers shared the surname Lu, including Lu Xingzhi himself.⁸⁹ Although most of them cannot be positively identified, from the fact that some of them also came from the Suzhou area and some shared

⁸⁷ The highest office of Lu Xingzhi's political career is the Archivist of the Hanlin Academy (8a), which indicates that Lu had served in the central government in Dadu. Wang, *Yuanren zhuanji*, 1355.

⁸⁸ Qian's *Record of the Nestling-in-Green Pavilion* is dated February 20th, 1315, six months earlier than his *Record of the Retreat at Water Village*.

⁸⁹ In addition to Lu Xingzhi, the other six inscribers are Lu Zuyun (dates unknown), Lu Zuxuan (dates unknown), Lu Zhu (dates unknown), Lu Zukai (dates unknown), Lu Chengsun (dates unknown) and Lu Jishan (fl. fourteenth century).

similar personal names, we may infer that they were members of the extended Lu family, to whom no doubt Qian especially wished to express his gratitude.

The close examination of the inscriptions following Zhao Mengfu's *Water Village* reveals the social complexity of an art object in the early fourteenth century. It is evident that by the early Yuan period, painting inscription was widely used to manipulate the viewer's perception and interpretation of the painted image as well as to craft public statements about personal relationships. Qian Zhongding purposefully inscribed and collected inscriptions to make the *Water Village* scroll a testimony of his association with the illustrious statesman, a celebration of his retirement place, and an advertisement of the generosity of his patron. While *Water Village* may be an extreme example, it is by no means the only one. Painting and painting inscription were already an established part of social exchange among literati. Yang Weizhen and his generation did not invent but inherited the social art of painting inscription that had been long in formulation.

The preceding discussion establishes a preliminary outline of the history of painting inscriptions from the fourth to the fourteenth centuries, with an emphasis on the social aspect of the practice. As discussed above, the relative weight of the three overlapping aspects of painting inscriptions – the aesthetic, interpretive and social – shifted throughout history according to the function and value of painting as perceived by the literati class. When considered in the larger context of literary history, painting inscriptions evolved as a sub-genre of literature dictated by current literary trends. Moreover, the exchange of painting inscriptions as gifts was derived from the exchange of poetry and literary compositions among friends, following the same rules of social engagement. The basic pattern of this type of social exchange was already well in place as early as the fourth century.

Still, while the practice of inscribing painting is inherently social, the social dimension did not come to the forefront until the Southern Song dynasty. Many factors contributed to this development. Externally, the political circumstances – the decline of political power of the literati class – resulted in a redirection of creative energy toward the arts, and an increase of literati involved in the art of painting. The establishment of the Yuan dynasty only accelerated the political and social changes began in the previous period. Internally, as many literati painters in fact depended on their artistic skill for a living, the distinction between professional and amateur painting became an ever more pressing issue. As they purposefully developed a style distinct from that of the professional artists, they also showcased their literary ability, the hallmark of the literati, by mandating inscriptions as an integral part of their art. Last but not least, it was the participation of the audience – the literati community – that truly made the practice of inscribing painting a social phenomenon.

Conclusion

Yang Weizhen was a man of his time; and this dissertation is about men of his time: literati artists and audience interacting socially via the medium of art. Yang Weizhen's life and career epitomize the trials and tribulations facing the Southern literati in the mid-fourteenth century, amidst which they struggled to maintain their identity. His aesthetic ideals encapsulate the artistic concerns of his time – namely, archaism and amateurism. He was a man of many artistic talents: while not apt at painting himself, he was an exceptional poet, calligrapher and musician. His painting inscriptions, albeit a small segment of his literary oeuvre, open a window into the world of literati arts and their audience of his time. By seeing through his eyes, we may bring the art of literati painting closer into perspective as a part of a broader field of artistic activities and greater social fabric.

A study of painting inscriptions is a study of audience reception. Painting inscriptions provide art historians with invaluable documentation of viewers' responses conveniently attached to the primary object itself. The additional question raised by this dissertation, however, is whether painting inscriptions can be seen as a separate and supplementary entity from the image to which they respond. First of all, the assumption that a painting inscription is a response to the painted image alone is frequently challenged throughout the examples discussed in this study. Often the inscriptions have naught to do with the painted image *per se* – they elaborate on the subject matter as the real object it represents, or an echo of historical or literary precedents, from which they derive interpretations beyond the painted image. Furthermore, an inscription is both a response and part of the work, once inscribed on the image itself. The inscriber thus becomes a co-author, and the meaning of the work continues to

evolve as more inscriptions join the assembly. Last but not least, the literati audience's interpretive approach, as discussed in this dissertation, is more than often socially motivated. The objective of this dissertation, therefore, is to highlight the social dimension of painting inscriptions by examining the actual mechanism of constructing social relationships via text-image objects. As we delve into the seemingly generic language of the fourteenth-century painting inscriptions, elaborate patterns of social intercourse emerge.

The discussion of the social dimension of painting inscriptions in the present study is informed by the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu on the field of cultural production.¹ According to Bourdieu, individuals (*agents*) operate in the field of cultural production with its own governing forces and principles. The agents compete with each other for *symbolic capital* which in turn determines their position in the field. Furthermore, the agents act upon their *habitus*, a set of dispositions, inclinations or preferences, that is both objective and subjective.² When applying Bourdieu's theory to the present inquiry, we find that painting inscriptions are visible traces of the forces at work in the field of artistic production.

In the case of *A Breath of Spring*, the artist Zou Fulei presented his own work to the distinguished poet Yang Weizhen for an inscription. We may safely assume that *A Breath of Spring* was one of Zou's best, thus the solicitation a form of artistic daring. Yang Weizhen responded to the challenge with words of admiration as well as a style to match Zou's artistic brilliancy. Yang's extraordinary inscription goes beyond the fulfillment of social obligations.

¹ The major works by Pierre Bourdieu related to the discussion of this dissertation including his essay "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed," translated by Richard Nice, in Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 29-73; and Richard Nice trans., *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984); and Susan Emanuel trans., *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996).

² For a more comprehensive summary of Bourdieu's theoretic framework, see the introduction of this dissertation.

The relationship between Zou's painting and Yang's colophon demonstrates that the inscriber was by no means insensible of the artistic merits and would express his appreciation with responding ingenuity when occasions arise. Still, one must bear in mind that the text-image relationship in *A Breath of Spring* is a rare instance of its kind. The fact that the artist himself was the owner and solicitor is also a social condition to be considered in the studies of painting inscriptions.

By and large painting inscriptions, by the fourteenth century, are directed by and reflections of the owner's social agenda. As discussed in the second chapter, the assembling process of *Leisure Enough to Spare* reveals that the owner, Mr. Du, was perhaps in a questionable social standing among the men of letters. Taking the phrase "leisure enough to spare" to be the name of his dwelling place, Mr. Du identified himself with the archetypal scholar-farmer, Tao Qian. By appropriating the form of a painting of a scholar's retreat, he commissioned the text-image object as a status symbol that legitimized his ties to the literati class. Ironically, most of the inscriptions in the scroll, upon closer examination, reveal a lack of intimate knowledge and sometimes regard for the owner. Nevertheless they illustrate the various approaches an inscriber may take in fulfilling his social obligations. From these inscriptions we observe patterns of social interaction indicating the relative positions of different agents in the field, which are also repeated in many other examples discussed in this dissertation.

Zhang Zhong's *Bird and Peach Blossoms* and its inscriptions demonstrate the fluidity of meaning in Chinese painting. Yang Weizhen's inscription, by virtue of his eminent social position and the novelty of his interpretation, transformed the bird-and-flower painting into a memorial portrait and the scroll a forum of community building. By sharing their remembrance of the deceased artist, members of the Songjian coterie strengthened the bond of their own social group. So potent was this display of comradeship that the early-Ming owner of the scroll,

Hu Yan, was compelled to request inscriptions from not only his own social connections but also those of the previous inscribers. In this case social relationships were not only the guiding principle of the inscribers' interpretive approaches, but also a collectable for later connoisseurs. Moreover, the inscriptions were treated clearly as part of text-image assembly, and no pre-modern viewer would have had considered them otherwise.

The many shades of social complexity of text-image objects produced in the mid-fourteenth century, as discussed in the first three chapters of this study, find their roots in earlier practices. The fourth chapter traces the social dimension of painting inscriptions from as early as the fourth century and concludes that the act of inscribing is inherently social. While the aesthetic and interpretive elements of painting inscriptions evolved along with the function and value of painting assigned by the literati class, the social aspect was always present, overtly or covertly. The practice of presenting painting inscriptions was derived from the exchange of poetry and literary compositions as gifts, thus it was dictated by the contemporary literary taste and followed the same codes of social intercourse. Painting inscriptions evolved along with the increasing participation of the literati class in the art of painting, and their focus shifted according to the value and function the literati placed in painting. The social dimension of painting inscriptions surfaced to the dominating position during the Southern Song dynasty, and its potentials continued to unfold in the centuries that followed.

On a broader level, this dissertation prompts a reevaluation of the use of painting inscriptions in the studies of Chinese painting history. Modern scholarship tends to treat the painted images as the primary inquiry and acknowledges inscriptions only when they contribute to the authentication or interpretation of the painted image. The approach is problematic in several ways. First of all, in the case of literati painting especially, a "painting" is

incomplete until it is properly inscribed, and the pre-modern audience perceives and responds to painting and inscriptions as a whole, not as independent entities. Painting inscriptions, whether by the artists, prominent authors or art critics, or now-unknown writers, are part of the text-image assembly and contribute to the overall meaning. Therefore, if we are to understand the reception and interpretation of a painting in its historical context, we have to give inscriptions due attention as equal partners of the image. Secondly, the discussions in this study reveal that many inscriptions that may easily be dismissed as mediocre, generic and irrelevant are in fact products of particular social scenarios. They are records of how the art object was used in various social contexts while in the process generating new meanings and interpretations. They shed light on the social conditions to which the artists and audience alike were subject. Some painting inscriptions are celebrated precisely for fulfilling social obligations without conspicuously doing so; for instance, Ming scholar-official Yang Xunji (1456-1544) expressed his appreciation for Yang Weizhen's *Record of Zhuxi* in his own inscription to the *Thatched Hall of Zhuxi*: "Tieyai treated literary endeavors as games all his life. His Zhuxi inscription is most excellent... I once said social writings are not necessarily a malignant thing – this proves it!" Nevertheless, his comment reminds us that, whether by an eminent hand or not, and regardless of artistic or literary merits, a painting inscription is a form of social writing. The social circumstances behind the composition of each and every painting inscription always weigh in the interpretations. The cases discussed in this dissertation highlight the social dimension of painting inscriptions so hopefully they may be considered in a more comprehensive light in future studies.

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