

Epigraphic and Art Historical Responses to *Presenting the Tripod*, by Wang Xuehao (1803)

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On the twentieth day of the first month in 1803, the public official and scholar Ruan Yuan (1764–1849), then the governor of Zhejiang Province, turned forty years old. One of nineteenth-century China’s most important cultural and political figures, Ruan chose to celebrate by inviting friends to the embankment of the Qiantang River where it met the Hangzhou Bay. Among the gifts he received was a collection of poems by friends, each composed to harmonize with the classical poem “First White Hair,” written by Bai Juyi (772–846) on the occasion of his own fortieth birthday.¹ Another gift he likely received that day was a modest landscape painting in handscroll format, *Presenting the Tripod at Mt. Jiao*, by Wang Xuehao (1754–1832), a painter Ruan had known for almost a decade (fig. 1).²



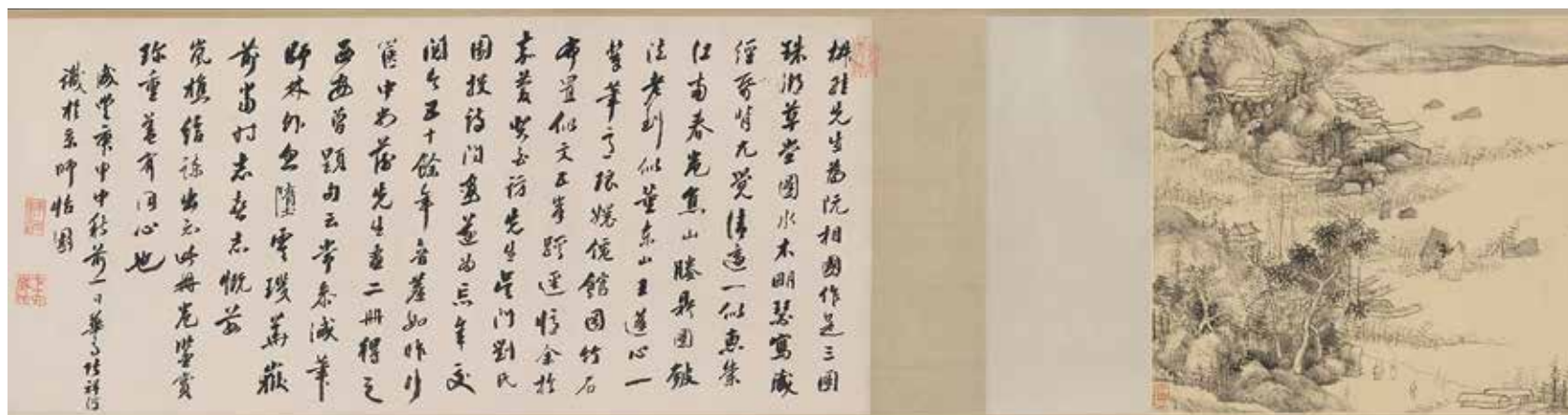
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The painting commemorated an event that had occurred a few months earlier. In the ninth month of 1802, Ruan Yuan donated an ancient bronze ritual vessel, the Taoling Tripod, to the Dinghui Temple, at the base of Mt. Jiao.³ His philanthropic deed occasioned responses in a variety of media and was recorded in dozens of contemporaneous private writings and local histories.⁴ Wang Xuehao's landscape is the only painting known to represent the event.⁵

Two colophons (textual responses appended to the painting), dated 1845 and 1860, respectively, attest to the efficacy of Wang's painting in eliciting passionate reactions from viewers well after it was made. Surprisingly, neither of the texts focuses on the original purpose of the image, which was to acknowledge Ruan Yuan and his donation to the temple. Instead, both authors responded to the handscroll by imagining entirely different kinds of images. Ouzhuang (mid-nineteenth century), who viewed Wang's landscape in 1845, wrote in his colophon about rubbed

images taken from the surface of the Taoling Tripod, an object barely depicted in the painting. Zhang Xianghe (1785–1862), who saw the work in 1860, was inspired to describe it in relation to a genealogy of famous landscape paintings.

This article examines the processes of visualization that enabled these two distinct reactions by describing the historical events surrounding the painting and situating both colophons within larger trends of nineteenth-century visual culture in China, including the tradition of scholarly painting and the study of ancient cast and inscribed objects. Both responses to Wang's painting reveal embodied modes of viewing prevalent among audiences of painting in late Qing dynasty China (1644–1911). In one case, Wang's work served as a lens through which the viewer mentally projected himself into the minds and bodies of past painters. In the other, the image provided a link to the experience of touching the textured surfaces of an ancient bronze vessel.



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fig. 1 Wang Xuehao
(Chinese, 1754–1832).
Qing dynasty (1644–1911).
*Presenting the Tripod at
Mt. Jiao*, 1803. Handscroll;
ink on paper, image $13\frac{3}{16} \times$
 $35\frac{1}{4}$ in. (33.5 × 89.5 cm). The
Metropolitan Museum of
Art, Purchase, Friends of
Asian Art Gifts, 2015
(2015.574)

fig. 2 Wang Xuehao.
Presenting the Tripod, 1803.
Handscroll; ink on paper,
entire scroll H. 14 in.
(35.5 cm), L. 31 ft. 9 in.
(967.3 cm). The
Metropolitan Museum of
Art, Purchase, Friends
of Asian Art Gifts, 2015
(2015.574)

fig. 3 Detail of *Presenting
the Tripod* (fig. 1), showing
the Taoling Tripod on the
boat to Mt. Jiao

A PAINTING FOR RUAN YUAN

In its current state, *Presenting the Tripod* consists of three conjoined sections mounted as a single handscroll (fig. 2). Wang Xuehao's painting is at the center, but it is not the first image encountered as the scroll is unrolled. Instead, the viewer is first presented with a colophon, dated 1845, which has three components. Two are ink rubbings of the ancient bronze tripod mentioned in the title: one is of the outer waist, the other of the underside of the lid. The third element is a text, inscribed by Ouzhuang, that discusses the rubbings. As the handscroll is unrolled further, the painting, dated 1803, is revealed. Finally, after the painting, comes a second colophon. Dated 1860, it presents an assessment of Wang Xuehao's painting by the scholar Zhang Xianghe.

As the image at the center of the handscroll is unrolled from right to left, the artist's inscription appears first, setting the scene with a simple declaration: "Image of Presenting the Tripod at Mt. Jiao, 1803, first month, done for Governor Ruan Yuan—Wang Xuehao." The information is succinct: action illustrated, location, date, and the names of the recipient and the painter. The painting was thus initially presented to viewers as a visual document of an event.

Handscrolls were rarely, if ever, seen completely unrolled. They were instead viewed in increments of about one shoulder's width. The natural distance between the right and left hands as they held either end of the partially unrolled scroll determined how much of the image was visible at one time. The width of Wang Xuehao's painting suggests that it would have been viewed in two sections. The first would have included Wang's inscription, the portion of the image that contains Mt. Jiao, and a boat on the water. On the boat, seven figures gather around two tables.⁶ On one of the tables sits the large tripod that is at the center of the painting's narrative (fig. 3).



After this section was viewed, Mt. Jiao would have been rolled up from the right, and as the image was unrolled to the left, the boat would no longer be seen in relation to Mt. Jiao (its destination) but to the shore from which it departed, where several standing figures watch its progress. In the upper left portion of the image, a cluster of buildings and a slender pagoda represent the city of Zhenjiang, a major trading hub in imperial China, located at the intersection of the Grand Canal and the Yangtze River, just upstream from Mt. Jiao.

The composition thus unfolds in reverse temporal progression, first revealing the tripod's future home of Mt. Jiao, then its point of departure from Zhenjiang. Inverse chronological arrangement is typical in handscroll compositions, creating a counter-directional tension as the image is unrolled, and then resolving that tension as the handscroll is rolled back up. Wang Xuehao made use of other common landscape painting conceits to animate the scene as well. For instance, his brushmarks flick and quiver with nervous energy, as if barely able to coalesce into depictions of concrete objects. This was intentional. Viewers were supposed to see how each stroke was made and to understand what



fig. 4 Detail of *Presenting the Tripod* (fig. 1), showing the artist's complex brushwork

came first and which mark overlapped which other mark. Wang Xuehao revealed his painterly process to viewers as a series of gestural and compositional decisions that collectively settled into the construction of forms. This manner of painting was considered elegant, refined, and appropriate to the educated classes in China from the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127) onward, and it was generally referred to as “scholar-official” or “literati” painting. Wang’s image practically vibrates, as each brushstroke seems to both define form and break it apart. In his rendering of the mountains, these oscillations can be seen in dynamic combinations of dry brush texturing over fleeting sections of wet wash. In other areas, such as at the rooflines, two layers of ink—one light gray, the other dark gray—are painted purposefully out of register with one another to activate the contours of form (fig. 4).

This sense of the expansion and contraction of forms has its counterpart in the overall composition. At the center of the image, the boat carrying the tripod is seen from an elevated perspective and is framed by an open stretch of water. The water is implied, with the raw material of the paper left unpainted to represent the surface of the river. The horizon bows away from the scene, containing the boat’s travel in an arc of expanding space that extends upriver into faint gray washes. Parabolic curves in the landscape frame the sides of the central scene as well—at the shorelines of Zhenjiang, on the left, and the island of Mt. Jiao, on the right—bracketing the event at the center of the painting. The boat thus appears to be suspended on an unpatterned but dynamic plane of water that pushes against its

physical boundaries. Through these dramatic framing and brushwork devices, Wang excited viewers’ attention in order to direct it to the narrative scene he celebrated: the passage of the Taoling Tripod across the Yangtze River to its new home in Dinghui Temple at Mt. Jiao.

The iconography of Mt. Jiao would have been identifiable to Wang’s contemporaries. A well-known saying from the Song dynasty (960–1279) compared Mt. Jiao to the nearby Mt. Jin, just upriver: “At Mt. Jin, the temple winds around the mountain; at Mt. Jiao, the mountain winds around the temple.” From the Song dynasty onward, depictions of these mountains followed this description, with Mt. Jin represented as a sharp peak capped by a pagoda and temple buildings, and Mt. Jiao rendered as a small, rounded sugarloaf mountain buttressed by a few low buildings along the water.⁷ Both mountains had been celebrated travel destinations since the Song dynasty, with Mt. Jiao in particular known as a prime site for the study of ancient stone inscriptions.⁸ The fame of these peaks increased in the eighteenth century, when temporary palaces and stele pavilions were constructed there for the Qianlong emperor’s Southern Inspection tours.⁹

When Wang Xuehao painted *Presenting the Tripod*, he had known Ruan Yuan as an important patron and friend for almost a decade. By 1803, Ruan Yuan was governor of Zhejiang Province, one of the wealthiest areas of the empire, and was therefore in a position of great political power and influence within the Qing dynasty bureaucracy. He was among the most notable politicians of his generation, serving terms as governor or governor-general of six provinces and eventually becoming a grand secretary in the palace in Beijing.¹⁰ He was also a prolific author and scholar, responsible for writing, editing, compiling, or publishing nearly ninety books and essays on history, geography, phonetics, and epigraphy.¹¹

Much of Ruan Yuan’s output was accomplished through his sponsorship of and dependence on other talented scholars. As he advanced in the Qing bureaucracy, he brought many of these men along with him. Of the more than four hundred names that have been associated with him in a broad scholarly network, more than sixty were those of people he employed directly as aides, assistants, editors, authors, researchers, and artists in the production of his published works.¹² Among these associates was Wang Xuehao, whose role was to create images complementing Ruan Yuan’s cultural endeavors. Wang was one of dozens of artists, working in diverse styles, who rotated through Ruan Yuan’s stable. They included major painters of the late eighteenth



and early nineteenth centuries, such as Xi Gang (1746–1803), Fei Danxu (1802–1850), and Gu Luo (1763–1837).

Wang Xuehao first became part of Ruan Yuan's network in the 1790s. Among his earliest projects for Ruan was a set of paintings, commissioned in 1794, that responded to Ruan Yuan's "Eight Poems on the Scholarly Bureaus of Shandong," a poem cycle in pentasyllabic quatrains describing famous locations in Shandong.¹³ Over the next two decades, Wang made at least six more paintings for Ruan. In addition to *Presenting the Tripod*, the surviving works include three landscapes depicting West Lake, in Hangzhou; a rendering of one of Ruan Yuan's garden pavilions (see fig. 9); and a collaborative portrait of Ruan Yuan.¹⁴ As late as 1817, Wang Xuehao was still making references in his painting inscriptions to the positive impact of his time spent with Ruan Yuan.¹⁵ The two men appear to have been close. Having taken the provincial-level civil service exams together in 1786, they described one another in inscriptions as of "my same birth year" or of "the same season."

While Ruan Yuan was an important patron in Wang Xuehao's early painting career, Wang was far from dependent on Ruan, according to contemporary accounts.¹⁶ Although eligible to take the final metropolitan examinations in the capital and find employment in government work, Wang did not pursue civil service as a path to success. Instead, he traveled widely through the Qing empire before settling in Suzhou, where he enjoyed broad popularity among the scholarly elite. His work was often associated with the landscape paintings of Wang Yuanqi (1642–1715) and three other painters surnamed Wang (together, they were known as the Four Wangs) who achieved fame during the Kangxi reign (1661–1722). Early twentieth-century scholars grouped Wang Xuehao's work with the paintings of the Lesser Four Wangs of the eighteenth century, the stylistic and biological descendants of the Four Wangs of the Kangxi reign.¹⁷

As a painter who had passed the provincial-level examinations and who practiced landscape styles associated with elite scholar-painters of previous generations, Wang Xuehao was considered one of the most prominent literati painters of the early nineteenth century. Yet very little scholarly or literary output can be attached to his name. The only published writing known to be by him is a short treatise on painting, *Shannan lun hua* (Shannan's discussions on painting)—Shannan being one of Wang Xuehao's pen names. The content of the treatise aligns with the general understanding of early nineteenth-century painters as conservative and grounded in a necessary though

sometimes confining relationship to the great painters of the Kangxi era.¹⁸ For instance, in his treatise Wang reaffirmed the connections between his work and that of the Four Wangs, quoting both Wang Hui and Wang Yuanqi directly. But rather than merely repeating their ideas, Wang offered his own interpretation of them: "Wang Hui once said, 'Some ask, what is literati painting? And I say, it is the writing of a single word, and that is all.' What is most pertinent about this is that characters must be written, not traced, and painting is just like this. As soon as one begins tracing paintings, one becomes coarse and mechanical."¹⁹

Commenting on a statement by Wang Yuanqi, Wang Xuehao once again emphasized the fundamental distinction between tracing and writing:

Wang Yuanqi once said, "Study antiquity, but do not take it as your master. Meet with the true traces of the ancients as if you are walking at night without illumination." As far as what I take from this to advance my own pursuits, I look at how the ancients use the brush, how they accumulate ink, place and arrange, exit and enter, lean and shift, but that must come from the same sources as my own thoughts, and must be in agreement with them.²⁰

While Wang Xuehao was plainly an artist who paid homage to influential painters of the past, he was also critically engaged with their ideas. He regarded their paintings not as templates to copy, but as guides for catalyzing his own thoughts.

A closer reading of the excerpts quoted above reveals that Wang Xuehao's understanding of painting was rooted in bodily metaphors about brushwork. "True traces," a common term denoting authentic paintings, was also used to refer to relics and other artifacts that held direct physical associations with important historical figures. Wang further invoked the role of bodily sympathy in viewing painting when he described visualizing the brushwork actions of past masters, including how they paused to let ink pool or how they leaned and shifted in order to guide the brush. Looking at paintings in the manner Wang described, viewers reimagined the creative process by mentally projecting themselves into the body of a painter and following the direction, timing, and gestures of the accumulated marks in the finished work.

Wang's corporeal language and the mode of viewing it described were not new. They can be traced back to the bodily metaphors used as early as the seventh century to describe the brushwork of calligraphy and painting in China.²¹ By adopting this classical mode of



thinking about viewing and making painting, and by citing important early Qing dynasty painters like Wang Yuanqi and Wang Hui, Wang self-consciously placed his work in the lineage of canonical scholar-painters. It was this same manner of engaging with painting that Zhang Xianghe adopted when he saw *Presenting the Tripod* in 1860 and added his colophon to the work.

ART HISTORICAL RESPONSES TO PRESENTING THE TRIPOD

In his colophon to Wang Xuehao's painting, Zhang Xianghe avoided discussion of the work's central subject. Instead, he wrote about the painter, the painter's relationship to Ruan Yuan, and the position of the painting within a lineage of other paintings and painters. He began his colophon by describing three paintings that Wang Xuehao had done for Ruan Yuan:

Zhuhu Grass Hut is of a zither being played in a landscape, is written on the back of sutra paper, and is especially clear and bright, similar to Huichong's handscroll of *Spring in Jiangnan*. *Presenting the Tripod at Mt. Jiao* is in his mature texturing style and resembles the brush concepts of the previous generation's Dong Bangda and Wang Chen. *Langhuan Immortal Hall* is laid out by means of bamboo and rocks and follows the path of Wen Boren.

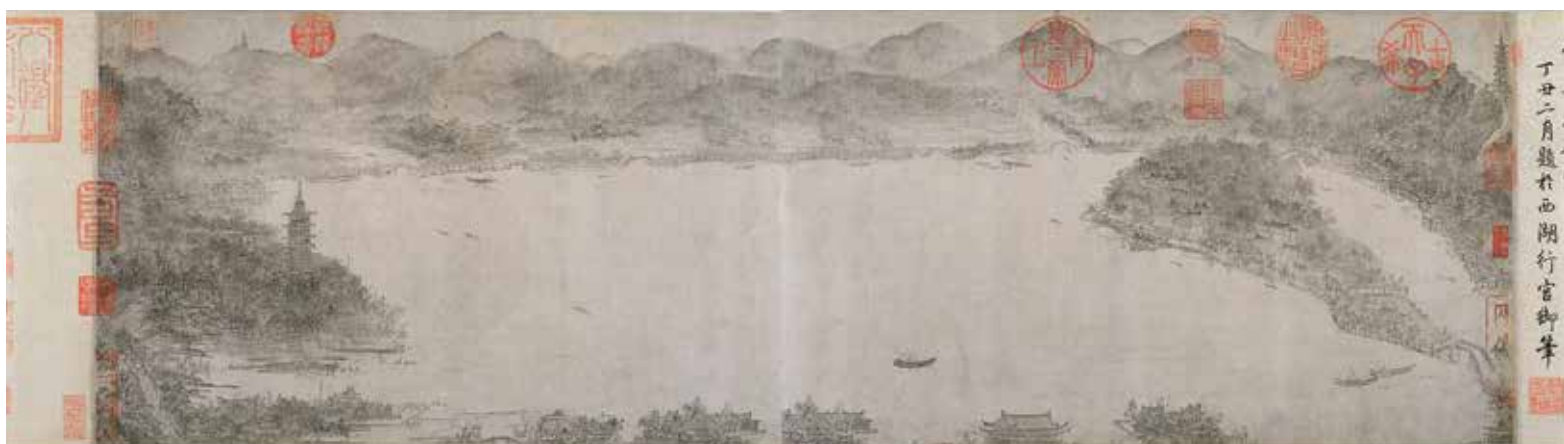
fig. 5 Attributed to Huichong (Chinese, 965–1017). Northern Song dynasty (960–1127). *Sandy Shoals and Misty Trees*. Album leaf; ink on silk, 9½ × 9⅞ in. (24 × 24.5 cm). Liaoning Provincial Museum

Using these references to painters and paintings of the past, Zhang located Wang Xuehao's paintings for Ruan Yuan within a lineage of images spanning seven centuries. With each of these comparisons, Zhang emphasized a different admirable quality of Wang's work. This genealogical approach to painting guided artists and their audiences alike. It was common in China as early as the twelfth century and became predominant among the elite classes by the late seventeenth century.²² As with the language in Wang Xuehao's treatise on painting, Zhang's genealogy rested on bodily metaphors of viewing. Although not all the works Zhang mentions survive, there are enough close comparisons to allow us to begin to understand how Zhang saw Wang Xuehao's painting through the work of other painters.

The present location of the first of these comparisons, *Spring in Jiangnan*, by Huichong (965–1017), is unknown; the same is true for Wang's *Zhuhu Grass Hut*. All that can be said for certain about *Spring in Jiangnan* is that it is well celebrated in the history of Chinese painting. Later copies of the work were painted by artists such as Wang Hui, and two poems were written about it by Su Shi (1037–1101), whose status as an origin figure of scholarly painting helped to secure a place for Huichong's painting in the canon.²³

While neither of the compared paintings is available today, *Sandy Shoals and Misty Trees*, a small album-leaf-format landscape attributed to Huichong, allows us to speculate on the aspects that Zhang Xianghe found common to the work of both painters (fig. 5). A compositional correspondence with *Presenting the Tripod* is immediately noticeable. In both works, overlapping and diminishing shorelines represent spatial recession. But it was their "clear and bright" qualities that Zhang cited in particular. A close look at Huichong's *Sandy Shoals and Misty Trees* shows that the top of each shoreline embankment is left unpainted. This technique, used to indicate the reflection of sunlight, is employed by Wang in the mountain peaks of *Presenting the Tripod*.

Wang's painting also bears a remarkable resemblance to another eleventh-century work, *West Lake*, attributed to Li Song (fig. 6). The two images, similar in scale, show a range of low hills surrounding a large area of unpainted paper, which, following the conventions of Chinese landscape painting, is understood as water. At the center of each painting, a boat floats midway between an island on the right and a pagoda-crowned shoreline on the left. Both images are constructed by means of loose accumulations of monochromatic ink washes and brush marks, in the literati fashion. Although Zhang Xianghe makes no mention of



Li Song's painting, it seems likely that Wang Xuehao either drew upon it directly for his composition or took inspiration from a later derivative of it.

Zhang next compared *Presenting the Tripod* to the work of the eighteenth-century painters Wang Chen and Dong Bangda, emphasizing the similarity of the artists' "brush concepts" (figs. 7, 8). By this, Zhang meant the dynamics of the image, from the overall composition to the position and execution of each stroke. Indeed, the representative styles of both Wang Chen and Dong Bangda offer precedents for the quivering and intentionally misaligned brush marks that activate Wang Xuehao's work. In the paintings of all three artists, landforms and trees are built up through accumulations of feathery brushwork, dry-on-wet contrast, and loosely composed forms.

"Brush concepts" was a topic that Wang himself elaborated on in *Shannan lun hua*, which was published posthumously in 1876 and edited by the same Zhang

Xianghe who wrote the colophon on *Presenting the Tripod*. Wang Xuehao wrote, "When concept is there, the brush follows. It can't be set ahead of time. Only capable scholars can achieve this."²⁴ Painters in the scholarly tradition read brush marks as physical traces of a painter's thoughts. To say, as Zhang Xianghe did, that Wang Xuehao's paintings followed the brush concepts of earlier painters meant that Wang's mind was in harmony with the minds of great painters from the past. It also meant that the movements of Wang's hand and the rest of his body were in harmony with theirs.

Wang went on to say, "In all painting, when you begin, you must think in terms of the brush, and when you are arranging the composition you must think in terms of ink. This is what the ancients called placing the brush with your gut and arranging the composition with a refined heart-and-mind."²⁵ In this statement, Wang uses bodily metaphors to relate the actions of the brush to the painter's "gut" and the invention of composition

fig. 6 Attributed to Li Song (Chinese, act. 1190–1230). Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279). *West Lake*. Handscroll; ink on paper, image 10½ × 33½ in. (26.7 × 85 cm). Shanghai Museum

fig. 7 Wang Chen (Chinese, 1720–1797). Qing dynasty (1644–1911). *Landscape*, 1788. Folding fan mounted as an album leaf; ink and color on paper, 7½ × 20¼ in. (18.1 × 51.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of John M. Crawford Jr., 1988 (1989.363.163)

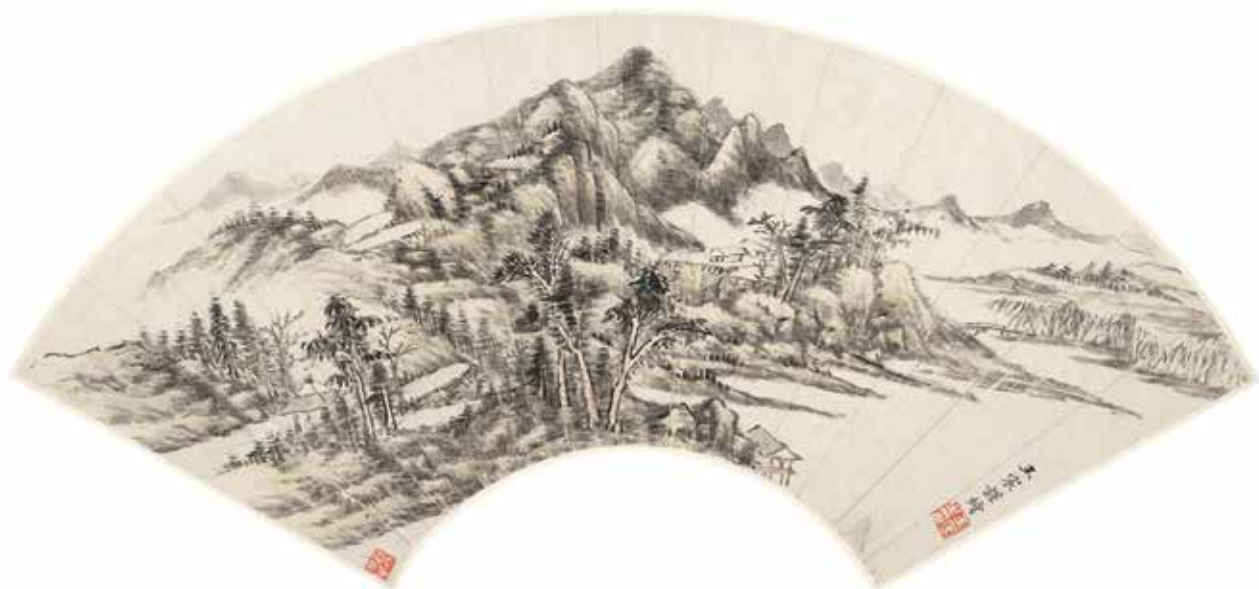


fig. 8 Dong Bangda (Chinese, 1699–1769). Qing dynasty (1644–1911). *Album of Landscapes in the Style of Twelve Song and Yuan Painters*, 18th century. One of 14 leaves; ink and light color on paper, 8 $\frac{9}{16}$ × 12 $\frac{13}{16}$ in. (21.8 × 32.5 cm). Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University, Gift of Marybee Chan Booth (1983.246.1-14)



to the “heart-and-mind.” For Wang Xuehao, as for Zhang Xianghe after him, to make or view a painting meant understanding the image as a network of marks that actualized the thoughts and actions of the person who made them.

In his last comparison, Zhang wrote that Wang Xuehao’s *Langhuan Immortal Hall* “follows the path” of the painter Wen Boren, particularly in the way the landscape is organized around clusters of bamboo and rocks (fig. 9). Zhang did not name a specific painting by Wen Boren, but *Thatched Hut at Southern Springs*, dated 1569, makes for a good comparison (fig. 10). In that image, as in Wang’s, pathways wind among tilting buildings; waterways meander through the environment; color washes are light in tone; and diverse spaces conjoin to create a single cohesive scene. But to follow the path of Wen meant more than adopting Wen’s methods for painting pathways in a landscape. Zhang’s phrase positioned Wang as a disciple of Wen Boren—a student of Wen’s style of painting and manner of being, someone who followed in the footsteps of a mentor who came before him.²⁶

Wang Xuehao had employed language similar to Zhang’s when he echoed Wang Yuanqi’s exhortation to “meet with the true traces of the ancients as if you are walking at night without illumination.” For Wang

Xuehao and Zhang Xianghe, as well as for Wang Yuanqi before them, paintings by previous masters were pathways to the intellectual decisions and physical processes that had gone into their making. Zhang’s comparisons of Wang’s painting to earlier paintings were not based on superficial resemblances, nor were they simple claims to the authority of the past. While viewing Wang’s painting, Zhang felt he could travel through its “brush concepts” and compositional pathways, following the reembodyed thoughts and gestures of a long line of past painters.

Zhang Xianghe’s reaction to *Presenting the Tripod* reflected one mode of viewing paintings in early nineteenth-century China, a mode with an established tradition among the scholarly elite and those who aspired to scholarly taste. The other colophon added to Wang Xuehao’s painting signaled an entirely different way of viewing painting, one in which the image pointed not to past painters but to an ancient bronze object. Seeing Wang Xuehao’s landscape image, the author of that colophon, Ouzhuang, wanted to touch the physical surfaces of the Taoling Tripod. To understand his reaction, it is first necessary to appreciate the importance of ancient bronze ritual vessels like the Taoling Tripod to nineteenth-century scholars and painters such as Ruan Yuan and Wang Xuehao.

fig. 9 Wang Xuehao.
Langhuan Immortal Hall,
1804. Handscroll; ink and
color on silk, 11½ × 33 in.
(28.2 × 83.8 cm). Collection
Michael Shih, Taiwan



fig. 10 Wen Boren (Chinese,
1502–1575). Ming dynasty
(1368–1644). *Thatched Hut
at Southern Springs*, 1569.
Section of a handscroll;
ink and color on paper,
overall 13¾ in. × 23 ft. 5 in.
(34.8 × 713.5 cm). Palace
Museum, Beijing



NINETEENTH-CENTURY ANTIQUARIAN CULTURE

It is uncertain how the Taoling Tripod came into Ruan Yuan's possession. Although Ruan wrote about the vessel on at least two occasions, he did not mention its acquisition. Instead, he focused on its historical significance and the admirable qualities of the calligraphy cast into it. In his 1804 publication of collected studies on ancient cast and inscribed objects, *Jiguzhai zhongding yiqi kuanzhi* (Inscriptions on bells, tripods, and bronze vessels from the Jigu Studio), Ruan Yuan explained why he donated the Taoling Tripod to the Dinghui Temple:

When I obtained this tripod, I thought that because Mt. Jiao has only the tripod of the Zhou dynasty, if this Han tripod could accompany it, then it [the older tripod] would increasingly be added to the sections on poems and events in Classics and Histories, and official documents would then also begin to include it. Therefore, I have publicly gifted this to Zhenjiang, in Dantu county, committing it to the temple at Mt. Jiao to treasure forever.²⁷

According to this account, an older, Western Zhou dynasty (1046–771 B.C.) bronze vessel needed the company of a Western Han dynasty (221 B.C.–A.D. 9) bronze in order to gain greater renown. But Ruan Yuan's statement about pairing the two objects—neither of which survives today—for posterity's sake only hinted at the

logic of bringing these tripods together. In a poem written to celebrate his donation of the Taoling Tripod, Ruan Yuan elaborated on the marriage of the two vessels, emphasizing their calligraphic value through a series of comparisons.

In one corner of the Jade Mountains a spring tide flows,
and in the middle a Zhou dynasty tripod separates the
clouds from the cliffs.

With ten lines of ancient text it shines upon the river
waters. . . .

In a thousand years ancient seal script turned into clerical
script, as recorded in the carved inscriptions of the
Western Han.

I have a Han cauldron of fifty inscribed words, cast in Qian
of Yumi County, offered by Dingtao.

The Hall of Sea Clouds is filled with ancient trees, and
here two cauldrons make their first acquaintance
behind bolted doors.

It is like adding the autumn rites of the palace to the Zhou
ceremonies or recording the biography of Cao Zhi
among the events of the Han.

The seal-script characters preserved here are broken like
the night cries of ghosts, and the *bafen* clerical style
does not resemble that of the kingdoms of Zhou.

Each ripple and each hard downward stroke runs deep in
this liquid stone, concealed together like the immor-
tals You and Chao.²⁸

fig. 11 Xuzhuan Tripod inscription as reproduced in Ruan Yuan, *Jiguzhai zhongding yiqi kuanzhi* (Inscriptions on bells, tripods, and bronze vessels from the Jigu Studio), 1804, vol. 4, p. 22a

fig. 12 Taoling Tripod inscription as reproduced in Ruan Yuan, *Jiguzhai zhongding yiqi kuanzhi* (Inscriptions on bells, tripods, and bronze vessels from the Jigu Studio), 1804, vol. 9, pp. 6b–7b

Ruan Yuan began his poem by identifying the Zhou tripod with the island of Mt. Jiao, where it was located, in the middle of the “spring tide” of the Yangtze River. It is notable, given this attention to place-names, that he omits the name of the temple that housed the tripod. The Dinghui Temple on Mt. Jiao was among the oldest Buddhist temples in the region, but in Ruan’s poem, the famous location is important only because it serves as the repository of an ancient ritual vessel capable of such feats as separating clouds from cliffs. When Ruan alludes to the temple, he mentions only its “bolted doors.”²⁹

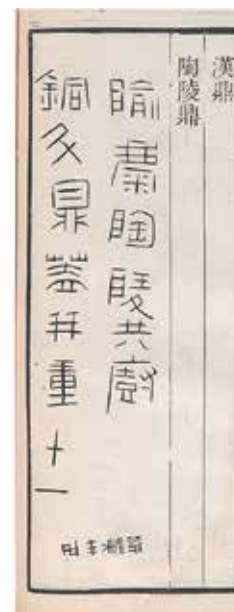
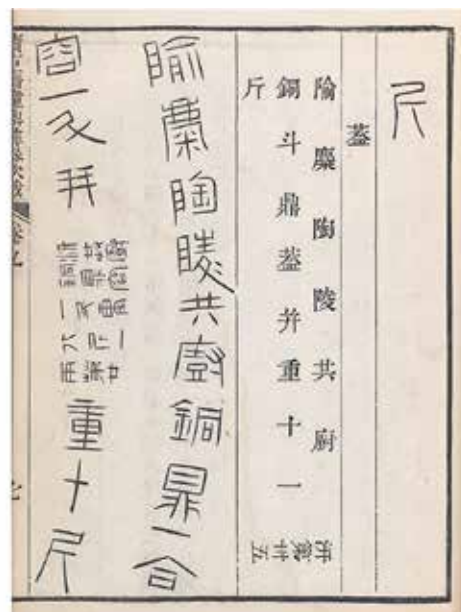
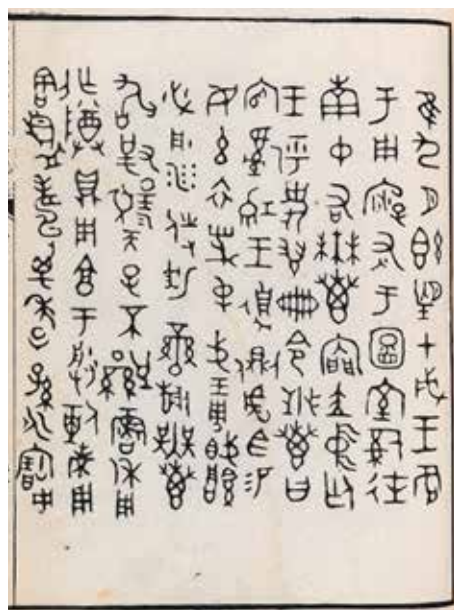
The metaphor of a tripod rising from the river to separate land and sky is an oblique reference to the story of the Nine Tripods, mythical vessels cast at the founding of the legendary Xia dynasty. Tripods (*ding*) were important elements in the rites of ancestor worship dating back to the earliest periods of civilization in China. Possession of the Nine Tripods of the Xia dynasty was emblematic of the right to rule and of the virtue associated with that right. At the end of the Zhou period, as the virtue of rulers waned, the tripods were said to have disappeared into a river. After the unification of China under the Qin dynasty (221–206 B.C.), legend had it that the tripods revealed themselves again briefly, rising up from the river only to disappear again under the waves, evading the first emperor’s grasp—a sign of his lack of virtue.³⁰ In Ruan Yuan’s poem, the Zhou tripod at Mt. Jiao, rising from the Yangtze River, is analogous to those legendary tripods, symbols of integrity and sovereignty.

After establishing the merits of the Zhou vessel, Ruan Yuan reduces the long and complicated historical

transition from the Zhou dynasty to the Han dynasty to a calligraphic event: “In a thousand years ancient seal script turned into clerical script, as recorded in the carved inscriptions of the Western Han.” And when it comes to describing the vessels, one from each end of the historical spectrum the poem has just established, it is the texts cast into their surfaces that mark them as special.³¹ “I have a Han cauldron of fifty inscribed words,” Ruan continues, expanding on his calligraphic theme and reinforcing it with references to ancient texts. With the “Zhou ceremonies,” he alludes to the *Liji* (The book of rites); the “events of the Han” refer to the *Hou Hanshu* (History of the Later Han).

As the poem draws to a close, Ruan continues to compare the calligraphy on the two vessels. The “seal-script characters preserved” on the Zhou vessel, “broken like the night cries of ghosts,” do not resemble “the *bafen* clerical style” of the Han vessel; “each ripple and each hard downward stroke runs deep in this liquid stone, concealed together like the immortals You and Chao.” Paragons of moral purity, [Xu] You and Chao[ufu] were legendary hermits, each of whom refused the offer of the throne from the fabled emperor Yao.³² Ruan Yuan, through poetic analogy, presents the styles of the tripod inscriptions as reifications of the virtuous hermits’ upright behavior.

It was not only in his poem that Ruan lauded the bronze vessels’ cast inscriptions. In *Jiguzhai zhongding yiqi kuanzhi* he catalogued both tripods, beginning their entries with reproductions of the inscriptions rather than with illustrations of the vessels themselves (figs. 11, 12).³³ The images of the inscriptions were followed by concise reports of the number of words they contained:



“The Han Taoling Tripod. Cover inscription: incised inscription of fifteen large characters and four small characters. Vessel inscription: seventeen large characters and sixteen small characters”; “The Xuzhuan Tripod. Ninety-four characters.”³⁴

Next, each entry located the places and identified the persons named in the epigraphs. These determinations were made using methods of linguistic comparison and relied on evidence drawn from early philological and calligraphic texts. For the Taoling Tripod, Ruan Yuan combed through various ancient sources to identify its original recipient as Liu Kang, son of Emperor Yuan (r. 49–33 B.C.) and father of Emperor Ai (r. 7–1 B.C.) of the late Western Han dynasty.³⁵

The dating of the older vessel, the Xuzhuan Tripod, was a complicated affair and had been written about extensively by the scholars Dai Zhen (1724–1777) and Weng Fanggang (1733–1818). Dai Zhen used the inscription on the Xuzhuan Tripod to redate a poem from the *Shijing* (Classic of poetry), one of the primary Confucian texts that all scholars were expected to master. By drawing evidence from a multitude of supporting texts and making complex comparisons of the early use of specific words, Dai Zhen showed that the poem had been written in the reign of King Xuan (r. 827–782 B.C.) rather than in that of King Wen (r. 1056–1050 B.C.).³⁶ Weng Fanggang’s treatise followed Dai Zhen’s and, similarly, focused on the linguistic and calligraphic characteristics of the inscription in order to establish its correct date.³⁷

In his entry on the Xuzhuan Tripod, Ruan condensed the findings of Dai Zhen and Weng Fanggang and added a politically charged anecdote about the vessel’s more recent history: “The monk Xingzai recorded in the *Mt. Jiao Gazetteer* that the Tripod was transferred here [to Mt. Jiao] by the Wei clan of my own hometown [Yangzhou], so that when Yan Song took power he could not obtain it.”³⁸ Yan Song (1480–1567), a domineering, wealthy prime minister under the Jiajing emperor (r. 1521–67), accumulated a large collection of artworks and antiquities. After he was disgraced and cast out of court, his vast collection was seized by the state and catalogued in *Tianshui bingshan lu* (A record of the waters of heaven melting the iceberg).³⁹ During Yan Song’s tenure as prime minister, the Wei family, owners of the Xuzhuan Tripod, donated the vessel to the temple at Mt. Jiao to prevent the covetous Yan from claiming it. Their gift of this valuable object was an act of political defiance. Ruan Yuan’s donation of the Taoling Tripod almost three hundred years later thus followed a precedent of benevolent donation of antiquities to Mt. Jiao.

It does not appear that Ruan Yuan donated the Taoling Tripod to make a political statement. Presumably, his motives were largely based on his scholarly interest in calligraphy. Ruan Yuan’s deep involvement in the study of inscriptions on ancient cast and engraved objects stemmed from the usefulness of these texts as source materials in the field of evidential research, an intellectual trend that flourished during the Qing dynasty and affected scholarship of every kind. Evidential research scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries changed the instrument of intellectual debate from metaphysical rhetoric to empirical evidence. One of their fundamental methods was to analyze texts from verifiable, early bronze or stone objects, such as the Xuzhuan and Taoling bronze tripods. This partly explains why so much attention was lavished on studying the inscriptions on these objects from both linguistic and stylistic perspectives. As Dai Zhen and Weng Fanggang showed in their work, an inscription like the one on the Xuzhuan Tripod allowed scholars to question canonical interpretations of historical texts like the *Shijing*, a practice fraught with possible social and political ramifications.⁴⁰

Ruan Yuan was central to this intellectual movement. He was a prolific author and compiler of ancient inscriptions and sponsored the creation of at least ten books on ancient inscribed objects, including seals, stone steles, and bronzes. Aside from his books on epigraphic materials, he wrote and sponsored the production of dozens of philological commentaries and comparative studies of early texts.⁴¹ Within this culture of antiquarian studies, then, Wang Xuehao’s *Presenting the Tripod* was seen not only as an image of an event but also as an attestation of Ruan Yuan’s preeminence in the field of epigraphy.

At least ten leading scholars, many of them Ruan Yuan’s friends and aides, wrote poems about his gift of the Taoling Tripod. Each of them followed his precedent and compared the two bronze vessels at Mt. Jiao in metaphorical terms that called attention to the objects’ antiquity and inscriptions. Hong Liangji wrote, “How is it that the Tao Mausoleum resembles the Chang Mausoleum forever more, just as flood waters frighten in the same ways that seawater leaps? Sunken and fused ages ago and now one with flowing waters, even tripods and braziers have their wasted words.”⁴² Hong’s lines reiterate themes found in Ruan’s own poem, including the connection between tripods and water and the pairing of the two vessels in terms that highlight the act of scrutinizing their inscriptions.

Later in the century, other prominent scholars and officials, moved by Ruan Yuan's gift, continued to promote cultural narratives surrounding the Taoling Tripod, even offering their own antiquities to the temple at Mt. Jiao. For example, in 1830 an ancient bronze drum was donated to the temple by Zhang Jing, then Director-General of Waterways in charge of the Grand Canal, which emptied into the Yangtze River at Zhenjiang, near Mt. Jiao.⁴³ As Ouzhuang's colophon to Wang's painting indicates, by mid-century the tripod had gained an excited following among passionate collectors and scholars of ancient inscriptions.

EPIGRAPHIC RESPONSES TO PRESENTING THE TRIPOD

In 1845, as Ouzhuang pored over Wang Xuehao's painting, he immediately understood how it related to the Taoling Tripod of the Han dynasty, the location of Mt. Jiao, and Ruan Yuan's donation.⁴⁴ Like Zhang Xianghe, Ouzhuang saw the image and then began to visualize something completely different. But unlike Zhang's colophon, which invokes other paintings, Ouzhuang's text calls attention to an ink rubbing of the surface of the tripod at the center of the painting's story. His inscription reads:

The Zhou tripod collected at Mt. Jiao in Zhenjiang and the Han tripod given by Ruan Yuan are two famous auspicious bronze vessels. Many times I've seen rubbings [of these bronzes] at the desks of friends, and for many years I've sought a copy to purchase myself, without any luck. In 1845, I was teaching in Zhenzhou and met with [my friend] Qian Xitao, [who had] asked [his father-in-law] to send a rubbing [of the tripod] to him. After three months during which I was ignorant of this [plan] I received the document. In the short time I have had this, I have been happy beyond measure, and so I write these several words to record this unexpected delight of epigraphic studies.

Rather than focusing on the artistic qualities of Wang's painting, Ouzhuang directed his attention to the bronze tripod, an object barely visible in the image. He wrote passionately about his long-held desire to obtain a rubbing of it. When his friend surprised him with one, Ouzhuang was "happy beyond measure." Adding his rubbing of the Taoling Tripod to Wang's handscroll, Ouzhuang documented the connection between the painting and the object. Though the tripod itself was beyond his reach, he could simulate proximity, touch it, even, by means of an image that had been produced through direct physical contact with it.

Ouzhuang's colophon is a tactile imagining of the tripod as well as the painting. It reflects a way of seeing Wang's painting that is fundamentally different from Zhang Xianghe's, though both rely equally on embodied modes of viewing.

Ouzhuang's response to the painting was surely prompted by Wang Xuehao's brief title inscription, which names the tripod, and also by the depiction, however small, of the Taoling Tripod itself. But an important underlying factor to consider is the attraction epigraphic materials held for scholars of this generation because of their contribution to evidential research. The obsessive collection and documentation of epigraphic sources such as ancient carved and cast objects was pervasive among Ouzhuang's contemporaries, as exemplified by Ruan Yuan.⁴⁵ Their passion engendered what has been called an "epigraphic aesthetic" in early nineteenth-century visual culture, in which images, styles, and textures of ancient inscribed objects were represented and reproduced in calligraphy and painting.⁴⁶

The epigraphic aesthetic was most apparent in the growing study and use among scholars, including Ruan Yuan and those in his circle, of the calligraphic style known as clerical script. In Ruan Yuan's time, clerical script was understood to offer a more direct path of transmission from the past to the present than other celebrated styles. Ruan Yuan argued in his 1823 essay *Nanbei shupai lun* (A theory of Southern and Northern calligraphy) that the examples of clerical script calligraphy found on carved and cast objects were more authentic and reliable than calligraphic models from later periods because they were inscribed in durable materials. He noted that later calligraphies, inscribed on paper or silk, were often riddled with errors resulting from the inexact hand-copying methods employed to preserve them.⁴⁷ For Ruan Yuan and his peers, the finest examples of early calligraphy were from the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) and were preserved on objects such as stone steles or bronze ceremonial vessels like the Taoling Tripod. To write in clerical script at this time, as many scholars chose to do, was to cite this past style and invoke its associations of authenticity, elegance, and virtue. The most direct access to early forms of calligraphy was through rubbings, like the ones Ouzhuang appended to Wang's painting.

Scholars used rubbings as early as the sixth century to reproduce inscriptions found on ancient bronze objects, but it wasn't until the eighteenth century that these prints became prevalent as objects of intense debate and exchange among scholars and collectors.⁴⁸ While rubbings were fundamentally different from



fig. 13 Liuzhou (Chinese, 1791–1858). Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Western Han Dingtao [Taoling] Tripod, 1839. Composite rubbing; ink and color on paper, 9 7/8 × 26 1/8 in. (25 × 66.3 cm). Zhejiang Provincial Museum

paintings, the two types of images began to merge at this time with the development of composite, or “full-form,” rubbings. Ruan Yuan was a chief sponsor of this new mode of making images of bronzes, often collaborating with his friend Liuzhou, also known as the Epigrapher-Monk (1791–1858).⁴⁹ Ouzhuang’s inclusion of contact rubbings in his response to Wang Xuehao’s painting must be considered in the context of the blurring of boundaries between rubbings and painted images instigated by Ruan Yuan and his peers.

A prime early example of the composite technique is Liuzhou’s 1839 rubbing of the Taoling Tripod (fig. 13). In contrast to Ouzhuang’s rubbing of the same object, which captures only the inscriptions, Liuzhou’s composite rubbing describes the cast text, the body of the vessel, and also the interior and exterior of the lid. Liuzhou made separate rubbings of the front and back of the tripod and juxtaposed these two views in order to show the complete text cast into the band encircling the upper half of the vessel. By doing so, he created an uncanny image in which a unique object appears to exist alongside and within the same pictorial space as its doppelgänger. Additionally, the composite method clearly depicts the relationship between the inscription and its support, revealing their relative scale as well as the sculptural shape of the rubbed object, which viewers could now appreciate without being in the object’s presence.⁵⁰ The strong interest in rubbings shown by scholars of Liuzhou’s generation is indicated by the several dozen inscriptions on his composite rubbing of the tripod, many more than are found on Wang Xuehao’s painting. Liuzhou’s handscroll even includes a frontispiece and preface written by Ruan Yuan himself in the archaic style of calligraphy known as “lesser seal script.”⁵¹

The same logic of reference that applies to sacred relics was applied to rubbings. Having touched an esteemed object, they were thought to carry part of its

aura with them. To emphasize this intimate relationship, the art historian Wu Hung has used a bodily metaphor to describe rubbings: “manufactured skin peeled off the [stone or bronze] object.”⁵² But composite rubbings, which depict a totalized image of the referent object, go beyond this, and bear a greater resemblance to paintings than to basic rubbings.⁵³ If rubbings like Ouzhuang’s can be seen as skins, then a composite rubbing like Liuzhou’s can be seen as the artful arrangement of those skins in a cohesive and separate pictorial space in order to convey the illusion of a three-dimensional object.

Another composite rubbing by Liuzhou, *Cleaning the Lamp*, 1837, provides a good example of this effect (fig. 14). In this handscroll, Liuzhou juxtaposed two rubbings of a bronze lampstand shaped like a goose foot. Each rubbing is understood by its very nature to represent the lampstand at one-to-one scale. But the composite method employs foreshortening to give viewers the impression of observing the objects in three-dimensional space. To achieve this effect, only selected parts of the bronze were rubbed. The rubbing of each part was planned on a single sheet of paper so that together the parts coalesced into an image of the original object as it would be perceived when displayed on a table in a scholar’s studio, for example. But an ambivalence in the viewer’s understanding of the image is also created. No longer understood simply as a set of rubbed skins documenting selected surfaces of an object, the image is also seen as a picture with recessional space in which events can occur. Liuzhou further harnessed the potential for this ontological conflict by having his portrait painted in each composite rubbing of the lampstand by the artist Chen Geng.

The rubbing on the right shows the lampstand foot-down, the position in which it was meant to be used. Painted on the rubbing is a likeness of Liuzhou, who is

fig. 14 Liuzhou and Chen Geng. *Cleaning the Lamp*, 1837. Composite rubbing; ink and color on paper, 12¼ × 27½ in. (31 × 69.5 cm). Zhejiang Provincial Museum



shown leaning against the bronze goose leg, gazing at and caressing its surfaces. The rubbing on the left depicts the lampstand upside down. Here the small figure of Liuzhou crouches over the cast inscription to clean out any detritus that may have settled in the inset lines of the text, as if preparing them for the clearest possible future rubbings. Observing the small figures of Liuzhou interacting with the rubbings, a viewer experiences two simultaneous and contradictory responses to the handscroll. The rubbings, as lifesize renderings of a lampstand, convey a sense of the original object's portability. A hand holding the painting is commensurate with a hand that would hold the original object. But within the picture, the rubbings are monumental in scale, dwarfing the body of the human caretaker, whose small hands are the size of individual characters inscribed on the bronze. By touching the rubbed image of the bronze, the small portrait of Liuzhou points directly to the source of this disjuncture in systems of representation: the capacity of a rubbing to be understood as both an object and an image. Liuzhou's composite rubbing-and-painting breaks down such boundaries and in the process offers viewers a vivid sense of visual and tactile intimacy with the ancient lampstand.

The diminutive figures of Liuzhou illustrate the compelling fascination for ancient bronze objects that drove the production, accumulation, and publication of rubbings among epigraphy scholars. Ouzhuang engaged in a similar intense imagining and fetishizing of the Taoling Tripod when he reacted to Wang Xuehao's painting in 1845. Seeing a landscape depicting the journey of the tripod, Ouzhuang imagined what the experience of touching that object would be like, then actualized his vision by mounting a rubbing of the tripod alongside Wang's painting.

It might be easy for some to think of Ouzhuang's and Zhang Xianghe's colophons as incidental to *Presenting the Tripod*. Added decades after the painting was completed, these reactions to the work could seem to warrant less careful attention than the art itself. But they tell us something the painting alone cannot. They tell us what viewers saw when they looked at literati paintings. In this case, the colophons reveal that viewing a landscape image was not just a process of identifying the narrative that the painting purported to depict. Instead of describing Wang's landscape in relation to the events of Ruan Yuan's donation of the Taoling Tripod to the temple at Mt. Jiao, viewers like Zhang Xianghe and Ouzhuang looked at the painting and then wrote of the ways it enabled them to imagine entirely different images.

In 1803, when Wang Xuehao gave his painting to Ruan Yuan, it may not have been his intention to encourage viewers like Ouzhuang to imagine touching the surfaces of the Taoling Tripod, much less to mount rubbings to the handscroll in order to bring those surfaces into a direct relationship with the landscape painting. But because *Presenting the Tripod* was made to complement a major event in the early nineteenth-century culture of epigraphy studies, viewers like Ouzhuang used Wang's image to visualize proximity to the tripod itself. While the painting provided Ouzhuang with the opportunity for this experience, it was the rubbing, an image created through direct physical contact with the original object, that brought him closest to the tripod.

On the other hand, it is natural to think that Wang would have predicted and even encouraged the kind of viewing that Zhang Xianghe described in his colophon, given that Wang Xuehao's painting theories and Zhang

Xianghe's viewing response were both grounded in the ideals of literati painting. To see Wang's painting and then to imagine it as a gateway to a genealogy of other paintings and painters, as Zhang did, meant understanding the relationship between the painted marks of the image and the actions and thoughts of the painter who made it, as well as those of the painters who came before him.

Taken together, close readings of the two colophons to Wang Xuehao's *Presenting the Tripod* reveal to us an important aspect of viewing literati painting in the nineteenth century, and perhaps in earlier periods also: that painting was understood in various embodied terms, and through those terms a viewer could visualize images beyond the painting. The reactions of Zhang Xianghe and Ouzhuang to Wang's painting show that they experienced the image by connecting it to their own memories of canonical paintings and reverence for historical objects. Viewing Wang's image meant

traveling through it to feel the surfaces and brush marks of the past. This mode of viewing created in spectators a relationship to the past that was sensed in the body as much as it was reasoned in the mind or gleaned from texts.

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NOTES

- 1 Wang Zhangtao 2003, pp. 303–4.
- 2 The painting's full title, *Presenting the Tripod at Mt. Jiao*, is abbreviated hereafter to *Presenting the Tripod*, in keeping with the Metropolitan Museum's preferred title.
- 3 Wang Zhangtao 2003, p. 292. The Taoling Tripod is sometimes referred to as the Dingtao Tripod. Its present location is unknown.
- 4 Poems were written about the event by luminaries including the outspoken statesman Hong Liangji (1746–1809), the poet Chen Wenshu (1775–1845), and the poet, collector, and official Weng Fanggang (1733–1818). The 1865 edition of the *Jiaoshan zhi* (Gazetteer of Mt. Jiao) mentions the tripod. Illustrations of the tripod's inscription, together with the story of Ruan's donation, were published in many books on epigraphy, starting with Ruan Yuan's 1804 *Jiguzhai zhongding yiqi kuanzhi* (Inscriptions on bells, tripods, and bronze vessels from the Jigu Studio), and also, notably, Zhang Yanchang's *Jinshi qi* (Epigraphic engravings), written sometime before Zhang's death in 1814. Many rubbings of the tripod were made by epigraphy experts during the nineteenth century, including those by the monk Liuzhou (1791–1858), discussed later in this article.
- 5 It is uncertain whether Wang was present on the occasion of the Tripod's donation. Neither his inscription nor the other extant accounts of that day mention who was there. But whether he was a direct witness or not, his image deploys the tropes of landscape painting and the iconography of Zhenjiang scenery—Mt. Jiao's in particular—to give a convincing likeness of the location.
- 6 Although inscriptions attached to the painting do not list names that would identify the figures, and although the figures bear no distinguishing features, they may be stand-ins for well-known individuals, from Ruan Yuan himself to the various officials and scholars who wrote poems to commemorate this event, such as Weng Fanggang, Chen Wenshu, Hong Liangji, and others. See Wang Zhangtao 2003, pp. 292–93.
- 7 See Mei 2008, pp. 98–211, and Mei 1999, pp. 200–206, especially the list of paintings of Mt. Jin and Mt. Jiao from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries on pp. 201–2.
- 8 As early as the Northern Song dynasty, literati traveled to see the most famous inscription preserved at Mt. Jiao, *Yihe ming* (“Inscription on Burying a Crane”), traditionally dated to 514.
- 9 The emperor's building campaign has been described as part of a “cult of imperial monuments” promoted by the court in the Qing dynasty. Mei 2008, p. 105. In 1779, the Qianlong emperor ordered the construction of the Wenzong Pavilion at Mt. Jin, one of only three locations in southern China to house a copy of his grandest cultural project, the *Siku Quanshu* (Comprehensive Library of the Four Treasuries), an encyclopedia of historical books that composed the sum total of approved knowledge in the Qing empire.
- 10 Ruan Yuan held the governorship of Zhejiang from 1799 to 1805 and again in 1808–9. In 1838 he attained his highest imperial rank as *Tireng daxueshi* (Grand Secretary of the Tiren Pavilion), serving in the Qing imperial palaces in Beijing. An outline summary of Ruan Yuan's political career is given in Wei 2006, pp. xv–xvii.
- 11 Wang Zhangtao 2003, pp. 1037–61.
- 12 Wei 2006, pp. 63, 69, 212.
- 13 Wang Zhangtao 2003, pp. 59–60. Ruan Yuan's record contains the only known mention of these paintings.
- 14 The history of the West Lake paintings, dated 1799, 1800, and 1802, is complex and relates to Ruan Yuan's establishment of an

- academy of scholars to explicate classical texts. The two later works were added to Wang Xuehao's original handscroll, as was a painting from 1800 by Xi Gang and inscriptions by Liu Yong and Ruan Yuan. The single handscroll containing all these paintings is in the Tianjin Museum. For a discussion of the West Lake academy, see Wang Zhangtao 2003, pp. 207–9. Reference to at least one of Wang Xuehao's two later West Lake paintings is found in *ibid.*, p. 237. For discussions of figure 9, see below in this article and also Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts 2007, vol. 1, pp. 112–13. The collaborative portrait of Ruan Yuan, dated 1808, is in the Nanjing Museum. The inscription indicates that Wang Xuehao painted the pine tree, while an unnamed artist painted the portrait.
- 15 In his inscription on a painting now in the Hebei Provincial Museum, Wang cites a painting by Wang Meng he once saw in the collection of Ruan Yuan. See *Zhongguo gudai shuhua tumu* 1986–2001, vol. 8, p. 69.
 - 16 One of the earliest biographies of Wang Xuehao is in Jiang Baoling, *Molin jinhua*, vol. 8, pp. 1a–3a. Wang's treatise on painting, *Shannan lun hua*, as compiled by Zhang Xianghe and published in 1876, contains a short biography by Yan Bing dated to 1846. Brief accounts of Wang's life are in Fu and Fu 1973, pp. 336–37, and Claudia Brown and Chou 1992, pp. 43–44. Both are based on Jiang's biography. In Chinese, as in English, there is little scholarship dedicated to Wang Xuehao. For a useful summary of his life and thoughts on painting, see Lu 2006.
 - 17 The Lesser Four Wangs were Wang Su, Wang Jiu, Wang Yu, and Wang Chen, eighteenth-century painters who followed the principles of the historically engaged style credited to Dong Qichang in the early seventeenth century and perpetuated in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries by the Four Wangs: Wang Shimin, Wang Jian, Wang Hui, and Wang Yuanqi.
 - 18 A bias against early nineteenth-century Chinese painting has its roots in the new methods of art history instituted in early twentieth-century China under the influence of Western Enlightenment thinking, which permeated many aspects of Chinese thought at this time. That bias carried forward into the otherwise broad-minded and inclusive scholarship of Sherman E. Lee and James Cahill in the late twentieth century. It was not until Claudia Brown and Ju-hsi Chou's 1992 exhibition "Transcending Turmoil" (Phoenix Art Museum) that scholars began to take a nuanced approach to the subject, though the conservative label clings to painters like Wang Xuehao, whose approach to painting is still seen as "orthodox." See Lee 1982, Cahill 1982, and Brown and Chou 1992.
 - 19 Wang Xuehao, *Shannan lun hua*, p. 1b.
 - 20 *Ibid.*, p. 2a.
 - 21 Words such as "bone" and "flesh" apply to line direction and the absorptivity of ink in *The Battle Formation of the Brush*, traditionally attributed to Lady Wei (272–349) but dated between 618 and 678 in modern scholarship. See Barnhart 1964, pp. 15–17. Similarly, "bone" is used as a metaphor for brushwork in the second of Xie He's "Six Laws of Painting." For a synopsis of translations of those laws, see Bush and Shih 1985, pp. 10–17.
 - 22 The genealogical approach to making and viewing painting was formalized by Dong Qichang (1555–1636) in his theory of Northern and Southern schools of painting. See Wai-kam Ho 1976.
 - 23 For Wang Hui's copy of Huichong's *Spring in Jiangnan*, see China Guardian Auctions 2018, lot 412. The Beijing Palace Museum preserves an anonymous painting titled *Spring Sunrise among Streams and Mountains* that was once attributed to Huichong and known as *Spring in Jiangnan*. See *Zhongguo gudai shuhua tumu* 1986–2001, vol. 19, 京1, no. 574. Su Shi's poems are *Huichong Chunjiang wanjing er shou* (Two poems on Huichong's Spring in Jiangnan). See Su Shi, *Su Shi shiji hezhu* (2001 ed., vol. 2, pp. 1334–35).
 - 24 Wang Xuehao, *Shannan lun hua*, p. 2a.
 - 25 *Ibid.*, p. 1a.
 - 26 The phrase "follow the path" likely carried Buddhist connotations of a master-disciple relationship. That *Zhuhu Grass Hut*, the first painting mentioned by Zhang Xianghe, was written on the back of Buddhist sutra paper lends weight to this probability.
 - 27 Ruan Yuan, *Jiguzhai zhongding yiqi kuanzhi*, vol. 9, p. 7b.
 - 28 Zhang Yanchang, *Jinshi qi*, vol. 1, pp. (ding) 9–11.
 - 29 That Ruan Yuan knew of the Dinghui Temple's history and held the institution in high esteem cannot be doubted. He built a library for the monastery there in 1813. Wang Zhangtao 2003, pp. 575, 577.
 - 30 Wu 1995, pp. 4–11.
 - 31 For the relative importance of text and decoration on cast-bronze vessels in the late Shang and early Zhou periods, see Wu 1995, pp. 53–56.
 - 32 The stories of Xu You and Chaofu have been told in various forms. One of the earliest accounts is included in *Gaoshi zhuan* (Biographies of lofty scholars), by the third-century scholar and physician Huangfu Mi. Xu You's story is memorably recorded in *Zhuangzi*, section one, "Free and Easy Wandering." See Burton Watson's classic translation, *Chuang Tzu, Basic Writings* (1964, pp. 23–30).
 - 33 Ruan Yuan was not the first to organize a study of ancient inscribed objects in this manner. Chu Jun's *Jinshijing yanlu* (Record of viewing bronzes and stones), first circulated in 1736, reproduced rubbings in printed form in order to intensify the indexical relationship of the reader to the original objects. See Tseng 2010.
 - 34 Ruan Yuan, *Jiguzhai zhongding yiqi kuanzhi*, vol. 9, pp. 6–7 (Han Taoling Tripod), and vol. 4, pp. 28a–28b (Xuzhuan Tripod).
 - 35 It was from Liu Kang's honorary title, Prince of Dingtao, that the tripod got its name, "Taoling Tripod," or the "Tao Mausoleum Tripod."
 - 36 Arguments for the revision centered particularly on dating the name Nanzhong 南仲, which was cast into the Xuzhuan Tripod and was also used in two poems of the *Classic of Poetry*, "Bringing out the Chariots" and "Changwu." Dai Zhen, *Mao Zheng shi kao zheng*, vol. 2, pp. 3b–4a; Ruan Yuan, *Jiguzhai zhongding yiqi kuanzhi*, vol. 4, p. 29a.
 - 37 Weng Fanggang, *Jiaoshan dingming kao*.
 - 38 The history of the Xuzhuan Tripod is given in Ruan Yuan's *Jiguzhai zhongding yiqi kuanzhi* (vol. 4, pp. 28a–30b). That account is repeated in an inscription on a composite rubbing-and-painting of the tripod by Wu Changshuo: *Dingsheng tu* (Flourishing Tripod), 1902, Zhejiang Museum.
 - 39 See Clunas 2004, pp. 46–49.
 - 40 The debate over the *zuo* and *gongyang* commentaries of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* exemplifies the destabilizing possibilities of evidential research. The *zuo* commentaries were the basis for Neo-Confucian governmental training, but during the early Qing dynasty, evidential research scholars dated the *gongyang* commentaries to a period closer to the time of Confucius. This revision posed a challenge to orthodox understandings of Confucianism, especially as the *gongyang* commentaries presented Confucius as an uncrowned king, while the *zuo*

- commentaries portrayed him as a sage-like teacher. Calligraphic style found on ancient inscribed objects was central to the philological argument assigning the *gongyang* commentaries to an earlier date. The two positions were known as the “old text” and the “new text” schools, with “old” and “new” referring to calligraphic styles rather than absolute dating. A prime example of the exploitation of these texts for political purposes is Hong Liangji’s use of language from the *gongyang* commentaries to make accusations against Heshen after the death of the Qianlong Emperor. See Nivison 1959, Elman 1989, and Elman 1990, pp. 284–90.
- 41 Ruan’s books based on evidential research include *Yili shijing jiaokan ji* (Collated notes on the rites and ceremonies of the Stone Classics); *Songben Shisanjing zhushu* (Commentary essays on Song editions of the Thirteen Classics); and *Maoshi buyi jian* (Supplementary commentaries on the Mao version of the Classic of Odes). Among his most-cited epigraphic publications are *Jiguzhai zhongding yiqi kuanzhi* (Inscriptions on bells, tripods, and bronze vessels from the Jigu Studio); *Shanzuo jinshi zhi* (Inscriptions in bronze and stone from Shandong); and *Liang Zhe jinshi zhi* (Inscriptions in bronze and stone from Zhejiang). See Wang Zhangtao 2003, pp. 1037–61, and Wei 2006, pp. 329–35.
- 42 Hong Liangji, *Gengshengzhai shi xuji*, vol. 9, pp. 4a–5b.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 The identity of Ouzhuang and how he came to possess the painting in 1845, four years before Ruan Yuan died, are unknown. If Ouzhuang had written his colophon while Ruan Yuan owned the work, he would have acknowledged Ruan as he signed his name, as was customary in inscriptions on the property of others. The lack of such an acknowledgment and the fact that Ouzhuang attached his cherished original rubbing to the handscroll indicate that he was probably the owner at the time he wrote the colophon. What Ruan Yuan did with the painting between 1803 and 1845 is also uncertain. Presumably, after being given this painting, Ruan Yuan would have held on to it. However, no inscription or seals by Ruan are attached to the work, and he does not mention the work in his writings. The painting may have had inscriptions by Ruan and others that were later separated from it, although there is no direct evidence for or against this theory. A lack of additional colophons or inscriptions is not unusual for literati paintings, especially those presented as gifts. However, it does raise the possibility that Ruan never accepted the painting or that it was never given to him. While this eventuality may cast doubt on the work’s authenticity, its style is quintessentially that of an authentic Wang Xuehao painting. In addition, the calligraphy matches that found in other inscriptions by Wang, and the mid-nineteenth-century colophons as well as the collection seals of the same period added to the handscroll by Xu Chuanjing support an attribution to Wang Xuehao.
- 45 Early steles were choice pieces of evidence for evidential research arguments. The age of these objects conferred authenticity, and the material solidity of their texts reduced the likelihood that they had been polluted through multiple recensions, in the manner of printed versions of early texts. For Ruan’s concept of the authenticity of early cast and inscribed calligraphy, see his *Nanbei shupai lun*, in *Lidai shufa lun wenxuan* 1979, pp. 629–37, and Ledderose 2001, pp. 231–32. For the reliability of inscriptions on Han dynasty monuments, see Miranda Brown 2005. For the use of rubbings in evidential research, see Elman 1984, pp. 6–9, 29–30, 49–53, 103–4, 225–34.
- 46 The epigraphic aesthetic is described in Ledderose 2001; it is elaborated on in Tseng 2008 and Chuan-hsing Ho 2012. For a historiography of the perceived connections between epigraphy and painting in the nineteenth century, see Li 2012.
- 47 The preference for clerical scripts among scholars of this generation is covered in Ledderose 2001, pp. 231–32. It is also discussed in Ruan’s essay, in which “Northern” styles—those transmitted by inscription on stone steles—are commended for their authenticity over “Southern” styles, which were transmitted via less durable materials, such as silk or paper, and were often known only through copies.
- 48 For a synopsis of the early history of rubbings, see Starr 2008, pp. 3–8. The use of rubbings by scholars in the eighteenth century is discussed in Elman 1984, pp. 6–9, 29–30, 49–53, 103–4, 225–34. For the early collecting of these prints by literati such as Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072), see Egan 2006, especially chap. 1.
- 49 Bai 2010, p. 299. Liuzhou’s given name was Tao Dashou.
- 50 For an introduction to rubbing techniques and concepts, see Starr 2008. For rubbings in relation to a fascination with ruination, see Wu 2003 and Wu 2012.
- 51 Zhejiang Provincial Museum 2014, pp. 32–37.
- 52 Wu discusses rubbings as substitutes for original objects, referencing Roland Barthes’s description of photographs as perfect analoga. Wu argues that rubbings are superior to photographs in reducing the distance between an object and its image. Wu 2003, p. 30.
- 53 For a description of composite rubbing techniques, see Bai 2010, p. 295.

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