



"Glimpses of the Duanwu Festival" by Fang Xun (1736-1799) : commemorative painting or private souvenir ?

Anne Kerlan-Stephens

► To cite this version:

Anne Kerlan-Stephens. "Glimpses of the Duanwu Festival" by Fang Xun (1736-1799) : commemorative painting or private souvenir ?. *Phoebus, A Journal of Art History*, 2001, 9, pp. 171-141. halshs-00004172

HAL Id: halshs-00004172

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00004172>

Submitted on 19 Jul 2005

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Glimpses of the Duanwu Festival by Fang Xun (1736-1799) : commemorative painting or private souvenir ?

Anne Kerlan-Stephens

CNRS, Centre de recherche sur la civilisation chinoise, Paris.

The Roy and Marilyn Papp collection is very precious for the study of late Chinese painting¹. For 18th century art, as Claudia Brown has stated², it allows us to go beyond the two traditional points of interest for art historians, Imperial Court painting and the Yangzhou school, to delve into what was actually the mainstream of the time, Orthodox painting³. Such is the case with the painting *Tianzhong Jiejing Tu* (*Glimpses of the Duanwu Festival*) (figure 1) by Fang Xun 方薰 (1736-1799), a painting that richly rewards attention.

Glimpses of the Duanwu Festival is a short handscroll that bears no date, signature or seals of its author. Its attribution is made clear thanks to two inscriptions⁴. The first, on the painting itself, was written in 1880 by the painter Zhang Xiong 張熊 (1803-1886) for the owner of the time, an unknown prefect (*taishou* 太守). The other, earlier inscription follows the painting and was written in 1811 by Fang Xun's oldest son, Fang Tinghu 方廷瑚, who became *juren* in 1808⁵ and later was a district magistrate in the Beijing area. This inscription is the more important as it provides an approximate date of composition and theme, as we shall see. Nevertheless, the Zhang Xiong inscription is noteworthy in that it proves Fang Xun was still a name in the art market at the end of the 19th century.

¹ I would like to thank William Stephens, my husband, for his close reading of the article as well as Michèle Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens.

² In her article "The Roy and Marilyn Papp Collection of Chinese Painting" in Claudia Brown and Ju-hsi Chou, *The Scent of Ink* (Phoenix, 1994).

³ My understanding and interest in the Orthodox school of painting owes much to the illuminating analysis of Ju-hsi Chou. See Ju-hsi Chou, "In defense of Qing Orthodoxy", in Richard Barnhart, James Cahill et al., *The Jade Studio, Masterpieces of Ming and Qing Calligraphy from the Wong Nan-p'ing Collection* (New Haven, 1994).

⁴ See annexe I for a translation of the inscriptions. I would like to thank Olivier and Atsuko Venture for their help in the reading of the first inscription.

⁵ See Geng Weihu 耿維祐, Pan Wenlu 潘文輅 and Pan Rongjing 潘蓉鏡, *Jiaqing Shimen Xianzhi* 嘉慶石門縣志 (1821 edition), *juan* 16, 24.

The scroll depicts an estate garden, neither walled nor gated, but well protected by large parasol trees⁶, the *wutong* 梧桐 which gave their name to the place, the Tonghua Guan 桐華館 (The Flowering Paulownia Studio). Unscrolling it, one first sees a riverbank with bamboo, shrubs and *wutong* trees that hide the main buildings tucked in the background. Inside the entrance hall, one finds a low table, set with flowers, and two stools, and on the wall, a hanging scroll that can be identified as the portrait of Zhong Kui, the conqueror of ghosts⁷ associated with the *duanwu* festival. In the hallway on the left side, a woman stands holding a baby in her arms, looking at two children at play with a pet in the front courtyard. Leaving this peaceful scene, one follows a narrow trail between a Taihu rock, a banana tree and a loquat tree to a pavilion situated under a willow tree by the river. Inside, four men socialize while a servant presents them drinks. The painting then leaves the garden to end with an open view of the river disappearing in the distance. The riverbanks are empty, except for one small, red winding bridge that leads the eye to the background, far away from the garden.

The painting is finely done. The view is taken from a distance, but each part is painted with many details that bring it to life. The *duanwu* festival is evoked in several ways: the touches of red that animate the painting recall the red silk thread carried by children that day; the plants by the river look like the sweet flag (*changpu* 菖蒲) used during the festival to repel pestilence and the flowering vegetation (the garden hollyhock) reminds us that this festival takes place when nature is in full bloom. Finally, the composition sets in subtle opposition the main buildings and the pavilion. These two parts of the estate are well separated by the vegetation, but nevertheless connect and become complementary, with one placed at the background with a broad, open space in front and the other in the foreground with emptiness behind.

The painting, according to Fang Tinghu, was executed in 1782 or 1783 when Fang Xun was a painter in residence at the Tonghua Guan, an estate that his main patron, the scholar Jin Deyu 金德輿 (1750-1800), built in Tongxiang 桐鄉, next to Hangzhou 杭州. Fang Tinghu tells us the scroll describes this same Tonghua Guan and a gathering attended by Jin and three of his friends, Zhu Fang'ai 朱方藹 (1721-1786), Zhao Huaiyu 趙懷玉 (1747-1823) and Bao Tingbo 鮑挺博 (1728-1814). Interestingly, the painter did not include himself in the scene. There are four

⁶ I would like to thank Georges Métaillé who helped me to identify, where possible, the plants in this painting. It is in fact interesting to see how, in the same image, Fang Xun depicts very precisely some plants (the loquat tree is a good example) and is much less precise in depicting other plants. See annexe II. for the list of the plants identifiable.

⁷ See also Ju-hsi Chou's description of the painting in Brown and Chou, *Scent of Ink*, 104-105.

seals on the painting, but unfortunately, apart from the seals of Zhang Xiong and Fang Tinghu, the other two cannot be identified⁸. The seals do not belong to Fang Xun or to any of the four men mentioned by Fang Tinghu, nor did any of them add an inscription.

This absence of seals, signature and inscriptions make this work a small mystery, even if the attribution to Fang Xun is clear. It is entirely logical to assume that the painting was commissioned by Jin Deyu to commemorate the gathering. If so, how can we explain the silence of the participants, who did not add the usual inscriptions? One answer could be that the painting is either not finished or is a draft version, but considering the care Fang Xun put into the composition and coloring, this is difficult to accept. Another explanation could be that it did not please Jin, or any of the other participants, and was therefore set aside. A third option is that Jin chose not to observe the formalities associated with commemorative painting. Perhaps because the subject was so private, it seemed unnecessary to inscribe it⁹. I will examine this third hypothesis before considering a fourth possibility, one that takes into account Fang Xun's life and personality.

A commemorative painting?

Commemorative paintings were common among scholars, who used them in a variety of ways: to mark literary gatherings, depict someone's estate, or symbolically portray friends or associates. Because they served an implicitly social purpose, commemorative paintings were usually followed by inscriptions from the friends, clients, or painter connected to the subject. In the case of *Glimpses of the Duannu Festival* this is not so. Moreover, the painting is not very "social" in tone. Just the contrary, it is modest, indeed, intimate. The viewer feels he is penetrating a private space, at a moment when the inhabitants, family and friends, are not aware of his presence. If this painting is, in fact, a commemorative work, we need to understand the choice of this private tone along with the absence of inscriptions. Perhaps an explanation can be found in the state of mind of the men depicted here, all of whom were representative figures of the Hangzhou elite.

Three were scholars and the fourth was from an old merchant family, but none would ever complete a full career as a high-ranking official. Jin Deyu, appointed Secretary of the Fengtian

⁸ The first one, at the beginning of the scroll on the painting reads "Chun chao qing wan 春潮清頑", then comes the seal of Zhang Xiong and, lower down after the painting, a seal that reads "Tieyun shending jinshi shuhua 鐵雲審定金石書畫".

⁹ This is the hypothesis suggested by Ju-hsi Chou in his study of the painting for the catalog exhibition ; see Brown and Chou, *Scent of Ink*, 106.

Bureau in the Ministry of Justice, left office to settle at Tongxiang¹⁰ while Zhao Huaiyu renounced a promising career when his father died and later became director of the Academy Wenzheng 文正書院 in Jiangsu province¹¹. Zhu Fang'ai, a poet and *prunus* flowers painter, received imperial honors in his youth¹² but chose not to pursue an official career. As for Bao Tingbo, he was never himself a merchant; the wealth of his family allowed him to become a man of letters, and more precisely a famous bibliophile¹³. The destinies of Jin Deyu and Bao Tingbo are highly symbolic of the development of the 18th century Chinese elite: while Jin Deyu, a member of the old gentry, died poor after squandering his fortune to maintain his standard of living, the new, well integrated merchant elite typified by Bao Tingbo was climbing the ladder of success.

This circle of friends was, it seems, rather traditional in its social composition and well representative of the intellectual climate of the Jiangnan area. They shared a passion for books and belonged to a network of bibliophiles very active in the Hangzhou area, an important center for bibliophiles at that time¹⁴. This passion coincided with an interest in philology¹⁵, and the *jinshi xue* 金石學 movement, the study of bronze and stone inscriptions¹⁶. The involvement of these men in the cultural and intellectual life of the Qianlong 乾隆 (r. 1736-1796) era is exemplified by a common project they worked on, probably at the moment the painting was done. Zhao Huaiyu, with the assistance of Jin Deyu and Bao Tingbo, printed in 1784 in Hangzhou the *Siku Quanshu Jianming Mulu* 四庫全書簡明目錄, an abridged version¹⁷ of the imperial

¹⁰ For Jin Deyu's biography, see Yan Chen 嚴辰 *Guangxu Tongxiang Xianzhi* 光緒桐鄉縣志 (1887 edition), *juan* 15, 19-20.

¹¹ See Arthur W. Hummel ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (Washington D.C., 1943-44), I, 71-72 for his biography.

¹² His biography is also given in the *Guangxu Tongxiang Xianzhi*, *juan* 15, 20. He was received by the emperor in 1762.

¹³ See Bao Tingbo's biography in Hummel ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, II, 612-3. According to Nancy Lee Swann, "Seven Intimate Library Owners" in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 1936, vol. 1, 386, Bao Tingbo dedicated himself entirely to book collecting in the 1750's.

¹⁴ Jin Deyu is quoted as one of the bibliophiles in the preface by Zhu Wencao of Bao's *Zhibuzhu Zhai Congshu*. 知不足齋叢書. See also Nancy Lee Swann, "Seven Intimate Library Owners", 381.

¹⁵ Jin Deyu worked on many historical sources. He was called « the Historian's assistant ». See *Guangxu Tongxiang Xianzhi*, *juan* 15, 20.

¹⁶ Zhang Yanchang 張燕昌 (1738-1814) describes a bronze he saw at the Tonghua Guan in his *Jinshi qie* 金石契 (Shanghai Library edition without date), *juan* 2, 20.

¹⁷ The list of the 3450 titles of the *mulu* was presented to the throne in 1782. For the history of this edition, see Hummel ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, under Ji Yun. See also Robert Kent Guy, *The Emperor's Four Treasuries, Scholars and the State in the Late Chien-lung Era* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), chap. 3.

encyclopedia catalogue made under the supervision of Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724-1805). This non-official edition obviously targeted the men of letters of the Jiangnan area.

The relationship the men in Jin Deyu's circle had with imperial power seems ambivalent. As members of the elite of their region, they were necessarily in contact with the Emperor. For instance, in 1780 during the imperial inspection, the four men contributed to the publication of a book Jin Deyu offered to the throne, the *Taiping Huanle Tu* (*Peace and Joy in the Realm*) (figure 2). The folio described, in 100 pictures composed by Fang Xun, the peaceful and happy life of the people of Zhejiang¹⁸. Such an act of allegiance was not rare; it was in fact sometimes inevitable and can reflect a wide range of attitudes toward the Emperor, from one of obligation (an elite like Jin Deyu was compelled, like his elders did before him¹⁹, to offer something to Qianlong), to a strategy for advancement in the official curriculum²⁰, to even a precautionary measure. This last was not at all unreasonable considering the dangers of politics. To our four subjects, the tragedy of the Zhu family was a close example of what could happen to those serving the Empire. One of Zhu Fang'ai's older brothers, Zhu Ying 朱英, was imprisoned in Sichuan for 37 years due to a fault committed by a brother while on post in this province²¹. This caused the ruin of his family, including the death of his eldest son, Zhu Hongyou 朱鴻輅 (d. around 1783), who was also Jin Deyu's cousin.

Such events likely made the four friends' relationship with imperial power problematic: how to maintain the contact required of economic and intellectual elites without running afoul of often fickle imperial justice? Their response seems to have been to withdraw into purely intellectual activities, which gave sufficient opportunity to honor imperial authority without making one too vulnerable to political dangers. If this is indeed the spirit they adopted, it matches well the painting's intimate tone of withdrawal to a very private space.

But is this withdrawal sufficient to explain the absence of seals or inscriptions? It certainly did not mean these men were uninterested in socializing, or the practice of commemorating social events.

¹⁸ Jin Deyu was the donor of the album, which he gave together with some rare books, Zhao Huaiyu and Zhu Fang'ai added inscriptions to the pictures and Bao Tingbo wrote the title. See the preface of the *Taiping Huanle Tu* (1888 edition, Shanghai Library).

¹⁹ Bao Tingbo gave to the throne 623 books from his library, responding to the call of the Emperor in 1773 at the launch of the *Siku Quanshu* encyclopedia project. The *Guangxu Tongxiang Xianzhi* says that Zhu Fang'ai offered paintings he did to the Emperor during the 1762 Southern Tour Inspection.

²⁰ According to the *Guangxu Tongxiang Xianzhi*, Jin Deyu received some silks from the emperor, but the *Tongxiang Xianzhi* seems also to connect this gift with the appointment of Jin Deyu in Beijing. However, 1780 is quite late for such a start in the career of Jin Deyu. Jiang Baoling 蔣寶齡 in *Molin Jinbua* 墨林今話 (1840) reprinted in *Qingdai Zhuanji Congkan* (Taipei, 1985), vol. 73, 131-132, says that Fang Xun prepared the book at Jin Deyu's mother request.

²¹ See *Guangxu Tongxiang Xianzhi*, *juan* 15, 26, under Zhu Ying.

Jin Deyu's poem anthology, the *Tonghua Guan Shichao* 桐華館詩鈔 (*Poems from the Flowering Paulownia Studio*) and Zhu Fang'ai's anthology, *Chunqiao Caotang Shiji* 春橋草堂詩集 (*Collection of the Poetry from the Thatched Cottage of Chunqiao*)²², are full of poetic games made during informal meetings. For instance, one finds in the *Chunqiao Caotang Shiji* the evocation of a gathering that happened in 1783 at the same Tonghua Guan²³. It cannot be the one depicted in the painting, because it happened in springtime. However, it gives a good idea of the atmosphere at the Tonghua Guan, where informality and poetic games were common: “ In the year *guimao*, at springtime, there was a friendly gathering at the Tonghua Guan, among reeds and grass at the moonlight. Our host served us some bamboo roots. Because we were composing poems about green bamboo with half of their skin, I improvised one with the rime *ban* (half)”.

Fang Xun himself was often present and did some commemorative paintings in other circumstances. This is the case for the *Yinghua Shuwu Tu* (*The Library of Bright Flowers*) (figure 3), painted in 1795 during a literary gathering²⁴. It bears a poem by Fang Xun and other inscriptions that explain the circumstances under which the painting was made. It also clearly focuses on the three men sitting in the building. The few objects depicted are books and scrolls. In comparison, in *Glimpses of the Duanwu Festival*, the focus is on the family life, well protected by the Zhong Kui, as it should be that day (figure 4)²⁵. The few objects depicted, the postures of the figures, playing or at ease, evokes more a day of rest in a protected place (figure 5). Compared to a commemorative painting like the *Yinghua Shuwu Tu*, our painting shares neither the tone, nor the inscriptions, nor the focus and so does not seem to answer the prerequisites of this genre.

Of course, one can say that the composition of *Glimpses of the Duanwu Festival* reflects the wish of the participants to be perceived as men who prefer the simplicity of a secluded life in a rural

²² These two collections were published together in 1800. I found a copy of the edition at the Shanghai Library.

²³ See *Chunqiao Caotang Shiji*, *juan* 8, 16. This inscription invites us to reconsider the identity of some of the figures depicted because it mentions the presence of Zhu Hongyou at the gathering in springtime 1783. One of the participants of the *duanwu* festival gathering could also have been Zhu Hongyou, instead of Bao Tingbo or Zhao Huaiyu.

²⁴ There is also, in the Shanghai museum, a painting called *Elegant Gathering* (*Yaji tu* 雅集圖) which bears inscriptions but is not signed or dated. See a small reproduction of this painting in *Zhongguo Gudai Shuhua Tumu* (Beijing, 1989-2001), vol. 5, n° 1-4780. Another painting by Fang Xun, also in the Shanghai museum, signed and dated from 1798, can be considered a commemorative painting: the *Portrait of Zhang Shiqi*, (*Zhang Shiqi Xiaoxiang Tu* 張士燊肖像圖), which bears numerous inscriptions. For a reproduction see Anne Kerlan-Stephens, « Traduction et commentaire d'un texte sur la peinture chinoise : Fang Xun et son *Shanjingju hualun* (Propos de l'Ermitage de la Montagne tranquille) » (ph.D dissertation : Université Paris7-Denis Diderot, 2000) vol.3, 132. We are very thankful to the museum of Shanghai, which gave us the unpublished reproductions of Fang Xun paintings.

²⁵ As is well known, the Duanwu Festival is a day that is considered to be ominous. The Zong Kui, sweet flag and other protective devices were stamped on the door of the house. It looks as if the inhabitants of the Tonghua Guan garden are, in fact, well protected against any attack from pestilence.

retreat to honors and glory, an aspiration entirely in keeping with traditional literati values. It could mean that our men valued the space of the family and close friends because it was the only one that remained untouched from social and political obligations. However, we would be right to ask why, as private as it was, this painting did not even bear the inscriptions of men described as close friends. Were they so reluctant to play the literary game? This also touches on the issue of the purpose of a painting, specifically a painting made at a patron's request. What does a painting become if it stays in a private circle? If it is not seen by others? It becomes a private souvenir, like a family photograph kept inside the familial sphere of Jin Deyu. We cannot exclude this possibility, but as we saw, it would then be very different in nature from a commemorative painting. It would unveil a care for privacy rarely seen to such a degree among literati patrons.

A biography of the painter

Thus far, we have assumed that *Glimpses of the Duanwu Festival* was made at Jin Deyu's request. But this assumption, as believable as it is, does not provide an entirely satisfying answer to the problem posed by the painting. We need to examine another hypothesis and to do so, we need first to understand better who was the painter, not only because he created the work but also because the painting depicts a place where he lived and men he was familiar with. The painting provides insight into Fang Xun's life.

Fang Xun's life is somehow typical of that of a professional literati painter of that time. Born in 1736, he died in 1799²⁶ and stayed most of his life in the Jiangnan area, chiefly in the prefecture of Jiaying 嘉興, between lake Taihu 太湖 and Hangzhou, in the district of Shimen 石門 where he was born, and the bordering district of Tongxiang, the location of the Tonghua Guan. It is in this "suburban" milieu, rather than in the populous Hangzhou, that our painter developed his career.

The choice, if it was one, to work and live in a suburban area rather than the city, where the art market was certainly larger, is indicative of a man described as a gentle and humble personality. Illness and a physical disability²⁷ are said to have prevented him from engaging in an official

²⁶ In Brown and Chou, *Scent of Ink*, 104, the date given for Fang Xun's death is 1801. There was, in fact, a painting attributed by Osvald Siren to Fang Xun in *Chinese Painting, Leading Masters and Principles* (London and New York, 1958-59) vol. VII, 329, and dated from 1801. But several textual sources, including an inscription on a painting by Fang Xun (see figure 8), and the preface of Jin Deyu's *Tonghua Guan Shichao* (1800), all mention the death of Fang Xun in 1799. For this question see Anne Kerlan-Stephens, *Traduction et commentaire d'un texte sur la peinture chinoise, Fang Xun et son Shanjingju hualun*, I, 38.

²⁷ He probably had a foot problem. See *Molin Jinbua* (QDZJCK, vol. 73, 131-132) and Guo Lin 郭, *Lingfen Guan Shibua* 靈芬館詩話, juan 4, 4-6.

career. Instead, he relied on painting to make a living²⁸. Fang Xun was, like his father, a commoner (*buyi*) but with a good classical education that made him a literatus. His father, Fang Mei 方 (1714-1762), was a free-spirited man, good at poetry, calligraphy and painting but unable to provide his sons²⁹ with a permanent home³⁰. But he taught Fang Xun painting and soon the young boy, no older than 15 years³¹, started to support the family with his work as a professional painter. Fang Xun is considered to be a very pious son who helped his father alive or dead³², but the man must have been an extravagant person because when he died, Fang Xun found himself in a difficult situation.

This is when, it seems, the Jin family began to help him. Fang Xun may have been introduced to the Jin's through Zhu Fang'ai, a mutual friend. Jin's mother, a fervent Buddhist, asked Fang to come and copy sutras. Soon, Jin Deyu himself began supporting Fang Xun, who became a painter in residence at the Tonghua Guan³³. From that time on, his career was connected with the destiny of Jin Deyu and the Tonghua Guan became a second home for him.

At the Tonghua Guan, Fang Xun developed a career typical for a painter in residence, copying for his patron the paintings in his collection³⁴, or executing works at his demand as when Jin Deyu, fond of a strange stone in a friend's collection, tried to exchange it for a painting by Fang Xun³⁵. He would also participate at poetic gatherings or travel with his patron, providing both poems and paintings³⁶. *Taishan Jiyou Tu (Records of Travels to Mount Tai)* (figure 6), executed in 1783, in the same years as the Papp collection painting, might be one example.

Was Fang Xun's situation as a painter in residence the best available to him? It is a difficult question to answer. "Protected" by his patron, Fang Xun developed a chosen clientele, avoiding the vulgar merchants who asked for erotic paintings³⁷, working for scholars and officials,

²⁸ See Guo Lin, *Lingfen Guan Shibua*, juan 4., 4-6.

²⁹ Some texts invite us to think that Fang Xun was the eldest son of the family. See *Tonghua Guan Shichao*, juan 2, 15.

³⁰ See *Molin Jinbua (QDZJCK)*, vol. 73, 60) for Fang Mei's life.

³¹ There is an inscription by Jin Deyu made on a painting Fang Xun did when he was 12 years old. See *Tonghua Guan Shichao*, juan 2, p. 8a. The *Guangxu Tongxiang Xianzhi*, juan 15, 13, says that at the age of 15, Fang Xun was already traveling with his father, meeting men of letters and gaining respect for his painting.

³² Fang Xun is said to have spent all his earnings for the burial of his deceased father. It is also said that he continued to help his mother in law after her husband's death. See *Jiaqing Shimen Xianzhi* (1821), juan 16, 24.

³³ See *Molin Jinbua (QDZJCK)*, vol. 73, 131-132). An inscription on a painting by Fang Xun also says that Fang Xun was saved (from poverty) by the Jin family when he was young. The postscript of the *Shanjingju Hualun*, in Yu Anlan 于安瀾 editor, *Hualun Congkan 畫論叢刊* (Reprint Taipei 1984), vol. 2, 465, dated from 1797, mentioned that at that time Fang Xun was at the Jin's residence.

³⁴ See *Molin Jinbua (QDZJCK)*, vol. 73, 131-132) and Yu Jiao 俞蛟, *Dubua Xianping 讀畫閒評* (in *Mengguang Zazhuo 夢廣雜著*, 1828 ed., juan 5), 20.

³⁵ See Guo Lin, *Lingfen Guan Zazhuo Xubian 靈芬館雜著續編*, juan 3, 7.

³⁶ For the poems, see the numerous poetic games reported in the *Tonghua Guan Shichao*. According to *Dubua Xianping*, 20, Fang Xun traveled with Jin Deyu and Zhao Huaiyu to Mount Taibai in Shanxi.

³⁷ See *Dubua Xianping*, 20.

sometimes even working with them, like in the painting made in collaboration with Qian Zai 錢載 (1708-1793) *Zhushi Tu* (*Bamboo and Rocks*) (figure 7). But when we compare his career with that of his peer, Xi Gang 奚岡 (1746-1803), a very independent and difficult personality, one can say that the latter became more famous. Xi also may have found more opportunity to develop his own style. In fact, some anecdotes, as we shall see, show that Jin Deyu was a jealous patron, who may have not only controlled access to his protege but also supervised, for good or bad, his artistic development. More positively, it seems that Fang Xun attained a stable economic situation, unlike Xi Gang who died in poverty. In fact, some anecdotes and one inscription on a painting lead us to think that Fang Xun's paintings were quite valuable during his lifetime and even after his death. The inscription written in 1818 by Dai Guangzeng 戴光曾 on *Mo Songren Shese Huabui Juan* (*Flowers After Song Masters*) (figure 8), tells us that Dai bought a Fang Xun painting for 14 pieces of foreign silver (*fanyin* 番銀)³⁸.

According to Fang Tinghu's inscription, in the 1780's, Fang Xun stayed at the Tonghua Guan. Later in his life, he moved into his own home in the vicinity, staying close to his patron³⁹. The fame he acquired a few years before his death can be seen from two events. First, his treatise on painting, the *Shanjingju Hualun* 山靜居畫論 was published around 1798 in the *Zhibuzu Zhai Congshu* 知不足齋叢書, the collection of Bao Tingbo. At that time, Fang Xun was living in Hangzhou, either because he followed his patron there or was "invited" by Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764-1849), then Director of Education for Zhejiang. In Hangzhou, Fang Xun met important men of letters within the circle of Ruan Yuan, like the poets Chen Hongshou 陳鴻壽 (1768-

³⁸ *Fanyin*, of *yinyuan* 銀圓 is foreign money of all sorts but in 1818 it most likely was the Spanish *real* coming from Mexican and Peruvian mints. Among them, the coins of the Spanish King Charles IV (1788-1808) were the most common. In Zhejiang and Fujian, in 1818, one of these coins would be worth 936 mace (*qian* 錢). I thank M. François Thierry from the Bibliothèque National de France for those informations. Fang Xun's painting was then sold for 13 104 coins or 1310 *tael* (*liang* 兩), one *qian* being a tenth of a *liang*. Fang Xun's work would then be rather expensive. This could be confirmed by an anecdote in *Dubua Xianping*, 20, saying that a merchant offered Fang Xun several hundred *taels* for an erotic painting that Fang Xun refused to do. *Molin Jinhua* (QDZJCK, vol. 73, 131-132) says that people were offering several thousand gold pieces for a painting of Fang Xun. It is difficult to know if these amounts are real or if they are just put in the text for emphatic, laudatory reasons.

³⁹ See *Molin Jinhua*, (QDZJCK, vol. 73, 131-132).

1822) and Chen Weixie 陳文杰 (1771-1883), or Guo Lin 郭 (1767-1831)⁴⁰. But Jiang

Baolin, in his good biography of Fang Xun, gives a negative account of the meeting with Ruan Yuan, which would have occurred in 1798. He states that Fang Xun went reluctantly and against his own will to Hangzhou and spent a year with Ruan. Ruan Yuan talks very little about Fang Xun; the two did not seem to have gotten along well⁴¹. If Jin Deyu was a paternalistic patron, Ruan Yuan seems to have been an authoritative one who wanted to have at his disposal all the famous names of the Hangzhou area. When Fang, an old man by this time, returned home after his time with Ruan, he fell sick and died. At his death, he was well respected as an artist in the Zhejiang milieu.

Built up during a lifetime spent around collectors, Fang Xun possessed a rich visual culture. He had access, for instance, to the collection of Xiang Yuanbian 項元汴 (1525-1540), that Jin Deyu partly bought⁴², and to the collection of Gao Shiqi 高士奇 (1645-1704), that was transmitted to one of his relatives, Zhu Hongyou, the nephew of Zhu Fang'ai⁴³. Although Fang Xun can be defined as an orthodox painter, his interest was not selective and the concern he expresses in his treatise for a professional mastery of his art leads him to study painters who do not belong to the Southern school. His approach to painting, in general, was more historical than ideological, which makes the *Shanjingju Hualun* a refreshing treatise.

A rich visual culture was necessary for a professional painter who, in fact, had to answer to a broad demand. Fang Xun was most famous as a painter of flowers— a genre very fashionable at that time-- but he also painted landscapes, portraits and popular themes, on paper or silk, in ink or colors. The variety of his techniques and subjects reflects the variety of the demand and also his own professionalism. But despite his versatility, Fang Xun has a characteristic style. First, he belongs to the orthodox tradition, as is most clear when looking at his landscape painting. In these works, the “imitation after ancient masters” (*fang* 倣) is fundamental, as we see in *Lin Ni Zan Zhensong Jieshi Tu* (Rock and Pine After Ni Zan)⁴⁴ (figure 9) or in this landscape after Guan Tong

⁴⁰ See Guo Lin, *Lingfen Guan Shihua*, juan 9, 4-6, who evokes the gatherings with Ruan Yuan, Jin Deyu, Fang Xun, Chen Hongshou and Chen Wenjie : « We were offering each other poetry and drinks with a totally free and relaxed spirit ».

⁴¹ See Ruan Yuan, *Dingxiang Ting Bitan* 定香亭筆談, juan 1, 50-51 where Ruan Yuan presents Fang Xun and gives some of his poems. By comparison, Ruan Yuan talks much more about Xi Gang in the same text.

⁴² See Molin *Jinhua* (QDZJCK, vol. 73, 131-132).

⁴³ See the *Shanjingju Hualun* (in Yu Anlan 于安瀾 editor, *Hualun Congkan* 畫論叢刊 (Reprint Taipei 1984), vol. 2, 460-466) where Fang Xun describes some of the paintings he saw.

⁴⁴ There are two dates on the painting. The first one with a dedication is 1774 (*jiawu er yue* 甲午二月), the second is with Fang Xun's signature, 1782 (*Qianlong sishiqi nian shi yue* 乾隆四十七年十月).

Shanshui Tu 山水圖 (figure 10) that uses the classical formula of the genre. But the view is not monumental. The artist displays an attention to detail that brings to the entire image warmth and familiarity, even if it sacrifices something in terms of cosmic rhythm. This care for detail is the second aspect of Fang Xun's work, well illustrated in his painting of flowers, where the artist is at his best. In his handscroll of flowers after Song masters (figure 8), he manages to give life and movement without losing a sense of detail. Fang Xun seemed capable of precision as well as freedom in his brushwork, developing a style of his own with time.

The Papp painting is unique among Fang Xun's work during the period. It seems, indeed, a much more personal painting. In the depiction of the garden setting and the figures, in the use of light colors, the work is full of simplicity and delicacy, a delicacy one finds ten years later in the *Yinghua Shunwu Tu* (figure 3). But *Glimpses of the Duannu Festival* is infused with a nostalgia that comes from this delicacy itself, combined with a depiction of daily details that gives it considerable charm. It is interesting to note that both paintings are, according to their title or inscription, made after two masters of the Wu school, Wen Jia 文嘉 (1501-1583) and Qian Gu 錢穀 (1508-1578). Of course, Fang's two paintings are much more casual in their treatment of the theme than would be an ethereal rendition by a Ming master. But the attention paid to the depiction of figures and the garden setting, the ink washes and minute coloring given preference to powerful mountain structures, owes something to the Wu artists.

A personal souvenir

The personal tone of the *Glimpses of the Duannu Festival* suits well, if it is the case, the private nature of the painting requested by Jin Deyu. It also suits well Fang Xun himself, who was described as a well-behaved, modest man. Perhaps this explains his absence from his own paintings. This absence might also shed light on the relationship of painter and patron. Many texts, including poems by Jin Deyu⁴⁵, present Jin's relationship with Fang as a friendly one. But the two men were in reality far from being social equals. In fact, Fang Xun was in Jin's debt, as the inscription written by Dai Guangzeng on the flowers handscroll presented earlier suggests: "Everytime somebody wanted a painting by Fang Xun, he had first to ask for Eyan's [Jin Deyu] permission. It is because when he was young, Fang Xun supported himself with the Jin's help. This is why he would only follow Eyan's orders." This aspect of the relationship is confirmed by Jiang Baolin who tells us that Jin Deyu would refuse on Fang Xun's behalf certain commands

⁴⁵ See *Tonghua Guan Shichao*, juan 1, p. 11 where Jin Deyu evokes in ten poems his « dear friends ». He then writes a poem about Bao Tingbo followed by one about Fang Xun.

made of Fang⁴⁶. In short, Jin Deyu exercised control over Fang Xun's production. By becoming a painter in residence, Fang Xun may have traded freedom for security.

From this point of view, perhaps Fang Xun does not represent himself in *Glimpses of the Duanwu Festival* because he does not really belong to the world of his patron. His status at the Tonghua Guan was perhaps an ambiguous one: he could not be represented simply as a servant, nor could he be painted at the table with Jin Deyu's friends. He is nowhere, neither in the familial sphere nor in the friendly one. Given this, he may have found a way to "appear" through, rather than in, his painting. The Zhong Kui, hanging in the entrance hall, was a type of painting that Fang Xun actually executed⁴⁷ and could therefore be the only tangible presence of the artist in this image. But beyond this visual evocation of himself, one can feel Fang's presence in the way he depicts a place where, it needs to be noted, he actually lived. This fact suggests another hypothesis, one that would explain the personal tone, the private treatment and the absence of seals or signatures on the painting. It could be that *Glimpses of the Duanwu Festival* was indeed conceived as a personal souvenir, not for the patron but for the artist himself, not commissioned but freely executed.

For Fang Xun, the Tonghua Guan was not only a garden for gatherings, it was, after his father's death and maybe for several years, his home, maybe the first he ever knew considering his father's life. We can imagine that, while living at the Tonghua Guan or even long after, the painter took up his brush to depict a place very important in his life, offering a personal vision that focuses on both the familial sphere and the circle of friends, which included men important to his life and career. But he also presents the place with the distance appropriate to the painter-in-residence he was. This mixing of closeness and distance captures well the vision presented by the painting as well as Fang Xun's status in the milieu in which he worked. After completion, Fang Xun would have kept the painting for himself. He would not have needed to sign or inscribe something made for his own use. One can imagine his son finding it, blank of any inscription, more than ten years after Fang's death, and giving it his own interpretation.

The circumstances surrounding the creation of the *Glimpses of the Duanwu Festival* will stay a mystery to us because of the lack of documents. Both main hypotheses have their interest, and they both point toward the use of painting as a private souvenir, a type of personal photograph, separate from ceremonial, social functions. In both cases also, the absence of the figure of Fang Xun expresses his status, the status of a painter-in-residence, not entirely part of the world he was

⁴⁶ See *Molin Jinbua* (QDZJCK, vol. 73, 131-132).

⁴⁷ There is a Zhong Kui painting by Fang Xun in the Shanghai Museum. It bears no date or inscription but is signed by Fang Xun. The signature "Shimen Fang Xun jing hua" « Fang Xun from Shimen respectfully painted it » may indicate that the painting was done at somebody's request.

depicting. This absence is compensated for by the delicacy of the emotions that appear under his brush. In the end, it is through his art that the painter manifests his presence, and maybe appropriately, through an image, manifests the place. As Fang himself said in one of his poems, written long after he left the estate, “I long lived at the Tonghua Guan. In its courtyard, on its flowers, rocks and bamboo, everywhere, I left the trace of my brush....”.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ *Shanijingju yigao* 山靜居遺稿 (manuscript from the Shanghai Library), 20.

Annexe I: Transcription and translation of the inscriptions on the painting.

A.

此圖為石門
方蘭坻先生
所繪天中小景
未經題款在
香生太守偶
意得之攜示
雖無款識一
嘗而知為先
生真跡無終 (?)
宜 (?) 寶之
光緒庚辰冬十月六日
鴛湖後學
張太子祥
氏審宗 (or 空) 因
記者年七十八

This painting was made by master Fang Landi of Shimen; it represents a small scene of the Tianzhong festival. [The author] never inscribed or signed it. The *taishou* (prefect) Xiangsheng happened to acquire it and brought it to show it to me. Even if it bears no signature, as soon as I had a look, I knew it was an authentic work of the master. We must treasure it for ever (?). In the sixth day of the tenth month of winter of the year *kengchen* (1880), under Guangxu, the disciple Yuanhu, Zhang Xiong Zixiang, at the request of the honorable Shen, wrote this, at the age of 78 years.

One seal : Zhang Xiong

B. (Translation from Ju-his Chou, in *Scent of Ink*, p. 105, except for the last sentence).

The scroll's length is not more than five [Chinese] feet. The subject concerns the Duanwu festival, with essential details intact. I, Hu, carefully examined the scroll, and felt that this scroll must have been painted in either 1782 or 1783. At the time, my late father was residing in the Tonghua Guan (Flowering Paulownia Studio), [at the estate of] the venerable Jin [Deyu]. On that occasion, elders like Zhu Fang'ai, Zhao Huaiyu, and Bao Tingbo were present. Consequently, given the circumstances, [my late father] depicted the scene on this scroll to record the spirit of that day. In that, he was but following in the footsteps of the *Elegant Gathering at the Western Garden* of the past.

In the eight day of last decade of the first lunar month of the year *xinwei* (1811), under Jiaqing, I, Hu, respectfully [wrote] this note.

Annexe II:

List of the plants identified in the painting (from right to left)

Bamboo

Firmiana simplex (L.) W.F. Wight [Parasol tree, *wutong* 梧桐]

Myrica rubra (Lour.) Sieb. et Zucc. [Chinese bayberry, Chinese waxmyrtle, *yangmei* 楊梅]

Nerium indicum Mill. [Sweetscented oleander, *jiazhutao* 夾竹桃]

Althaea rosea (L.) Cavan. [Garden hollyhock, *shukui* 蜀葵]

Eriobotrya japonica (Thunb.) Lindl. [Loquat tree, *pipa* 枇杷]

Musa sp. [Banana tree, *xiangjiao* 香蕉]

Cymbidium sp. [Orchids, *lan* 蘭]

Salix sp. [Willow (*lin* 柳)

Acorus calamus L. [Sweet flag, *changpu* 菖蒲]

Illustrations :

Fig. 1 : Fang Xun: *Fang Wen Wenshui Tianzhong Jiejing Tu* 做文文水天中節景圖 (*Glimpses of the Duanwu Festival After Wen Jia*) . No date. Handscroll, ink and color on paper; 22.4 x 116.9 cm (painting); 22.4 x 38.8 cm(colophon). Roy and Marilyn Papp collection, Phoenix Art Museum.

Fig. 2: Jin Deyu, Bao Tingbo ed., Fang Xun (drawings): *Taiping Huanle Tu* 太平歡樂圖 (*Peace and Joy in the Realm*) . 1780, reprint 1788. Album of 100 pictures. Shanghai Library.

Fig. 3: Fang Xun: *Yinghua Shuwu Tu* 映花書屋圖 (*The Library of Bright Flowers*). 1795. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper; 125.6 x 33.2 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.

Fig.4: Fang Xun: *Fang Wen Wenshui Tianzhong Jiejing Tu* 做文文水天中節景圖 (*Glimpses of the Duanwu Festival After Wen Jia*) . Details.

Fig.5: Fang Xun: *Fang Wen Wenshui Tianzhong Jiejing Tu* 做文文水天中節景圖 (*Glimpses of the Duanwu Festival After Wen Jia*) . Details.

Fig.6: Fang Xun: *Taishan Jiyou Tu* 泰山紀遊圖 (*Records of Travels to Mount Tai*). 1783. Handscroll. Ink on paper; 31.8 x 275 cm. Sotheby's, New York, 1990.

Fig. 7: Fang Xun and Qian Zai (1708-1793): *Zhushi Tu* 竹石圖 (*Bamboo and Rocks*). 1785. Hanging scroll. Ink on paper; 162.5 x 42.8 cm. Christie's, New York, 1994.

Fig. 8: Fang Xun: *Mo Songren Shese Huahui Juan* 摹宋人設色花卉卷 (*Flowers After Song Masters*). 1781. Handscroll. Colors on paper; 29.5 x 551.3 cm. Shanghai Museum.

Fig. 9: Fang Xun: *Lin Ni Zan Zhensong Jieshi Tu* 臨倪瓚貞松介石圖 (*Rock and Pine After Ni Zan*). Inscription: 1774; signature: 1782. Handscroll. Ink on paper; 29.5 x 68.5 cm. Tianjin Fine Arts Museum.

Fig. 10: Fang Xun: *Shanshui Tu* 山水圖 (*Landscape After Guan Tong*). 1781. Hanging scroll. Ink on paper; 91 x 35.8 cm. Wuxi Museum.