

Shen Zhou 沈周 (1427-1509)

Farewell Party [for Wang Ao (1450-1524)]

餞別圖

Jianbie tu

(Alternative title: *Songxing tu* 送行圖)

Painting

Dated 1492

Hanging scroll; ink and color on paper; 234.7 cm x 51.7 cm (scroll sheet); 146.3 cm x 36.5 cm (painting)

The Mactaggart Art Collection. Access # 2004.19.23

Gift of Sandy and Cécile Mactaggart

ARTIST'S INSCRIPTION & SIGNATURE, dated October 20, 1492

(6 columns in semi-cursive script)

On this occasion I and my old friends have a chat

All lamenting the passing of the years

Aged with thinning hair on the temples

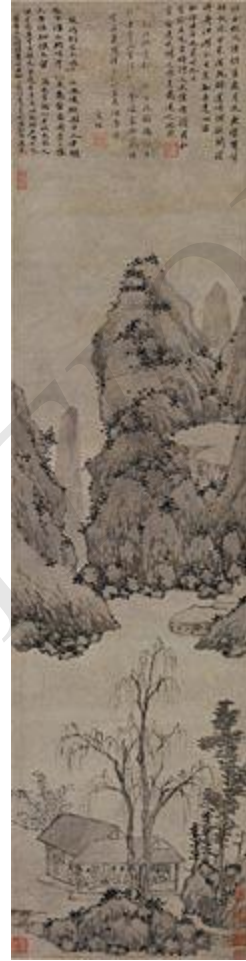
In the autumn water floating tens of thousands of houses

Though already drunk, we call for more wine

The boat is about to sail, and [Wang Ao] has to lean on its side

These days both the river and lake are flooding¹

He is going far away, as we know, but his mind will linger here



¹ The suburb of Suzhou was flooded in 1492 as Shen Zhou described in a poem; see Chen Zhenghong 1993, 227.

On the twenty-ninth day of the ninth lunar month in the *ren zi* year of the Hongzhi reign (October 20, 1492), Mr. Wang, Academician Expositor-in-waiting, is about to leave [for Beijing]. Wen [Lin], former Chamberlain for the Imperial Stud, hosts a farewell party for him. I composed a poem in response to the Academician's *Poem of Crossing the Tai Lake* in the same rhyme, and depicted the party in this painting as a gift for him.²

Shen Zhou

偶合故人語，仍嗟歲月流。老懷雙鬢 / 短，秋水萬家浮。既醉還呼酒，欲開
須 / 倚舟。江湖今日患，知去遠心留。 /

弘治壬子九月廿九日， / 宮諭王先生將行，文太僕作餞，因和 / 宮諭過太湖
之作，系圖送之。沈周

ARTIST'S SEALS

Shen shi Qinan 沈氏 / 啓南, square relief

COLOPHONS

Wen Lin 文林 (1445-1499)

(4 columns in semi-cursive script)

Separated for long and far apart by rivers and lakes

We have thought of one another in the past years

Inebriated, we enjoy tonight's farewell party

Aged, we realize life floating

² Translation modified from Tsang 2008, 2; for Wang Ao's poem, see the Note.

Have a nice trip, and wish you a success in the court
Sailing in the night, you will not realize the moving of boat
We are not in a hurry to say good-bye, though it's late
How could we continue to stay together just for wine?³

Wen Lin

□[久]△[別]江湖遠，相□[思]歲月流。醉憐今夕 / 餞，老覺此生浮。□□[好去]
登瀛客，聊藏夜 / 壑舟。更殘情未極，豈為酒淹留。 / 文林

Wu Kuan 吳寬 (1435-1504)

(5 columns in semi-cursive script)

Sitting side by side, we are in full dress
Yet, no less wild than those Jin scholars
Tall mountains seen through the window
And the lake wave dashing just below the threshold
No harm pouring down another gallon of wine
And having his boat remain tied
[Otherwise,] the man who has been homesick
Will regret for a rather long time

Jizhi, the Academician Expositor-in-waiting, took the advantage of supervising the provincial civil service examination in Nanjing and visited [his hometown] Suzhou. He spent over twenty days to stay with his parents and friends. This painting, with a poem inscribed on, is the gift for him from Shen Shitian at the farewell party hosted by Mr. Wen, the former Chamberlain for the Imperial Stud.

³ Translation modified from *ibid.*

I also composed a poem by the same rhyme, and my intention is embedded in the last two lines.⁴

Wu Kuan

□[衣]冠仍列坐，不減△[晉]風流。峻嶺圖中入，△[重]湖 / 檻下浮。不妨傾
斗△[酒]，更爲繫扁舟。當日懷 / 人者，誰知恨久留。

濟之宮諭以主試南闈之 / 便，道過吳中，與親友留連者累旬。此則沈石田於
文 / △[太]僕席上所贈詩畫也。因和一首，以見予意於末聯云。吳寬

COLOPHON WRITERS' SEALS

Wen Lin

yunluo youxin ji chajing 雲蘿 / 幽信寄 / 茶經, square intaglio

Wu Kuan

Wu Kuan 吳 / 寬, square relief, square relief, rarely used

COLLECTORS' SEALS

Ma Yuelu 馬曰璐 (1701-1761)

xiaoshou Yangzhou niansi qiao 消受 / 揚州 / 廿四橋, square intaglio

Zhang Dayong 張大鏞 (1770-1838)

Luqiao 鹿樵, rectangular intaglio

Ziyiyue zhai shuhua lu 自怡悅 / 齋書 / 畫錄, square relief

Zhang Luqiao jiancang 張鹿 / 樵 / 鑒藏, square intaglio

Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 (1837-1909)

⁴ Translation modified from *ibid.*

Zhang yin Zhidong 張印 / 之洞, square intaglio

郭志權 (fl. the early 20th century)

Guo shi Quanwan lou cang 郭氏權 / 宛廬藏, tall rectangular relief

CATALOGUED

Tao Liang 陶樑, *Hongdoushu guan shuhua ji* 紅豆樹館書畫記, 8:16b-17b

Lu Xinyuan 陸心源, *Rangli guan guoyan xulu* 穰梨館過眼續錄, 6:14a-b

Tsang, *Brilliant Strokes*, 2-4.

Claypool, *China's Imperial Modern*, 24-29.

NOTE

A PAINTING created in 1492 by Shen Zhou (1427-1509) to present to his friend Wang Ao 王鏊 (1450-1524), depicting a farewell party for the latter hosted by their common friend Wen Lin (1445-1499). In its vertical composition, a lake expands far to meet high mountains in distance, and in a waterfront thatched hut shadowed by two tall willows, four scholars sit chatting with service by four busy lads. In terms of its format and the artist's ink and brush techniques, the Yuan tradition of painting evidently was employed that Shen Zhou had adeptly mastered.⁵

Two versions or copies of this painting were historically recorded. The first was collected in Tao Liang's 陶樑 (1772-1857) Red Bean Hall (*Hongdoushu guan* 紅豆樹館). The colophons on his copy are complete and identical to those on this Mactaggart copy, but the former is much larger (190.4 x 49.6 cm), with the colophon writers' seals

⁵ Tsang 2008, 3.

different: “Qinan” 啓/南 for Shen Zhou, “Zongru” 宗/儒 for Wen Lin and “Yuanbo” 原/博 for Wu Kuan.⁶ The second was possessed by Lu Xinyuan’s 陸心源 (1834-1894) in his Prosperous Pears Hall (*Rangli guan* 穰梨館). Lu’s copy features the measurements (151.36 x 37.12 cm) very close to those of the Mactaggart copy, though with minor textual variants in the colophons by Wen Lin and Wu Kuan (*geng can qing wei ji* 更殘情未極 in the Mactaggart copy while *geng can ren wei sheng* 更殘人未勝 in Lu, and *chong hu* 重湖 in the Mactaggart copy while *chong cheng* 重城 in Lu). Yet, it bears the same textual corruption, colophon writers’ seals, and collectors’ seals (excluding those of Zhang Zhidong and Guo Zhiquan because they were later than Lu) as those on the Mactaggart copy.

The current copy therefore could be the one from Lu’s collection. The textual variants could result from careless transcription and the shrunk measurements from remounting. Prior to Lu, Ma Yuelu 馬曰璐 (1701-1761) and Zhang Dayong 張大鏞 (1770-1838) possessed it successively, though it was not recorded in the catalogue of Zhang’s collection.⁷ Zhang completed his catalogue in 1834 that would be printed out posthumously in 1838 by his sons. This current painting most likely reached Zhang sometime between 1834 and 1838, when he could not describe it in his catalogue but impress his seals on it to mark his appreciation and ownership. It reached from Lu to Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 (1837-1909) who in turn transferred to Guo Zhiquan (fl. the early

⁶ Tao Liang 1882, 8:16b–17b.

⁷ see Zhang Dayong, “Ziyiyue zhai shuhua lu” 自怡悅齋書畫錄, in Lu Fusheng 1992, vol. XI.

20th century). The clear circulation and full description lend authenticity to this current copy.

The poetic colophons by Shen Zhou, Wen Lin and Wu Kuan are not included in their literary collections,⁸ yet Wang Ao's extant writings confirm the farewell party for him. Wang departed on August 6, 1492 from Beijing and arrived on August 27 in Nanjing, where he supervised the provincial civil service examination from August 29 through September 19.⁹ After his mission, he visited his parents in Suzhou for the first time since his success in the metropolitan civil service examination in Beijing in 1475. His visit excited himself and his friends, as he sang in a poem:

In the past ten years, my face has become dusty
 Now I wash it clean by the pure river
 [Again,] the mountain sees me
 And the sky is floating in water
 Rosy sunlight radiates over the fisherman's wharf in the evening
 Setting sun colors the orange grove in the autumn
 Really beautiful remains my homeland
 Why couldn't I stay here for a while?¹⁰

十年塵土面，一洗向清流。山與人相見，天將水共浮。落霞漁浦晚，斜日橘林秋。信美仍吾土，如何不少留。

This exactly is the poem that his three friends responded to in the same rhyme in the above colophons.

⁸ See Shen Zhou 1968; Wen Lin 1997; Wu Kuan 1508.

⁹ Wang Ao, "Yingtian fu xiangshi lu xu" 應天府鄉試錄序, Wang Ao 1781, 10:6b–8b.

¹⁰ Wang Ao, "Guisheng guo Taihu" 歸省過太湖, *ibid.*, 3:4a.

Farewell is a common motif in Chinese painting, especially in those works of the Suzhou artists in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries,¹¹ as in traditional Chinese poetry and prose. Several farewell paintings by Shen Zhou are extant, including one created in 1497 for Wu Kuan. The farewell painting, with miniscule figures and vast landscape depicted in, was considered the pictorial form of the “recipient’s journey to some faraway place, and the loneliness of those who remain behind.”¹² In this sense, the current painting, together with the poems inscribed on it, is a typical representation of the fifteenth-century Suzhou literati’s concept of farewell in their social life.

The farewell painting obviously served as a social currency and carrier of relationship. Depicted and recorded parties were organized for and within literati circles that were political, social, literary or artistic. Colleagues, fellow-countrymen, fellow-disciples and those who passed the same civil service examination in the same year were the core members of those circles. The four scholars represented in this current painting were native of Suzhou. Wen Lin and Wu Kuan succeeded in the same metropolitan examination in 1472. Wu Kuan was Wang Ao’s colleague in Beijing. Wen Lin’s son Weng Zhengming (1470-1559) studied compositional skills under Wu Kuan’s direction and painting in Shen Zhou’s studio. They and their families closely allied in different ways and dominated the local cultural production that could bring their circle political and economic capital.

Farewell parties for those about to depart from their hometowns commonly divulged their pride and identification of locality and concerns with local affairs – the

¹¹ Wilson, 1974, 33–34; see also Murase 1970.

¹² Cahill 1994, 25.

hometown always was on their mind and too beautiful and comfortable to leave, as Wang Ao and his native friends sang in their poems. Since the twelfth century, Neo-Confucianism, together with the civil service examination system, had sent gentry back to local societies rather than simply suggested to tie themselves and their families with the imperial court or royal family. Gentry collaborated in governance with the local government as the imperial court's agency. Most literati started to develop their cultural capital in local educational institutions with family and clan support, obtained their social and political capital by earning examination titles and by, if lucky, entering the officialdom. Government positions were limited, however, and the majority of literati returned home to maintain their families' prestige in their localities. Officials eventually also returned to their native places after retirements. Localities thus were the geographical base for gentry in developing and maintaining their privileges and statuses in the traditional Chinese society. Among the four scholars involved in this 1492 farewell painting, Shen Zhou was the leader of the Suzhou school of Chinese painting, and after Shen, Wen Lin's family had enjoyed an artistic and literary reputation in Suzhou until the seventeenth century. Wang Ao permanently returned home after his retirement in 1509 and his family remained in high status through intermarriages with other gentry families. Wu Kuan died in Beijing and was buried in Suzhou, and his sons carried on his social and political heritages in local affairs. Because of the extreme competition in the civil service examinations, only very few families could remain prosperous in their individual traditions. Forming circles of relationship, however, in most cases functioned well as a cultural and social strategy for a family's survival and expansion in a gentry society.

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(Lianbin Dai; updated 25 July 25, 2016)