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Paper Trails: Fang Yongbin and the Material Culture of Calligraphy

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Abstract
Fang Yongbin's (1542–1608) cache of paper-based ephemera—733 notes, invoices, and 190 name cards—now held in the Harvard-Yenching library, discloses the multidimensional expertise of the stationery dealer in late Ming China. This article explores how businessmen from Huizhou prefecture turned to the trade in writing materials to improvise with new forms of cultural entrepreneurship in the late sixteenth century. Introducing the diverse contents of the cache, I demonstrate how Fang's involvement in the sale of desktop tools drew from, and creatively combined literary endeavors, shop-keeping, and artisanal labor. Unsettling discrete conceptions of "scholar," "merchant," and "craftsman," Fang's career reveals how stationery dealers vied to usurp custodianship over the material culture of calligraphy. The Harvard-Yenching cache registers the increasingly powerful influence exerted over the business of culture by those skilled in the making and marketing of writing materials: largely forgotten salesmen whose services made the art of writing possible in the first place.

Following three decades of meandering journeys through the major cities of Ming China, Fang Yongbin 方用彬 (1542–1608) had acquired several hefty trunks stuffed with name cards, invitation letters, short shopping lists, the odd invoice, and a couple of colorful hand-bills. His assorted slips came in a wide range of shapes, textures, and sizes, some dyed pink or green with golden flecks, others cut to resemble veined plant leaves, or stamped with fret-pattern borders and woodcut images of mythical birds. Rather than discard such delicate ephemera, Fang fastidiously kept hold of these materials, noting a nagging concern, in an encomium (*shiyu* 識語) dated to 1601, that they might become "fodder for silverfish."[1] Adopting the guise of a romantic sojourner, Fang claims to have

[1]"After a long time, I became concerned that these words would be destroyed and become fodder for silverfish" 久之，慮將湮沒為蠹魚餐食, from Fang Yongbin 方用彬, "Fang Yongbin shiyu" 方用彬識語, in *Meiguo Hafo daxue Hafo Yanching tushuguan cang Mingdai Huizhou Fang shi qinyou shouzha qi bai tong kaoshi* 美國哈佛大學哈佛燕京圖書館藏明代徽州方氏親友手札七百通考釋, edited by Chen Zhichao 陳智超 (Hefei: Anhui daxue chubanshe, 2001), 1. For a partial English translation of the encomium, see Shum Chun, "The Chinese Rare Books: An Overview," translated by Sarah M. Allen, in *Treasures of the Yenching: Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the Harvard-Yenching Library Exhibition Catalogue*, edited by Patrick Hanan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 16.

acquired many of his papers from gatherings at estates and gardens dotted throughout the Yangzi river delta: his words suggest a lingering attachment to these documents as tokens of the "absent physical body" of their writers.[2] And yet, behind his boasts of a commitment to "past friendships," an underlying preoccupation with the allure of celebrity and the radically altered possibilities of commercial activity in the sixteenth century starts to come into view.[3] Indeed, a significant quantity of the surviving notes addressed to Fang altogether eschew the restrained conventions of epistolary literature to openly recount the details of payments in escrow, pledges for loans, and outstanding debts of silver. Many of these transactions, in turn, center upon the constituent materials of the cache itself: ink, samples of luxury stationery, and handcrafted papers.

In the course of his travels—from Guangdong in the deep south to Beijing in the north; from Suzhou in the east to Huguang in the west—Fang Yongbin (also named Sixuan 思玄; courtesy name Yuansu 元素; literary name Yijiang 黟江) had managed to obtain business cards and swathes of handwriting from some of the most renowned cultural figures in sixteenth-century China.[4] In his list of 618 contacts, leading poets and high-ranking government officials mingle with hereditary princes, fashionable courtesans, and military commanders, not to mention a host of aspiring students and peddlers from his hometown in Huizhou 徽州 prefecture.[5] Fang himself held no such claim to fame: born into an unassuming branch of a merchant lineage, he was virtually unknown in the centuries following his death. It was only when his cache of paperwork—733 handwritten notes and 190 name cards—happened to be purchased in Japan at the end of the Second World War and was brought to Harvard University, where it was rediscovered by the historian Chen Zhichao 陳智超 in 1997, that Fang's far-reaching engagements with Ming material culture once again became legible.[6]

[2]Antje Richter, "Introduction," in *A History of Chinese Letters and Epistolary Culture*, edited by Antje Richter (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1–16.

[3]"If afterward this is passed on to later generations, it will let them know in my life how sincere I was in valuing friendship and in treasuring my friend's writings" 異時傳諸後代, 使之知余生平重交誼, 寶翰墨之諄切也如此, Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 2.

[4]The cache contains samples of calligraphy from some of the most respected calligraphers of the late sixteenth century, including Zhou Tianqiu 周天球 (1514–1595) (Zhou Tianqiu [Moon: 1]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 275) and Zhan Jingfeng 詹景鳳 (1532–1602) (Zhan Jingfeng [Sun: 37]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 129)). For an introduction to practices of preserving paper correspondence for its calligraphic value, see Amy McNair, "Letters as Calligraphy Exemplars: The Long and Eventful Life of Yan Zhenqing's (709–785) *Imperial Commissioner Liu Letter*," in *A History of Chinese Letters*, 53–96; Qianshen Bai, "Chinese Letters: Private Words Made Public," in *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection*, edited by Robert E. Harrist, Jr. and Wen C. Fong (Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University Press, 1999), 381–99.

[5]Among Fang Yongbin's correspondents there are three major groups: first, members of the extended Fang clan (53 writers, including 7 *jinshi* 進士 and *juren* 舉人); second, contacts from throughout Huizhou prefecture (from Yanzhen 巖鎮, Xiuning 休寧, Qimen 祁門, and Wuyuan 婺源) (150 writers, including 35 *jinshi* and *juren*)—this group includes 26 letters to members of the Wang 汪 family (discussed in more detail below); and third, local officials from throughout Huizhou (25 writers). For an annotated list of Fang's correspondents, see Lin Li-yueh 林麗月, "Wanming "Rushang" yu diyu shehui: *Mingdai Huizhou Fang shi qinyou shouzha* de kaocha" 晚明「儒商」與地域社會:《明代徽州方氏親友手札》的考察, in *Jinshi Zhongguo de shehui yu wenhua (960–1800)* 近世中國的社會與文化 (960–1800) (Taibei: Shida lishi, 2007), 467–507.

[6]For Chen's discovery of the archive and its transmission, see Chen, "Daoyan" 導言, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 1–7. The cache was passed down to Fang Yongbin's grandsons, one of whom added an encomium (dated to 1678) to the earth folio; see "Wu Qizuo shiyu" 吳期祚識語, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 14. The circumstances surrounding the subsequent passage of the cache to Japan (at the very latest by the end

The Fang Yongbin cache (catalogued as *Notes from Select Luminaries of the Ming* (*Ming zhu mingjia chidu* 明諸名家尺牘)) remains an utterly singular resource for the study of late Ming information networks. It is extraordinarily rare, to begin with, to find any original correspondence from the sixteenth century, let alone such a sizeable corpus of manuscripts all received and preserved by a single person—Fang's cache remains the largest-known collection from the Ming.[7] The earliest note can be dated to 1564 (Jiajing 43) and the latest to 1598 (Wanli 26), allowing readers to trace firsthand Fang's travels, fluctuating fortunes, and the vicissitudes of his personal relationships over a thirty-four year period.[8] Many of the papers can be classified as "notes" (*chidu* 尺牘, *shujian* 書簡, *daobi* 刀筆), brief "practical" missives with a mundane and straightforward demeanor, in contrast to the studied elegance of a literary "letter" (*shu* 書).[9] Fang categorizes his documents—divided into seven folios titled sun (*ri* 日), moon (*yue* 月), metal (*jin* 金), wood (*mu* 木), water (*shui* 水), fire (*huo* 火), and earth (*tu* 土)[10]—as "letters and poems" (*jiandu shici* 柬牘詩詞), "short name-cards and notes" (*duanci shouzha* 短刺手札), and "cards of formal invitation and regrets" (*fuli qing cixie zhi tie* 夫禮請辭謝之帖).[11] The contents of the cache, however, distend and exceed the framework of epistolary practice: notes are juxtaposed, for instance, with a range of other paper-based ephemera, from account bills (*zhangdan* 賬單) to

of the nineteenth century) remain unclear. The cache entered the Harvard-Yenching library on December 3, 1955.

[7]For a recent study of an early Qing collection of 750 letters (*Yanshi jiacang chidu* 顏氏家藏尺牘) from over 250 correspondents, also compiled by a single individual (Yan Guangmin 顏光敏 (1640–1686)) see David Pattinson, "Epistolary Networks and Practice in the Early Qing: The Letters Written to Yan Guangmin," in Richter, *A History of Chinese Letters*, 775–828. Given Yan's reputation as a famous official, these letters are more restrained in content and tone (particularly on financial matters) than Fang's collection.

[8]Beyond Huizhou, there are four large geographical clusters of correspondents in the Fang Yongbin cache: 1) Ningguo fu Xuancheng 寧國府宣城 (19 writers); 2) Nanjing 南京 (22 writers); 3) Guangdong 廣東 (28 writers); and 4) Huguang Macheng 湖廣麻城 (8 writers).

[9]On this distinction, see Ronald Egan, "Su Shih's "Notes" as a Historical and Literary Source," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 50, no. 2 (1990): 561–88. Unlike the letters preserved in literary collections, these notes were never edited or reprinted, and so record concerns with everyday activities—buying, selling, handling debt—that have typically been expurgated in published anthologies of personal correspondence. The letters in literary collections are all from the same hand, whereas Fang's cache consists of notes from a wide range of hands addressed to one person. Fang's gathered papers—many drafted by acclaimed calligraphers—show how sophisticated brushwork had become thoroughly implicated in such mundane tasks as filling out an invoice or signing a receipt for goods. For an instructive comparison to everyday uses of calligraphy from the early Qing, see Qianshen Bai, "Calligraphy for Negotiating Everyday Life: The Case of Fu Shan (1607–1684)," *Asia Major* 12, no. 1 (1999): 67–125.

[10]There is no explicit justification for this organizational scheme; however, one might infer some implicit conceptual links between the title of a folio and its contents (referring to a phase in Fang's career or a type of activity): most of Fang's prestigious correspondents, for instance, appear in the opening sun folio (suggesting the ascendance of *yang* energy); his engagements with the Wang family are largely in the metal folio (metal symbolizing a period of collecting or harvesting), while the name-cards are all in the earth folio. It is still difficult, however, to fully account for the particular reasoning behind this classification system.

[11]Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 1. The "poems" Fang refers to—apparently separated from the contents of the Harvard cache in the course of its transmission—are most likely those preserved in a companion folio now held in the Leiden Institute of Sinology. For more on this folio, which I discuss in greater detail below, see Shi Ye 施曄, "Cong xin jian Ming ceye kan Jia Wan nianjian Huizhou shishang jiaoyou" 從新見明冊頁看嘉萬年間徽州士商交遊, *Jianghuai luntan* 江淮論壇 4 (2013): 138–47.

name-brand advertisements for a line of local tea (*fangdan* 仿單).[12] Taken as a whole, the archive serves as a stark reminder both of how little is still known about the myriad uses of handwriting in Ming society—a corrective to oversimplifying views of early modern China as a "print culture"—and how many other similar sets of documents may have been lost to the ravages of time. This stash of "paperware" affords precious insight into dynamic, yet largely ephemeral modes of written communication that flourished beyond the pages of the Ming woodblock book.[13]

How, then, did Fang Yongbin gain access, at least momentarily, to such a distinguished clientele? How did he use ostensibly private manuscripts to generate and sustain such levels of publicity? The answer is hidden in plain view for anyone who has an opportunity to handle the contents of the Harvard-Yenching cache: these informal shopping lists are drafted on sensuous sheets of decorative paper with refined brushwork, colored ink, and elegant seal impressions. When Fang's acquaintances sought him out, they did so with choice items of studio paraphernalia, materials that Fang then collected and preserved for posterity, as if he were compiling his own catalogues of stationery, calligraphic models, or seal designs. Fang saw himself and was seen by others as an aficionado of desktop supplies, and the terse messages scrawled across the many papers in his cache return time and again to the buying and selling of the "Four Treasures of the Scholar's Studio" (*wenfang sibao* 文房四寶)—inkstones (*yan* 硯), inkcakes (*mo* 墨), brushes (*bi* 筆), paper (*zhi* 紙)—and related accessories: water dippers, hand-wrests, brush-holders, and seal stamps.[14] Luxury writing materials constituted a medium for Fang's communications with his patrons, and were also commodified as tokens of exchange between these parties. It was Fang Yongbin's role in the making and marketing of the material paraphernalia of calligraphy, or the appurtenances of a scholar's desk, that became a primary source of his income and ultimately propelled his short-lived stint in the cultural limelight: Fang's was a life lived with and through the technologies of ink and paper. The primary aim of this article is to use the Harvard-Yenching cache to demonstrate how the social lives of writing materials in late Ming China engendered new alignments between aesthetic pursuits, mercantile experience, and craft knowledge.

From a broader historical perspective, the documents Fang Yongbin packed away in his rattan boxes uniquely attest to the profound impact of the business in calligraphic tools on the changing social landscape of early modern China. To begin with, the cache

[12]As a repository of rare paper-based ephemera, the cache falls under the broader field of "Huizhou sources" (Huizhou wenshu 徽州文書), a designation for the array of documents, manuscripts, and rare imprints that were passed down in private collections and have transformed the study of local lineage culture in late imperial China. For an introduction to these materials, see Yan Guifu 嚴桂夫, *Huizhou lishi dang'an zongmu tiyao* 徽州歷史檔案總目提要 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 1996); Yan Guifu and Wang Guojian 王國鍵, *Huizhou wenshu dang'an* 徽州文書檔案 (Hefei: Anhui renmin chubanshe, 2005).

[13]"This paper was the arsenal he drew upon, a kind of tool for thinking: his 'paperware' for our 'software'": Peter N. Miller, *Peiresc's Mediterranean World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 15.

[14]On the origins of the expression "Four Treasures of the Scholar's Studio" (*wenfang sibao*), see Chen Tao 陳濤, "Wenfang sibao *yuanliu kao*" 《文房四寶》源流考, *Zhongyuan wenhua yanjiu* 中原文化研究 1 (2014): 57–63. The first use of the expression is conventionally attributed to Mei Yaochen 梅堯臣 (1002–1060), see Mei Yaochen, *Mei Yaochen ji biannian jiaozhu* 梅堯臣集編年校注, edited by Zhu Dongrun 朱東潤 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), 25: 809. For an introduction to the broader family of desktop objects, see James C. Y. Watt, "The Literati Environment," *The Chinese Scholar's Studio: Artistic Life in the Late Ming Period*, edited by Chu-tsing Li and James C. Y. Watt (New York: Asia Society Galleries, 1987).

sheds new light on the workings of the "scriptural economy" of the Ming, or the "dynamic totality" of devices, formats, and techniques that shaped experiences of writing.[15] In an expanded sense, the notion of a scriptural economy might also be taken to cover the trade in substances, substrates, and implements that sustained the powerful function of calligraphy as a technology of socialization. If the physical condition of the Harvard-Yenching cache—the arrangement and layout of Fang's papers—illuminates unsuspected channels of writerly exchange in Ming China, the swathes of messages addressed to Fang reveal the ways in which dealership in writing tools constituted a testing-ground for historically unprecedented improvisation with social roles. Late Ming history has largely been narrated from the perspective of men who were distinguished for wielding the brush, yet the Harvard-Yenching cache registers the increasingly powerful influence exerted over the business of culture by those skilled in both the making and marketing of such implements: largely forgotten entrepreneurs whose services made the art of writing possible in the first place. Ultimately, the cache invites further reflection on whether those who produced and sold writing tools could disrupt or manipulate the reigning conditions of the "culture of *wen* 文" (writing, literature, civility).[16] Could these entrepreneurs lay claim to, or usurp custodianship of the material culture of calligraphy?[17] Were these figures—working in the "infrastructural subbasement of Chinese script"—able to influence the ways in which writing was valued and understood?[18] To what extent, this article asks, was a character like Fang Yongbin able to envision alternative models of knowledge and action, or to develop forms of inquiry and inventiveness that were less constrained by entrenched hierarchies of head over hand.

The Huizhou Entrepreneur: From Status to Skill

The Harvard-Yenching cache attests to a powerful interchange between the trade in writing materials and new constellations of cultural expertise in the late Ming, yet this relation is largely predicated upon economic developments and forms of social organization that were relatively unique to Huizhou prefecture in the late sixteenth century. Fang's papers afford unparalleled insight into the dynamics behind the emergence of the "Huizhou entrepreneur" in the Ming, encouraging a shift in attention from the problem of the merchant's social standing to the novel combinations of skill that transformations in Huizhou commercial activity spurred and sustained.

Much ink has been spilled on the question of status in relation to upheavals in late Ming material culture. Historians, largely inspired by the work of Pierre Bourdieu, have noted how members of the gentry turned to the "invention of taste," particularly in the Wanli era, to protect besieged conceptions of decorum, trying to preserve their privilege

[15]Lisa Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), x.

[16]The phrase "culture of *wen*" is from Dorothy Ko, *The Social Life of Inkstones: Artisans and Scholars in Early Qing China* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2017), 3.

[17]For an introduction to the "material culture of calligraphy" or the technologies of brush, ink, inkstone, and paper—as they took shape in the Northern Song, see Yanchiuan He, "The Materiality, Style, and Culture of Calligraphy in the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127)" (PhD diss., Boston University, 2013).

[18]Thomas S. Mullaney, *The Chinese Typewriter: A History* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2017), 15.

as cultural gatekeepers in the face of threats to traditional bases of economic power.[19] The extensive commercialization of the sixteenth-century Chinese economy had led members of families engaged in trade—historically denigrated as the lowest of the "four occupations" (*simin* 四民) in Confucian social theory—to lay claim to the trappings of literati identity, particularly through purchasing degrees and the acquisition of antiquities.[20] At the same time, due to the difficulties involved in sustaining a career in an increasingly dysfunctional civil service, educated students were forced to pursue commercial opportunities in order to make a living.[21] The question of how to possess luxury objects—or how to properly behave as a consumer of things—was, by the late sixteenth century, central to far-reaching negotiations over the labels available to an individual for self-identification.

In trying to account for the convulsive social transformations of the late Ming, historians have started to reject deterministic categories like "class" or "status," noting how they fail to convincingly capture changing models of human agency.[22] The practice of the late Ming Huizhou entrepreneur further unsettles conceptions of "scholar" (*shi* 士), "merchant" (*shang* 商), and "artisan" (*gong* 工) as discrete or predetermined entities. As Joseph McDermott has demonstrated, pressure on forested mountain land had prompted families in Huizhou prefecture to develop trusts for the sale of timber, aiding the emergence of a local futures market in the late fifteenth century.[23] These lineages, in turn, repurposed the institution of the ancestral hall as a credit association and "proto-bank," financing members to move into markets throughout the Yangzi delta.[24] With the transition from a grain–salt exchange system to a new policy of "paying silver for salt," institutionalized in 1491, prosperous Huizhou merchants replaced their counterparts in Shanxi and Shaanxi as the dominant power bloc in the highly lucrative salt business.[25] During the sixteenth century, Huizhou lineages started to strategically alternate between encouraging their sons to pursue careers in the civil service and trade, so that a single family could earn scholarly respectability, while developing extensive commercial networks.[26] Under such circumstances, it seems more productive to think of "scholar" and "merchant" as roles—modes of performance that tried to meet certain felicity conditions in different contexts and for different ends—rather than exclusive

[19]Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004); Wu Renshu 巫仁恕 [Wu Jen-shu], *Pinwei shehua: wan Ming de xiaofei shehui yu shidafu* 品味奢華: 晚明的消費社會與士大夫 (Taibei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan, Lianjing chubanshe, 2007).

[20]Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). The four occupations, in order of priority, were: scholar, farmer, artisan, merchant. On the origins of the scheme, see Anthony Barbieri-Low, *Artisans in Early Imperial China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 36–37.

[21]Joseph McDermott, "The Art of Making a Living in Sixteenth Century China," *Kaikodo Journal* 5 (1997): 63–81.

[22]As Dorothy Ko notes: "Social status … had become largely a matter of performance, posturing, and self-claims that are subject to social perception and judgment." Ko, *The Social Life of Inkstones*, 200.

[23]Joseph P. McDermott, *The Making of a New Rural Order in Southern China: 1. Village, Land, and Lineage in Huizhou 900–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 431.

[24]McDermott, *The Making of a New Rural Order*, 432.

[25]For an overview, see Wu Yulian, *Luxurious Networks: Salt Merchants, Status, and Statecraft in Eighteenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 31–47; He Ping-ti, "The Salt Merchants of Yang-Chou: A Study of Commercial Capitalism in Eighteenth-century China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 17, no. 1/2 (1954), 130–68.

[26]Yü Ying-shih 余英時, *Zhongguo jinshi zongjiao lunli yu shangren jingshen* 中國近時宗教倫理與商人精神 (Taibei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1987), 109.

or intrinsic occupational categories inherited at birth. A single figure could alternate between both roles at different points in life, rejecting an ontology of distinction ("either/or") for an ethics of synthesis ("this and that").

Fang Yongbin was born into a Huizhou merchant lineage and studied for the exams, seeking throughout his career to substantiate self-claims as a scholar. And yet, his practice extends beyond what has conventionally been said of the "Confucian merchant" (*rushang* 儒商) or "gentry merchant" (*shishang* 士商). As Xu Min 許敏 has suggested, despite a wealth of studies attending to the late Ming mixing of *shi* and *shang* (and concomitant efforts to police these distinctions), there are few biographical accounts of how someone born into a family of traders might participate in, shadow, or eventually impact the culture of *wen*: Fang Yongbin's case allows historians to shift their focus away from literati-authored polemics and prescriptions to place a young businessman at the center of the story, observing with an unprecedented level of detail how such a figure might have made and remade a name for himself.[27] In a compelling study of Huizhou salt merchants from the eighteenth century, Yulian Wu has asked whether the paradigm of status negotiation elides "the possibility that merchants might identify, understand, and enjoy themselves outside the realm of literati-merchant competition."[28] The Harvard-Yenching cache allows one to pose a similar question for an earlier era, where amid rampant boom and bust, the contours and prospects of the market for things were being drastically reconfigured.

More specifically, Fang Yongbin's career suggests how negotiations over the roles of scholar and merchant might be triangulated through involvement in the sphere of craft, or the tacit art of working with materials. Much of the discussion of how merchants sought to position themselves as scholars has focused on the problem of conspicuous consumption: how people presented themselves through their possessions.[29] Fang Yongbin's practice, however, invites a shift in focus from the definition of a consumer's identity to questions of expertise and skill: not what someone was, *but what they were able to do*.[30] This article departs from a focus on literary representations of merchants in late Ming sources to examine how the practice of the Huizhou entrepreneur opened up a "middle ground" where learned knowledge, technical competence, and trade might be integrated to constitute a mode of hybrid expertise.[31] The emergence of this repertoire became intimately intertwined with the development of the

[27]Xu Min 許敏, "Shixi Mingdai houqi Jiangnan shanggu jiqi zidi de wenrenhua xianxiang—cong Fang Yongbin tanqi" 試析明代後期江南商賈及其子弟的文人化現象—從方用彬談起, *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中國史研究 3 (2005): 157–72.

[28]Wu, *Luxurious Networks*, 14.

[29]In this sense, Fang's papers allow for a belated response to Joanna Handlin Smith's supposition that "rich merchants may have introduced new consumption habits to the bureaucratic elite." See Joanna Handlin Smith, "Review of Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 51 (1992): 885–87.

[30]On arguments for the centrality of skill reproduction to social organization, see Jacob Eyferth, *Eating Rice from Bamboo Roots: The Social History of a Community of Handicraft Papermakers in Rural Sichuan, 1920–2000* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009), 6–7.

[31]In invoking this notion of a "middle ground," I have been inspired by Ursula Klein and E. C. Spary: "[this middle ground], where technical competence, connoisseurship, and learned natural knowledge were converging and from which hybrid experts emerged, borrowing skill, language, and explanations from both the artisanal and the scholarly worlds." See Ursula Klein and E. C. Spary, "Introduction," in *Materials and Expertise in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Ursula Klein and E. C. Spary (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 6.

late Ming business in writing implements. Just as these things-in-motion forged new channels between the domains of the market, the workshop, and the scholar's studio, so too, those who made and sold them developed novel strategies for blending skills in connoisseurship, salesmanship, and handiwork, artfully synthesizing learned and practical knowledge of materials.[32] The Harvard cache reveals an expanding web of interlocking connections between Fang's poetry on paintings and calligraphic scrolls, his activity as a pawnbroker versed in the pricing and exchange of artwork, a travelling dealer and connoisseur of inkstones, a salesman and manufacturer of ink and paper, a carver of seal stamps, and a collector of ancient scripts. Fang's career was, in this respect, characterized by what might be termed a "leitmotif of mobility," evinced not only in his extensive travels throughout the empire, but in his ability to journey across and undermine the boundaries between hitherto segregated fields of knowledge and action: he was, in Ursula Klein's words, a "hybrid expert."[33] Fang refrained from conceptualizing such hybridity, yet his practice nevertheless elucidates early portents of what by the High Qing—through an alliance between Manchu statecraft and the managerial prowess of Huizhou salt merchants—had come to constitute the field of the "cultured and cosmopolitan man" (*tongren* 通人).[34]

In what follows I examine how Fang Yongbin variously improvised with the roles of "scholar" (as a purchased licentiate and aspiring poet), "merchant" (as a pawnbroker and shopkeeper), and "artisan" (as papermaker, inkmaker, and seal carver), refining and adapting different sets of skills, while channeling his capital into new endeavors. There has been a recent boom in Chinese-language studies of the Fang Yongbin papers, aided in part by the publication of Chen Zhichao's annotations and notes.[35] This article is primarily intended to introduce both the cache and critical work on Fang Yongbin to an English-language audience, while identifying the central dynamic behind Fang's multi-faceted career and his sprawling collection of paper-based ephemera: namely, the interplay between his entrepreneurial persona and skill in the design and retail of writing implements; in his contributions to shaping the material culture of calligraphy. More generally, I depart from recent Chinese scholarship on Fang Yongbin by shifting attention from the question of his social status to the configuration and development of his multidimensional expertise. Moving between different sets of artifacts—from inkstones to seal stamps—the structure of the article loosely approximates one of the many shopping lists addressed to Fang Yongbin, foregrounding the diversity of the materials he worked with, and the different sets of skills such work required. A larger question remains as to how unique Fang's story really is, or whether it is simply the uniqueness of his archive that matters. Understanding his involvement in the trade in writing tools constitutes a first line of response to this interpretative dilemma, revealing something of the co-creation of man and his materials, suggesting how Fang

[32]On "domains," see Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 59: "domains … were dynamic localities defined by physical environment, work, and sociability. Discrete but interlocking, they both exhibited and were constituted by particular clusters of representations, practices, and skills."

[33]Klein and Spary, "Introduction," 6. On the "leitmotif of mobility" as a characteristic of entrepreneurship, see Christopher G. Rea and Nicolai Volland, *The Business of Culture: Cultural Entrepreneurs in China and Southeast Asia, 1900–65* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2014), 15.

[34]Wu, *Luxurious Networks*, 187.

[35]For an overview, see Zhu Wanshu 朱萬曙, *Huishang yu Ming Qing wenxue* 徽商與明清文學 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2014), 50–59.

transformed himself through his papers, and how—long after his death in poverty—such durable ephemera might remake our own perceptions of the times in which he lived.

Worldly Scholar

Born into one of twenty branches of the Fang 方 clan based in Yansi Market Town 巖寺鎮, Yongbin was brought up in a merchant household whose members conducted trade between Huizhou and Yangzhou, a prosperous port city on the Grand Canal.[36] With no prior history of exam success among his direct male ancestors, Fang's early aspirations for a scholarly career and his access to eminent contacts beyond Huizhou stemmed instead from his relationship with a powerful local patron named Wang Daokun 汪道昆 (1525–1593), an acclaimed prose stylist and one-time Vice Minister of War. It was through Wang Daokun, for instance, that Fang Yongbin was able to interact with the acclaimed Ming general Qi Jiguang 戚繼光 (1528–1588), fresh from violent anti-pirate campaigns in Fujian, and to participate in publicizing the sensational tale of the scholar Zhang Yaowen 張堯文 (1544–?), returning, after eighteen days, from the dead.[37] In a more general sense, Wang governed the direction of Fang's literary education and advocated for his pursuit of a degree. The *Fang Family Genealogy* (*Fangshi zupu* 方氏族譜), meanwhile, notes that Yongbin married into the larger Wang clan, indicating extended kinship ties that subtend and inflect what became a student–teacher relationship.[38] Given Wang's empire-wide fame as both a statesman and a literary celebrity, Fang's loyalty to his patron seems eminently pragmatic, the more intriguing question then becomes what Fang Yongbin might have offered to Wang in return. In responding to this question, we can begin to gauge how Fang's aspirations and activity as a poet or a self-proclaimed "worldly scholar" (*shiru* 世儒) connected to his expertise in handicrafts and shop-keeping. More generally, Wang and Fang's relationship illumines the interplay between two distinct models of Huizhou cultural endeavor in the late Ming: Wang Daokun represents an effort to defend the standing of mercantile lineages through political office and in established literary media; Fang—representative of a younger generation—worked under this umbrella to chart and practice new alignments between the scholarly arts, trade, and craft knowledge.

[36]Chen, "Fang Yongbin jiqi qinyou" 方用彬及其親友, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 1–2.

[37]See Qi Jiguang 戚繼光 [Earth: 8]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 1026. Wang Daokun served alongside Qi as Surveillance Vice Commissioner (Fujian ancha fushi 福建按察副使) in campaigns against "dwarf pirates" (*wokou* 倭寇) in Fujian from 1562 to 1566. They developed a life-long bond that explains Fang's access to Qi. See Jiang Weitang 姜緯堂, "Qi Nantang yu Wang Taihan" 戚南塘與汪太函, in *Qi Jiguang yanjiu lunji* 戚繼光研究論集, edited by Yan Chongnian 閻崇年 (Beijing: Zhishi chubanshe, 1990), 318–51. Zhang Yaowen's miraculous return from the dead was a widely circulated tale in the late Ming. Yaowen had travelled to Beijing to take the exams with his elder brother Zhang Kewen 張克文 in 1567. Yaowen fell ill and appeared to have passed away, yet after Kewen prayed day and night to Guan Yu 關羽, his younger brother returned to life. The following year, Kewen obtained the rank of *jinshi* in the exams, and sixteen years later Yaowen also achieved the rank of *jinshi,* after which he was posted to serve as a magistrate in Jingxian 涇縣 to the north of Shexian. Fang Yongbin preserved ten letters from Zhang Yaowen and compiled a series of poems, "Verse on Returning to Life" (Huisheng shi 回生詩), from his correspondents dedicated to Zhang (there are no surviving copies of Fang's own poems for this collection). For an introduction, see Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 201–11. Fang also served as an intermediary through whom Zhang requested a stele inscription from Wang Daokun; see Zhang Yaowen [Sun: 72]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 200–201.

[38]Chen, "Fang Yongbin jiqi qinyou," *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 2.

Huizhou vs Suzhou: Late Ming Tournaments of Value

Himself the scion of a Huizhou salt merchant lineage, Wang Daokun won prestige for his clan when he earned the *jinshi* degree in 1547 in the same cohort as the Suzhou scholar Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526–1590)—eventually the dominant intellectual in the late-sixteenth-century world of letters—and Zhang Juzheng 張居正 (1525–1582), a controversial Grand Secretary under the Longqing 隆慶 (1567–1572) and Wanli (1573–1620) emperors. The vicissitudes of Wang Daokun's subsequent official and literary careers were largely defined by his relationships with these two men: Zhang played a role in Wang Daokun's promotions to assistant Censor-in-Chief in 1570 and right Vice Minister of War in 1572; Wang Shizhen, meanwhile, promoted Wang Daokun's classical prose at an early stage, inviting his erstwhile classmate to enter the highest echelons of the Ming literary scene.[39]

Wang Daokun and Wang Shizhen later became known as the "Two Simas" (Liang Sima 兩司馬), both because their official ranks were deemed comparable to the ancient Sima civilian military officers and their literary talents were seen to be worthy of the Han dynasty rhapsodist Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179–117 BCE) and historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145–90 BCE).[40] As the fame of the "Two Simas" spread as far as Chŏson Korea, both men were treated within literati communities of the Yangzi river delta as opposing leaders in a broader regional competition between the localities of Huizhou and Suzhou. This rivalry reached a tipping point in a notorious potlatch-style gathering on the Yellow Mountains (Huangshan 黃山) hosted by the two Wangs.[41] One hundred amateur aficionados—local leaders in everything from calligraphy and the music of the *qin* to football and pitch-pot—were allegedly invited from Suzhou and paired with counterparts from Huizhou in a "tournament of value": a periodic event removed from the routines of economic life, where the "rank, fame, or reputation of actors" was reconstituted through contests to determine central tokens of value in Ming society: poems, paintings, and works of calligraphy.[42] It is unclear whether or not this event ever actually occurred (and if it did, whether Fang Yongbin might have attended), yet the tournament serves as an apposite framework for understanding the contests between Huizhou and Suzhou in the late Ming, where personal prestige became invested in "arresting or diverting" the passage of these accessories of gentility.[43]

The fraught rivalry between Wang Daokun and Wang Shizhen extended from poetry to the practice of art collecting and connoisseurship. Between the death of Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470–1559) and the rise of Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636) around the turn of the seventeenth century, Ming China lacked a single pre-eminent connoisseur with the power to decisively authenticate artworks, creating a vacuum that gave rise to an unprecedented degree of regional competition between different

[39]For a recent critical biography of Wang, see Zhang Jian 張健, *Huizhou hongru Wang Daokun yanjiu* 徽州鴻儒汪道昆研究 (Hefei: Anhui shifan daxue chubanshe, 2014). A critical chronology of Wang's life can be found in Xu Shuofang 徐朔方, "Wang Daokun nianpu" 汪道昆年譜, *Wan Ming qujia nianpu* 晚明曲家年譜, edited by Xu (Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1983), vol. 3.

[40]Guo Qitao, *Ritual Opera and Mercantile Lineage: The Confucian Transformation of Popular Culture in Late Imperial Huizhou* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 234.

[41]Xu Chengyao 許承堯, "Wang Yanzhou zhuren you She" 王弇州諸人遊歙, *Sheshi xiantan* 歙事閑譚 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2001), 413.

[42]Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, edited by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 21.

[43]Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," 21.

factions striving to promote the collections and collectors of their hometowns.[44] Wang Shizhen sought to rigorously defend the cultural hegemony of Suzhou landowning gentry, while Wang Daokun—as a nominal spearhead of the fashion for collecting in Shexian 歙縣—looked to justify the efforts of Huizhou merchant lineages in their acquisition of antiquities.[45] Fang Yongbin's entrepreneurial activities can be set against this backdrop: his improvisation with strategies of connoisseurship, salesmanship, and craft took advantage of, and was made possible by, a prevailing uncertainty in the late sixteenth century as to whether the representatives of Huizhou or Suzhou might eventually gain the upper hand in matters of taste-making.

The very first note preserved in the Harvard cache is addressed to Fang from Wang Shizhen, and can be dated to late 1589 in Nanjing.[46] It concerns a postscript Wang Shizhen had recently composed for Fang Yongbin's scroll of four Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365–429) poems drafted by the widely commended Cantonese calligrapher Li Minbiao 黎民表 (1515–1581), a figure with whom Fang had studied brushwork in Guangdong and Beijing.[47] The exchange clearly mattered less to Wang Shizhen than to Fang Yongbin—he even mistakenly transcribed Fang's cognomen Yuansu 元素 as Taisu 太素—and yet the case still demonstrates that by the late sixteenth century, perhaps the most renowned scholar in the empire might deign to discuss matters of calligraphy, in writing, with a travelling Huizhou salesman. Behind Wang Shizhen's fumbled address to Fang Yongbin—who momentarily shifts positions from student and dealer to patron—lurks a grudging realization of the entrepreneurial businessman's growing participation in shaping the culture of *wen*.

[44]Liu Xinru 劉心如 [Liu Hsin-ju], "Xin'an juyan: Zhan Jingfeng yu wan Ming jianshang jia de diyu jingzheng" 新安具眼：詹景鳳與晚明鑑賞家的地域競爭, *Mingdai yanjiu* 明代研究 18, no. 6 (2012): 83–104.

[45]See Wu Qizhen (1607–1677) in Wu Qizhen 吳其貞, *Shuhua ji* 書畫記 (Shanghai: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1963), 160–61: "There were no better places that exemplified the prosperity of Huizhou than Shexian and Xiuning. The possession of antiquities determined whether one was cultivated or vulgar. Therefore, people contended for acquisition at all costs. Hearing that, antique dealers from everywhere came to Huizhou, and the merchants traveling in other cities searched for and brought back antiques. Consequently, acquisition increased greatly. *This trend began with the vice- minister of war Wang Daokun and his brothers.*" 憶昔我徽之盛， 莫如休， 歙二縣，而雅俗之分， 在於古玩之有無，故不惜重值爭而收入。時四方貨玩者， 聞風奔至， 行商于外者， 搜尋而歸， 因此所得甚多。 其風始開於汪司馬兄弟. For a brief introduction to art collecting in sixteenth and seventeenth century Huizhou, see Jason Chi-sheng Kuo, "Hui-chou Merchants as Art Patrons in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries," *Artists and Patrons: Some Social and Economic Aspects of Chinese Painting*, edited by Chu-tsing Li (Lawrence, KS: Kress Foundation Dept. of Art History in association with University of Washington Press, 1989), 177–88.

[46]Wang Shizhen 王世貞 [Sun: 1]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 17.

[47]A letter from Sheng Shitai 盛時泰 (1529–1578) to Fang Yongbin from the eighth month of 1574 records an invitation to meet with Li Minbiao in Beijing, see Sheng Shitai [Water: 6]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 810. Fang travelled to Guangdong in 1582 to attend Li's funeral. Much of the correspondence with scholars from Guangdong in the Harvard-Yenching cache stems from Fang's relationship with Li Minbiao and his younger brother Li Minhuai 黎民褱; see Chen, "Fang Yongbin jiqi qinyou," *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 45. On Fang's training with Li (and the aforementioned scroll of Tao's poetry), see Wang Daokun, "Li Mishu shu Tao shi hou" 黎秘書書陶詩後, *Taihan ji* 太函集, edited by Hu Yimin 胡益民 and Yu Guoqing 余國慶 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2004), 86: 1783. Shi Ye suggests that Fang visited Li in Guangdong twice, first to study calligraphy and then in 1582 for Li's funeral, see Shi, "Cong xin jian Ming ceye," 139.

Poetry of Association: Wang Daokun's Fenggan Society

While Wang Daokun's reputation as the foremost literary authority in Wanli-era Huizhou stemmed from his exam success and subsequent official appointments, he sustained his dominance over local scholarly activity through running a series of poetry societies. These organizations were notionally intended to foster homegrown literary talent, yet also came to function as a mechanism through which Wang Daokun extended his influence over developments in late Ming material culture. Due to turbulent factional politics at court, civil service tenure had become increasingly precarious, leading scholars to turn to poetry societies as a way of reaffirming ideals of communal leadership, fashioning a "world of their own" around principles of worthiness and talent.[48] Wang Daokun spent nineteen years of his life in forced retirement and similarly took advantage of his coterie to buttress his standing as a community role model or *fan* 範.[49] And yet his management of these societies diverged from other contemporary examples through the heightened emphasis he placed on cultivating the careers of figures involved in the making and marketing of things. With the establishment of his Fenggan Society (Fenggan she 豐干社), in 1567, Wang Daokun developed a dynamic model of local patronage, wherein he offered young men like Fang Yongbin the opportunity to gain literary credentials, while he took advantage of their business operations to bolster his own collections, generating social credit and further revenue for his family.[50] Wang Daokun effectively used the Fenggan institution to offer up access to an aura of scholarly renown in exchange for a connection to resources in trade and craft.[51]

Named after a local river in Shexian, the Fenggan Society initially consisted of seven members in addition to Wang Daokun and his brother and cousin, four of whom came from Fang Yongbin's extended family.[52] Wang claims to have founded the Society in order to aid in the literary education of Wang Daoguan 汪道貫 (1543–1591; courtesy

[48]Tian Yuan Tan, *Songs of Contentment and Transgression: Discharged Officials and Literati Communities in Sixteenth-Century North China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 113–46.

[49]On the concept of *fan*, see Lihong Liu, "Collecting the Here and Now: Birthday Albums and the Aesthetics of Association in Mid-Ming China," *The Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 2.1 (2015), 77.

[50]For Wang Daokun's own account of the Fenggan Society, see Wang, "Fenggan she ji" 豐干社記, *Taihan ji*, 72: 1481. For a detailed introduction, see Geng Chuanyou 耿傳友, "Baiyu she shulüe" 白榆社述略, *Huangshan xueyuan xuebao* 黃山學院學報 1 (2007), 29–33; "Wang Daokun yu Mingdai Longqing, Wanli jian de shitan" 汪道昆與明代隆慶，萬曆間的詩壇, *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu* 中國文化研究 4 (2006), 100–109.

[51]We see this dynamic at play most clearly in Wang Daokun's relationship with Yongbin's relative Fang Yulu 方于魯 (1541–1608), perhaps the most famous ink manufacturer in late Ming China and a fellow early member of the Fenggan. Wang assisted Yulu in his efforts to publish an anthology of poetry, yet he also took command of Yulu's ink business, commissioning Yulu's inkcakes for his own ends. By the 1580s, Wang had composed several endorsements for Fang's commercial lines of ink and had assumed for himself a dominant editorial role in the publication of *Master Fang's Catalogue of Inks* (*Fangshi mopu* 方氏墨譜), a lavishly illustrated print anthology of Fang Yulu's merchandise. See Lin Li-chiang 林麗江, "Wan Ming Huizhou moshang Cheng Junfang yu Fang Yulu moye de kaizhan yu jingzheng" 晚明徽州墨商程君房與方于魯墨業的開展與競爭, *Faguo hanxue* 法國漢學 13 (2010), 121–97. Yongbin exchanged letters with Fang Yulu and also sold his wares, see Xie Bi 謝陛 [Fire: 56]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 934; Tian Yiheng [Wood: 51]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 778; Yang Yizhou 楊一洲 [Moon: 19]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 313; Zhang Zhengmeng 張正蒙 [Moon: 35] Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 353; Wu Wanchun 吳萬春 [Metal: 64]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 597. For correspondence between Fang Yongbin and Fang Yulu, see Fang Da'ao 方大澈 [Fire: 62]; [Fire: 92]; [Fire: 93]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 941; 978; 979.

[52]Fang Ce 方策, Fang Jian 方簡 (1542–1584), Fang Yu 方宇 (1546–1610), and Fang Yulu.

name: Zhongyan 仲淹) and Wang Daohui 汪道會 (1544–1613; courtesy name: Zhongjia 仲嘉)—named the "Two Zhongs" (Er Zhong 二仲)—and it was his sibling and cousin who, in turn, first brought Fang Yongbin into the group. Wang Daokun appears to have already taken an interest in meeting with Fang Yongbin, as is recorded in a letter in the Harvard cache from an enigmatic figure who simply went by the character Shu 淑. The letter divulges Wang's hope to invite Fang to discuss the classic of Han dynasty historical writing, Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史記):

> My uncle met with Master Nanming [Wang Daokun] and in their discussion of literary matters, he said you are dedicated to writing. He [Daokun] was delighted and suggested that you might find an opportunity to talk with him. If you proceed to his residence, he will go over the *Records of the Grand Historian* with you.
>
> 家伯見南明先生，因論文，道兄尚文墨。渠甚喜，謂兄何不于渠處一談。若往渠宅，渠當謂兄講《史記》。[53]

Wang Daokun further embraced his role as Fang Yongbin's teacher in a dedicatory essay that begins with an injunction that the young man—"the son of a wealthy family" (富家翁子)—"humble himself to become a scholar" (無寧折節為儒).[54] In Wang's account, Fang was initially taken aback by the suggestion, referring to himself as a "worldly scholar" (*shiru*), a self-deprecating epithet—evoking a clerkish mentality—that he would later use elsewhere as a signature:[55]

> He heard my words and was solemnly stirred within. He withdrew and thoughtfully stated: "I am deficient, how could I really become a scholar? If I keep on as a worldly scholar, would that be sufficient? … To sincerely follow noble teachers in receiving instruction at college, to proceed and steal a glimpse of an imperial chariot procession, an abundance of officials from all ranks, the rites of delegations at suburban altars, the regalia of summoned officers; to then withdraw and study the words of the many masters and scholars of broad learning, to befriend gentlemen from all over the empire, for me this is enough."
>
> 生聞余言，灑然有慨於中矣。退而深念曰:「用彬不敏，又惡能儒？藉使紛如為世儒，世儒安足為也？。。。誠願從先生往受業成均，進而竊睹萬乘之尊，百官之富，郊廟朝會之典，公車召對之儀，退而治博士諸家之言，友天下之士，於余小子足矣。」[56]

Wang Daokun's ventriloquized version of Fang's response perhaps says more about himself than his protégé: by having Fang effuse over the transformative experience of entering the National Academy (Guozjijian 國子監), Wang once again publicizes his own achievements in winning the *jinshi* degree, inviting younger Huizhou merchants to imitate and uphold his example. Such recommendations eventually led Fang to travel to Beijing in 1573 to sit for the exams; he appears to have been unsuccessful, however, and he later settled on purchasing for money a "licentiate degree" (*jiansheng* 監生)

[53]Shu 淑 [Wood: 27]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 756.
[54]Wang, "Zeng Fang sheng xu" 贈方生序, *Taihan ji*, 3: 72.
[55]Fang, "Fang Yongbin shiyu," *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 2.
[56]Fang, "Fang Yongbin shiyu," *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 2.

through the common yet increasingly maligned practice of *juanna* 捐納.[57] While Wang Daokun provocatively challenged rigid bifurcations between scholar and merchant in his literary prose, once posing the question: "in short, in what way is a good merchant inferior to a prominent scholar?" (要之，良賈何負閎儒), the authority to make such pronouncements and the genres in which he worked remained those of an archetypal official.[58] Fang Yongbin, by contrast, may have felt resigned to the self-effacing label of a "worldly scholar," yet he proceeded to blend learned, mercantile, and artisanal expertise in practice.[59]

Fang Yongbin failed in his pursuit of a civil service career, yet he was still able to use his experience of Wang Daokun's tutelage to garner modest acclaim as a poet.[60] Fang appears to have performed various literary secretarial tasks for his patron: clients, for instance, approached Fang with requests for family tomb memorials from Wang. Fang was also involved in printing copies of Wang Daokun's 1574 collection of literary prose and poetry, *Fumo* 副墨.[61] Unlike other early members of the Fenggan Society, Fang did not publish a print collection of his own verse, yet fellow alumni shared manuscripts and dedicated poems to him, suggesting that his literary talents were taken seriously by his peers.[62] A forty-leaf album dedicated to Fang Yongbin, acquired by Robert Van Gulik (1910–1967) and now held in the Leiden Institute of Sinology (catalogued as "A Memorial Folio for Fang Yuansu's Glorious Return" (Fang Yuansu ronggui jinian ce 方元素榮歸紀念冊)), has also recently been brought to light, containing 104 poems from eighty-two poets—the majority of whom also drafted letters in the

[57]Chen, "Fang Yongbin jiqi qinyou," *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 4–5.

[58]Wang, "Gaozeng fengzhi dafu hubuyuan wailang Cheng gong ji zeng yiren minshi hezang muzhiming" 誥贈奉直大夫戶部員外郎程公暨贈宜人閔氏合葬墓誌銘, *Taihan ji*, 55: 1146. For similar statements, see Wang, "Haiyang chushi Jin Zhongweng pei Dai shi hezang muzhi ming" 海陽處士金仲翁配戴氏合葬墓誌銘, *Taihan ji*, 52: 1099; Wang, "Ming gu chushi Xiyang Wu changgong muzhiming" 明故處士谿陽吳長公墓誌銘, *Taihan ji*, 54: 1142. For a discussion, see Guo, *Ritual Opera and Mercantile Lineage*, 60.

[59]Again, there are illuminating parallels with Fang Yulu, whom Wang Daokun allegedly encouraged to give up poetry to focus on inkmaking. A later tomb epitaph written by Li Weizhen 李維禎 (1547–1626) records how during the course of his participation in the work of the Fenggan Society, Wang Daokun instructed Fang Yulu, whose family had recently fallen on hard times, to turn to inkmaking as a way of "aiding literary thoughts" (*zhu wensi* 助文思) and "making a living" (*zhisheng* 治生). This retrospective account presents Wang Daokun not simply as a supporter of Fang's products, but as the inspiration behind his ink business. Li upends the assumption that a merchant-artisan might strive to assume the reputation of a poet by suggesting that Fang Yulu, with Wang Daokun's encouragement, actually progressed from poetry to inkmaking, see Li Weizhen, "Fang Waishi muzhi ming" 方外史墓誌銘, *Dami shan fangji* 大泌山房集, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1997), vol. 150, 87. Wang Daohui, similarly, moved from his early involvement in the Fenggan Society to acting as an inkstone dealer in Nanjing, see Feng Mengzhen 馮夢禎, *Kuaixue tang riji* 快雪堂日記 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2010), 108–9.

[60]On praise for Fang Yongbin's poetry from authors of letters in the Harvard-Yenching cache, see Wang Minzhong 汪民中 [Metal: 151]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 718.

[61]For a request of a Wang Daokun tomb memorial (*muzhiming* 墓誌銘), see Qiu Tan 丘坦 [Water: 43]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 848. On the printing of *Fumo*, see Fang Wenming 方文明 [Metal: 36]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 551.

[62]Fang does appear, however, to have collected drafts of poems for compilations on set themes, including an anthology of verse he edited in praise of the magistrate Peng Haogu's 彭好古 response to recent local crop failures, "Ruimai song" 瑞麥頌, Wang Youdao 王有道 [Metal: 136]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 702.

Harvard-Yenching cache.[63] Shi Ye 施曄 has suggested that these handwritten drafts of poems addressed to Fang Yongbin were probably compiled along with the letters now in the Harvard-Yenching collection, only to have been separated into another folio at a later date.[64] Just as we have no surviving examples of the many missives Fang likely sent in response to the requests he received from clients, so too, we can only surmise —at least at this stage—the not inconsiderable quantity of verse that Fang must have composed to sustain relations with the eighty-two poets listed in the Leiden album.[65]

What little has survived of Fang Yongbin's verse relates almost exclusively to paintings that he inscribed or collected: his poems on ekphrastic themes, displayed on the surfaces of fans and scrolls, point to the intimate relationship between Fang's literary aspirations and his engagement—as both dealer and maker—with the material culture of calligraphy.[66] A fellow Ming dynasty Huizhou scholar's collected works preserves a poem with Fang's seals dedicated to a depiction of his garden, first included in an illustrated anthology of *go*-charts.[67] The Qing dynasty compendium, *Catalogue of Calligraphy and Painting from Ten Hundred Studio* (*Shibai zhai shuhua lu* 十百齋書畫錄), contains another of Fang's few extant poems, a transcription of a piece originally written on an ink painting of bamboo.[68] Shi Ye has suggested that two of the four categories of poems addressed to Fang in the Leiden folio concern paintings: the first, a horse painting to commemorate Fang's trip to Beijing to enter the National Academy; and the second, a scroll or set of paintings on a bamboo grove dwelling.[69] The moon folio in the Harvard cache, meanwhile, contains a poem in praise of a "beauty painting orchids," the first two lines of which—"Consort Jiang has worked well, with first buds of orchid and calamus; moonlight illumines the banks of the Xiang, washed in evening mist" (江妃修好初蘭荃，月映湘皋澹晚煙)—conceal the characters for "Orchid" 蘭 and "Xiang" 湘, naming the celebrated Nanjing courtesan and ink painter Ma Xianglan 馬湘蘭 (1548–1604) (Ma Shouzhen 馬守真; Ma Ruqian 馬汝謙).[70] The aforementioned Qing painting catalogue, *Ten Hundred Studio*, also cites another reference to a landscape scroll, offered to Fang Yongbin by a

[63]For an introduction, see Shi, "Cong xin jian Ming ceye." The folio contains contributions from Wang Daokun and Li Minbiao among many others.

[64]Shi, "Cong xin jian Ming ceye," 139.

[65]The Leiden poems cover a nineteen-year span, from 1569 to 1588.

[66]For Fang's gift of a "poem fan" (*shishan* 詩扇), see Wang Dacheng 汪大成 [Sun: 90]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 245.

[67]The poem, "Inscribed on Zuoyin's Garden" (Ti Zuoyin yuan 題坐隱園) for Wang Tingne's 汪廷訥 *Go Charts by Master Zuoyin* (*Zuoyin xiansheng dingpu* 坐隱先生訂譜), has been reprinted in Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 11.

[68]Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 11.

[69]The first painting, "Galloping to the Yan Pavilion" (Yantai xiangshou 燕台驤首), was a scroll based on the tale of King Zhao of Yan 燕昭王 (r. 312–279 BCE) building a legendary Golden Terrace (*jintai* 金台) to attract worthies to Yan. The focus of the painting is a horse, an allegory for Fang's courage in traveling to Beijing and a reference to a local mountain in Fang's hometown of Yansi Market Town named the "Divine Stallion" (Tianma 天馬). The second painting was on a "Bamboo Grove Dwelling" (Zhuli guan 竹里館), an architectural structure based in Fang Yongbin's garden. Letters in the Harvard cache reveal Fang's efforts to solicit manuscripts of poems on these two topics, yet we do not know if Fang succeeded in publishing these compilations or whether he composed his own verse for the collections. For the Yantai piece, see Zhou Liangyin 周良寅 [Sun: 7]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 44; for the Bamboo Grove work, see Huang Qiaozhu 黃喬柱 [Moon: 34]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 352.

[70]Fang's poem for Ma, entitled "To a Beauty Painting Orchids" (Fude meiren hualan 賦得美人畫蘭), is appended to a letter from Yu Ce 俞策 [Moon: 110]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 470–71. According to

Nanjing-based Buddhist monk named "White Foot" (Baizu 白足) that bears a poem dedicated to Fang signed by Ma.[71] Aside from these two poems—likely intended as a pair of tokens in a parting exchange—there are unfortunately no further details concerning the nature of Fang's relationship with one of Ming China's leading female celebrities. While there are no surviving paintings attributed to Fang Yongbin, the Harvard cache indicates that he repeatedly sought out work from his contemporaries, often on fashionable themes—in one instance, soliciting a Guanyin 觀音 scroll from a female gentry painter.[72] While direct commissions for Fang's own paintings were rare, clients repeatedly request for him to draft his "large characters" (*dashu* 大書)—a reference to clerical script (*lishu* 隸書)—on folding fans, suggesting that he had earned local acclaim for his brushwork following his aforementioned lessons with Li Minbiao.[73]

In tracing Fang Yongbin's transactions with paintings and works of calligraphy, however, we can begin to see conventional practices of gift-giving among aspiring late Ming scholars give way to other matters of business: clients come to Fang with paintings they hope to value for a sale or pawn for a sum of silver.[74] Fang's own requests for commissions—as with the Guanyin painting—were accompanied by gifts of ink and paper, supplies he manufactured and marketed through his own shop.[75] If Fang's poetic activities were entwined with his role in the exchange of paintings and calligraphy, his role in managing the passage of such artwork was, in turn, indelibly marked by his expertise in selling writing materials. There is, in Fang Yongbin's case, no conversion from merchant to scholar (or its inverse, from aspiring scholar back to merchant)—rather we are left with a knotty tale of self-extension that proceeds in fits and starts, where Fang's learned skills in poetry or calligraphy on occasion surpass, sometimes harness, and yet more often seem to merge with his involvement in handicrafts and shop-keeping.

Shopkeeper

Fang Yongbin solicited and sustained many of his contacts through his management of a shop and pawnbroking business named the "Treasure Store" (variously transcribed as: Baodian 寶店; Baosi 寶肆; Baopu 寶鋪).[76] It is unclear where precisely in Yansi Market Town the store was located or how many other branches of this franchise were set up in

the early Qing poet Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664), Ma Shouzhen took the sobriquet Xianglan because of her talent in painting orchids.

[71]Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 9.

[72]Yang Yizhou 楊一洲 [Wood: 17]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 746–47.

[73]Ma Dian 馬電 [Moon: 115]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 480; Bai Qianshen 白謙慎, "Chenshi de shiji" 尘事的史跡, *Dushu* 讀書 1 (2007), 55.

[74]Fang Dawen 方大汶 [Fire: 80]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 968; Yu Jiaren 俞嘉訒 [Fire: 65]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 953; Wang Hongze 汪弘澤 [Metal: 122]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 685–86. For a brief study of the letters, and the light they shed on changing practices of art connoisseurship and patronage in late Ming Huizhou, see Zhang Changhong 張長虹, *Pinjian yu jingying: Mingmo Qingchu Huishang yishu zanzhu yanjiu* 品鑒與經營：明末清初徽商藝術贊助研究 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2010), 73–95.

[75]For examples of Fang giving ink and paper in his requests for paintings, see Liu Jue 劉爵 [Water: 23]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 825–26; Liu Zhijie 劉之節 [Wood: 66]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 798.

[76]For Baodian, see Fang Dazhi 方大治 [Metal: 82]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 618; Fang Kan 方侃 [Fire: 71]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 958; Fang Shiji 方士極 [Fire: 104]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 991; Baosi, see Fang Yu 方宇 [Metal: 50]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 569; Xu Hang 許沆 [Fire: 18]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 889; Baopu, see Wang Daoguan [Metal: 7]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 506–07.

Shexian, yet the business appears to have been a family-run outfit.[77] Fang's "Treasure Store" specialized in the commercial sale of what Chen Zhichao calls "cultural commodities" (*wenhua shangpin* 文化商品)—or the appurtenances of a scholar's studio—and moneylending. These two sets of activities, to a degree that remains unrecognized in existing cultural histories of late imperial China, were often mutually constituted as two sides of the same operation.

In the absence of a widespread network of deposit banks,[78] consumers sought to convert their money into social credit through conspicuous consumption.[79] As a dealer and pawnbroker, Fang Yongbin catered to such demands: he facilitated the acquisition of decorative objects and could covert such supplies back into hard cash when it was required. Pawnbrokers assume a particularly influential role in settings where the "neutral exchange" of money and commodities develops alongside networks of obligation and personal connection in which material is "richly absorbent" of memory.[80] We encounter a not-dissimilar situation in sixteenth-century Huizhou where an expanding money economy had begun to destabilize and reconfigure the "paternalistic order of the agnatic community" and gentry-dominated lineage institutions.[81] Under these circumstances, a given luxury object—a green jade inkstone, say—could oscillate between its guise as a commodity with a calculated cash value and its life as a "material mnemonic" of status, of momentous occasions, of kinship ties. The pawnbroker lived on the "social cusp" between an "intermittent yet persistent" need for cash and this world of "material memories."[82] Across the papers of the Harvard cache, we see Fang take in family heirlooms for sums of money, while selling artifacts that were then recycled as gifts, assuming an almost alchemical power to transmute silver into art and art back into silver. From the

[77]Several letters concerning debt repayments refer to Fang Yongbin's cousin Fang Yongxian 方用賢 as a steward of the shop; see Xu Hang [Fire: 24]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 894.

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

[79]To begin to parse the significance of practices of pawnbroking across the early modern world, it is first necessary to suspend anachronistic assumptions that only the poor turn to moneylenders for financial assistance. The economic historian Peng Xinwei famously speculated that there were 20,000 pawnshops in sixteenth-century China (as opposed to only 7,000 in the nineteenth century) and while it is impossible to verify the accuracy of these estimates, we do know that a number of such institutions specialized in high-value goods and art works; see Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, 15 and 135. For an introduction to the distinctive attributes of pawnbroking in Huizhou in the Ming and Qing dynasties, see Wang Shihua 王世華, "Ming Qing Huizhou dianshang de shengshuai" 明清徽州典商的盛衰, *Qingshi yanjiu* 清史研究 2 (1999), 62–70.

[80]The terms of my account have been inspired by Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 20. Evidence of pawnbroking in China dates back to the fifth century, and Chinese pawnshops appear to have originated in Buddhist monasteries—the concept of a loan against a pledge may have originated in India. Few business records from China survive from before the nineteenth century except for a seventh-century account book from a pawnshop discussed by Valerie Hansen, "Records from a Seventh Century Pawnshop in China," in *The Origins of Value: The Financial Innovations That Created Capital Markets*, edited by William N. Goetzmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 54–59.

[81]Guo, *Ritual Opera*, 24.

[82]Jones, *Renaissance Clothing*, 20.

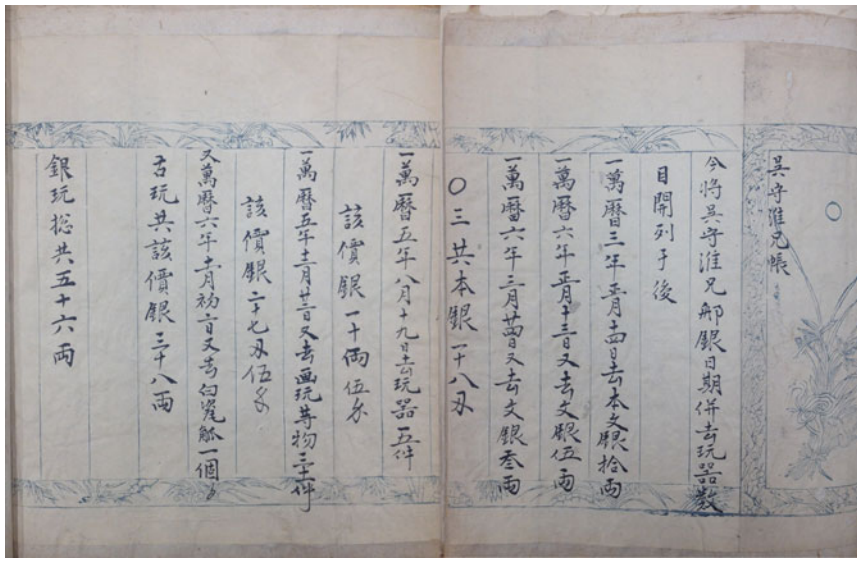

Figure 1. Invoice for Wu Shouhuai. Image courtesy of Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University. Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Fire: 114.

pawnbroker's perspective, such work drew from and synthesized strategies of discernment and dealership, simultaneously manipulating a customer's tastes and debts.

A Pawnbroker's Invoice

Nestled among the papers collected in the fire folio is an invoice sent from Fang to a customer named Wu Shouhuai 吳守淮 that gives a better sense of how he made a living (see Figure 1).[83] Drafted on an elegant sheet of decorative paper with an illustrated border of the "four gentlemen" (plum blossom, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum), Fang's bill lists the sums of silver that Wu owed from earlier loans:

> *Invoice for Brother Wu Shouhuai:*
> I have set out below the numbers and dates for the amounts of silver and artifacts taken out by brother Wu Shouhuai.
>
> 1) Third Year of Wanli, 14th of the First Month: 10 taels of silver taken out.
> 2) Sixth Year of Wanli, 13th of the First Month: 5 taels of silver taken out.
> 3) Sixth Year of Wanli, 24th of the Third Month: 3 taels of silver taken out.
>
> Total = 18 taels
>
> 1) Fifth Year of Wanli, 19th of the Eighth Month: 5 artifacts taken out, priced at 10 taels and 5 mace.

[83]The Leiden folio of poems also contains a short bill for four pawned paintings dated to the fifteenth of the ninth month of 1584: a Guo Xi 郭熙 (1000–1087) landscape for three taels (*san lian* 三兩); a Tang Yin 唐寅 (1470–1524) inscribed painting for one tael (*yi liang* 一兩); a tea painting by Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470–1559) for one tael (*yi liang* 一兩); and a Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254–1322) regular script calligraphy for five mace (*wu qian* 五錢). Shi, "Cong xin jian Ming ceye," 141.

2) Fifth Year of Wanli, 22nd of the Twelfth Month: 31 paintings and artifacts taken out, priced at 27 taels and 5 mace. Also: Sixth Year of Wanli, 2nd of Eleventh Month—a single white porcelain vase.
Total = 38 taels

Combined Total of Silver and Artifacts = 56 taels

吳守淮兄帳。
今將吳守淮兄那銀日期併去玩器數目開列于後:
一，萬曆三年正月十四日去本文銀拾兩。
一，萬曆六年正月十三日又去文銀伍兩。
一，萬曆六年三月廿四日又去文銀叁兩。
三共本銀一十八兩。
一，萬曆五年八月十九日去玩器五件，該價銀一十兩五錢。

一，萬曆五年十二月廿二日又去畫，玩等物三十一件，該價銀二十七兩伍錢。又萬曆六年十一月初二日又去白瓷觚一個。
古玩共該價銀三十八兩。
銀，玩總共五十六兩。[84]

The invoice reveals how Wu availed himself of Fang's services as a pawnbroker over a four-year period, drawing both silver and decorative objects or "playthings" (*wanqi* 玩器) from his shop. The terse format of the bill, however, partly obscures the background to Fang and Wu's relationship. Both individuals were select members of Wang Daokun's seven-man coterie, the Fenggan Society, and Wu was the author of the single largest number of letters to Fang in the Harvard cache.[85] If Wang Daokun used the Fenggan group to harness the skills of its members in trade and craft, the younger participants in the Society appear to have concurrently relied on each other's contacts to pursue the acquisition of things and to take advantage of basic financial services. Twelve of the letters collected in the moon, metal, wood, and water folios reveal a casual friendship between the two men, with Wu addressing Fang in an informal manner through use of his courtesy name.[86] Wu alludes to the acquisition of pots of sweet flag (*changcao pen* 菖艸盆), new brush washers (*xin bixi* 新筆洗), and orchid fragrance incense (*lanxiang* 蘭香), yet much of the discussion—befitting their acquaintance as fellow members of Wang Daokun's literary society—concerns the convivial exchange of poetry and calligraphy: in one instance, Wu even shared what appears to have been a manuscript of his poems ("clumsy drafts" 拙稿) with a provisional title "Warm Spring Pavilion" (Yangchun ge 陽春閣).[87] The tone and content of the correspondence changes markedly, however, in the letters from the fire folio. From this point onwards, Fang appears increasingly impatient in trying to get Wu to repay his debts. There are

[84]Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 1008.

[85]On the Fenggan Society, see Wang, "Fenggan she ji," *Taihan ji*, 72: 1481.

[86]See, for example, Wu Shouhuai [Metal: 72]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 605. Wu also refers to Fang as "Society Senior" (社長) and himself as "Society Brother" (社弟), invoking their fellowship in Wang Daokun's Fenggan Society.

[87]On the flowers and plants (所諾菖艸盆并小新筆洗，幸檢發，令蒼頭持來), see Wu Shouhuai [Metal: 87]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 626. For references to the incense and manuscript (拙稿并陽春閣，并乞發下), see Wu Shouhuai [Metal: 86]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 625–26.

several references to a cauldron-shaped inkstone made from green jade (*luyan yu* 緑研玉) that Wu borrowed and had neither returned nor paid for.[88] Fang sent representatives to try and extract payments for this artifact (and other outstanding sums) as Wu became increasingly resentful, venting that "your barbaric lackeys had come for this matter" (候胡奴至了此前件) and challenging him, "why fashion such vulgar airs?" (作此里中俗態何也).[89] It seems unlikely that Fang Yongbin was ever repaid in full, as biographies of Wu Shouhuai all claim he died in poverty. Nevertheless, Fang still benefitted from artifacts that Wu had turned in as pledges for loans and repayments for earlier debts: to take one telling example, he acquired a "Huangting Classic" calligraphic model (*Huangting jing tie* 黃庭經帖) from Wu Shouhuai, once owned by Wu's uncle, that he then lent out to another close associate and fellow Fenggan Society member: Wang Daokun's younger brother, Wang Daoguan.[90]

Inkstone Connoisseur

Through his familiarity with the handling and pricing of decorative objects, Fang Yongbin assisted Wang Daokun with the expansion of his acclaimed collections. Fang's services for Wang's family, however, were largely mediated through the "Two Zhongs"—Wang Daoguan and Wang Daohui. The extensive correspondence between the Wangs and Fang Yongbin reveals a complex web of different modes of exchange and of diverse objects—porcelain, mirrors, paintings, calligraphy, books—that bound the two parties together, yet a persistent concern in many of these letters is the acquisition of inkstones. In several cases, we see the Wangs cast themselves as customers, writing simply to purchase artifacts from Fang. In the eighth letter in the metal volume, for instance, Wang Daohui identifies a blue and white porcelain "hanging vase" that he encountered on a visit to Fang and sends his younger brother back to buy:

> Yesterday I paid thanks. I am most grateful for you accompanying me for the whole day. As for the blue and white porcelain hanging-vase, would it be possible for me to entrust my younger brother to come and pay you? Unfilial Wang Daohui lays his forehead to the ground.
>
> 昨拜謝，辱追陪竟日，感感。青花壁瓶，乞便付家弟，嗣當償償，如何？不孝汪道會稽顙。[91]

Much of the correspondence, however, suggests a messy entanglement of purchases, pledges for loans, repayments for debts, gifts, and non-binding temporary exchanges of possessions for trials or tests. An illustrative example is a longer letter from Wang Daoguan, scrawled while he was suffering from an illness (Figure 2). The note begins with Wang returning to Fang Yongbin a set of five paintings that he had borrowed temporarily, before notifying him that he will be holding on to some of the other paintings and artifacts taken out on loan for longer than anticipated. Wang then names paintings that he says his "brother" (we can take to be Wang Daohui) will come and collect, although it is unclear whether he plans to purchase or simply borrow them. Wang

[88]Wu Shouhuai [Fire: 25]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 895; Wu Shouhuai [Fire: 119]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 1012.

[89]Wu Shouhuai [Fire: 28]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 898.

[90]Wang Daoguan [Metal: 146]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 712.

[91]Wang Daohui [Metal: 8]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 508.

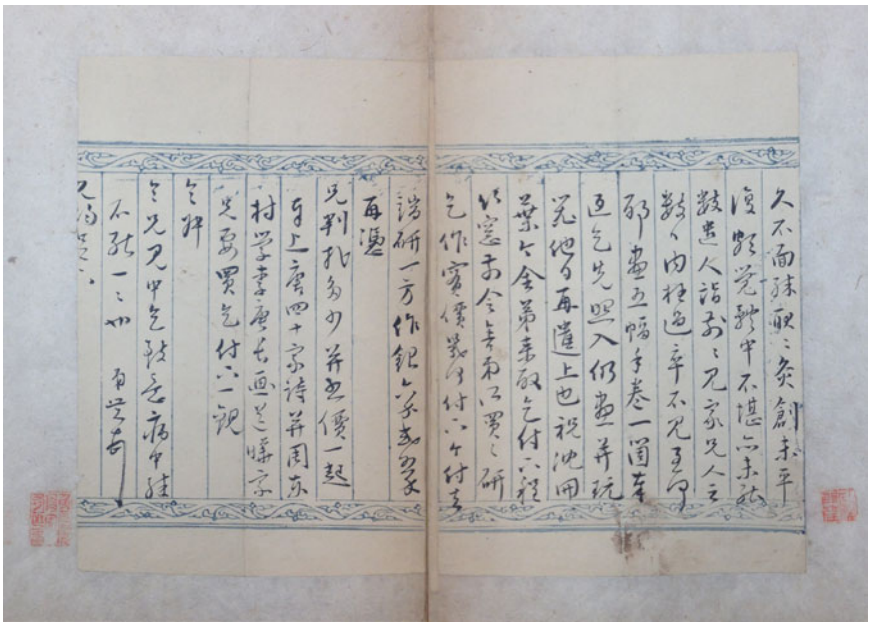

Figure 2. Letter from Wang Daoguan to Fang Yongbin. Image courtesy of Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University.
Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Metal: 148.

proceeds to remind Fang how his associate Cheng Zhuchuang 程竹窗 had entrusted Wang Daohui to purchase an inkstone, while enquiring about the price. Along with the letter, Wang Daoguan sends to Fang Yongbin a Duan inkstone (that he hopes to pawn for a five or six mace discount in the price for the inkstone Cheng wants Daohui to buy) and asks Fang to settle the remaining balance together with the money he owed for an earlier purchase of books. The letter concludes with Wang Daoguan writing of his cousin's intention to purchase a copy of the "Poems of Forty Tang Masters" (*Tang sishi jia shi* 唐四十家詩) and a painting by a Suzhou artist from Fang; Daoguan insists that before he sends the money he wants to view the items once more.[92] Other notes in the cache show that Fang's shop sold inkstones and Wang Daoguan's letter suggests that some of this stock may have come from inkstones that clients had pawned to him.[93] Moving from lists of objects to sums of money, from debts repaid to purchases made, the letter approximates the format of a ledger, tracing the development of an open account with Fang's shop.

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

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

The Wangs not only looked to Fang Yongbin for assistance with the purchase of inkstones, they also started to approach him as an expert in the refined judgment of such artifacts. In a letter from the metal folio, Wang Daohui begins by listing a set of items he hopes to exchange before inviting Fang Yongbin to judge a "large and rare inkstone" that he had recently acquired:

> I've offered two bowls to swap for a caltrop mirror. If you want to use the porcelain cup, come and collect it at a later date. As for the matter from a few days ago, there have been a few setbacks but I'll wait until I see you to tell you in full. As for the peacock feathers you wish to send me, I'll get one of my lads to fetch them, how's that? I recently obtained an inkstone, an exceptional specimen; what day could you come to appraise it? Brother Hui bows his head.
>
> 二碗持易菱鏡。磁杯如足下欲用，他日當取至。前日之事，就中多少周折，俟相見面盡之。足下瓶內所置孔雀尾數莖願與不佞，即令豎子持下如何？近得一研，大是世間希有之物，何日來一鑒賞也？弟會頓首。[94]

It is striking that Wang uses the term *jian shang* 鑒賞 to call upon Fang to appraise the object. This reversed form of the more conventional compound *shang jian* 賞鑒—glossed as *shang* "to discriminate on the grounds of quality" and *jian* "to tell genuine from false"—was taken to denote "true" connoisseurship: "dependent on a combination of deep scholarship with lofty moral qualities" and was frequently contrasted with *hao shi* 好事 (fondness for things), a term for shallow dilettantism.[95] It is unclear from the letter what precisely Wang Daohui wanted from Fang Yongbin, whether a judgment on pricing, authentication of the object, or just plain flattery for his skills as a collector. In any event, it is striking that a man with privileged access (through his cousin Wang Daokun) to both the largest art collection in Huizhou and to the famed collections of Wang Shizhen in Suzhou, should start to address a travelling businessman as if he possessed the "power of eyes" (*muli* 目力) or "power of mind" (*xinli* 心力) usually reserved for a cultivated scholar.[96] Wang's deference to Fang nevertheless makes a point that while never explicitly articulated in the diaries of self-proclaimed collectors might now seem self-evident: to become a successful dealer, one had to master practices of authenticating and discriminating art in order to outsmart one's customers.[97] The truly accomplished dealer was, in this sense, always already a connoisseur.

[94]Wang Daohui [Metal: 75]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 612.

[95]Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, 86.

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

[97]From this perspective, Fang Yongbin's cache represents a remarkable counterpoint to the diaries of renowned art collectors like Li Rihua 李日華, upon which prevalent narratives of the late Ming art market are based. Li's candid account of his day-to-day experiences as a consumer in the art market over the course of eight years from 1609 to 1616, *Diary from the Water Tasting Studio* (*Weishuixuan riji* 味水軒日記), frequently refers to Huizhou salesmen (the "Dealer from She" (She gu 歙賈)) who travelled to his residence in Jiaxing 嘉興 to present him with their wares. It was common for Li to use these visits as a chance to display his own superior skills, outwitting the salesman by identifying fakes and correcting erroneous

This partnership between the Wangs and Fang Yongbin led to their collaboration on a series of joint publishing ventures. The first, was a catalogue of headgear (*guanpu* 冠譜); and the second, a manuscript catalogue of seal-stamp impressions (*yingao* 印稿)—neither of which survive.[98] In both instances, it is difficult to ascertain to what extent these publications were initiated by the Wangs seeking out Fang's assistance as a shopkeeper to market the prestige of their family holdings, or by Fang soliciting help from the Wangs to promote the merchandise of the Treasure Store.

Carver

The Harvard cache shows that customers repeatedly approached Fang Yongbin for his talents in handicrafts. Various letters specifically refer to Fang's personally crafted dyed papers (*zase zizhi xiaojian* 雜色自製小箋; *waiji shi suo zhi caijian* 外記室所製彩箋)[99] and requests for supplies of ink allude to his "Abstruse Treasure" (Xuanbao 玄寶), a possible brand name for a line of products.[100] It would be reasonable to infer that a considerable number of notes in the cache were written with supplies that Fang Yongbin had sold to his clientele. While Fang had clearly earned a reputation in both of these fields of craft, he was more widely recognized for his extensive engagement with artisanal knifework, particularly the carving of seal script (*zhuan* 篆) into private seal stamps (*yin* 印; *zhang* 章). During the late Ming, research into forms of *zhuan* that had existed prior to Li Si's 李斯 (280–208 BCE) modifications of the regional scripts of the late Zhou became a critical field of activity in scholarly circles, as philologists sought to recover models of the sages from early inscriptions.[101] Against this backdrop, Ming literati became increasingly

attributions. Fang Yongbin's papers allow us to look at such transactions from the perspective of a dealer, examining the role of the salesman in the construction of taste. See Craig Clunas, "The Art Market in 17th Century China: The Evidence of the Li Rihua Diary," *History of Art and History of Ideas*: *Meishushi yu guannian shi* 美術史與觀念史, edited by Fan Jingzhong 范景中, Cao Yiqiang 曹意強 (Nanjing: Nanjing shifan daxue chubanshe, 2003) vol. 1: 201–24.

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

[99]The cache attests to innovations in stationery paper design from the late sixteenth century with a wide-range of woodblock-printed images. For an introduction to these developments, see Suzanne E. Wright, "Chinese Decorated Letter Papers," in *A History of Chinese Letters*, 97–134.

[100]有所欲言，容小僮面稟。雜色自製小箋，惠數番至感。佐公再頓首。Qiao Zuoqing 鄡佐卿 [Moon: 33]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 349, 350; 外記室所製彩箋，惠徼數種，幸示所值於來人，便登入也。Jiang Hongxu 姜鴻緒 [Moon: 82]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 415 (this particular request appears on a piece of paper bearing a woodblock stamp of a bronze cauldron copied from the *Xuanhe bogu tu*); 昤葉竹刷能付此力否？見諸親友一一道謝，千萬。Zhu Duozheng 朱多烝 [Moon: 30]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 341. For references to Fang Yongbin's ink, see Yuan Fuzhi 袁福徵 [Moon: 55]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 294; Wang Wuze 汪無擇 [Metal: 74]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 607.

[101]The calligraphy for stamping seals is based on what is conventionally translated in English as "seal script": either "great seal script" (*dazhuan* 大篆) primarily from the mid-eighth century BCE set of

preoccupied with the more mundane problem of how to transfer seal script calligraphy, drafted with the brush, into the durable medium of a stamp, molded with a knife. Scholars had, traditionally, hired artisans to carve their handwriting onto bronze or ivory bodies, yet in the late sixteenth century the question of who wielded the brush and who wielded the knife became fraught with broader significance: could a scholar release himself from his dependency on an artisan? Could an artisan pass as a scholar?

Clients commissioned Fang Yongbin to manufacture seals in a range of materials, predominantly bronze and ivory. In the following note, a fairly illustrative request from Fang's collection, a customer specifies his general preferences for four personal seals with an enclosed sum of one tael of silver as payment:

> My humble self still lacks several seals of different kinds; I've attached another design and trouble you to find an opportunity in your spare time to complete it. Use ivory or use bronze, it's really up to you. If you use bronze, make it tall and slender. It's far better if you don't add a knob to it. I've also enclosed one tael of silver as remuneration. I respectfully request your aid in carving four copies and I'd be grateful for your examination of them. The name has been corrected. Respectfully Huang Xueceng. In haste. Enclosed please find one tael.
>
> 不佞尚乏數圖書各色，具別幅，煩公暇中一成之。或用牙，或用銅，俱隨便。然銅宜用高長，勿以鈕為之更妙。外具折儀壹兩，小刻四册侑敬，幸檢入。名正具。侍生黃學曾拜。速。折儀壹兩。[102]

Fang Yongbin's skill in engraving seals seems to have been linked to his ability to carve other artifacts—including ivory and bamboo hairpins (*yazan* 牙簪; *zhuzan* 竹簪).[103] A letter from the wood folio suggests that Fang not only sold bronze and ivory seals, but that his shop also peddled knives for cutting these materials: "I humbly request a knife to carve bronze and a knife to carve ivory, please don't be sparing, my sincere thanks" (鐫銅并鐫牙刀各丐一柄，幸勿悋，容面謝。).[104] While not all of the requests explicitly indicate that Fang personally cut the seal (in some instances, he may have also procured the services of other artisans through his shop), he was praised for his talents as a carver by his customers:

> This sobriquet I received from you is truly wonderful; I can't express my gratitude. The design of the "Fount of White Clouds" cannot surpass this. The poise of the calligraphy and the finesse of the engraving lie in the virtuosity of this refined hand's movements. It was certainly not the work of a lesser craftsman.
>
> 承贈賤字妙甚，感不可言。白雲源規模不過如此。其間字畫之均勻，鐫鏤之精絕，又在高手運移之巧，非區區所能盡也。[105]

"Stone Drums" and inscriptions on bronze ritual artifacts; or, more commonly, "small seal script" (*xiaozhuan* 小篆), an official script for the Qin court based on Li Si's modifications of the regional scripts of the late Zhou.

[102]Huang Xueceng 黃學曾 [Earth: 17]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 1036.

[103]A letter from Fang Maoxue 方懋學 in the metal folio praises a bamboo hairpin 承賜竹簪併妙書，足感高情。Fang Maoxue [Metal: 48]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 567.

[104]Pan Wei 潘緯 [Wood: 24]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 753. See also Fang Weichong 方惟充 [Wood: 8]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 738.

[105]Fang Dazhi [Metal: 105]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 659.

The author of this note celebrates Fang Yongbin's craft, claiming he bettered a rival with the popular title "Fount of White Clouds" (Baiyun yuan 白雲源) through his deft ability to synthesize calligraphy (字畫) and carving (鐫鏤). Some of Fang's customers went further by requesting that he share his seal designs as a method of instruction: "as for the art of engraving insects, could you please instruct us? It would be better, if possible, for you to show your designs—I would be awfully grateful."[106]

Although Fang, like other hired artisans, seems to have primarily engraved seals for clients in ivory and bronze, there is also evidence in the Harvard cache that he carved script in stone. Wang Jun 汪濬, a kinsman of Wang Daokun, for instance, sent a pair of letters asking Fang to carve a personal seal in "fieldstone" (粗石一方). These two notes are particularly striking for the pathos of Wang Jun's candid description of how he arrived at a phrase for his seal, recounting the process of devising an apt epithet to articulate his diminished physical state (Figure 3). Wang Jun died from his illnesses at the age of twenty-five (Wang Daokun commemorated a man "prone to sickness" 善病) and we see him search in his requests for redemption from convalescence, as if he still believed in the apotropaic powers of seal script:

> For the past several days my illness has returned; that I still haven't been able to heed your instruction only adds to my regrets. As for this block of fieldstone, I request that you carve the four characters: "Ailing Historian of Penglai Pond" as a way of diverting me from my sickness. I have my heart set on this seal; I've been dreaming of it. I've wanted to entrust you to do it, but haven't dared to trouble you. I hope you'll pay mind to this and my gratitude would be boundless. When I fully recover from my sickness, I'll make sure to repay you in full.
>
> 連日病復，未獲走聆教益為恨。粗石一方，敢求足下為刻「蓬池病史」四字，以為病中消遣。此印乃心愛者，夢寐想之。欲托之而不敢相勞者，屢中止矣。幸即留心，感激無涯也。賤恙全療，自當圖報不盡。[107]
>
> Zhang Pingzi's *Rhapsody on Returning to the Fields* has a line that reads: "Moved by the warning left by Laozi, I shall turn my carriage back to my thatched hut." I'll take this meaning for myself. If it is not too much to bear, how about you carve "Ailing Historian of the Thatched Hut" in fine seal script? Your younger brother Wang Jun, respectfully submitted to Master Yuansu, the society elder.
>
> This stone seal is too short. If you could cut it in two and then use it to make a knob for another seal, that would be wonderful.
>
> 張平子「歸田賦」云：「感老氏之遺誡，且迴駕乎蓬廬。」僕亦此意也。承不拒，乞為佳篆作「蓬廬病史」如何？友弟汪濬再頓首。元素先生社丈。 其石章太倭，倘為分作兩半，以便作鈕，尤妙。[108]

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

[107]Wang Jun [Metal: 46]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 565.

[108]Wang Jun [Metal: 45]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 563.

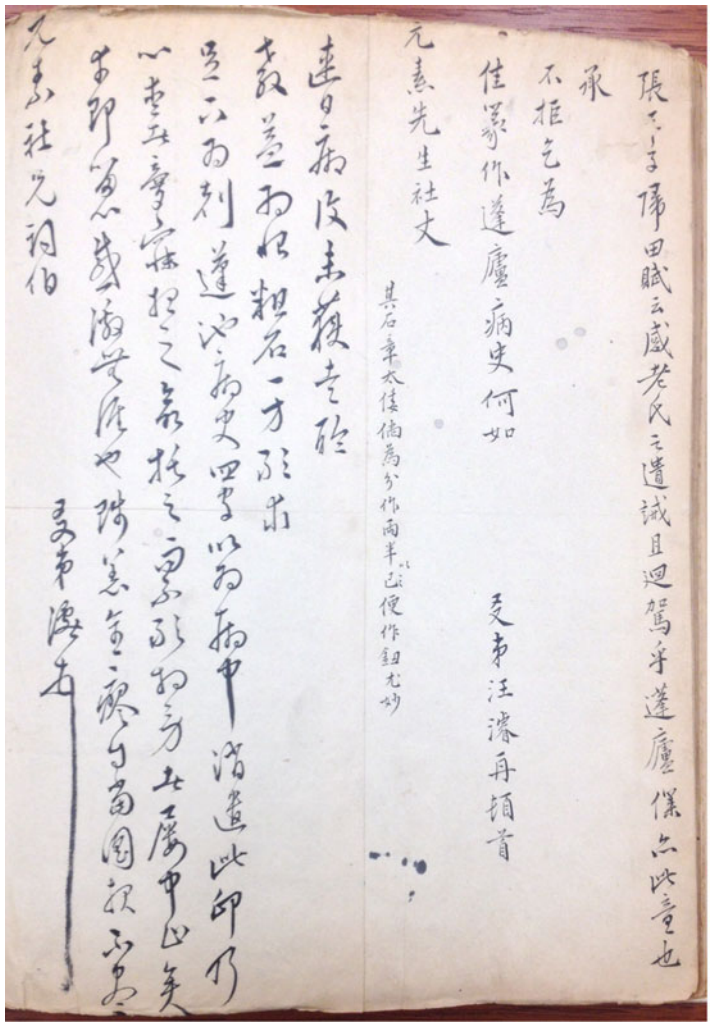

Figure 3. Letter from Wang Jun to Fang Yongbin. Image courtesy of Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University. Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Metal: 45 and 46.

Wang begins in the first note with the title "Ailing Historian of Peng Pond," invoking the specter of his mortality,[109] before later turning to a line from Zhang Heng's 張衡 (78–139) *Rhapsody on Returning to the Fields* (*Guitian fu* 歸田賦)—"Moved by the warning left by Laozi, I shall turn my carriage back to my thatched hut"—to bestow

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

upon himself a new moniker, "Ailing Historian of a Thatched Hut" (蓬廬病史). This line serves as a critical pivot in Zhang's rhyme-prose, marking the point when the protagonist leaves behind "the perfect pleasure of rambling and roaming, even as the sun sets, oblivious of fatigue" (極般遊之至樂，雖日夕而忘劬。)—to heed Laozi's injunction that "galloping and hunting cause one's mind to become mad," heading back to his hut to practice the zither and calligraphy. Fang Yongbin's seal for Wang Jun no longer survives, yet the request conjures up a compelling role for the hired engraver, or the entrepreneurial figure of the shopkeeper more generally: as a medium through whom other customers might fashion poetic projections of themselves. While the main body of the letter dwells on the significance of the phrase intended for the seal, with the customer displaying his skills in literary citation for the carver, it is followed by a short postscript in smaller characters that requests for an old stone to be refabricated as the knob for a new stamp (Figure 3). This slight detail again hints at Fang's artisanal expertise—or his tacit knowledge of how to manipulate materials with the knife—skills that exceeded mere literary craft.

Fang Yongbin as a Seal Collector

The Harvard cache shows that in addition to his work in retail, Fang corresponded with other prominent seal carvers of the late sixteenth century, notably the renowned cutter Wang Hui 汪徽 from Wuyuan (Figure 4), and the local engraver Wu Liangzhi 吳良止, a native of Xinan 溪南 in Shexian (Figure 5). In these letters, we see Fang assume for himself the guise of a client intent on collecting seal designs. In his first letter from the cache, Wang Hui refers to Fang with the intimate epithet of "the one who knows me" (*zhiji* 知己) and identifies a piece of jade that he had sent as the material for the seal:

> I am grateful to you, my true friend, and have received the jade seal you want me to make to express the virtue of your name, for you to wear at your belt. The other day I thought about it and brought it out to play with. I haven't carved a jade seal for a good decade or so, but now I have gone back to it, itching to test my skills for my true friend.
>
> 弟感足下知己，敢留玉印一方作足下表德，為足下佩之，它日相思，持以把玩也。弟不為人篆玉章已十數年所矣，今復技癢于知己之前耳。[110]

In a subsequent letter from the metal folio, Wang returns the seals he had carved to Fang Yongbin with two stamped impressions appending his note: both personal seals were based on Fang's literary names: "cognomen, Sixuan" (biezi Sixuan 別字思玄) and "Fang Yongbin, courtesy name: Yuansu" (Fang Yongbin zi Yuansu 方用彬字元素) (Figures 4 and 6).[111] In the course of four letters in the cache to the bronze cutter Wu Liangzhi, we similarly see: 1) Fang send Wu material for carving a seal; 2) Wu journeys to Yansi Market Town to try and obtain Fang's seal script (*yinwen* 印文) for the carving (possibly from the Treasure Store), but unfortunately Fang was not in; 3) Fang send Wu a gift of ink and a recently cut collection of poems trying to re-arrange a meeting; 4) Wu finally send Fang a bronze seal with his name.[112] The first of these letters

[110]Wang Hui [Moon: 109]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 469.

[111]Wang Hui [Metal: 79]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 615.

[112]1) Wu Liangzhi [Metal: 94]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 633; 2) [Metal: 95]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 634; 3) [Metal: 114]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 670; 4) [Wood: 2]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 732. Wu Liangzhi became famous for his skill in working with bronze and, through

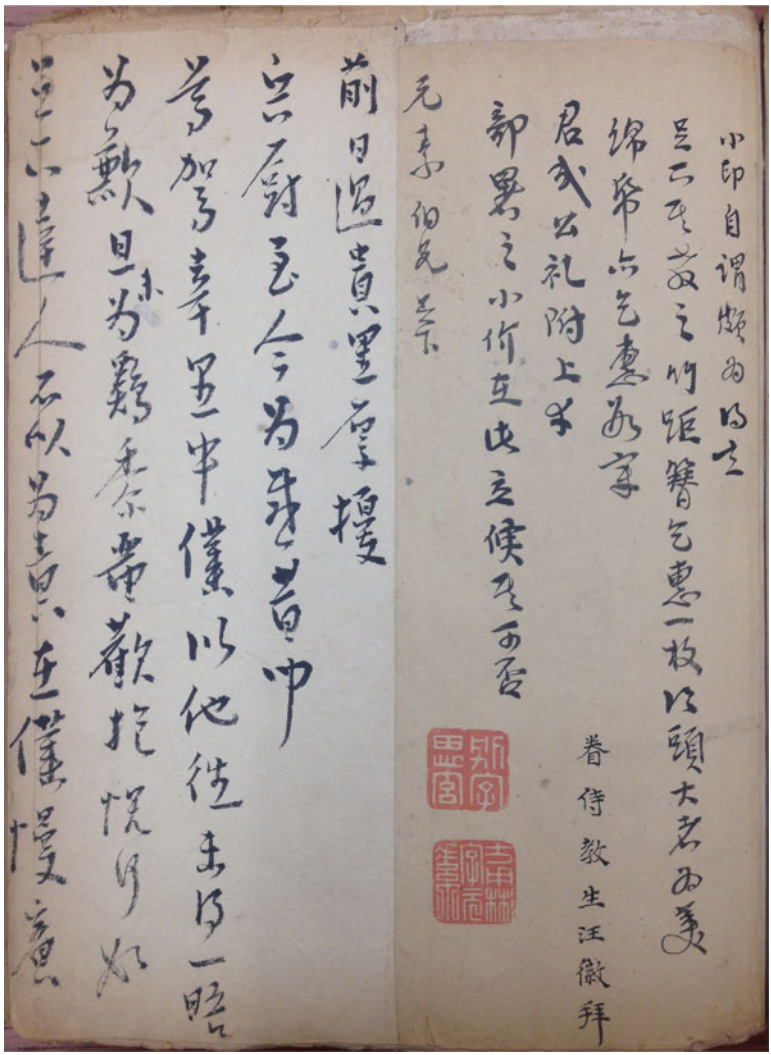

Figure 4. Letter from Wang Hui to Fang Yongbin. Image courtesy of Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University. Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Metal: 79.

bears Wu Liangzhi's personal seal and was drafted on a sensuous sheet of green decorative paper with flecks of gold (Figure 5). One of the more ornate samples in the Harvard cache, this piece speaks to Fang's investment in soliciting and collecting the calligraphy and seal impressions of his contemporaries. Indeed, one way of approaching the cache is as a carefully curated repository of around one hundred personal and

his collaboration with Zhang Xueli 張學禮of Yangzhou, produced copies of three thousand seals for an influential anthology of ancient impressions, primarily from the Qin and Han, *A Gathering of Seals from Research on the Proper Scripts of Antiquity* (*Kaogu zhengwen yinsou* 攷古正文印藪), published in 1589.

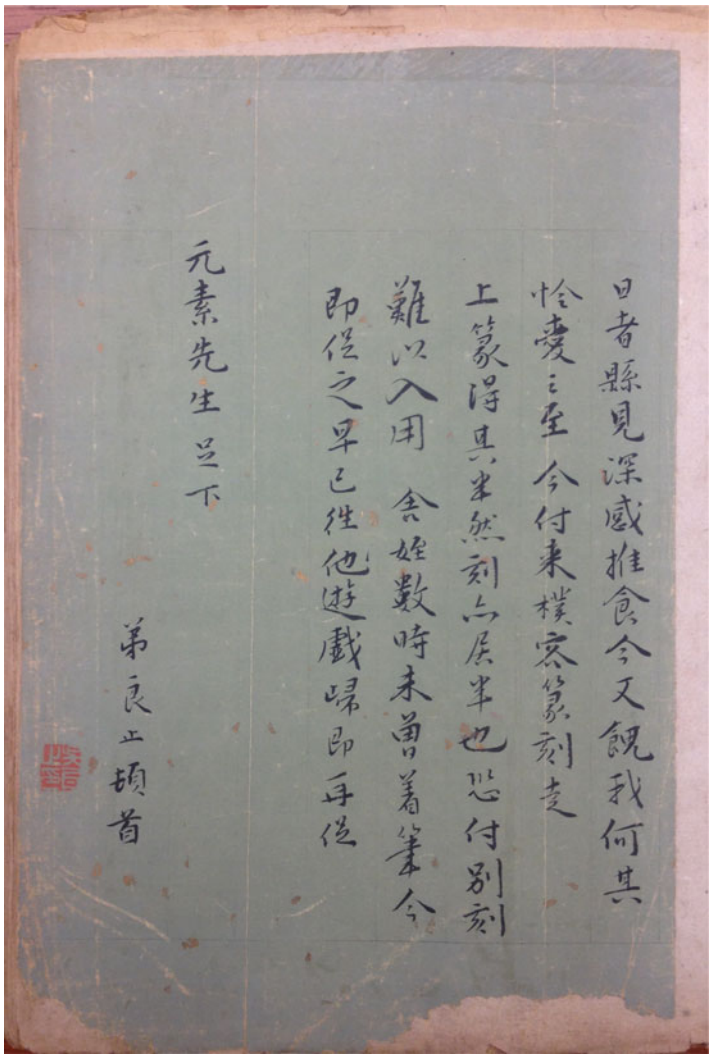

Figure 5. Letter from Wu Liangzhi to Fang Yongbin. Image courtesy of Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University.
Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Metal: 94.

leisure seals from prominent scholars of the sixteenth century, as Fang's own private "seal catalogue" (*yinpu* 印譜).[113] We know that Fang collaborated with Wang Daokun's brothers in the production of a manuscript of seal impressions, yet it is unclear whether this contained contemporary or antique designs. The Huizhou connoisseur Zhan Jingfeng, however, wrote to Fang Yongbin to applaud his proprietorship

[113]Wang Shiqing 汪世清, "Huizhou xue yanjiu de zhongda gongxian: Mingdai Huizhou Fang shi qinyou shouzha qibai tong kaoshi du houji" 徽州學研究的重大貢獻：《明代徽州方氏親友手札七百通考釋》讀後記, *Hefei xueyuan xuebao*合肥學院學報 21.1 (2004), 18.

Figure 6. "Cognomen, Sixuan" and "Fang Yongbin, Courtesy Name: Yuansu," Seal Impressions by Wang Hui, on letter from Wang Hui to Fang Yongbin. Image courtesy of Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University. Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Metal: 79.

of ancient seal scripts: "I heard that your recent acquisition of ancient seal designs is particularly rich and would relish the chance for you to display them one by one."[114] Such flattery, like Wang Daohui's earlier invitation to appraise the inkstone, points to Fang's newfound recognition among his peers as a connoisseur, yet still retains faint traces of the obsequiousness befitting a former customer of Fang's pawnshop. An earlier letter from Zhan Jingfeng reveals that he had approached Fang for a loan of over thirty taels of silver to cover a trip to the National Academy.[115] In these moments, we catch glimpses of Fang Yongbin—a dealer and carver—impinging upon the practice and purview of epigraphic scholarship.

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

[115]Zhan Jingfeng [Metal: 53]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 386.

The Invention of the Soft-Stone Seal: Scholar vs Artisan

Fang Yongbin's work as a carver took place against a backdrop of profound changes in understandings of the seal. During the late sixteenth century, the "rediscovery" of soft-stone ("gelid rock" (*dongshi* 凍石) or soapstone (a hydrous aluminum silicate resembling talc)) heralded the emergence of "literati seal carving," a movement that—as Bai Qianshen has demonstrated at length—exerted a profound influence on the aesthetics and politics of late imperial calligraphy.[116] Scholars had conventionally relied on hired artisans to carve their brushwork into the durable medium of a stamp, yet following a legendary tale of the retrieval of a batch of "gelid rock" in Nanjing by Wen Peng 文彭 (1498–1573)—the son of the illustrious Suzhou scholar-painter Wen Zhengming —renowned men of letters supposedly took up the knife themselves.[117] These developments led to a rethinking of the status of the seal stamp: what was once an assemblage wrought from the collaboration between commissioned artisans (skilled in knifework) and scholar-calligraphers (skilled in brushwork) gave way to a new vision of the stamp as an "authentic" alignment of mind, trace, and impression—an ideal synthesis of knife and brush that allowed for a more direct, or spontaneous mode of self-expression through writing. In the wake of Wen Peng's momentous discovery, commentators distinguished the soft-stone "scholar's seal" (*wenren zhi yin* 文人之印) from the "artisan's seal" (*gongren zhi yin* 工人之印), a synonym for stamps wrought from bronze, jade, or ivory.[118] Artisanal carvers were denigrated for "relying on copies and being unable to approach antiquity" (依樣臨摹，靡不逼古), while artisans who carved jade (a material that was too hard for self-proclaimed scholars to manipulate) were told they did not understand seal script and so lost the "intent of the brush as the methods of the ancients were abandoned" (玉人不識篆，往往不得筆意，古法頓亡).[119]

The popularization of soft-stone seal carving can be traced to Wen Peng and his student He Zhen 何震 (c. 1530–1604). In standard versions of their biographies dating from the early Qing, Wen discovers a batch of soft-stone at a stall in Nanjing: he realizes the true value of the material only after he witnesses a shopkeeper refuse to pay a haggard old man for retrieving the load, a detail that underscores a symbolic opposition between Wen's acquisition of the material and the workings of the marketplace.[120] Wen then displays the rock for none other than Wang Daokun,[121] who in turn gives

[116]Qianshen Bai, *Fu Shan's World: The Transformation of Chinese Calligraphy in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 51.

[117]For a study of other Suzhou literati engaged in seal carving activities around Wen Peng, see Huang Heng 黃惇, "Mingdai chu, zhongqi wenren yinzhang yishu diaoshen" 明代初，中期文人印章藝術釣沈, *Xiling yinshe guoji yinxue yantao hui lunwen ji* 西泠印社國際印學研討會論文集 (Hangzhou: Xiling yinshe chubanshe, 1998), 10.

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

[119]Cai Yaoqing 蔡耀慶, *Mingdai yinxue fazhan yinsu yu biaoxian zhi yanjiu* 明代印學發展因素與表現之研究 (Taibei: Guoli lishi bowuguan bian, 2007), 139.

[120]Zhou Lianggong 周亮工, *Yinren zhuan heji* 印人傳合集, edited by Yu Liangzi 于良子 (Zhejiang renmin meishu chubanshe, 2014), 1: 18–19.

[121]There are, however, no references in Wang Daokun's own collected writings to meetings with Wen Peng and it seems unlikely, given what we now know of their biographies, that the two men ever actually crossed paths in Nanjing. The earliest date Wang could have been posted to the Southern Capital was the fifth month of 1572 by which point Wen was already in Beijing. For a short study of Wen Peng's time in Beijing and Nanjing in his later years, see Liu Dongqin 劉東芹, "Wen Peng wannian shufa zhuanke

half of the supply to He Zhen, thereby establishing the "Huizhou School" of seal-carving.[122] Wen, we are told, no longer needed to rely on a hired engraver of ivory fans to help carve his seals, bypassing the mediating presence of the artisan's knife.[123] Fang Yongbin's practice, however, exceeds and challenges this narrative of the rise of "literati seal carving." On the one hand, Fang himself appears to have experimented with the new medium of soft stone: a letter in the water folio, for instance, records a request for Qingtian rock (承委青田石).[124] Fang likewise appears to have exchanged one letter with He Zhen: a note in the metal folio from a mysterious figure who takes the character Zun 遵.[125] On the other hand, however, Fang thwarts the distinction between "scholar's seal" (*wenren zhi yin*) and "artisan's seal" (*gongren zhi yin*), collapsing the very terms on which the discursive invention of literati seal carving was predicated: Fang carved in soft stones and in the hard "artisanal" materials of jade, ivory, and bronze; he drafted his own calligraphy and commissioned others to cut it with materials he sold through his shop; he was a craftsman *and* a salesman, yet also a proficient collector of antique scripts.[126] Where later scholars fetishized the soft-stone seal as a space of "mental refuge," Fang embraced the production of a stamp as a means of networking, or of extending the franchise behind his name: he approached the seal as a hybrid medium, one that links together and in doing so transforms the relations between diverse collaborators, materials, and otherwise distinct forms of expertise.[127] It is in Fang's seal art that the roles of worldly scholar, shopkeeper, and artisanal carver converge, affirming his increasingly powerful contributions to the production and reproduction of *wen*.

huodong ji liangjing xingji kaoshu" 文彭晚年書法篆刻活動及兩京行跡考述, *Shuhua yishu xuekan* 書畫藝術學刊 3 (2007), 431–38.

[122]We know from surviving poems that Wang Daokun promoted He Zhen's work as a seal carver, eulogizing his distinctive "Ancient Seal-Script Seal" (古篆印章), repeatedly celebrating his attention to ancient sources, and sending him off to the northern frontier to make money carving for garrisons and military staff. There are four poems in *Taihan ji*: Wang, "Jingkou song He Zhuchen huan Haiyang wei mu chenru ren qishi shou" 京口送何主臣還海陽為母陳孺人七十壽, *Taihan ji*, 117: 2663; Wang, "Song He Zhuchen zhi Chu shi jueju" 送何主臣之楚十絕句, *Taihan ji*, 120: 2781; Wang, "Song He Zhuchen beiyou si jueju" 送何主臣北游四絕句, *Taihan ji*, 120: 2771; Wang, "He Changqing" 何長卿古篆印章, *Taihan ji*, 116: 2594.

[123]The artisan was named Li Wenfu 李文甫: "Formerly, all of the seals made by Wen were ivory; he would write with ink and get Li Wenfu from Jinling to carve the characters. Li was talented at carving the sides of fans—his carving had a flowerlike quality, finely intricate with resonance. Wen relied on him for his seals, yet he never lost the intent behind Wen's brush strokes. Consequently, with Wen's ivory seals, half came from Li's hand. Since obtaining the stones, he has not gone back to making ivory seals." 先是，公所為印皆牙章，自落墨，而命金陵人李文甫鐫文。李善雕扇邊，其鐫花卉，皆玲瓏有致。公以印屬之，輒能不失公筆意。故公牙章半出李手。自得石後，乃不復作牙章。Zhou, *Yinren zhuan*, 1: 19.

[124]She Qi [Water: 13]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 817.

[125]Zun 遵 [Metal: 52]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 571.

[126]From one angle, Fang could even be cast in the Wen Peng story as the shopkeeper who refuses to pay for the load of soft stone, failing to understand its true significance; or as the hired carver of ivory fans who assisted scholars in the production of their seal stamps (Fang, as we have seen, was known for his skills in carving ivory).

[127]Bai, *Fu Shan's World*, 52.

Figure 7a. Handbill with "Fang Yongbin's Fineries of Mount Pine Lichen Inscription" pasted alongside letter from Jiang Dongshi to Fang Yongbin. Image courtesy of Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University
Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Wood: 69.

Coda: Advertising Ephemera

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

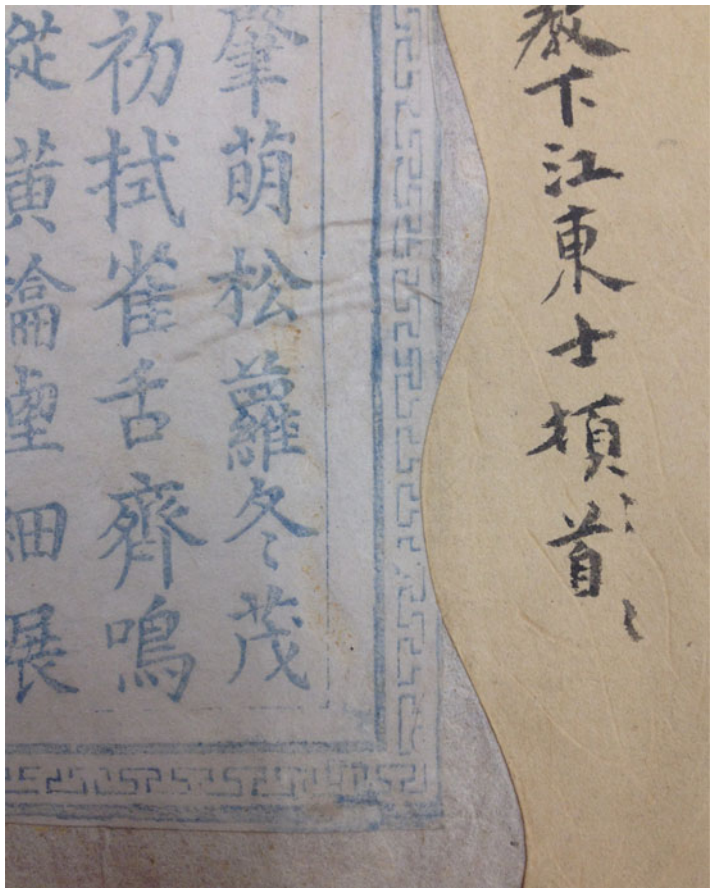

Figure 7b. Detail of Handbill with "Fang Yongbin's Fineries of Mount Pine Lichen Inscription." Image courtesy of Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University.
Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Wood: 69.

This text, which appears on two thin slips of paper that were later mounted and preserved within the cache, was printed in blue ink with a bold red title in seal script framed by a key-fret border (Figure 7a and b).[128] One print of the inscription bears the added detail of Fang Yongbin's personal seal: "Master Sixuan" (Sixuan sheng 思玄生)—a supplement that together with the calligraphy of the title implicitly alludes to the author's reputation as a dealer of seal stamps (Figure 8).[129] We know from

[128]The use of multi-colored printing in late Ming Huizhou is usually traced to a red-and-black ink edition of Lü Kun's 呂坤 (1536–1618) *Ten Volumes of Prescriptions for the Inner Chamber* (*Guifan shiji* 閨范十集) and the five-colored prints in Cheng Junfang's 程君房 (1541–1610) *Master Cheng's Garden of Inks* (*Chengshi moyuan* 程氏墨苑), yet Fang's handbills precede these publications, demonstrating that the design of paper flyers contributed to innovations in woodblock production, enlarging the possibilities for formatting and graphic display in print.

[129]Adding a certificatory seal to print adverts (in order to guarantee their authenticity) is a well-attested practice in sources from the Qing, see Zhai Tunjian 翟屯建, "Huizhou sanjian yinshua pin yanjiu" 徽州散

Figure 8. Handbill with "Fang Yongbin's Fineries of Mount Pine Lichen Inscription" pasted alongside letter from Qiu Tan to Fang Yongbin. Image courtesy of Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University.
Source: *Ming zhuming jia chidu*, Water: 44.

other letters in the cache that Fang Yongbin manufactured his own paper, prepared woodblock prints, and sold tea. In this light, these two pieces of ephemera further attest to his entrepreneurial practice, straddling and creatively combining different modes of cultural production.[130] Within the cache, Fang's promotional materials are juxtaposed with evidence of his other operations as a shopkeeper: the first copy of the inscription is mounted on a page together with a sheet of decorative golden leaf stationery bearing a request for advice on manuscript proofs—a pairing that seems to play on an implicit correspondence between Fang's list of leaves in his inscription and this finely rendered leaf-shape cut-out replete with vein patterning. The second copy of the "Pine Lichen

件印刷品研究, in *Huizhou: shuye yu diyu wenhua* 徽州：書業與地域文化, edited by Michela Bussotti [Migaila 米盖拉], and Zhu Wanshu, *Faguo Hanxue* 13 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010), 394.

[130]On requests for tea see Wu Liangqi 吳良琦 [Metal: 93]: Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 632.

Splendor" advert, meanwhile, is mounted alongside a letter fragment with a customer's request for a supply of brushes and paper from his shop (佳筆敢乞一枝。舊白箋啓乞數副。) (Figure 7a and b). While supposedly advertising tea, the presentation and production of these two flyers again speak to Fang's successful endeavors in the business of writing materials. Indeed, the "object" of Fang's inscription is not really tea, but the assemblage of the handbill itself, a testament to the expanding operation behind the production of the "Pine Lichen Splendor" label: Fang's deft ability to coordinate the manufacture of ink, paper, woodblocks, and seals, while channeling his capital into new ventures. Fang Yongbin is simultaneously poet, vendor, and maker, just as his "adverts" forge a novel synthesis between poetic composition, commercial labelling, and the artisanal engraving of script. In this sense, Fang's advertisements constitute a rare example of how the message, visual design, and material format of an inscription might all be traced back to the same hand.

Located to the north of Xiuning 休寧 in Huizhou prefecture in Southern Zhili, Mount Pine Lichen 松蘿山 became a prominent site for the cultivation and processing of tea during the Wanli era. Wang Daokun was one of the earliest poets to write of his first-hand experience testing freshly plucked tea leaves on the mountain, adhering to a common trope in Ming tea poetry of inviting the reader to vicariously imagine the ambience of the plantation through the persona of the lyricist.[131] If Wang invokes the authority of his official title to endorse the tea, Fang Yongbin foregrounds the fate of the product's name:

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

松蘿靈秀:
地勝鐘英，茗柯肇萌。松蘿冬茂，笋乳春榮。
龍團初拭，雀舌齊鳴。酪奴投獻，旗槍縱橫。
和煙細碾，帶雨盈烹。陶罇當注，甕盞須傾。
高賢宜啜，醒夢應清。將垂青史，永擅芳名。
新都方元素銘。[132]

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

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

"Pine Lichen" initially referred not to a particular tea leaf but to the processing methods that were developed on the mountain, and Fang is not so much concerned with any distinctive attributes of the product as with linking a medley of generic epithets for tea to the nascent celebrity of a local site.[133] The first four couplets simply list an array of exemplary tea leaves, punning on the component characters for these titles: "swallow tongues" *chirping* etc. In the second half of the inscription, Fang recounts step-by-step acts of preparing and drinking tea, tacitly inviting his readers to imagine the experience of testing the product for themselves. The poem concludes with Fang's claims for the prospective longevity of this "fragrant name," by which he means to refer to the brand "Pine Lichen Splendor"—and yet his concern with renown betrays an investment in the broader reception of his own name in an appended "sign-off": "Fang Yuansu of Xindu."

During the late Ming, Pine Lichen's reputation grew in stature, a trend attested to in the Wanli-era gazetteer for Xiuning county, which identifies a concurrent proliferation of counterfeits. A latent concern in this gazetteer entry is the way the name "Pine Lichen Tea," attaining a level of celebrity that caused demand to outstrip supply, might lose its connection to a unique method (*zhifa* 製法) or locus of production, an anxiety that led to a comparison with Su Shi's 蘇軾 (1037–1101) proverbial "Heyang pig" (Heyang zhu 河陽豕). In this tale, Su sent someone to purchase pork from Heyang, which he had heard was exceptional, only for his intermediary to get drunk and miss out on the pig (which took flight at night). The man then offered up another type of pork to Su Shi's banquet guests who, erroneously assuming it was the famed product from Heyang, praised it as "incomparable" (以為非他產所能及也). The parable mocks those quick to judge a commodity on the basis of what they have been led to expect from its name:

> Tea: The local mountain of the prefecture is named Pine Lichen on account of the many pines there: initially there was no tea. For a long time, the foothills were a source of betel palms, yet recently tea trees have been planted. A monk from a mountain monastery came across a processing method and developed it at Pine Lichen. The name took off and the prices of the tea soared. The monk made a profit and left his order for a secular life. People left but the name remained. The gentry sought out the tea of Pine Lichen and local managers had no way to respond and so followers wantonly sold fake products on the marketplace. Isn't this like what Dongpo said about the Heyang pig?
>
> 茶：　邑之鎮山曰松蘿，以多松名，茶未有也。遠麓爲榔源，近種茶株。山僧偶得製法，遂托松蘿，名噪一時，茶因踴貴。僧賈利還俗，人去名存。士客索茗松蘿，司牧無以應，徒使市恣贋售，非東坡所謂河陽豕哉！[134]

We can no longer ascertain how successful Fang's promotion of the "Pine Lichen Splendor" title ended up becoming, particularly amid common late Ming criticisms that "Mount Pine Lichen" had garnered unwarranted acclaim. What remains is a powerful impression of the extent to which a brand had become a valuable product in and of itself by the late sixteenth century.

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

[134]Reprinted in Chen, *Fang shi qinyou shouzha*, 13.

The design and physical format of Fang's endorsements offer a fleeting glimpse of a lost world of advertising media, ephemeral forms that shaped everyday experiences of the material world. These paper documents—often called "handbills" (*fangdan*) in later Chinese sources—represent an early example of a mode of commercial publicity that became increasingly widespread throughout the Qing dynasty. It was common, as Wu Renshu has noted, for traders to use handbills as wrapping paper or promotional inserts within a package of tea or medicine, providing informational text to endorse products under a particular trademark—very few examples of this form survive, however, from the Yuan and Ming dynasties.[135] While other notes in the cache haggle over the interpersonal exchange of things, Fang's handbills invite onlookers to imagine the consumption of a product—there is no longer any negotiation, deferral, or implied sense of reciprocity. When Fang speaks publicly in these printed inscriptions, he talks with and through his merchandise, appealing to his reader with a promise of access and the feigned illusion of exclusivity. In this final instance, he has no specific addressee in mind, only anonymous and by now altogether interchangeable customers.

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[135]Wu Renshu [Wu Jen-shu] 巫仁恕, "Ming Qing de guanggao wenhua yu chengshi xiaofei fengshang" 明清的廣告文化與城市消費風尚, in *Zhongguo shi xinlun: Shenghuo yu wenhua fence* 中國史新論：生活與文化分冊, edited by Qiu Zhonglin 邱仲麟 (Taibei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan, 2013), 353–76.

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