

The Nine Friends of Suzhou:
A Study of Traditional Chinese Fan Painting
From the Qing Dynasty
In the Groke Mickey Collection
At Washington and Lee University

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Chapter I: An Introduction

In 1995 Groke Mickey, retired businessman and diplomat of Charlottesville, Virginia, officially gave his fan collection to the Reeves Center at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, VA. One of the premier public collections of Chinese export porcelain in the United States, the Reeves Center and Watson Pavilion collection began with a gift from 1927 law alumnus Euchlin D. Reeves and his wife Louise Herreshoff Reeves in 1967. The initial gift consisted of roughly 6,000 pieces of ceramics, glass, and eighteenth-century furniture, as well as paintings and drawings by Mrs. Reeves herself, which filled the couple's two homes in Providence, Rhode Island. In 1993, Mrs. William C. Watson followed the Reeves' path and left to the University her collection of Chinese art, and the funds to build a second exhibition space, the Watson Pavilion for Asian Art, to house recent acquisitions, traveling exhibitions and, in the last two years, a Japanese tearoom. Groke Mickey has given numerous gifts to Washington and Lee University over the years, including pieces of Chinese and Japanese porcelain. Mr. Mickey's 1995 gift, comprised of 94 fans and one handscroll, consisted of pieces spanning three centuries.

Born on October 21, 1915, Groke Mickey grew up in Palm Beach amongst American royalty like John and Robert Kennedy.¹ He attended the University of Pennsylvania for a short period of time and finished his undergraduate career at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia, from 1933-37. He then served the United States government in Asia.

¹ Holly Bailey, former Reeves Center Associate Director, phone conversation, December 14, 2007.

After working in Pakistan, he toured India with the former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. President John F. Kennedy offered his dear friend the ambassadorship to India, but Mickey graciously declined, citing financial reasons.

After a falling out with the University of Virginia during his retirement, Mickey approached Farris Hotchkiss, the head of University Development at Washington and Lee University, about developing a relationship with the school.² Hotchkiss, recognizing Mickey's interest in Asia, sent Mickey over to the Reeves Center to meet its director, Mr. James Whitehead. Mickey proceeded to cultivate a relationship with the University that would span his lifetime and result in gifts of numerous Asian art pieces.

Mickey's tastes and enthusiasm for porcelain made him an ideal member of the Reeves Center family. Due to his earlier diplomatic career, Mickey knew the former Ambassador from the Republic of China, Dr. Hu Shi (1891-1962).³ The fans came into Mickey's personal collection through his relationship with the former Ambassador. Born in Shanghai, the young Hu Shi taught English to his fellow countrymen as a young man. In 1910, on the Boxer Indemnity Scholarship, Hu left Shanghai for Ithaca, New York, where he studied at Cornell University. Upon his return to China, he made several attempts to change the Chinese culture around him.⁴ In 1918 he advocated the teachings developed from dramatist Henrik Ibsen, "the father of modern drama," by applying a critical eye to all around him, and in 1929, he bravely held open discussions on human rights.⁵

Hu served as Dean of the Peking School of Literature in 1930, and in 1938, Chiang Kai-Shek named Hu Ambassador to the United States, a position he held until 1942. A leader of

² Holly Bailey, phone conversation, December 14, 2007.

³ Holly Bailey, phone conversation, December 14, 2007.

⁴ Yi Zhuxian. "Hu Shi, Chinese, and Western Culture," *Journal of Asian Studies*. Vol. 51, No. 4. (Nov., 1992), 915-916.

⁵ Yi, 916.

literary reforms in China, Hu was noted to have said that philosophy was his profession, literature his entertainment, politics his obligation.⁶ He even returned \$60,000 to the government, saying "my speeches are sufficient propaganda and do not cost you anything."⁷

Dr. Hu Shi presented Mickey with a collection of 94 fans and one handscroll sometime before his death in 1962. Realizing the effect that such a group could have on the collection of a university, Mickey offered the fans both to the Reeves Center at Washington and Lee University and to Dr. Robert D. Mowry, Senior Lecturer of Chinese and Korean Art at Harvard University and Curator of Chinese Art at Harvard's Sackler Museum of Art.⁸ The Reeves Center's emphasis on the continued study of the works won out in the end, and Mickey passed on his newfound treasure to Washington and Lee University in 1995.

When Mickey passed away in December, 2007 at the age of ninety-two, he continued to give to the University in both his will and in other ways. In his will he left the University a bronze bust of Dr. Hu Shi. Hu had had the bust made on a trip to see his friend in Charlottesville. Not satisfied with the initial result, Hu had the artist make a second bust. Mickey proceeded to buy the first bust. The bust sat in his study until Mickey's death in 2007. In November 2007, Mickey made a purchase from the Frankel Gallery in New York. A Chinese ceramic dog arrived at the University on January 1, 2008, to coincide with the arrival of curatorial consultant Ron Fuchs and to honor that scholar with a gift to the Reeves Center.

Dr. Hu Shi most likely acted as a middle man in the transaction of the fans. After studying both Hu's tastes and the fans, Dr. Sewall Oertling concluded that the fans probably

⁶ *Time*. "The Philosopher Departs." September 14, 1942.
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,802425,00.html>

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Holly Bailey, phone conversation, December 14, 2007.

were not assembled by Hu.⁹ Rather, word of the collection or the collection itself came into Hu Shi's possession, and he passed on word to his friends until he found a more suitable owner. Further evidence for his action as a middle man in the transition lies in the fact that he preferred modern art to works of the Qing dynasty. Finally, his own seal appears nowhere on the fans.

The University readily accepted and incorporated the fans into its collection. Originally, they were displayed in specially designed frames on easels throughout the Watson Pavilion. The fans could be easily rotated in and out of these frames, designed by local artisan and Washington and Lee University alumnus Michael Kopald. Limiting the amount of time within the frame in the brightly lit Watson Pavilion aided in fan conservation and easily enabled the study of the fans.

The University and Mickey then hired James Godfrey from Charlottesville, Virginia, to appraise the fans. Godfrey's personal history, through his work with Asian art, especially Chinese art, and his relative proximity to the University made him an ideal candidate for the job.¹⁰ His estimates suggested that the fans were worth much more than anyone had realized. For conservation purposes, the fans were then taken out of their frames and placed into acid-free packaging. Today, they sit in the Watson Pavilion basement while art historians, like Dr. Sewall Oertling, carry out extensive research on their origins and meanings.

My relationship with the Groke Mickey fan collection began during the Autumn of 2006 during my junior year. Invited by Professor Joan O'Mara of the Art Department, I tagged along with the senior art history majors to a seminar hosted by Sewall Oertling. I listened intently from my seat. Very soon after that excursion I decided to write my senior art history thesis on a

⁹ This is the opinion of Dr. Sewall Oertling, historian of Chinese Art who visited Washington and Lee in October 2006 as a consultant through a grant from ASIANetwork, a consortium of liberal arts colleges with Asian studies programs, to which Washington and Lee belongs.

¹⁰ Mr. Godfrey had worked at the San Antonio Museum of Art, where he established and created the Department of Asian Art, which houses a large collection of Chinese art. He has also worked in the departments of Chinese and Far Eastern Art for Christie, Mason, & Woods and served as a consultant for many other Asian art collections.

portion of the collection. Very little research (if any) had been done on them, and I wanted to be a part of the research that was to come. Incorporating both my background in Chinese as an East Asian Languages and Literature major, and the classes I had taken under Professor O'Mara on Asian art, I began my research.

By selecting works by a specific group of artists, the "Nine Friends of Suzhou," I was able to view a wide range of the art produced and purchased at the time. I expected to see an art still drenched in tradition and unchanging in a modern century, but the fans soon proved me wrong. I found the fans greatly influenced by the influx of colonialists, the presence of a Manchurian imperial government, the growing commercial market, and other cultural issues. The artists fought in wars, travelled overseas, and smoked prodigious amounts of opium. Even in this cultural setting of constant flux and change, however, the fans never strayed too far from tradition. The work created on these fans during the end of the Qing Dynasty shows a society trying to embrace a different way of life without letting go of tradition and consistency.

Chapter II: Artistic and Historical Background

The history of fans in China can be traced back to the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD), two thousand years ago. During that dynasty, there are records of Emperor Cheng's consort (33-7 BC) and the astronomer Chang Heng (78-139 AD) writing poetry on fans.¹¹ Divided according to shape, the formats include the folding fan, round fan, gourd-shaped fan, trapezoidal fan, square fan, and elliptic fan. During the Song dynasty the painting of circular fans became popular because of their auspicious shape associated with the full moon, union, and happiness.¹² The majority of the Groke Mickey gift comes in the form of the folding fan. The collection includes eighty-six folding fans, eight round fans, three ovoid-shaped fans, and one other octagonal-shaped fan.

The art of the folding fan embraces all three of the so-called "Three Perfections of Chinese Art:" painting, calligraphy, and poetry.¹³ The folding fan consists of two parts, the ribs (fan-bones) and the covering of paper or silk. The average fan length ranges between twelve and fourteen inches, with the paper or silk covering over half the length of the fan. Larger fans do exist, and during the Qing dynasty artists experimented more with the length of the ribs and

¹¹ Tseng Yu-Ho Ecke, *Poetry on the Wind: The Art of Chinese Folding Fans from the Ming and Ch'ing Dynasties* (Honolulu, Hawaii: Honolulu Academy of Arts, 1981), XXI.

¹² Qingzheshan Ming, *Folding Fans of the Ming and Qing Dynasties* (Beijing: Beijing Publishing House, 2006), 93.

¹³ Michael Sullivan, *The Three Perfections: Chinese Painting, Poetry and Calligraphy* (New York: George Braziller, 1974) 7-11. The Three Perfections, or the Three Incomparables, are the three arts, painting, calligraphy, and poetry, which are intimately connected throughout Chinese culture and history. Because the three arts are so interconnected, the Chinese have never had any problem including both writing and painting in one work. The simplest inscription on a work of art will include an artist's name and perhaps a seal, while more elaborate writings examine philosophy, art, metaphysics, or just simple information about the artist and patron, or the occasion for the painting.

paper.¹⁴ The ribs consist of two larger pieces with smaller and thinner pieces in between. The number of ribs varies and carries no special meaning in China.¹⁵ The most common rib material is bamboo, but ribs can be made of rosewood, sandalwood, boxwood, or other fragrant woods. Members of the Chinese military would carry fans with iron ribs. More ornate fans belonging to women had ribs made of ivory and whalebone. The art of engraving the fan's ribs blossomed in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), and artists would often inscribe their names on the interior, smaller ribs.¹⁶

The paper used to decorate the fans underwent several layers of pasting. After the layers were pasted together, they were polished in order to toughen the paper and create a glossy and water-resistant surface. Often the paper was then flecked with gold, making it even more non-absorbent and resistant to moisture. Qing dynasty artists favored white paper or silk, which allowed for subtle ink tonalities and color gradations.¹⁷ In Hangzhou, they used black paper coated with a vegetable varnish to create their "oil fan."¹⁸ Fans traditionally incorporated painting on one side and calligraphy on the other, but during the Qing dynasty artists used both to decorate one side. Some artists prepared their compositions on silk or paper beforehand. By doing so, the artist could easily adjust to the natural curvature of the fan.¹⁹ Even though fans required much preparatory work, a lot of painting occurred spontaneously, resulting in a more intimate relationship between the artist and the work. The unguarded brush had no other choice but to let the artist's inner self come through on the paper.²⁰ The Chinese embraced fan painting during the Ming and Qing dynasty. Many of the fans survive today because they were not used

¹⁴ The collection of fans in the Palace Museum in Beijing contains a fan that, when opened, has a width of 49 inches. Ecke, XXIV.

¹⁵ Contrary to the Chinese practice, the number of ribs on a fan in Japan directly related to a man's social status.

¹⁶ Ecke, XXV.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ The black color of the paper was achieved by soaking the paper in persimmon juice.

¹⁹ Ecke, XXXIV.

²⁰ Ibid.

as functional fans. Instead, the pieces were immediately mounted without ribs, ready to be incorporated into the owner's art collection.

The folding fan is cited as one of few artistic imports from Japan that took hold in China. The fan form did not come directly from Japan, however, but rather through the Koreans and their contact with the imperial Chinese courts.²¹ The Koreans introduced folding fans during the Northern Song dynasty in the eleventh century. The Chinese folding fan consisted of paper mounted on ribs, most commonly made of bamboo. During the middle of the Ming dynasty, the rib carver started to inscribe his seal into his carved pieces for the first time.

After its introduction during the Song period, the folding fan experienced a decline in favor. It was often associated with use by courtesans and laborers, and it took a reintroduction of the form to the Imperial Court in the Yuan Dynasty (1206–1368) to return the form to prominence.²² The Yuan dynasty also saw the literati, *wenren* or learned Chinese men, turning to fan painting as a means of social and political escape from the rule of the Mongols.²³ The *wenren* considered themselves amateur artists to distinguish themselves from the professional painters connected with the Court Academies. They composed their work mainly in ink on paper with added calligraphy and seal impressions added for identification. Their deep understanding of classic literature and their ability to write poetry conveyed their uniqueness, in comparison to the other artistic practitioners of the time. They polished their skills by developing riddles and double meanings for their images.

After the fall of the Mongol dynasty and rise of the Ming in 1368, the fan painting again jumped in popularity.²⁴ The Ming government revived court patronage, but its first attempts to

²¹ Ibid., XXII-XXIII.

²² Ibid., XXIII.

²³ Ibid., XXVII.

²⁴ Ibid., XXVI.

do so proved fatal for some artists. The first two emperors stuck to a preference for Song dynasty style, and the first emperor went so far as to imprison or kill artists over stylistic differences.²⁵ The Koreans again came to court with fans during the reign of Emperor Yong lo (1403-1425), the third Ming emperor.²⁶ It is noted that this Emperor took a special liking to the form. He carried one on his person, and copied, inscribed, and gave away folding fans as gifts.²⁷

The persecution of artists stopped during the rule of the sixth Ming emperor, Xuan Zong, from 1426-35.²⁸ Economic stability spread throughout China, especially in the South. Literacy rates rose, and the intellectual community grew in the regions around Nanjing, Shanghai, and Suzhou. Artists became identified with certain schools, comprised of groups of artists originally based upon the style of the region where they practiced, but later on the style of the dominant or best-known artist in the school. The largest of these schools were the Wu School from Suzhou and the Zhen School from Hangzhou.²⁹ The Wu school practices were characterized by the use of modeling in shaded brushstrokes to suggest the rugged nature of mountain and tree forms.³⁰ The influence of the Wu School continued into the Qing dynasty.

The literati continued the practice of conveying double meaning within their works, but instead of reacting against a non-Han government, as had been the case in the Yuan Dynasty, Ming artists observed social injustices around them.³¹ The artists then recorded what they witnessed in their work. They used their art to express personal views, as well. Painting became a way to project the artist or man, making the artist a more important aspect of the work. The

²⁵ Ibid., XXVI.

²⁶ Ibid., XXIII.

²⁷ Ibid., XXIII.

²⁸ Ibid., XXVI.

²⁹ Diana Kan, *The How and Why of Chinese Painting* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1974), 102.

³⁰ Ibid., 102.

³¹ Ecker, XXVII.

practice of selling art to make a professional living also grew. Some artists left the official schools to carry out freelance work.

Connoisseurship also expanded among artists seeking to collect and study art. They studied and copied a work with the intent of capturing the spiritual essence within the piece. Methodology and training became increasingly important, as books expressing the aesthetics and techniques of old masters became more available.³²

At the close of the Ming dynasty, the Manchus from the regions beyond China's northeast border took control of China and established themselves as the Qing dynasty in 1644.³³ As a protest against the takeover by a non-Han government, many intellectuals committed suicide.³⁴ Those who continued to work again used art, as their predecessors had during the Yuan Dynasty, as a means to express their psychological disposition. Quite a few of these artists developed into a group that art historians today call the "Seventeenth-century Individualists" because of their visual representation of a rejection of Qing power and patronage.

Other artists, like the so-called "Four Wangs," blossomed under the new court because the Manchu government adopted the Chinese, or Han culture.³⁵ The Four Wangs consisted of landscape painters Wang Shimin (1592–1680), Wang Jian (1598–1677), Wang Hui (1632–1717), and Wang Yuanqi (1642–1715), who were also counted among the Six Masters of the early Qing period. They mastered the conservative, orthodox tradition of the scholar-painter. Also included in the Six Masters, along with the Four Wangs, were flower painter Yun Shouping (1633–1690) and landscape artist Wu Li (1632–1718). The Four Wangs extended their painting influence

³² *The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), ix-xvii. In 1679 a work compiled by Wang Gai, *Jieziyuan Huazhuan*, or *The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting*, was published. Basic techniques of brushwork and composition were explained, as well as ways to depict rocks, trees, and the so-called Four Gentlemen of Painting: bamboo, plum, orchid, and chrysanthemum.

³³ "Ch'ing Dynasty," *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9082155> (Accessed April 7, 2008)

³⁴ Ecker, XXIII.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, XXIX.

through their teachings of paying more attention to imitation and less to the content of the work. There still remained a decline within the arts in the imperial court. Adapted from the Ming dynasty, schools like Yangzhou, Loudong, Youshan, and Xiling grew, but the numbers of serious literati artists declined.³⁶

In Suzhou, the Wu School, originally established during the Ming dynasty, dominated the painting tradition.³⁷ With the advent of urbanization, which began after the Opium War ended and the international ports reopened in 1840, classical painting ideals waned as commercialism grew. The lives of artists drastically changed. A genuine effort grew in the fledging cities to establish a cultural foundation, but the new schools were less elegant than those that had gone before them.³⁸ The members gained access to artistic groups through skill and competence, and no longer through their social position or learning. The now more open and friendly groups met to discuss the arts, as well as to perform commercial transactions between members. With the influx of opium, some artists lived a carefree lifestyle dominated by the use of that drug. Ni Tian, member of "The Nine Friends of Suzhou," lived among prostitutes in Shanghai. Ren Yu, son of one of the "Four Rens," Ren Xiong, found the feelings produced from the opiate high perfect for painting.³⁹

Shanghai dominated the area around the Lower Yangzi Valley, including Suzhou, economically, culturally, and artistically in the nineteenth century. After the end of the Opium War in 1842, the port of Shanghai reopened to international trade.⁴⁰ Westerners poured in from countries like the United States, Great Britain, and France, Japan and Korea were represented, as

³⁶ Ibid., XXVI-XXVII.

³⁷ Ibid., XXX.

³⁸ Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth Century China* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1998), 21.

³⁹ The "Four Rens" consisted of Ren Xiong and his two brothers, Ren Xun and Ren Yi, and his son Ren Yu. Their work spans the nineteenth century. Ren Yu is considered a member of the "Nine Friends of Suzhou," as well.

⁴⁰ "Opium Wars," *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9057210> (Accessed April 7, 2008)

well. The influx of peoples meant more patrons for the Chinese artists, even in the most tense of times. Nineteenth-century China was a time of chaos for the native Chinese, the government, and the ever-growing foreign population.

The first Opium War had begun when the Qing government confiscated opium warehouses. This Chinese action was followed by drunken British soldiers killing a Chinese villager. The British government refused to turn over the men, and hostilities broke out. The war ended with two treaties: the Treaty of Nanking in August 29, 1842 and the October 8, 1843 British Supplementary Treaty of the Bogue. The British took over five ports, forced the Chinese to pay a large indemnity, and determined the right of British citizens in China to be tried in British courts rather than face a Chinese magistrate.

Before the middle of the nineteenth century, Shanghai had had a small foreign population that preferred to live outside the city walls. By 1855, the Occidental population became known for building race tracks and selling large amounts of imported opium.⁴¹ The foreign population first became civically active in September of 1853, only to face the onslaught of the Taiping Rebellion.⁴² A sect of the Triads, known as the Short Swords, captured Shanghai in the name of this Taiping Rebellion.

Because a Chinese military group fighting the Rebellion refused to move from a camp close to the area where the foreigners lived, the foreigners attacked the Manchu forces.⁴³ The French authority stepped in, setting a new and offensive military precedent for foreign

⁴¹ Earl Cranston. "Shanghai in the Taiping Period." *The Pacific Historical Review* 5, No. 2. (June 1936): 150-155. <http://links.jstor.org/sci?sci=0030-8684%28193606%295%3A2%3C147%3ASITTP%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Y> (accessed on October 17, 2007)

⁴² The Taiping Rebellion was the name for the group that had been credited with bringing about in 1368 the end of the Yuan dynasty, a dynasty established by Mongol nomads. In the 1760s, a group known as "The Society of Heaven and Earth" (*TianDiHui*) emerged in opposition to Manchurian rule. From that group came *SanHeHui*, the "Three Harmonies Society" referring to heaven, earth, and man. The groups used the triangle in their imagery, causing the British to nickname them the "triads."

⁴³ "Taiping Rebellion." *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9070978> (Accessed April 7, 2008)

intervention in Shanghai. They cut off supplies and bombarded the metropolitan area, which had grown to the size of 540,000 by 1852. The growing numbers of foreigners sought more freedom for travel inland and fewer restrictions on trade. At the Daku forts near Tientsin, foreign ships demanded port, provoking an attack from the Chinese side. The Chinese successfully defended their forts, resulting in a nationwide anti-foreign movement.⁴⁴

The anti-foreign movement intensified in Shanghai with rumors of coolie trafficking, the return of the Taiping Rebels, and the 1860 looting and burning of the Summer Palace outside of Beijing. The growing Chinese distrust of outsiders stemmed from rumors of Chinese men having been kidnapped and shipped off to work in other countries.⁴⁵ If they were not kidnapped but had willingly left their homeland, these men still arrived to an indentured servitude and found only empty promises to send home to their families. The British called these laborers coolies, from the Hindi word *qulī*, referring to a tribe from the Gujarat region in Pakistan called the *kulī*. The Chinese considered the trade equivalent to the plight of slaves.⁴⁶ Even during these tumultuous times, artists remained active inside the Yangzi River Valley.

The second Opium War, or the “Arrow War,” grew out of foreign restlessness within the region. Both the British and the French sought more open trade and permission to travel further into China’s interior. In 1856, the British objected to the boarding of a British vessel *The Arrow* by a Chinese official who, once aboard, took down the British flag. The British cited this event as their reason to ignite hostilities. The French cited the death of a missionary in the interior of China as their motive. The fighting ended in 1858 with the Treaty of Tientsin. That treaty, reinforced at the Beijing Convention in 1860, gave the foreign powers the right to travel into China’s interior, set up foreign residences in the capital city of Beijing, and officially legalized

⁴⁴ Cranston, 156.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

the trade of opium, which the British were already exporting in large amounts, from India to China. In 1879, the amount of opium reached an all-time high. Counting both Indian import and locally grown opium, there was an estimated 20,500 metric tons of it in China.⁴⁷ The large amounts of opium affected the work of artists, as well. Ren Yu (1853-1901), the youngest of a very artistic family, often only produced art to pay off an opium tab at opium dens.

In 1859 and again in 1862, the Taiping Rebels returned to a Shanghai defended by British, American, and French troops. The rebels eventually failed to gain full control of the city, but gossip spread that the overseas troops had fired on white flags, pillaged, raped, and murdered the Chinese.⁴⁸ In 1860, Suzhou fell under the attack of the Taiping Rebels. During a three-year occupation the Taiping leader Li Xiucheng sought to protect that city's artistic heritage and its arts continued to blossom.⁴⁹ As a result many of the cities famous gardens survived, leaving plenty of inspiration for the artists living there. In 1863, the Taiping Rebellion fell and the rebels left Suzhou.

After the 1862 attack in Shanghai, the foreign element attempted to establish a 'Free City' with an independent government. Only through intervention by American and British governments was this idea extinguished. Yet in 1864, Shanghai Occidentals established an international mixed quarter where all the foreigners would reside. They opened their own banks and followed their own laws. These actions caused greater Chinese dislike of these non-Chinese people in the Lower Yangzi River Valley, but such dislike did not stop artistic production for foreign patrons.

⁴⁷ R.K. Newman, "Opium Smoking in Late Imperial China: A Reconsideration," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 4. (Oct. 1995), 72.

⁴⁸ Cranston, 153,157.

⁴⁹ Liu-Den Zhen, *Chinese Classical Gardens of Suzhou* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 4-5.

The rule of the Empress Dowager Cixi marked the coming end of the Qing dynasty in the nineteenth century. A lowly consort of the Xianfeng Emperor, she had produced the Emperor's only son, Tongzhi, in 1856. When the Emperor died in 1861, Cixi's son was only six years old. The government was placed within the hands of eight elder officials. The rule of the eight officials ended a few months after it began, with a coup by Prince Gong, the former Emperor's brother. Gong and Cixi ruled together and established schools for the study of foreign languages, created Western arsenals, and installed the first Chinese foreign service office. In 1873, Tongzhi, now able to rule, continued having his mother involved in state affairs. After her son's death in 1875, she maintained power through her adopted son and nephew, the Emperor Guangxu.

In 1894, she dismissed her brother-in-law, Prince Gong, from the palace and from power. In 1894, war broke out between China and Japan over Korea. Forced to open up to foreign trade by the Japanese, the pro-Japanese Korean leader Kim Ok-kyun was lured to Shanghai and assassinated. The Chinese placed his body on a warship and sent it back to Korea as a warning to other pro-Japanese Koreans. This act ignited public outrage in Japan, but it was not until Chinese troops officially entered Korea that the Japanese reacted militarily.

The Tonghak rebellion broke out in Korea that same year, and at the request of the Korean royal family, the Chinese government sent aid to Korea. The Japanese viewed this act as a direct threat and sent 8,000 troops to Korea. On August 1, 1894, the sides officially declared war. The Japanese overwhelmed the Chinese troops on land and sea, and by March of 1895, they had successfully invaded Shandong and Manchuria. Soon afterwards, the Chinese government sued for peace, which resulted in the loss of Taiwan to the Japanese. This embarrassment asserted the strength of the Japanese as a new world power while China looked weak. Two artists from the Lower Yangzi River Valley, Wu Dacheng (1835-1902) and Lu Hui

(1851-1920) left their homes and went north. There they fought under the imperial army only to face an embarrassing defeat. The artist Lu Hui would continue to work at home, but Wu Duchang's reputation would be tarnished forever.

In 1898, Cixi returned to the forefront of politics after China had suffered humiliating defeats in the Sino-Japanese War and her nephew's reforms had failed. The Emperor tried harder to push through a series of reforms to clean up a corrupt government, but his opponents organized a military coup. They backed Cixi, and she resumed regency.

In 1900, the officially supported Boxer Rebellion swelled around Beijing.⁵⁰ The rebellion attempted to rid China of all foreigners. The secret society's name, *Yihequan*, translated to "Righteous and Harmonious Fists," causing the foreigners to give it the nickname "Boxers." When foreign forces again tried to intervene, the Empress Dowager used her imperial forces to block the advancing Western soldiers. The Boxers entered Beijing and immediately started ravaging the foreign areas of the city. June in Beijing saw foreign control over the Daku forts, an announcement from Cixi to kill all foreigners, and Chinese Christians attacked. The rebellion ended in August when international forces took control of Beijing. Cixi fled the city, but returned in 1902. She tried to implement the changes her nephew had begun in 1898, but to no avail.⁵¹ She died that same year.

Throughout the turmoil in Beijing, Shanghai came under intense pressure from foreign and commercial interests. The treaty port city of Shanghai looked relatively safe in comparison

⁵⁰ The Boxer Rebellion was led by a secret society, *Yihequan*, which believed that through the practice of certain boxing and calisthenic rituals, they were invulnerable. The group originally opposed the Qing government as well, but the more conservative rule of Cixi's nephew in 1898 caused the group to drop their opposition. The group ravaged the North, especially in areas that were pinpointed as specifically Western, like those controlled by missionaries or churches. In September of 1901, the hostilities officially ended. Negotiations were signed and reparations given to the Western powers.

⁵¹ One of the reforms her nephew wanted to enact would have weaned the nation from its opium dependency. The government wanted to require that all opium users register and be licensed. The government would then ration out amounts of opium to the citizens, with smaller and smaller amounts rationed over time. The goal was to eliminate the use of opium in China entirely.

to northern China, and residents flocked to the area. By 1910, the population reached 1.2 million residents.⁵² Shanghai shed its provincial disposition and took on a new image as an international melting pot. Its incredible growth led to an expansion in the art market there, as well. Shanghai saw the emergence of the commercial elite who favored portraiture, popular narrative subjects, and colorful bird-and-flower compositions.⁵³ Alongside these interests in new forms and styles came a resurgence of traditional tastes as a reaction to the large number of Japanese and Western printed books, photographs, and advertising in Shanghai.

Modern art historians call the painting produced during this latter half of the nineteenth century in the Lower Yangzi River Valley the “Shanghai School.”⁵⁴ A broad term for a number of smaller schools, the artists can be grouped together because they were all reacting to the new, increasing culture of modern urbanization. Artists like Zhao Zhiqian (1829-1884) blossomed in the new environment.⁵⁵ The son of a merchant, he pursued a civil career while selling his art in the streets of Beijing. While serving as district magistrate in Jiangxi Province, his work incorporating the “Three Accomplishments” of Chinese art (calligraphy, seal carving, and painting) made him famous.⁵⁶

The Shanghai school consists of such groups as the “Duckweed Blossom Society,” a group consisting of 24 painters, set up in 1862 by Wu Zonglin, or the “Feidan Pavilion Painting

⁵² Andrews and Shen, *A Century in Crisis*, 20.

⁵³ “Art in Late- Nineteenth- Century Shanghai.” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 58, no. 3 (Winter 2001): 10. <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0026-1521%28200124%292%3A58%3A3%3C10%3AAILS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-R> (accessed September 25, 2007)

⁵⁴ Andrews and Shen, *A Century in Crisis*, 80-1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 31-2.

⁵⁶ Claudia Brown and Ju-hsi Chou, *Transcending Turmoil: Painting at the Close of China's Empire 1796-1911* (Phoenix, AZ: Phoenix Art Museum, 1992), 240. Artists who could pursue all three art forms at the time were considered rare because the pursuit of all three forms requires such a large effort by the student. The student often studied calligraphy first, followed by seal carving. Zhao Zhiqian did not practice painting until 1849, when he was twenty years old.

and Calligraphy School,” which met at the Deyuelou Restaurant in Shanghai’s Yu Garden area.⁵⁷

Another group included as part of the title the Shanghai School was called the “Nine Friends of Suzhou:” Wu Guxiang (1848-1903), Gu Yun (1835-1896), Ni Tian (1853/5-1919), Wu Dacheng (1835-1902), Lu Hui (1851-1920), Hu Xigui (1837-1883), Jin Lan (1841-1909/11), Ren Yu (1853-1901), and Gu Lunshi (1865-1930).

⁵⁷ Andrews and Shen, 21.

Chapter III: “The Nine Friends of Suzhou”

The fan collection at Washington and Lee University contains twelve fans by members of “The Nine Friends of Suzhou.” Within this group of twelve fans, six of the nine artists are represented. The artists vary in style from a more traditional follower of the Wu School, Wu Guxiang, to the carefree Ni Tian. The fans reflect the common feeling that painting reflected a profession, and not a literati lifestyle.

A native of Jiaxing, Wu Guxiang (1848-1903) stands as one of the more orthodox members of the group. His travels took him throughout China, as the artist took up residence in Yushan, Suzhou, and Shanghai. Wu Guxiang also notably traveled to Beijing in 1892, a rarity amongst Shanghai School artists.⁵⁸ He was the only member of “The Nine Friends of Suzhou” to do so. Wu Guxiang, one of the more orthodox artists of the nine, witnessed in Beijing the atmosphere of the more traditional art of the capital. On his return to the Yangzi River Valley, Wu Guxiang appears to have been more attuned to merchant taste, rather than strictly practicing classical style.⁵⁹ Considered a great admirer of art, the painter’s careful observance and appreciation of it is noted by historians, as well. A contemporary of Wu, Chu Deyi wrote in an inscription, “In 1892 he went to the capital where Minister Weng Tonghe and Chancellor Wang Yirong admired his paintings to the extent of producing famous Song and Yuan paintings (from

⁵⁸ Brown and Chou, 157-8.

⁵⁹ Oertling, *AsiaNetwork Consultancy Report*. 26 April 2007, 9.

their collections) for him to study.”⁶⁰ His body of work was greatly influenced by the styles of Wen Zhengming and Tang Yin, the most famous of the Ming dynasty Wu school painters.⁶¹ In some works, the grading of his ground plane suggests an awareness of the shading found in Western Art brought to China, to which he would have had access in bustling Shanghai.⁶² One of his great patrons was a Korean nobleman, Min Yong ik, an example of a non-Chinese who showed interest in the arts of Shanghai.⁶³

The next member of the group in the collection is Gu Yun (1835-1896). If Wu Guxiang’s stay in the Chinese capital of Beijing is counted as significant, Gu Yun’s travels to Japan must be appreciated, as well. Shanghai’s foreign population consisted of residents from East and West alike, including the Japanese, long noted for their admiration of ancient Chinese painting. The Japanese invited Gu Yun, recognized for his mastery of ancient themes, along with other artists to Nagoya, Japan, to teach ink painting in 1888.⁶⁴ While in Japan, he lived at the official Qing embassy. Gu’s popularity in Japan reached new heights, but unfortunately the bulk of the work that he created while there burned in 1923 during the Great Kanto Earthquake.⁶⁵ A printed collection of his works did appear in Japan in 1926. Gu Yun’s popularity is credited with reviving some traditional painting styles in China. His courtesy name was *ruo-po*, or “like waves,” and his pen name was *yunhu*, or “cloud vase.”⁶⁶ Gu Yun is one of the most heavily

⁶⁰ Brown and Chou, 157.

⁶¹ Ibid., 158.

⁶² Oertling, 9.

⁶³ Brown and Chou, 158.

⁶⁴ Andrews and Shen, 84.

⁶⁵ On September 1, 1923 shortly before noon, an earthquake hit Japan’s main island, Honshū. With a magnitude between 7.9 and 8.4 on the Richter scale, the earthquake lasted between four and ten minutes. Because the earthquake hit around lunchtime, many people were using fires to cook food. The fires quickly spread, amplifying casualties and destruction. Estimates of the number dead range from 100,000 to 142,000, the latter number including the 37,000 reported missing and assumed dead.

⁶⁶ <http://www.answers.com/topic/gu-yun>

represented artists in the collection. The assortment contains five Gu Yun fans, more than were contributed by any other member of “The Nine Friends of Suzhou.”

Known for the crass company he kept in brothels, Ni Tian (1853/5-1919) trained in Yangzhou under Wang Su. In Wang Su’s studio, Ni Tian studied and practiced figural subjects, portrayals of women, and Buddhist subjects. After Yangzhou, Ni Tian left for Suzhou.⁶⁷ He remained in Suzhou from 1888 until 1890, when he met a new patron and fellow painter, Wu Dacheng. Also in Suzhou, Ni Tian was able to obtain works of Ren Xiong, father to fellow member of “The Nine Friends of Suzhou,” Ren Yu. The artist left Suzhou in 1890 and remained in Shanghai for roughly thirty years. For the rest of his career, he never fully cut off ties with “The Nine Friends of Suzhou.” In Shanghai, he immediately sought out Ren Yi, one the “Four Rens” along with Ren Xiong, and continued his work with Ren Yi as a teacher. The artist strayed from society’s traditional view of the virtuous literati by living in brothels and maintaining a long-standing relationship with one of the women there.⁶⁸

Art historians view the work of Ni Tian as a continuance of the progressive practices of the Shanghai School. In Shanghai, he studied under Ren Yi.⁶⁹ According to legend, Ren Yi discovered Ni Tian at a roadside stand while walking by and immediately took the artist under his wing. While working in Shanghai, Ni Tian gave up the *gongbi*, or meticulous style, and stopped doing portraiture work. Whether for economic reasons or out of impatience, the artist did not completely adopt the style of his master, Ren Yi, but favored the *xiayi* style noted by its conveyed feeling of immediacy through quick brushstrokes.⁷⁰ Ni Tian continued to work in

⁶⁷ There remains some dispute about Ni Tian’s history after Yangzhou, but he most likely left for Suzhou and not Shanghai. Brown and Chou., 203.

⁶⁸ Oertling, 16.

⁶⁹ Brown and Chou, 203.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 203.

Shanghai and remained active through the Republican period, with the reputation of being “greasy and flippant.”⁷¹

One of the oldest members of the group, Wu Dacheng (1835-1902), entered the district school and studied seal script under Chen Huan. Better known for his political work than his artistic career, Wu Dacheng served as a scholar at Beijing’s Hanlin academy by 1868.⁷² Wu then moved back to Suzhou where he served in the Provincial Printing office for the next two years. In 1887, he became the governor of Guangdong and later Hunan in 1892. During his time as governor, Wu Dacheng led a group of men North, including fellow “Nine Friends of Suzhou” artist Lu Hui, to fight in the Sino-Japanese War. Wu returned home to deal with the infamy of defeat.⁷³ In 1898, however, the Longmen Academy of Shanghai named Wu Dacheng as its Director.

Wu Dacheng spent the entirety of his life collecting art. In Hunan, Wu Dacheng amassed a collection of *jinshi*, pieces of metal and stone, and left a record of his collection, the *Kezhai Cangchi Mu*, and a compilation in 1888, *Seal Book from the Sixteen Golden Fu Studio*.⁷⁴ He had composite rubbings made of his pieces, including ancient bronze vessels. Historians also note that Wu was knowledgeable about jade and had a taste for ancient paintings and calligraphy.⁷⁵ His posts enabled Wu to make all the right connections, as well. These contacts would especially help fellow group-member and artist Lu Hui.

Wujiang native Lu Hui (1851-1920) stands as the closest to a traditional *wenren* artist found among the “Nine Friends of Suzhou.”⁷⁶ The style of Lu Hui can be seen as deriving from

⁷¹ Ibid., 204.

⁷² Qianshen Bai, “Wu Dacheng (1835-1902) and Composite Rubbings,” *Center for the Arts of East Asia*.
http://caea.uchicago.edu/events_publications/symposia/110306/abstracts/bai.shtml

⁷³ Brown and Chou, 216.

⁷⁴ http://caea.uchicago.edu/events_publications/symposia/110306/abstracts/bai.shtml

⁷⁵ Brown and Chou, 217.

⁷⁶ Oertling, 10.

those of his two teachers, Liu Deliu and Tao Tao.⁷⁷ Of the two artists, Liu Deliu's technique left a larger impression on Lu.⁷⁸ Liu Deliu, noted for his fluid ink play amidst strong sweeping brushstrokes, taught Lu Hui how to draw plants, flowers, birds, and insects in his Red Pear Blossom Studio. Liu Deliu's stylistic effect on Lu Hui is most noticeable in the artist's latter works of the 1880's and 1890's. One of his earliest successes, an 1891 twelve-leaf album of subjects such as flowers, fruit, fish and animals, contains an overall elegant feeling similar to that found in works by Liu Deliu.

Lu Hui most likely left his second teacher, Tao Tao, in pursuit of his new patron Wu Dacheng, but Tao Tao introduced the artist to the painting of landscape. As Tao Tao looked to newer trends, Lu Hui mastered the old and left Wujiang. Lu Hui then met Wu Dacheng. He followed the new governor to Hunan and the North, to fight in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-5). After the loss, Lu Hui returned and continued to meet other powerful southern Chinese men, like Weng Tonghe and Zhang Zhidong, through his connections to Wu Dacheng, whose reputation had declined as a result of his military losses. Because of his growing fame and connections in the South, Lu Hui gained access to collections all over Jiangnan and Hunan. Lu also helped other members of the elite, like Pang Yuanji (1864-1949), to compile their own collections. Lu Hui and Pang Yuanji created a close relationship over the last thirteen years of his life. Lu Hui even taught Pang Yuanji how to paint, and Lu Hui's style can be seen in works by Pang Yuanji fifteen years after his death in 1935.⁷⁹

Hu Xigui (1837-1883 or 1858-1890) was born in Suzhou and began to paint at a very young age. He studied by copying all the masters, including paintings of flowers after Yun

⁷⁷ Brown and Chou, 216.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 218.

Shouping and figures after Hua Yan.⁸⁰ His work also contained copies of stele rubbings and depictions of beautiful women that would influence poster artist Zhou Muqiao (1868-1923), who depicted similar women in his commercial work.⁸¹

Jin Lan (1841-1911) viewed himself as a self-taught artist. His style emulated earlier artists and was clearly affected by conventional Qing dynasty art styles. He collaborated with artists of similar styles, like fellow “Nine Friends” member, Gu Yun.⁸²

Ren Yu (1853-1901) lived the most controversial lifestyle of all of the “Nine Friends.” Son of one of the “Four Rens,” Ren Xiong, his birth paralleled his father’s first major series, an exhibition of a series of woodblock prints, *Liexian Jiupa*, 48 wine cards of immortals, created for use in drinking games. They were one of Ren Xiong’s first major undertakings and successfully toured the South.⁸³ Ren Xiong’s success was short-lived. When Ren Yu reached the age of four *sui*, three or four years old according to Western tradition, Ren Xiong died in 1857.⁸⁴ After the death of his father, the principal wage earner, his mother looked to her family as well as Ren Yu’s brother, Ren Xun, for aid. Ren Yu’s uncle most likely played the largest artistic role in his nephew’s life, but his father’s disciple, Ren Yi in Shanghai, may also have visited and left an impression on the young Ren Yu.⁸⁵

When Ren Yu took up the brush, his initial style followed tradition at the time. At first, Ren Yu looked like a conventional *wenren* artist, but an addiction to opium soon changed that.

⁸⁰ E.J. Laing, email- 2/11/08.

⁸¹ E. J. Laing, *Selling Happiness: Calendar Posters and Visual Culture in Early-Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 96.

⁸² Oertling, 61.

⁸³ Brown and Chou, 193.

⁸⁴ According to Chinese tradition, Chinese newborns are regarded as one year old one the day that they are born. With the passing of each Chinese New Year, one more year is added to a person’s age. If the artist’s father died when he was four *sui*, the artist’s age according to Western tradition, could in fact have been either three or four.

⁸⁵ Brown and Chou, 193.

The artist tossed aside social convention and his own health in pursuit of opium. Novelist Li

Boyuan tells the following anecdote:

He was deeply addicted to opium. At the time when the urge came, he would, with wrinkled eyebrows (apparently in pain), sneak into a small opium den, lying stiffly on a shabbily furnished bed, teary and with running nose, and request that the owner provide him the purple-mist paste (opium)... The owner would refuse. Therefore, there was someone who (taking advantage of the situation) consulted the owner ahead of time, waiting for (Ren Yu's arrival)... This man would negotiate with the owner, saying 'I have several hundred cash, and am willing to treat Master Ren. I don't have other requests, but a fan or piece of paper would do. Perhaps you could intercede on my behalf, so that (Master Ren) would agree to yield his brush.' The owner in turn conveyed to Ren Yu this request. At that point, the latter's gratitude was such that it could not be expressed in words, nor could he but respond positively to whatever was requested... Having done with smoking opium, he borrowed brush and ink stone, and started to paint right by the bed. Shortly it was done, and when seen, it was truly a fine composition. This man in turn sold it to someone else, and instantly reaped a handsome profit.⁸⁶

Addicted or not, the young Ren was sought out by patrons for work. One such patron, a priest named Yuan, housed Ren Yu for over a month.⁸⁷ He provided the artist with the finest opium, hoping for an image of *Guanyin* in return, but Ren Yu left one day without any of his belongings and produced no such image for the priest.⁸⁸

The local gazette in Suzhou, the *Wuxian Zhi*, managed to take pride in the irresponsible artist, saying Ren Yu "...was the blue that surpassed indigo. He was able to move beyond ancient methods and utilize his own ingenuity... to create a novel effect."⁸⁹ The indigo stood for his famous family, but realistically, Ren Yu's work was inconsistent and dependent on his addiction. Such a description was quite a leap. The author Yang Yo more correctly stated it in his work *Haishang Molin* ("Shanghai's Forest of Ink"). He

⁸⁶ Brown and Chou, 193.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 193-4.

⁸⁸ *Guanyin*, a Buddhist figure who is the the Bodhisattva of Compassion, has already achieved enlightenment but chooses not to enter nirvana in order to aid others in their search for enlightenment.

⁸⁹ Brown and Chou, 194.

placed the young artist's work behind that of both his father and uncle Ren Xun.⁹⁰ Ren Yu left no followers because his opium-driven lifestyle was unable to accommodate them. With his two uncles and father, Ren Yu makes up the fourth member of the familial artist group, the "Four Rens."

Gu Linshi (1865-1930) would outlive all other members of the group. His art was characterized by a more traditional style because his grandfather, Gu Wenbin (1811-1889) owned a major collection in Suzhou, consisting of paintings from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties. A young Gu Linshi studied these works in *Guoyunlou*, "the Tower of Passing Clouds," his grandfather's studio. After his grandfather's death, Gu Linshi inherited the collection and created a beautiful garden renowned for its display of fantastic rocks.⁹¹ In 1891 Gu Linshi and fellow "Nine Friends," member Wu Dacheng organized the *Yiyuan huaji*, that met at Gu's garden. The group consisted of many of the "Nine Friends," along with other artists like Yang Yan and Yang Borun.

The "Nine Friends of Suzhou" consisted of varied artistic tastes and personal lifestyles with few common links between them, other than the time period when they worked and their connection to the Yangzi River city of Suzhou. Their twelve pieces in the Washington and Lee fan collection consist of calligraphy, landscape painting, flower painting, and figure painting. The artists' styles show a blend of tradition and modernity that found favor with the taste of their patrons in the merchant class.

⁹⁰ Brown and Chou, 194.

⁹¹ Andrews and Shen, 84.

Chapter IV: Twelve Fans by “The Nine Friends”

The Groke Mickey collection at Washington and Lee University contains twelve fans by six members of the Yangzi River Valley painting group, “The Nine Friends of Suzhou.” Represented in the collection are five fans by Gu Yun, two fans by Wu Guxiang, two fans by Ren Yu, and a fan each by Jin Lan, Ni Tian, and Gu Linshi. The three artists not represented are Wu Dacheng, Hu Xigui, and Lu Hui.

The first fan by one of the Nine Friends artist, Wu Guxiang, is the second fan of the collection (Figure I). The undated, eight-ribbed folding fan depicts a lone figure in a pavilion on the water, in a mountain landscape dominated by pine trees. Landscape painting in Chinese is known as *shanshui* (山水) which translates as a “*mountain-water*” painting. Chinese landscape paintings generally contain both a mountain and a water element. These two elements coincide with the Daoist beliefs about the *yin*, the dark, low places like a river valley, and the *yang*, the light or high places like the mountains. By representing both *yin* and *yang* next to each other, the Chinese landscape painting displays the delicate balance and flux between the two.⁹²

In this piece, the influence of the great Ming Dynasty Literatus Wen Zhengming appears in the artist’s placement of the few components and his controlled use of softer pastel colors.⁹³ The fan’s theme and decoration are reminiscent of a handscroll done by Wu Guxiang in 1895,

⁹² Cliff G. McMahon, “The Sign System in Chinese Landscape Paintings,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Spring, 2003), 64-5.

⁹³ Oertling, 10.

Landscape with Willows (Figure II).⁹⁴ Two trees dominate the foreground of both pieces, but in completing the fan, Wu Guxiang made the trees central. The willow trees of the handscroll stand in the lower left corner to balance the calligraphy above. In the fan the pine trees' branches are entwined with one another. Black ink is used to render the dark, thin lines of the pine needles most likely created with quick, downward movements with the tip of an upright brush. The artist uses a softer, more calligraphic stroke in the line of the trunks. Spots of orange suggest pine cones or buds of some sort on the trees. A dead branch hangs from the tree on the right. Off in the background, pine trees with their trunks painted in outline form and silhouetted against dark foliage line the hillsides.

The pine tree symbolizes unyielding resistance and loftiness for the Chinese because the trees do not shed their needles with the arrival of the winter season.⁹⁵ Since the Song Dynasty, pine trees have also been associated with longevity. In Chinese art, many natural objects come with moral and idealistic meanings because the Chinese artist is a subjective rather than an objective being.⁹⁶ Groupings of trees, like the pines here, echo the varying heights of the mountains behind them. The varying heights subtly suggest the Daoist idea of a cycle and *yin* and *yang* by their rising and falling.⁹⁷ Groupings of pines specifically also imply the family groupings and hierarchies of proper Confucian order and the protection and friendship of Daoism.⁹⁸

Behind the trees, a lone figure sits in a pavilion on the water. Perpendicular lines suggest a tile roof on the simple four-posted structure. The left side of the work is dominated by painting,

⁹⁴ Brown and Chou, 194, 159.

⁹⁵ T.C. Lai, *Understanding Chinese Painting* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 118-9.

⁹⁶ Chung-yuan Chang, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 19, No. 3, Symposium on Aesthetics East and West. (Jul., 1969), 281.

⁹⁷ McMahon, 69.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

balanced with the calligraphy on the right. The artist suggests water through a linear treatment on the left, but completely abandons the lines and uses the undecorated paper to suggest the water on the right. A green ink is used to decorate the hills on the left, with hemp fiber strokes used to show the rough slopes of the hillsides. According to Daoist tradition, all natural things have their own inner essence, including items that make up the natural world.⁹⁹ Chinese painters suggest the mountain's essence through a mountain's 'life-lines' (or texture strokes), accumulated through years of erosion. These 'life-lines' show a mountain in a state of change between the *yang* of the mountain and the *yin* of the low places.¹⁰⁰

The right side of the paper shows mountains off in the distance. The artist uses a gray and blue wash for the mountains far away. There are three kinds of perspective in Chinese landscape painting: perspective in height; perspective in depth; and perspective on the level.¹⁰¹ In this piece, the latter of the three, perspective on the level, a perspective where a broad expanse of mountains is seen in the far distance across a body of water, is employed by Wu Guxiang.¹⁰²

Often, such scenes in landscape painting reflect the theme of the mountain as the ideal retreat for the scholar. The mountain is far from the city and the impurities of daily life. Within the mountain setting the scholar can live in harmony with nature by taking part in the Four Pleasures of the Chinese literati: fishing, reading, plowing, and wood-chopping.¹⁰³ The scholar in Wu Guxiang's painting gazes out across the body of water before him to the mountains in the distance, forgetting the time-consuming city life or the strict guidelines of imperial service.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 70.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Kan, 101.

¹⁰² When the height of a mountain is stressed and the form stretches sharply upward from its base at the bottom of the composition to its peak, the artist employed perspective of height. When the base is hidden and peaks are visible rising upward but recede gradually into the near distance, the artist employed perspective in depth. Perspective on the level is when one finds a broad expanse of mountains in the far distance across a flat plain or body of water.

¹⁰³ Liu Yang. "Fantastic Mountains: Where Man Meets Nature in Chinese Landscape Painting," *Oriental Art* 50, no. 3 (2005/6): 17.

The next fan in the collection done by a “Nine Friends of Suzhou” artist is fan #8 by Gu Yun (Figure III). This undated, circular fan is one of five in the collection by Gu Yun. Depicted is another scholarly retreat, but without any water and featuring much more elaborate architecture. There are two figures in the piece. The first, the scholar, sits at a table in the second story of the pavilion. An open book and some sort of vessel, perhaps for food or drink, lie on the table before him. The second figure appears to be some sort of servant. His dress and shorter hairstyle suggest both a different age and class than the scholar. The young man carries a tray with a cup on top, through a covered walkway. When the artist depicts people performing everyday tasks like meditating, fishing, or working, he is expressing a Chinese Daoist idea that through human effort, men and women establish harmony with heaven.¹⁰⁴ When these tasks are not completed, the whole cosmic order is damaged. By placing this subject in a literati-themed painting, the artist raises the importance of common or trivial tasks of the everyday and allows the viewer to identify personally with the piece.

The architecture contains the same stylized, perpendicular lines for the roof, but the multiple roofs and greater detail suggest a much more intricate retreat. In the room where the scholar sits, one wall is left completely open to the elements. Leaving the wall open is a traditional technique in Chinese painting, allowing the viewer to witness a scene that otherwise would have not been visible. The wall to the left of the scholar, also the viewer’s left, contains a lattice-work window. The wall to the right of the scholar is dominated by a window with curtains. Shelves with books line the back wall. The diagonal composition of the buildings, from the bottom right to the upper left, draws the viewer’s eyes through the landscape, the pair of pine trees, and to the mountain in the distance.

¹⁰⁴ McMahan, 67.

To the left of the work, the artist depicts a mountain executed in a darker blue wash. The perspective used here is perspective in depth. The base is hidden, but peaks are visible rising upward. The use of this perspective gives the scholar's retreat the appearance of being on a mountain itself, giving the scholar ample views with which to reflect upon the mountain outside the retreat.

The plant life is much more varied than it was on the first fan. About four different types of foliage can be identified in the work: fern, pine, bamboo, and another unidentified tree. At the bottom left, there are long leaves suggesting some sort of fern done in a light gray wash. Pine trees again dominate the center of the painting. Another tree sits to the left, with its foliage done in pepper dots, a *mi* dot technique.¹⁰⁵ Bamboo, one of the Four Gentlemen of Chinese painting, along with the chrysanthemum, orchid, and plum, is scattered throughout the work. Bamboo also represents both the *yin* and *yang* of Daoist thought in Chinese painting, making it an appropriate piece of vegetation for the landscape piece.¹⁰⁶ Bamboo's *yang* quality comes from its strength and resilience. The *yin* quality of bamboo can be found its pliant ability as it bends in the wind.

Fan #10 is the first dated fan by the "Nine Friends" (Figure IV). Depicting a scholar leaning on a rock, the 1902 Ni Tian fan contains a dedication, date, and signature in the inscription in the upper left corner. The nine-ribbed paper fan shows signs of significant use. The creases are well worn and there are two large tears, around 1 ½"-2" each. One tear is in the upper left, running through the artist's red seal, and the other is at the bottom right, running

¹⁰⁵ Kan, 111.

During the Song Dynasty, the artist Mi Fei developed a stroke so new and different that it has since been named for him, the *mi* dot. Allison Stillwell Cameron, *Chinese Painting Techniques* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1999), 20.

¹⁰⁶ McMahon, 71.

through the hem of the scholar's robe. Such wear and tear is probably due both to usage as a fan and the frequent remounting that such fans underwent.

The composition of the fan is dominated by a large central rock. The rock is done in an ink wash. The artist then used ox-hair texture strokes, slightly curved and gently sloping strokes of the brush. On the left, the wash of the decoration fades. The calligraphy's dark black ink stands out in contrast, balancing the tree on the right.¹⁰⁷ To the right, the lone figure of the scholar leans on an elbow against the rock, reading an open book. The figure wears a pale gray robe with a dark belt cinching the robe at his waist. His hair is pulled back, and the bun is covered in a cloth of the same color as the robe. The most detailed figure seen so far, the figure appears young and distraught. His eyes do not look directly at the open book in his hands, but perhaps ponder something in the distance. The artist has used a very thin line to describe individual strands of hair, the folds of the ear, and the eyebrows.

In comparison to the calm contemplation of the scholar, the tree appears swept by a strong wind suggesting the turbulent times surrounding both scholar and viewer. Ni Tian mixes the flat head technique and a series of small combination dots to describe a small amount of flapping leaves suggesting an autumn scene. When using the flat head technique, the artist makes quick, short strokes applying more pressure towards the end of the stroke, making one end thicker and darker than the other.¹⁰⁸ The other leaves are done by quick contact between the brush and paper without any horizontal movement by the artist's hand.¹⁰⁹

The trunk has no clear outline, but rather the artist uses cross-hatching brushwork to depict its texture. The combination of calligraphic and wire line further suggests movement in the tree. The repetitive movement is also suggested in the grass below and the ferns seen at the

¹⁰⁷ Oertling, 16.

¹⁰⁸ Kan, 112.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

left. The plant life leans against the rocks as the wind sweeps through. The piece is typical of Ni Tian through the use of energetic brushwork and controlled ink.¹¹⁰

The first work by Gu Linshi in the collection was created in 1900 (Figure V). Fan #17 emphasizes the importance of a more traditional style in Chinese painting.¹¹¹ According to the inscription, the painting is done in the style of the great Yuan dynasty artist, Huang Gongwang. The fan illustrates the sixth principle of Chinese painting as described in Xie He's Six Dynasties Period essay. It states that through copying, ancient models and styles continue, and young artists learn. When comparing the work to Huang's *Fuchun Mountain scroll*, similar elements may be seen in both, including a pavilion over the water, complex distance of mountains, and lines of pine trees dotting the landscape (Figure VI).¹¹² Also, this monochrome ink fan illustrates Gu Linshi's talent in manipulating spaces. The viewer is given a *repoussoir*, a foreground that shows pine and other trees on a similar plane with the viewer looking down onto the water scene below.

The scene below depicts three figures in the style of Chinese *sanshui* (landscape) painting. Two scholarly figures sit in a pavilion on the water, facing each other. The two appear to be in discussion and one raises his arm as if to make a point about politics or some other contemporary event. Their bodies are depicted with a black line of ink around white bodies. Two dark dots illustrate the scholarly hairstyle seen before in the other fans, with the hair pulled back into a bun. The pavilion itself has little detail. There are no walls and no strokes depicting tiles in the roof above. Rather, a gray wash is used, outlined in ink.

A third figure stands alone in his boat, poling it towards the pavilion. The boat is long, about three times the height of the figure, and low, with a covering depicted by cross hatching.

¹¹⁰ Oertling, 16.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

Gu Linshi describes the lone figure the same way as the scholars, a white body outlined in ink. The figure, wearing a wide-brimmed hat, stands in profile as if striding forward. Neither scholar reacts as the man rows onward, emphasizing the deep conversation between the two.

The landscape consists of various trees, rocks, mountains, and a waterfall. Water covers roughly one fourth of the landscape, but only in the waterfall does the artist use brushwork to describe water. Twisting and flowing lines fall down the waterfall, using both a gray wash and dark ink. The waterfall is outlined by the wash used in the hillside. The water below sits still, and not even the movement of the fisherman's pole creates a ripple.

Gu Linshi scatters rocks throughout his landscape, illustrating his mastery of brushwork. In the rocks the artist uses a gray wash along with ox hair texture strokes, ax cut texture strokes, *mi* dots, and hemp fiber texture strokes. The rough and jagged terrain emphasizes the remoteness and difficulty one would have trying to reach this place.

Gu Yun's second piece in the collection is a collaborative work with the Qing artist Zhang Xiong (1803-1886) (Figure VII). The fan documents a relationship between the artists. It is one of the most significant works in the collection.

Zhang Xiong, a native of Jiaxing, was a well-established artist of his day. His studio, *The Silver Blossoms Lodge*, was described as "elegant" and "exquisite" by his contemporaries like Ren Xiong.¹¹³ Zhang Xiong filled it with his collection of ancient vessels and scrolls. His beloved wife, Zhong Huishu, was an artist as well, known for her paintings of plum blossoms and other floral plants.¹¹⁴ After her death in 1860, the artist never remarried. In 1862 he left Jiaxing for Shanghai for unclear reasons, but most likely they included fleeing the Taiping Rebels. His fame continued to grow in Shanghai, and the artist was offered a painting position in

¹¹³ Brown and Chou, 138.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

Empress Cixi's court. Zhang Xiong rejected the nomination, and spent the rest of his life in Shanghai, where he garnered high prices for his work and a large number of followers, including the artist Chao Xun (1852-1917). After transmitting a woodblock edition of *The Mustard Seed Manual of Painting*, the artist took on a major lithographic undertaking and republished the work.¹¹⁵

The paper folding fan is divided into four alternating parts: calligraphy, painting, calligraphy, and painting, with gold dusted over the entirety of the fan. Zhang Xiong completed the left half of the fan consisting of a painting of flowers and a clerical script inscription. Gu Yun's right half consists of a monochrome landscape painting and a seal script inscription.

Zhang's flower sheds light onto the season in which the fan was painted- autumn- and an overall mood to the work.¹¹⁶ The yellow chrysanthemum petals bloom as the flower appears to grow out of a rock. The yellow petals are outlined with ink. Its leaves are done in a bluish green tone, sometimes outlined with dark ink. The chrysanthemum is one of the Four Gentlemen of Chinese art, along with bamboo, plum, and orchid. Southern Song, Ming, and Yuan literati used the four as a special subject in their painting, associating them with the changing seasons and man's ideal moralistic behavior. The famous Chinese scholar, Tao Yuanming, perfected his representation of the chrysanthemum while in retirement from the court. Literati included the flower in the group for this reason, rather than idealized physical characteristics relatable to the human condition. In the book, *The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting* (1679-1701), the author describes the chrysanthemum as "defiant of frost and triumphant in autumn."¹¹⁷ Artists and literati looked to sayings like these that expressed a plant's character, to illustrate an overall mood or theme that they tried to achieve in their work.

¹¹⁵ Brown and Chou, 138.

¹¹⁶ Oertling, 27.

¹¹⁷ Sze, 435.

The rock that the chrysanthemum grows out of also speaks to the character of the flower. Done in a gray wash and small ax-cut texture strokes, it appears impossible for any plant to grow in such a spot, but the chrysanthemum does and blooms beautifully. Between Zhang Xiong's flowers and Gu Yun's landscape sits Zhang Xiong's clerical script. Clerical script refers to a standard type of Chinese calligraphy used by members of the court. Court officials used this script, mastered by most Confucian scholars, to copy government documents.

The landscape by Gu Yun displays some of the most convincing brushwork within the entire Groke Mickey Collection.¹¹⁸ An empty pavilion and two trees, one a pine, make up the foreground. Unlike the other landscape scenes, this scene contains no figure, but just the pavilion as a reference to the absent man. The audience can imagine themselves sitting in the pavilion, leaning on the far railing, and looking over the landscape to contemplate the mountain before them.

The mountain to the right, the one that would be the closest to the viewer, is made up of hemp fiber texture strokes to outline the slope. Dots line the edges of the mountains, a traditional Chinese painting technique to depict trees on the hillsides. The other two visible mountains recede into the distance as a series of fading washes. The artist uses the wash to display the mass of the mountain, while giving the viewer a sense of its distance.

Gu Yun leaves the painting surface white between mountain and man, employing perspective on the level. It is not clear whether the open area represents a lake suggesting the sense of distance between man and an overpowering nature. At the far right of the fan Gu Yun has filled the space with seal script. Seal script is a type of Chinese calligraphy that mimics the characters in the seals scholars and officials used to sign (stamp) a work.

¹¹⁸ Oertling, 263

Gu Yun also created the next fan by a “Nine Friends” member, Fan #24 (Figure VIII). This 1890 folding fan depicts an unusual subject in Chinese painting, three monkeys in a landscape setting. In contrast to his last landscape in Fan #22, Gu Yun uses blues, greens, reds, browns, pinks, and browns in various shades for this scene. One monkey mischievously climbs up the tree, perhaps to see the three mosquitoes up close, while the other two look on. With their gray fur, pink faces, and bare red bottoms peeking out, the monkeys appear to be macaques, a species native to China. The central monkey climbs the pine tree, twisting his body in space to watch the three red mosquitoes. The other two monkeys lazily sit on a rock watching their mischievous friend. Just like their furry counterparts, two of the three mosquitoes face left and the other right. Done in red with gray wings, the legs are no thicker than a strand of hair, showing the great skill Gu Yun had with a brush.

Gu Yun employs a traditional landscape scene as the setting for this unusual subject. A pine tree dominates the foreground. The central pine is similar to the pines seen earlier, except that the artist depicts these needles with a green wash and no outline. Much thicker and less natural-looking, the needles add a fantastical quality to the tree. The viewer’s eyes then move downward to the base of the trunk, to see a split in the tree. The pine appears to be standing on two legs, again adding to imaginative aspect of the scene.

Rocks and grass cover the rest of the foreground. The rocks are done in a gray wash. A darker wash is then used to show the striations and outlines of the rocks. A green wash is used for the grass. Green dots, similar to the *mi* dots seen on the mountaintops in the other fans, show where the hills slope, where the rocks meet the grasses’ edge, and are seen elsewhere in the work, as well. These dots line the rock as it moves upward on the left of the work, giving the impression of moss on a rock.

The mountains in the distance, done in a blue and gray wash, show a landscape done in a perspective on the level. The mountains, along with the monkeys and calligraphy, dominate the right side of the fan. The weightiness of the right side fades into emptiness on the left. The vast, open space most likely is a vast body of water. Gu Yun has left that side of his work almost empty, in contrast to the detailed brushwork that fills the right side of the fan.

Folding fan #25 also presents the audience with a twist on the traditional landscape setting (Figure IX). Done by Wu Guxiang in 1890, the viewer encounters the familiar image of the scholar on a mountaintop overlooking the scene in front of him, but instead of Chinese garb the scholar wears a Korean cap.¹¹⁹ The cap is especially interesting when the audience recalls two things. The first item to remember is the presence of foreigners, including Koreans, in the Yangzi River Valley. The fan could have initially been intended for a Korean patron like Wu Guxiang's major patron, Min Yong ik. The second factor to consider would be the skirmishes the Chinese government was having with the Koreans, and with the Japanese influence in Korea that would result in the breakout of the Sino-Japanese War over Korea in 1894. Wu Guxiang would have been aware of such tensions. He was one of the few "friends" who had traveled to Beijing during his career.

The scholarly figure sits with his legs crossed and arms in a meditative position, looking out at the landscape before him. His white robe is outlined with a twisting gray line, and his hair is pulled to the top of his head. Done with a pink tone, the face is tilted slightly downward, giving the impression of deep contemplation.

The left side of the composition also contains a pine tree, again treated differently from the other pines before it. The trunk is given scale-like texture with small circles done in brown, pinks, and grays. On the left side, a series of green dots gives the impression of lichens lining

¹¹⁹ Oertling, 28.

the tree. The tree grows out of a space in the rock and is the only real vegetation on this area of landscape, beside some blades of grass. In comparison to the other depictions of needles, these needles of the pine tree all point upward in a semicircular form instead of crisscrossing in every direction. As a result, the view is not obscured, for viewer and scholar alike. The rocks line the left side of the fan without much detail. They are only defined by a gray wash.

Off into the distance, washes in pink and brown depict a scene similar to a river delta, where two streams pour into a larger body of water. Wu Guxiang is emphasizing the valley, or low places of the *yin*, through the use of perspective on the level because one finds a broad expanse of mountains in the far distance across water in the form of a river or stream. The peaks recede upwards, but the wash fades because the peaks are not the focus of the scholar's contemplation. The artist depicts the water by leaving the canvas blank and using a darker wash at the mountain's base to highlight the water's edge.

The next "friends" fan in the collection is the second to last fan by the artist Gu Yun (Figure X). The undated, ovoid shaped fan presents a riverbank scene with distance details disappearing into the mist. The artist sticks to a light pastel palette for the work, adding an overall light and carefree quality to the landscape. Gu Yun cites as his reference a Song artist Zhao Lingrang in his inscription in the upper left corner of the work.¹²⁰ Zhao Lingrang was an active court painter during the twelfth century, before the Song court fled south.

This silk fan contains much more variant architecture than has been seen before: a new type of hut, a bridge, and a third, much larger and more open structure. The hut is a four-post building with a thatched roof. The roof is done in a series of browns and grays with a linear quality added on top to convey a rustic feeling to the work. A round form made up of sticks, like logs ready to be lit for a fire, appears underneath the structure. The arrangement of wood

¹²⁰ Oertling, 28.

suggests an upcoming festival or another event that would require a large fire where people would gather to celebrate. The owner of the structure needs only to take down the little hut.

A simple platform bridge crosses the water towards land. The single figure in the fan strides across the bridge with pole in hand. Wearing a blue shirt and white pants, the figure has no face; Gu Yun invites the audience to identify with the man. With the other hand on his hip he walks towards the land. His carefree stance suggests no other cares in the world except for this moment. The figure's attitudes toward life and the wilderness retreat make him an envious target for those living in the booming streets of Shanghai.

The final structure disappears off the fan, leaving only suggestions of what it could be. On the fan, what appears to be an entryway moves off towards the right. The walkway has a thatched roof and walls, but the walls only cover half of the sides leaving the structure open to a cool breeze. One can see grass on the inside suggesting that this structure is only a walkway and not the main attraction. The walls are decorated with an alternating tile-like pattern on tilted squares. The squares are decorated with parallel lines. The rotation of the squares gives a basket-weave effect, adding to the rustic quality of the building already suggested by the thatched roof.

The overall shape of the trees in the scene is reminiscent of the treatment of the orchid in Chinese painting. As if they were as flexible as a flower stem, their trunks bend this way and that in a sweeping curve. At the base, the tree abruptly stops, making the base appear out of place instead of natural. Pines, done in a light wash, are scattered throughout the distance, suggesting a depth to the overall landscape. The water's edge, like the entire scene, appears to melt into the water, giving the landscape a swamp-like feel.

In the next “friends” fan of the collection, the artist Jin Lan does not continue with the scholar or landscape theme, but proceeds with what many consider his specialty, the prunus branch (Figure XI).¹²¹ Done in the *wenren* style, the monochrome branch with light color spreads out on the surface of the folding fan.

The plant blooms, suggesting either early or late spring, depending on the species of prunus. Jin Lan depicts the plant through outline alone, never filling in branches, leaves, or buds with wash. Branches and flowers overlap, as the plant grows towards the left. In certain areas it is difficult to determine which stem is in front, but in others the artist uses a darker ink to suggest the closest flower to the viewer. Along with a section of calligraphy, the artist has decorated the entirety of the fan.

The next fan in the collection is one of two by the eccentric artist Ren Yu and belongs in the category of *bird-and-flower painting* or 花鸟画, which literally means “flower-bird painting” (Figure XII). This subject matter was considered appropriate for the scholar-artist to depict and includes flowers, birds, fish, and insects. Done in the sixth month of 1898, the fan’s inscription describes the painting as in the style of Yun shouping, a celebrated Qing Dynasty flower painter. Employing a boneless literati method, Ren Yu used colored washes with little or no ink to create this image of white and pink flowers of a twisting branch.¹²² Done on paper, Ren Yu covered the folding fan in gold, suggesting luxury and opulence in this piece.

Covering the fan are two different types of flowers. A white peony attached to a black branch, dominates the work by its central position and large size. Gray and black withered leaves make up the branch the white flowers are attached to. Great detail is given to the forms as they twist in space. They stand in contrast to the colorful flowers that make up the majority of

¹²¹ Oertling, 61.

¹²² Ibid.

the scene. Pink flowers, scattered among brown branches, are shown both in full bloom and closed. The pink flowers are attached to green leaves and branches. The pink flowers appear to be rhododendron species, a plant associated with danger and caution because of its toxicity.

The last fan in the collection by the artist Gu Yun consists of an open pavilion, partially covered by rocks, in the garden of a clearing (Figure XIII). Gu Yun completed the paper folding fan in 1984. The artist uses a monochrome palette for the entire scene except the small hut and two distant mountains. The viewer joins the scholar, whose presence is inferred, and views the opposing mountains from a mountaintop of his or her own, emphasizing the *yang* of the mountain while suggesting the *yin* of the valley. Without the presence of a body of water, the artist only hints at the literati landscape tradition of the mountain and water painting.

The hut and garden, a reference to a human presence, is enclosed with a fence. Inside the fence, bamboo and a large fern, central to the composition, grow wildly. Outside the garden, cypress trees bend and twist. Other tree forms exist, but without leaves they suggest a late autumn or winter scene. Rocks, done in a gray wash, dominate the right side of the fan. To balance out the composition, large mountains done in a blue wash fade into the distance on the left. In front of the mountains, a gray rock with texture strokes loom arranging both mountain and rocks in a grouping of three both relating the forms and contrasting them. According to Ming Dynasty painter Dong Qichang, “the rising and falling of mountains in the distance conveys a sensation of power,” which Gu Yun’s mountains have here.¹²³ The artist completes his work with an inscription in the middle at the top.

The artist Ren Yu completed the last fan by a “Nine Friends” artist in the collection during the year 1893 (Figure XIV). The odd-shaped fan displays Ren Yu’s more conservative

¹²³ McMahan, 69.

style.¹²⁴ The landscape looks to more orthodox traditions than the other members of Ren Yu's family. The landscape style resembles that of the Four Wangs of the Early Qing dynasty.¹²⁵ The artist handles space well, with a foreground, middle ground, and distance all clearly discernible.

In the scene's foreground a scholar crosses a bridge on a donkey's back, moving from the left to the right. He wears a red robe, cinched at the waist with a gray belt, and a wide-brimmed hat to shade his eyes on his long journey. A pole in his left hand suggests he might have already done a fair amount of walking on that journey. The donkey he rides appears awkward in form and posture, and Ren Yu's handling comes across as strained.¹²⁶ Chinese artists commonly show the horse in motion, and Ren Yu has done the same with the donkey here. By showing the animal in motion, the artist suggests the Daoist idea of a cycle of 'no journey without return' as the scholar arrives at his mountain retreat.¹²⁷ The bridge crossed by the figure consists of a railing only on one side allowing the viewer to grasp the rider on his donkey fully.

The foreground also consists of a variety of plant life. In the left corner behind the scholar, Ren Yu has filled the area with bamboo. As one of the "four gentlemen of Chinese painting," the bamboo plant is noted for its ability to bend in the wind with resistance to splitting, suggesting the ideal Chinese man would adapt to whatever life society demanded of him, but not allow his spirit or integrity to be broken by it. Ren Yu filled up the other side of the foreground with a pine tree. The pine tree, as noted before, suggests long life.

¹²⁴ Oertling, 82. The odd shape suggests that the fan was originally an ovoid shape, but has since been cut down from that form.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ McMahan, 72.

A hill or mountain form reminiscent of the mountains of the blue-green landscape style is used to depict the middle ground.¹²⁸ The hill, a mass of colors, rocks, and trees, arches out towards the right, almost reaching for the water below it. The hill appears designed for the scholar's residence, as it perfectly shades the house for part of the day and also allows the resident to gaze out upon the valley, water, and mountains done in a gray wash in the distance. Red and orange leaves throughout the middle ground suggest a scene in the middle of autumn. *Mi* dots cover a landscape filled with rocks, suggesting a retreat far away from an atmosphere dominated by man's hand. Generic pine trees sit at the base of the hill. Cypress trees, noted for their long lives and ability to grow in high altitudes in China, decorate the area around the scholar's home. The structure itself consists of two buildings overlooking the water. Two other buildings are situated off towards the left. All of the buildings have four walls, and even though one contains an open window, Ren Yu gives no details of the interior components. By doing so, the viewer examines the natural exterior setting rather than focusing on material objects.

Ren Yu treats water with lines and without, throughout the composition. In the middle ground, the water flows down a waterfall and around rocks. The small lines show rapids and the water's movement in the work. Between the residence and the distant mountains, Ren Yu depicts a vast body of water as calm, by leaving the canvas blank. By doing so, the artist employs perspective on the level, to give the viewer a sense of remoteness.

Each fan differs from the fan before it, but every fan continues on themes, styles, and symbolism of a painting tradition that spans a thousand years.

¹²⁸ The blue-green landscape is a style of painting from the Northern School of painting during the Tang dynasty. Noted for the large amount of blue and green pigments used, the style depicts craggy mountain forms jutting drastically upward on a detailed landscape scene.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The Groke Mickey Fan Collection at the Reeves Center of Washington and Lee University represents a variety of styles and trends during the closing years of the Qing Dynasty in China. By choosing to look at this selection of work by the “Nine Friends of Suzhou,” the viewer examines a range of techniques, tastes, and themes from a common time and place. The fans reflect culture heavily influenced by a growing commercial market. The tradition of Chinese painting no longer acts as a literati pastime, or as a product of professionals working in a court academy, but the fan paintings show a culture of painting leaning almost exclusively to a commercial market. Even within the context of a commercial market, the fans still apply traditional symbols and themes to address contemporary issues.

Both the artist and the viewer of a Chinese painting play important roles in the presentation and understanding of a work. The Chinese artist assumes that the viewer, presupposed to be educated on Chinese history and the evolution of art, can read the piece for both its artistic, literary, and sometimes political undertones. The Chinese culture has a common saying for this practice that states one “points to the dog to make fun of the chicken.”¹²⁹ The Chinese landscape painting differs from its Western counterpart in the fact it is viewed as part of an event.¹³⁰ The viewer unrolls the handscroll one section at a time or turns the leaves of an album to experience each image as the act of painting, as opposed an image placed motionless on

¹²⁹ Michael Wilson. “Yun-Fei Ji: Pratt Manhattan Gallery,” *Artforum International*. (May 2003)
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_9_41/ai_101779207

¹³⁰ Richard Vinograd, “Situation and Response in Traditional Chinese Scholar Painting,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Spring 1988), 366.

the wall before them.¹³¹ In Chinese art, the artist and the viewer work together to complete a piece, often literally. It was not uncommon for spaces to be left for the viewer to write a reaction or stamp a personal name, as a seal of approval.

The interaction between the viewer and the artist or writer in Chinese art stands as a critical feature in the reflection and appreciation of such a piece. The artist or writer is not satisfied by a strictly aesthetic enjoyment. They require the viewer to read each work far beyond its visual surface. By identifying symbols, cultural references, and a personal history, Chinese art and writing takes upon its full and intended meaning.

When looking at the fans, one can still see the effects of the long line of the Chinese painting tradition. The fan itself is a traditional format, and its roots lie in ancient China, allowing for a more abbreviated approach to a subject, in comparison to the longer handscroll format. The brushwork on the fans also reflects the history of Chinese painting. Song dynasty techniques like the *mi* dot decorate foliage in Gu Yun's #8 circular fan depicting the scholarly retreat. Hemp fiber texture strokes, another traditional Chinese painting technique, portray the inner essence of the mountain in the collection's second fan, a folding fan by Wu Guxiang.

Composition and subject matter remain traditional, as well. Some fans are directly cited as being in the style of an earlier artist, like fan #17 by Gu Linshi, where Gu writes in the colophon that the fan is in the style of Yuan Dynasty artist Huang Gongwang. Because of the tradition of copying an artist's work and style, the viewer and artist alike can apply the traditional themes and symbolism in painting. Through the essence of copying the work and styles of artists before them, the artists incorporate the same spirit or feeling of the former's work. Daoist readings of the importance of daily work, as in the painting by Wu Guxiang, or the

¹³¹ Ibid., 368.

rendering of a scholar in retirement, as in the collaborative work by Gu Yun and Zhang Xiong, mean much more than the surface suggests.

The fans reflect both this aforementioned literati tradition and the cultural happenings of the Yangzi River Valley during the Qing Dynasty. They reflect the influx of outside influence, especially in the forms of patrons. In Wu Guziang's 1890 piece, he depicts a Korean scholar, not a Chinese court official or literati, contemplating the untouched landscape. The depiction is a daring move considering the steps Empress Cixi's court will take in the next few years that result in the outbreak of war. His choice to show a foreigner in such an esteemed Chinese subject matter shows the influence of his patrons, most of whom were Korean.

The Yangzi River Valley, especially Shanghai, grew exponentially during this time. As a negative result of the growth, political unrest swept the area. Not only did the artists frequently move, for commercial reasons, but their movement came under great restriction, as well. Only one of the "Nine Friends" ever traveled to Beijing, the imperial capital and source of court patronage.

The economic growth also influenced the lifestyles of the artists. The influx of opium brought by the Europeans affected the production of some artists. As mentioned before, Ren Yu often completed work to pay off his tab at the local opium den. As a consequence of his practices, his work often did not meet the high standards that had been set by his elder family members.

The violence of the times also influenced the work of the artists. Wu Dacheng shared common ground with the literati that came before him, because his professional title did not speak to his talents as an artist, but rather to his political career. He held titles like that of governor. He fought and suffered humiliating results in the Sino-Japanese War. His protégé, Lu

Hui, even followed him north to fight by his side. Wu's artistic output, when compared to the other "nine friends," suffered. One reason that the collection, a wonderful reflection of nineteenth century Qing art, may not contain any of his pieces may be due to his active political involvement. Themes on the fans also reflected the tumultuous arena in which these works were produced. In the collaborative work of Zhang Xiong and Gu Yun, the chrysanthemum literally grows out of a rock, suggesting to the viewer that even in the hardest times one can still grow. The fans and their artists came under heavy influence of the aggression that swirled around them.

The effect of a broadening commercial market markedly stands as the largest influence on the artistic production of the "Nine Friends of Suzhou." The market and large number of works in the collection from this area reflect the artist as a professional, rather than living the literati lifestyle. The viewer cannot ignore the fact that these artists' groups, like the "Nine Friends of Suzhou," met for commercial reasons. They introduced their friends to other patrons and engaged in commercial transactions during the time they had together. The fans stand at a crossroads of traditional Chinese painting and a growing capitalist market.

Within the collection at the Reeves Center at Washington and Lee University, the fans complement a vast Chinese art collection. The effect of supply and demand on Qing Dynasty fan painting parallels the effects the markets had on porcelain production. The entire collection of the 94 fans contains similar literary and religious themes to those depicted on porcelain. Also, a lot of painting techniques seen in Chinese fan paintings, like the approach to landscape, appear on pieces of porcelain, as well. The full potential of the positive effects that the fans could have on the use of the Reeves Center Collection cannot be fully measured because of the fragility of the fans. Proper lighting stands as the largest problem in the display of the fans. The effects of lighting are the main reason that the fans are not continuously on display.

In an educational setting, the fans provide a unique way to approach East Asian Studies. They are not only appreciated for their artistic value; educators and students alike can use them to approach other areas of learning. Historically, the fans reflect the growth in economics and outside sources in China. The fans also contain many Chinese literary themes. Within the collection there are fans depicting the Song Dynasty prose poems by Su Shi, the two “Ode to Red Cliffs,” and the eighteenth century Qing Dynasty piece, *Dream of the Red Chamber*.¹³² A viewer can read and appreciate the fans for their cultural references to Daoist and Confucian teachings.

Steeped in tradition of styles, both artistic and cultural, “The Nine Friends of Suzhou” produced these fans to address current issues. The audience views these fans, rich with symbolism and meaning, as a reflection of current and past issues. The fans both embrace Chinese literati painting tradition and apply it to current issues. When we read these fans, we look into a turbulent time that was about to see the death of an imperial dynasty and the rise of a republican, and then a socialist government. The artist requires us as the audience to appreciate the fans for every composition and intricate detail. The artists seek to please viewer and patron alike, by adhering to the aesthetic and cultural codes set by artists before them. These fans embrace a painting tradition and apply it to the contemporary Qing Dynasty Chinese viewer.

¹³² For my East Asian Languages and Literature thesis, I completed a piece on the literary theme of “Ode to the Red Cliff” in the fans. Such work allowed me to explore Su Shi’s life and writings, Song dynasty history, and the meanings such literary themes might have in another time period.



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Figure 1

Wu Guxiang

Undated

Ink and Color on Paper

Gift of Wm. Groke Mickey

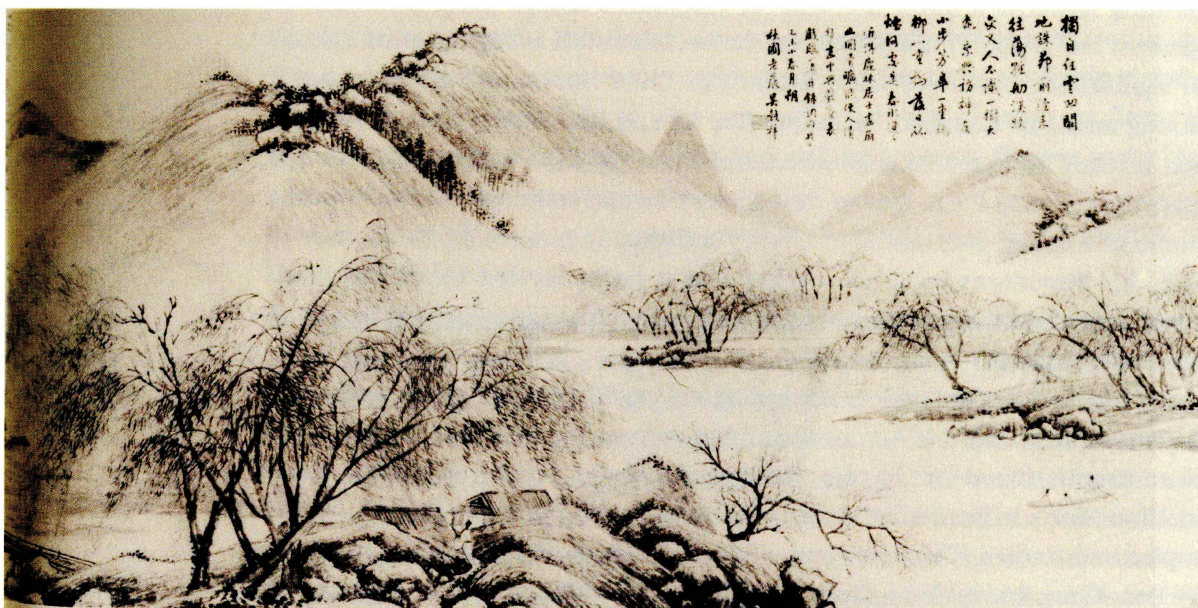


Figure II

Landscape with Willows

Wu Guxiang

1895

Ink on Paper

ink and color on paper

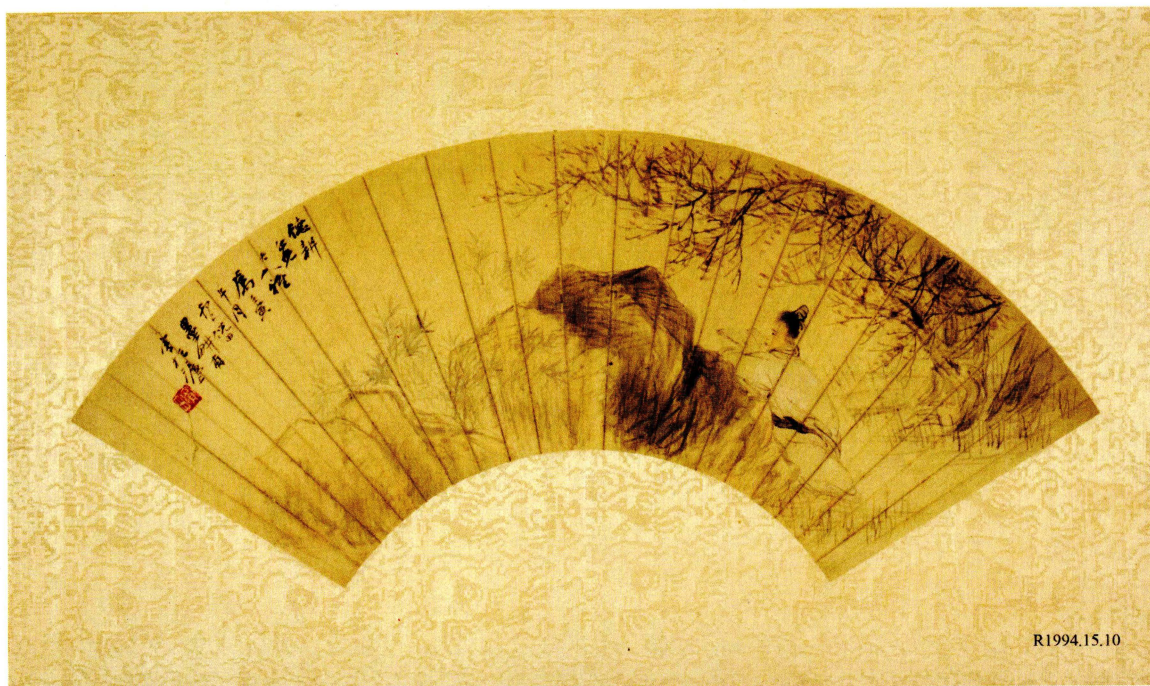
part of Wu Guxiang's collection



R1994.15.8

Figure III

Gu Yun
Undated
Ink and Color on Silk
Gift of Wm. Groke Mickey



R1994.15.10

Figure IV

Ni Tian

1902

Ink and Color on Paper

Gift of Wm. Groke Mickey



R1994.15.17

Figure V

Gu Linshi

1900

Ink on Paper

Gift of Wm. Groke Mickey

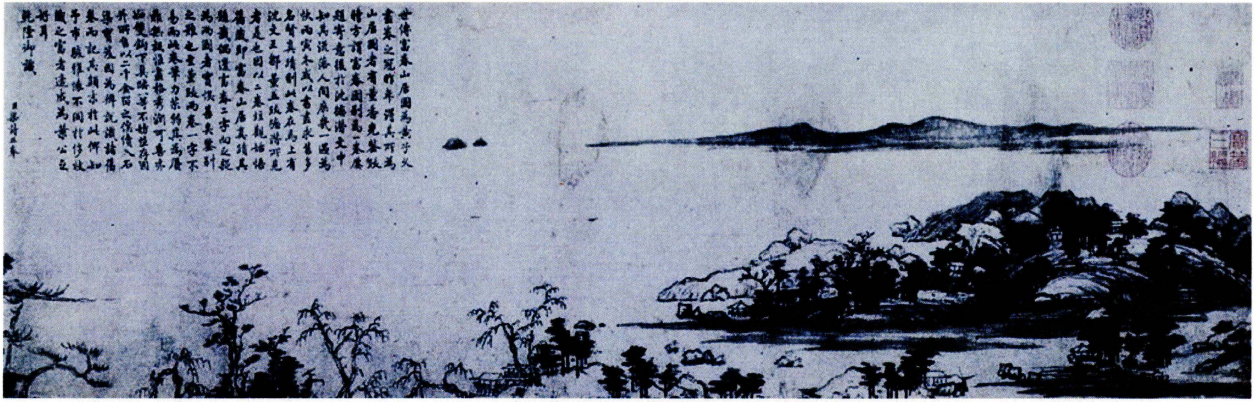


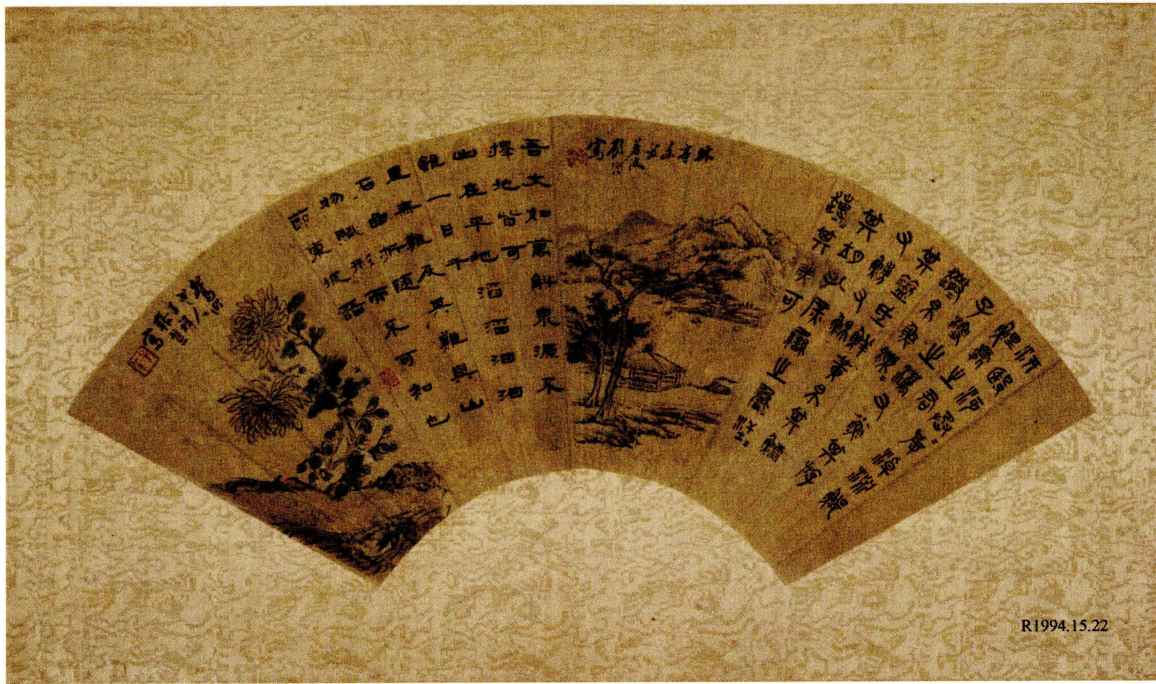
Figure VI

Two Details of *The Fuchun Mountain Scroll*

Huang Gongwang

1350

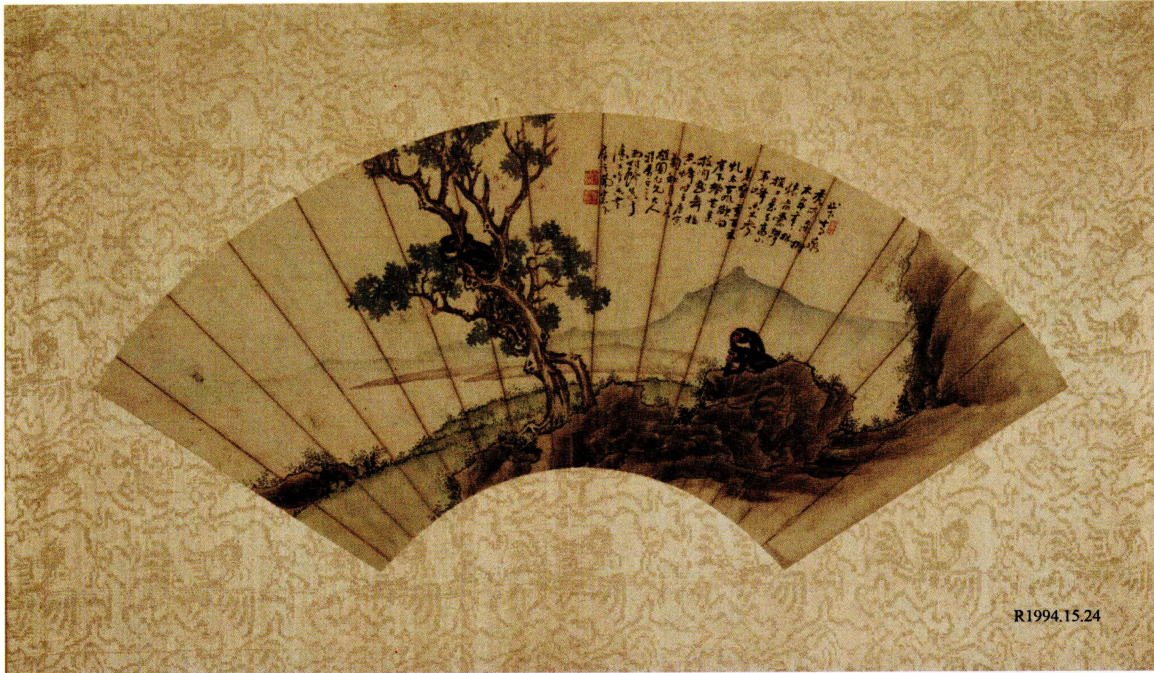
Ink on Paper



R1994.15.22

Figure VII

Gu Yun and Zhang Xiong
 Undated
 Ink, Color, and Gold on Paper
 Gift of Wm. Groke Mickey



R1994.15.24

Figure VIII

Gu Yun
 1890
 Ink and Color on Paper
 Gift of Wm. Groke Mickey



Detail of the monkey and mosquitoes from Fan 24

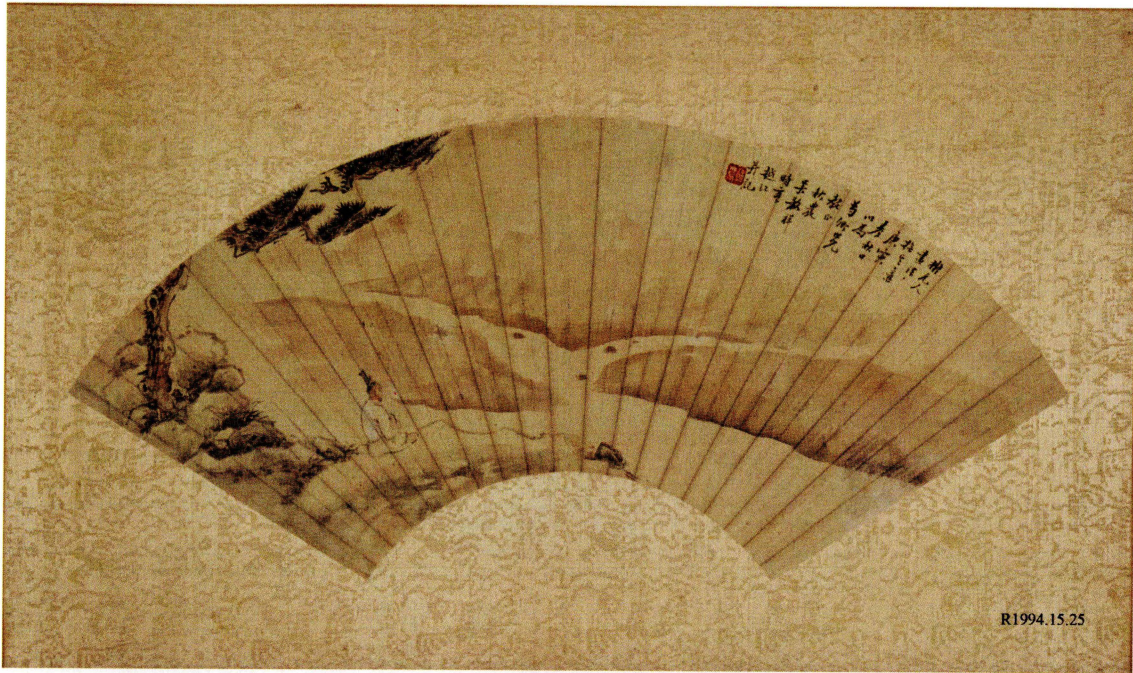


Figure IX

Wu Guxiang

1890

Ink and Color on Paper

Gift of Wm. Groke Mickey



Figure X

Gu Yun
Undated
Ink and Color on Silk
Gift of Wm. Groke Mickey



R1994.15.68

Figure XI

Jin Lan
Undated
Ink on Paper
Gift of Wm. Groke Mickey



R1994.15.80

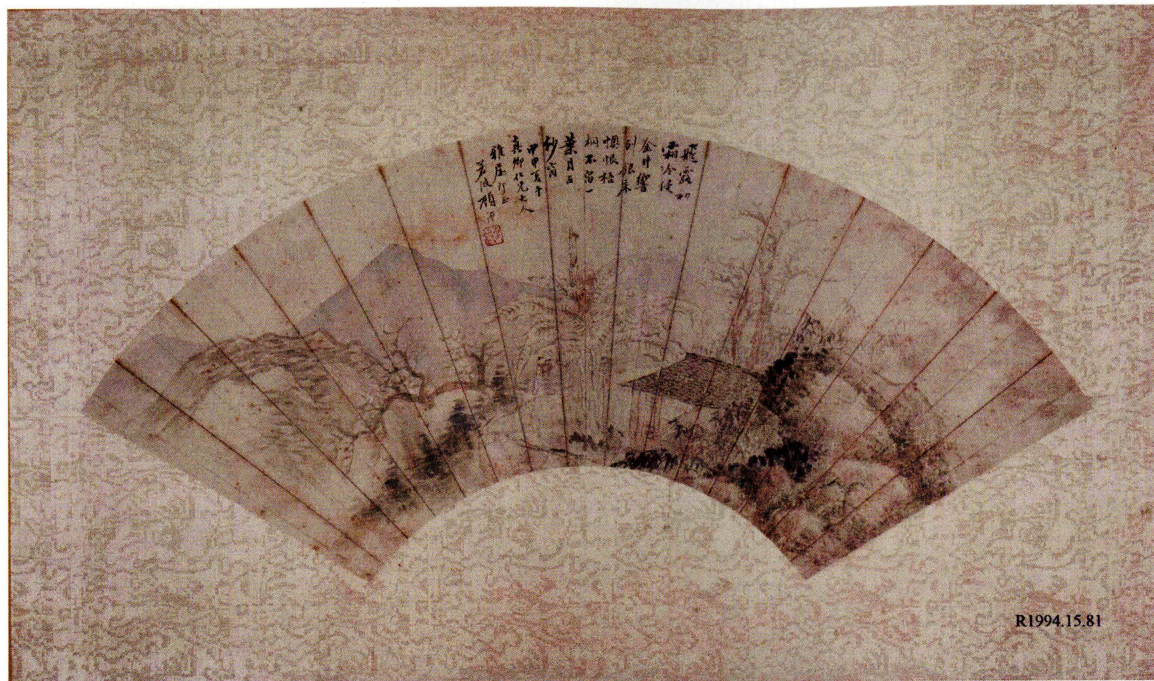
Figure XII

Ren Yu

1898

Ink, Color, and Gold on Paper

Gift of Wm. Groke Mickey



R1994.15.81

Figure XIII

Gu Yun
1894
Ink and Color on Paper
Gift of Wm. Groke Mickey



R1994.15.97

Figure XIV

Ren Yu
 1893
 Ink and Color on Silk
 Gift of Wm. Groke Mickey

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