

Research Report
Investigations in Beijing, Nanjing, Suzhou and Shanghai,
May 9th to June 2nd, 2011

YAO Ning

Early in 2011, as a PhD student of the Institute of East Asian Art History in Heidelberg University, I was awarded the Heinz-Götze travel scholarship for Chinese Art History, which provided me with a generous grant for carrying out research in Beijing, Nanjing, Suzhou and Shanghai. This grant provided me with the opportunity to investigate the original painting works and related material related to my dissertation, *Wu Li's 吳歷 (1632-1718) Remembering the Past at the Xingfu Chapel 興福庵感舊圖 ----- Chinese Literati Memorial Painting from Fifteenth to Seventeenth-Century.*

The experience of viewing original paintings during my stay in the three museums was amazing and unforgettable. It was the first time that I realized that viewing original paintings could give me a real sense of brushwork and style, which I was unable to get from slides, photographs etc. At the same time it gave me the feel for the materiality of the object whose importance I had not noticed before.

There was one highlight, which I would like to elaborate in some detail. In the Nanjing Museum I was able to examine the album Landscape in Archaic Style 仿古山水冊 which Wu Li 吳歷 (1632-1718) had dedicated primarily to the Chan Buddhist monk Morong 默容 (?-1671). It is one of the most significant works of Wu Li's for my research. To my surprise, I found a lightly painted moon on the large empty surface where there is supposed to be a lake — a reflected moon on water, on the first leaf. This lightly painted moon is definitely invisible in all catalogues, slides and other reproductions. Only then I understood, that the description of Wu Li's inscription on the painting, which mentions the reflection of a moon, indeed exactly tallies with what he had painted.

Because of the different sizes of the ten leaves in this album I also became aware that some of them differed in style, which made me realize that not all of the ten leaves originally belonged together and had not formed the album as it has come down to us, and which I had the opportunity to examine. All of the above factors can only be understood when viewing the original works.

It also was very valuable for me to discuss with and ask questions to curator Li Lan 李蘭 and her three colleagues at the Shanghai Museum, when we examined the paintings there together. Our discussion revolved around questions concerning the different paint-techniques, the use of color and how to repair and conserve pictures, which are all important for my research but on which it is quite difficult to find any written materials.

In order to explore the meaning of a small Buddhist seat, depicted on Wu Li's handscroll Remembering the Past at the Xingfu Chapel, and some other issues related

to Chinese Buddhist temples especially those established during the Ming (1368-1644) and early Qing (1644-1911) periods, another important goal of my research trip to China was to visit as many Buddhist temples as I could. Suzhou, where the monk Morong lived and where the Buddhist chapel Xingfu si originally was (unfortunately no longer in existence) and Wu Li's hometown Changshu thus are important places for me to conduct research. Since I had visited Changshu the last time when I went to China, this time I focused on the city of Suzhou. In Buddhist temples in Suzhou and other cities, I found some similar seats like the one on Wu Li's scroll and took photos of them. The questions as to their functions and the exact location of each seat are important to my research.

Time goes by very quickly. I have learnt a lot during my four weeks of research. I also realize that I have to return to China soon – with new questions and new ideas – to learn more and explore more.

In closing, I wish to express my deeply felt gratitude to the Heinz-Götze Foundation for giving me such a great opportunity for conducting research in Chinese art history in China.