

## A Burnt, Torn Fan-tasy of early twentieth-century China



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## WARM-UP



People: Li Zhuxi, Chinese (dates unrecorded)

Title: *Fan Decorated on One Side with an Assemblage of Bronzes, Rubbings, Painted Fans, and Printed Books and on the Other with Inscribed Pages and Fragments of Rubbings and Printed Pages.*

Work Type: fan, painting.



Medium: Folding fan on a brass frame; ink and colors on silk, with signature of the artist on one side reading “Yangzhu Shanren” and “Li Zhuxi” on the other; with the “Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Manuscript” inscribed on the brass frame.

Dimensions: 36 x 66 cm

Date: Republic of China, 1915.

Inventory Number: 1985.892

By now, we are toward the end of the semester and entering the modern period of Chinese art history. The end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century witnessed the waning of China’s Qing Dynasty. The country faced serious troubles both at home and abroad, internal revolts and foreign invasions. In such a historical context, this work was produced.

Burnt, torn, creased and fragmented, a variety of pieces were grouped together into one folding fan. Delicately painted with ink and color, the assemblage created an illusion of a collage of fragments. What did the artist try to show or to hide? In which way can we read such a work made slightly over one hundred years ago?

## INITIAL QUESTIONS

- Do the two sides of the fan look different to you?
- Do you recognize any of the objects illustrated on the fan? If so, which ones? Which images are completely unfamiliar to you.
- How would you describe the way that the objects on the fan leaves are presented?
- What do you think was the function of this object? Do you think it was made to be collected in a museum, or used in daily life? Who do you think owned an object such as this?
- Do you think each side of the fan has its own narrative? Does the fan tell a story, and if so, what kind of a story?

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## CASE STUDY

### I: What is on the fan?

In the first section of the case study, we will begin by identifying objects on the recto and verso of the fan as much as possible. Before we dig into the objects and texts on the fan, let's first know about two traditions of Chinese calligraphy: ink rubbing and *fatie* (rubblings of engraved models of calligraphy).<sup>1</sup>

#### **- Ink Rubbing**

By the beginning of the seventh century, or perhaps much earlier, the Chinese had found a method of making multiple copies of old inscribed records, using paper and ink. Rubbings (also known as inked squeezes) in effect “print” the inscription, making precise copies that can be carried away and distributed in considerable numbers.

To make a rubbing, a sheet of moistened paper is laid on the inscribed surface and tamped into every depression with a rabbit's-hair brush. (By another method, the paper is laid on dry, and then brushed with a rice or wheat-based paste before being tamped.) When the paper is almost dry, its surface is tapped with an inked pad. The paper is then peeled from the stone. Since the black ink does not touch the parts of the paper that are pressed into the inscription, the process produces white characters on a black background. (If the inscription is cut in relief, rather than intaglio, black and white are reversed.)

#### **- *Fatie*: rubbings of engraved models of calligraphy**

For the study of the history of writing and calligraphy, from the earliest script on shell and bone down to the running and cursive styles of later masters, inscriptions are irreplaceable sources. They trace the evolution of writing, century after century. Since the early dynasties, too, inscriptions have been carved in stone to preserve examples of the styles of great calligraphers. Rubbings of engraved models of calligraphy, known as *fatie* are the most widely reproduced and consulted genre of rubbings in China, Japan, and Korea today.

## **RECTO: Bronzes, Rubbings and Paintings**

#### **- Bronzes and the *Bogu* tradition**

Look at the bronze vessels on the recto of the fan. After the first few weeks on bronze pieces, are they familiar to you in some way? In which way are they similar or different to the bronze vessels we have looked at during the semester?

According to Nancy Berliner, since the mid-nineteen century there was a growing fascination with the calligraphy found on ancient objects such as bronzes, and eventually the calligraphy and rubbings taken from it became as significant as the objects themselves. *Bogu*<sup>2</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup>In Chinese: 法帖.

<sup>2</sup>In Chinese: “博古”.

(“plentiful antiquities”) paintings celebrated an idealized antiquity and recalled a scholarly way of life in which scholarly objects were cherished. The compositions of these *Bogu* paintings included scrolls and books.

An early example of the bogu tradition was *Xuanhe bogu tu*<sup>3</sup> (“*Bogu* Paintings of the *Xuanhe* Period”) of the Song Dynasty commissioned by Emperor Huizong. It was a record of the Huizong’s royal collection of bronzes dated back from Shang Dynasty to Tang Dynasty. Try to identify the bronze vessel types in the fan painting. Visually compare them to the reproduction of archaic bronze forms in *Xuanhe bogu tu*.



Examples of archaic bronzes from *Xuanhe bogu tu*

#### -Yan Zhenqing & Zheng Zuowei Tie<sup>4</sup>

Yan Zhenqing (709–785) was a leading Chinese calligrapher and a loyal governor of the Tang Dynasty. His artistic accomplishment in Chinese calligraphy parallels the greatest master calligraphers throughout the history. His “Yan style” of the Regular Script is the textbook-style that most calligraphy beginners imitate today. The “Yan style”, which brought Chinese calligraphy to a new realm, emphasizes on strength, boldness and grandness.



A piece of ink rubbing from the fan, acknowledged as a fragment of a copy of *Zheng Zuowei Tie*

This piece of ink rubbing is from one of the many copies of Yan Zhenqing’s famous work *Zheng Zuowei Tie*, which was a manuscript of a letter from Yan Zhenqing to Guo Yingyi<sup>5</sup> arguing about the order of seats in the imperial court. In the letter he criticized Guo Yingyi for his flattering the eunuch by bringing the eunuch’s seat forward, which disrupted the order of the

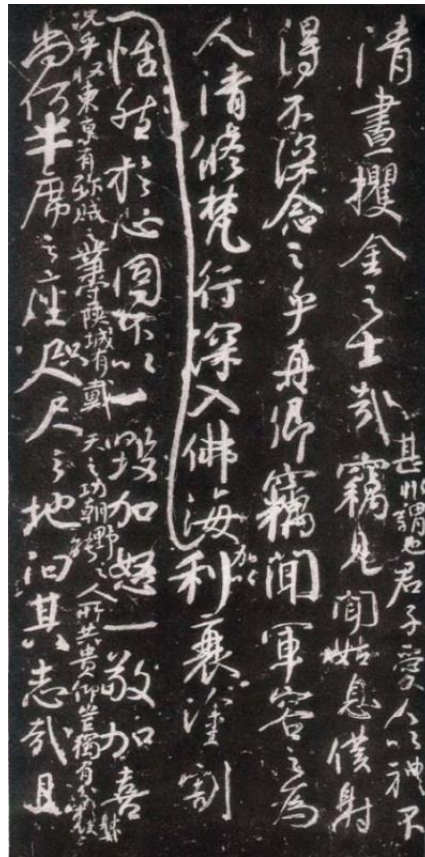
<sup>3</sup>In Chinese: “宣和博古图”.

<sup>4</sup>In Chinese: 颜真卿 & “争座位帖”.

<sup>5</sup>In Chinese: 郭英义.



court.



Excerpt from one copy of the ink rubbings of *Zheng Zuowei Tie*, collected by Mitsui Takakata.

### VERSO: Rubbings and Printed Pages

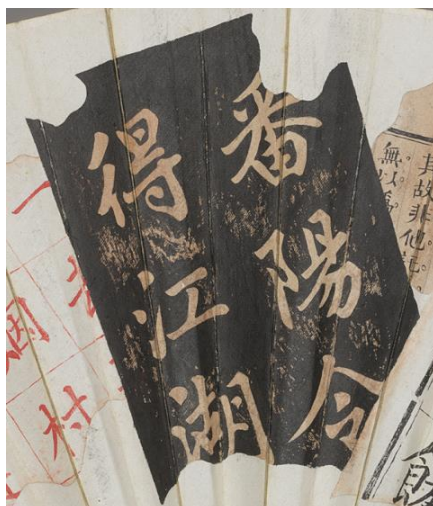
Look at the verso of the fan. In which way is the verso different from the recto? What are depicted here?

#### -Wu Rui in the *Book of Han* <sup>6</sup>

Another fragment of ink rubbing is from the *Book of Han*. The *Book of Han* or *History of the Former Han* is a history of China finished in 111, covering the Western, or Former Han dynasty from the first emperor in 206 BCE to the fall of Wang Mang<sup>7</sup> in 23 CE. It is also called the *Book of Former Han*.

<sup>6</sup>In Chinese: 吴芮 & 汉书.

<sup>7</sup>In Chinese: 王莽.



A piece of ink rubbing from the fan, text from the *Book of Han*

There are only six characters presented on this piece: “...Poyang ling...de jiang hu...”<sup>8</sup> (“...county magistrate of Poyang...won all corners of the country...”). The whole sentence in the *Book of Han* reads:

“Wu Rui is the county magistrate of Poyang in the Qin Dynasty. He won the heart of people from all corners of the country, known as Gentleman Po.” ---Wu rui, Book of Han<sup>9</sup>

#### -Wang Xizhi & *Lantingji Xu*<sup>10</sup>

Wang Xizhi (303-361) was a Chinese calligrapher traditionally referred to as the Sage of Calligraphy, who lived during the Jin Dynasty (265–420). He has arguably been the most esteemed Chinese calligrapher during and after the Tang Dynasty, and a master of all forms of Chinese calligraphy, especially the running script.

On the brass frame of the fan, Wang Xizhi's *Lantingji Xu* is inscribed. Literally meaning “Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Manuscript”, *Lantingji Xu* is a famous work of calligraphy by Wang Xizhi, composed in the year 353. Written in semi-cursive script, it is among the best known and often copied pieces of calligraphy in Chinese history. The preface describes the event during that year's Spring Purification Festival in which 42 literati were present at a gathering at the Orchid Pavilion near Shaoxing, Zhejiang, at which they composed poems, played music, and enjoyed wine. Towards the end of the preface the author expressed his nihilistic thoughts about the ephemeral lifetime of man.

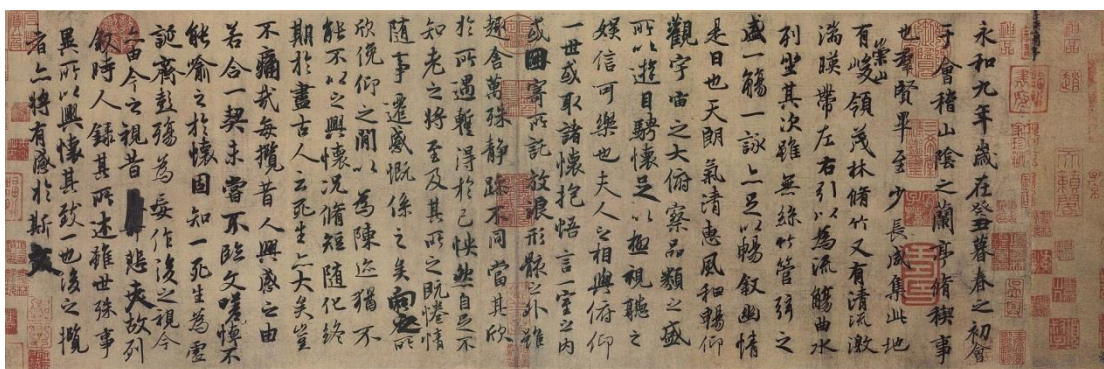
<sup>8</sup>In Chinese: “...番(鄱)阳令...得江湖...”.

<sup>9</sup>In Chinese: “吴芮，秦时番阳令也，甚得江湖民心，号曰‘番君’”。——《汉书·吴芮传》”.

<sup>10</sup>In Chinese: 王羲之 & “兰亭集序”.



The brass frame of the fan, with inscriptions of “Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Manuscript”



A partial section of the Tang Dynasty copy of the *Lantingji Xu* by Feng Chengsu<sup>11</sup>, dated between 627-650, collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing

<sup>11</sup>In Chinese: 馮承素.



At the end of the inscription on the brass frame reads:

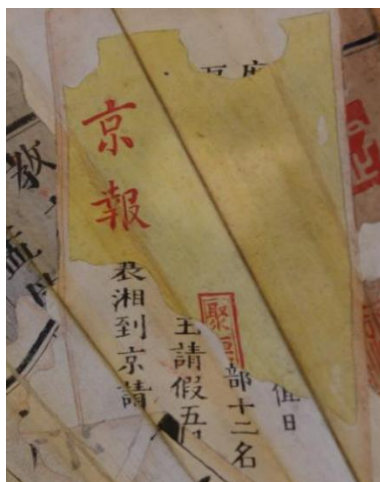
“For Mr. Songting to elegantly play with, in the third lunar month of the summer [July] in yimao year, carved by Zhao Yuetang from Guilin.”<sup>12</sup>

The inscription gives the name of the patron, the name of the carver and his hometown, and the date (1912).

### **-*Jing Bao* (the Capital Newspaper)**<sup>13</sup>

*Jing Bao* (the Capital Newspaper) was a privately published daily newspaper disseminating information about court announcements. It first appeared during the late Ming dynasty, and became popular during the Qing. *Jing Bao* and *Di Chao*<sup>14</sup> (official transcription of court announcement) were similar in nature and content. However, *Di Chao* came from the court and was often handwritten documents circulated among different levels of administrative bureaus. On the other hand, *Jing Bao* was published by private publication houses. It was mainly sold to officials and feudal landlords.

The content of *Jing Bao* consisted of three sections: the status of political affairs, the emperor's commands, and reports by the officials. The first section was often succinct in language, listing the bureau on duty that day, officials who were called upon to the court, officials who asked for leaves, came to greet, or were sent out for missions. The second part, emperor's commands, appeared only in a small quantity of issues, since only certain commands were public. The official reports in the third section often differed among various publishers, for they each had to make their own selections among a vast amount of reports every day. Extant copies of *Jing Bao* today are usually from the last several decades of the Qing dynasty.



A piece of paper from the fan, acknowledged as a fragment of *Jing Bao*

Only half of the text is visible. Here the questions are: is the visible text randomly presented or deliberately chosen by the artist? Are the torn pages and the texts depicted in the fan based on a realistic *Jing Bao* or the characters are reconstructed by the artist? It reads: "...department

<sup>12</sup>In Chinese: “頌庭先生雅玩，乙卯季夏，桂林趙月堂刻”。

<sup>13</sup>In Chinese: “京報”。

<sup>14</sup>In Chinese: “邸抄”。

twelve members...ask for leaves...Hunan to the capital...” The only complete verb at the center of the text is *qing jia* (ask for leaves)<sup>15</sup>. Scholars have observed that during the last few years of the Qing dynasty, asking for leaves became a predominant phenomenon in the court among officials. By presenting this keyword in the only private newspaper that provides information about the political affair of the country, the fan might integrate the incoherent and instable political situation at the end of the Qing dynasty with a torn and fragmented newspaper that has been possibly abandoned and forgotten in the new era.

### - A Piece of Paper Currency and *Heng Yuan* Gold Store

The silver paper currency on the fan a six *liang* silver worth dated to the year of *ding wei*<sup>16</sup> (1907) The name of the Chinese bank, *Heng Yuan* Gold Store<sup>17</sup>, is rendered in red mark at the bottom left corner of the paper currency. *Heng Yuan* Money Bank<sup>18</sup> was one of the “Big Four Heng”<sup>19</sup> Chinese banks (*qian zhuang*) (the other three are *Heng Li*, *Heng He*, and *Heng Xing*) founded by the Dong family from the Zhejiang province in the East Four Gate<sup>20</sup> area of Beijing. Their history can be traced back to the Qianlong period (1736-1795). Overtime, the family business grew and reached peak during the early Guangxu period (1875-1908). Chinese native banks were financial institutions emerged from the chaotic currency systems during the late imperial China and the need for money deposit and exchange. It includes money bank, silver bank, paper bank, and gold store. After the Opium War, along with the openings of the port cities and the increasing foreign trades, it was competed with foreign banks and other forms of modern financial institutions. With a good credit and befriended with high officials and rich merchants, the “Big Four Heng” banks stood out from the numerous financial institutions of the time. They mainly served the elitist and the richest class. Having paper currency issued from the “Big Four Heng” signified the class and monetary status.



A piece of paper from the fan, acknowledged as a fragment of a silver paper currency

<sup>15</sup>In Chinese:“请假”.

<sup>16</sup>In Chinese:“丁未”.

<sup>17</sup>In Chinese:“恒源金店”.

<sup>18</sup>In Chinese:“恒源钱庄”.

<sup>19</sup>In Chinese:“四大恒”.

<sup>20</sup>In Chinese:“东四牌楼”.

Unfortunately, like *Jing Bao*, the “Big Four Heng” also did not survive through the turmoil at the turn of the century. In 1900, the Eight-Nation Alliance occupied Beijing. A massive looting took place in the capital, and the over three hundred banks became the biggest victims in this catastrophe. The name mark of Heng Yuan Gold Store on the Harvard bapo fan, however, is probably a deliberate choice made by the artist reflecting on the incidence of the bank. Its torn state with a burnt hold in the center not only matches the burning and destruction of the 1900 looting, but also suggests the impossible retrieval.

### -“Illustrated Story of the Forever Celebration of Peace”<sup>21</sup>

Another piece is from the title page of the book *Illustrated Story of the Forever Celebration of Peace* by Guo Guangrui<sup>22</sup>. It was a book published in 1892. In the preface of the book, Guo mentions that the story was first made by Jiang Zhenming during the Xianfeng (1850-61) period, and was passed down among the storytelling field in Beijing. During the end of the nineteenth century, it was told by Ha Fuyuan. The book tells the story of the Kangxi Emperor (1654-1722)’s suppression of the riots led by tian di hui ba gua jiao (the Eight Diagram Cult of the Heaven and Earth Society<sup>23</sup>). However, it was not simply a reminiscence of the prosperous Kangxi reign (1661-1722) during the early Qing, but also a realistic depiction of the current society in the late Qing period. The story both hinted and encouraged the growing gangster culture and the barbarous mood that eventually led to the Boxer Rebellion.



The title page of the book *Illustrated Story of the Forever Celebration of Peace* on the Harvard *bapo fan*

Written during the Opium War, the story ends with a happy ending, reflecting a strong hope for peace during the time. Although the book was not an elite read, it was more appealing to the commoners who were fascinated with martial arts. The book reflects the high sensitivity to the changing society among people in the popular culture.

<sup>21</sup>In Chinese: “绘图永庆升平传”.

<sup>22</sup>In Chinese: 郭光瑞.

<sup>23</sup>In Chinese: “天地会”.

## -The Other Texts

For the other texts from the ink rubbings or the printed pages, here we give you the English translations of them.

a) A fragment of a page of *The Hundred Family Surnames*<sup>24</sup>. It is a classic Chinese text composed of common Chinese surnames. The book was composed in the early Song Dynasty. It was among the almost universal introductory literary texts for students, almost exclusively boys, from elite backgrounds and even for a number of ordinary villagers.

b) Title page of an ink rubbing book of *Youlan Fu*<sup>25</sup> (On Orchids) by Huang Tingjian<sup>26</sup>.

c) A page from a book of seals. Four seals are presented on the page:

“Heaven and Earth”<sup>27</sup>;

“Yesterday and Today”<sup>28</sup>;

“Old Friends”<sup>29</sup>;

“The Drunken Moon”<sup>30</sup>.

d) A creased page of a copy of an essay by a Confucian scholar of the Ming dynasty: *Shen Lǐ Lǔ*<sup>31</sup> (“On Deep Consideration”) by Fang Xiaoru<sup>32</sup>. In this essay, Fang Xiaoru talks about the rise and fall of all previous dynasties and points out previous emperors mistakenly attribute the collapse of dynasties to the will of heaven. With this essay, he admonishes the emperors to deeply consider the problem of maintaining prolonged stability.

The characters presented read:

“...The man who is concerned with the world usually thinks about the difficult issues but omits the...the formidable but omits the...natural law...do not know...”

e) Two creased pages of two copies of an essay by a Song Dynasty chancellor and poet Wang Anshi<sup>33</sup>, *Epitaph of Gentleman Xu, Registrar of the Hailing County, Taizhou*<sup>34</sup>. In this epitaph, Wang Anshi deplores the county official Xu Ping not having an opportunity to use his talents. He expresses his regrets but is unable to do anything and can only attribute Xu Ping’s unsuccessful life as will of heaven.

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<sup>24</sup>In Chinese: “百家姓”.

<sup>25</sup>In Chinese: “幽兰赋”.

<sup>26</sup>In Chinese: 黄庭坚.

<sup>27</sup>In Chinese: “天上人间”.

<sup>28</sup>In Chinese: “昨日今朝”.

<sup>29</sup>In Chinese: “故人”.

<sup>30</sup>In Chinese: “醉月”.

<sup>31</sup>In Chinese: “深虑论”.

<sup>32</sup>In Chinese: 方孝孺.

<sup>33</sup>In Chinese: 王安石.

<sup>34</sup>In Chinese: “泰州海陵县主簿许君墓志铭”.

The characters presented read:

“...Sign! Those who...of Zhenzhou...his son Qi is an Ancestral Temple...different from the common customs...Wensu...was impassioned himself...”

f) A fragment of an excerpt from Mencius about an Spring and Autumn period politician Baili Xi<sup>35</sup>.

g) A fragment of a copy of a poem by a Song Dynasty fortune teller Shao Yong<sup>36</sup>. This poem has been used for children's education for hundreds of years.

h) A fragment of an essay by a Song Dynasty scholar and historian Zeng Gong<sup>37</sup>, *A Letter to Mr. Ouyang*<sup>38</sup>. In this letter, Zeng Gong discusses the social significance of writing.

The characters presented read:

“...to people from streets and lanes...but few people have their writings handed down...the reason is no more than...nothing to do...”

i) A fragment of a page of *The Three Character Classic*<sup>39</sup>. The work is not one of the traditional six Confucian classics, but rather the embodiment of Confucianism suitable for teaching young children. Until the latter part of the 1800s, it served as a child's first formal education at home. The text is written in triplets of characters for easy memorization.

j) A fragment of a page of *Master Chu's Homilies for Families*<sup>40</sup>. It is a textbook about family ethical education by an early Qing Dynasty scholar Zhu Bolu<sup>41</sup>.

The characters presented read:

“...to eat...vegetables...delicacies...”

k) A page from another book of seals. One seal is presented on the page:

“Together with Sages and Men of Virtue”<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup>In Chinese: 百里奚.

<sup>36</sup>In Chinese: 邵雍.

<sup>37</sup>In Chinese: 曾巩.

<sup>38</sup>In Chinese: “寄欧阳舍人书”.

<sup>39</sup>In Chinese: “三字经”.

<sup>40</sup>In Chinese: “朱子家训”.

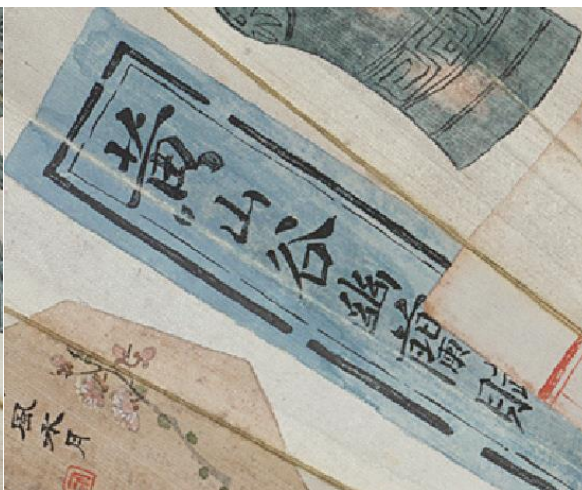
<sup>41</sup>In Chinese: 朱柏庐.

<sup>42</sup>In Chinese: “圣贤同归”.





a)



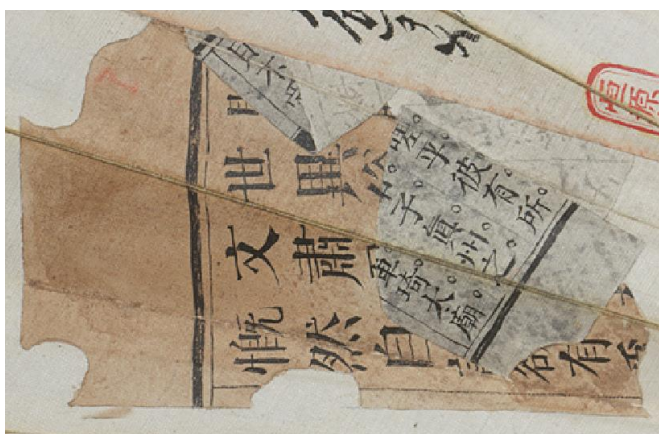
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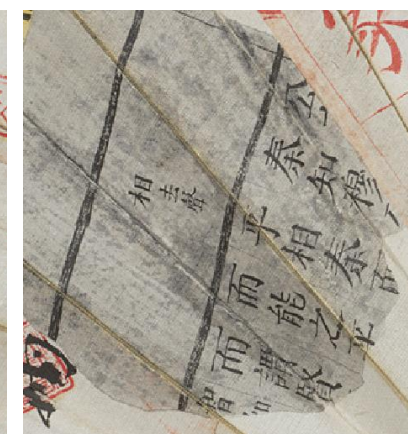
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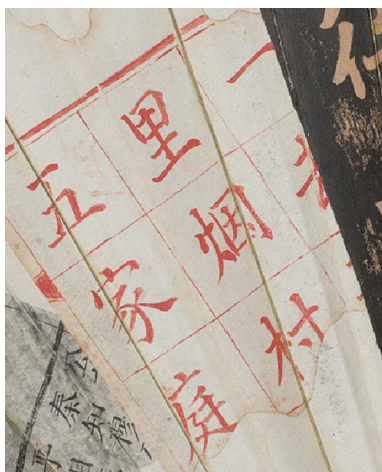


e)



f)





g)



h)



i)



j)



k)



l)

## Materials and Martial Arts

It is worth noting that the fan guards are made of brass instead of bamboo other more ordinary materials for a folding fan.

During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the spirit of martial arts becoming prevalent may result from people's the political and psychological need living in a falling society. Does the materiality of the fan indicate its affiliation with martial arts? According to Zhang Shunjiao, the first time the folding fan used as a weapon was most probably late Ming Dynasty or Early Qing Dynasty.

Here we are at the end of the first section of the case study. We have looked at the objects and texts on the fan, and the material of the fan. Let's think about these questions as we move on:

- What do you think is the fan used for?
- Did the artist try to convey certain meanings by making it?

## **II: Glued and Torn: European Precedents**

In the previous section, we took a close look at the diverse objects depicted on both sides of the fan. In this section we will turn to the following question: why do the fan leaves appear the way they do? Is the fan a collage, a trompe-l'œil or neither? In other words, what does it mean to have layers upon layers of diverse objects and what are earlier examples of such images? Here we will turn to the following themes: collage, trompe-l'œil, and the application of both as a way to remember the historical past.

### **- Is the fan leaf a Collage?**

Collage is both a technique and form. The term derives from the French verb, *coller*, which means "to glue." It is created by gluing several unrelated fragments of paper together to make a new whole. Often, collage makes use of found objects. A variation of collage is assemblage, which is a term referring to a collage with three-dimension objects. In a given collage, each object carries a specific meaning not only by itself but also together as the whole image.

Collages and assemblages are closely linked to early twentieth-century European art. The first deliberate use of collage is traced back to Pablo Picasso. In the spring of 1912, Picasso apparently pasted a real stamp onto his oil painting of a letter. Another example of a well-known Picasso collage is illustrated below, showing a still-life painting with oil-cloth pasted on top and encircled by real rope. To a certain extent, collages by Picasso and his contemporary, Georges Braque have been analyzed as a quest for a visual form that would suit the modern industrial society of the early twentieth century.



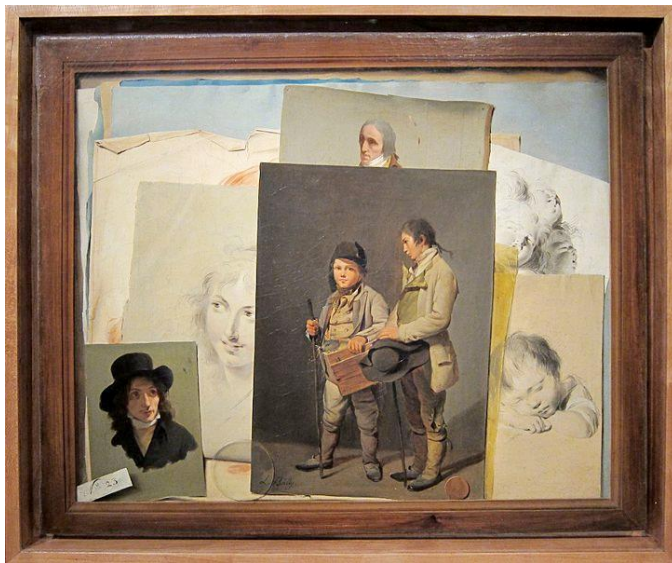
Pablo Picasso, *Still-life with Chair Caning*, Spring 1912, Oil on oil-cloth over canvas edged with rope, 29.0 × 37.0 cm, Inv. no MP 36, Musée National Picasso, Paris, France.

### - Is the fan leaf in Trompe-l'œil?

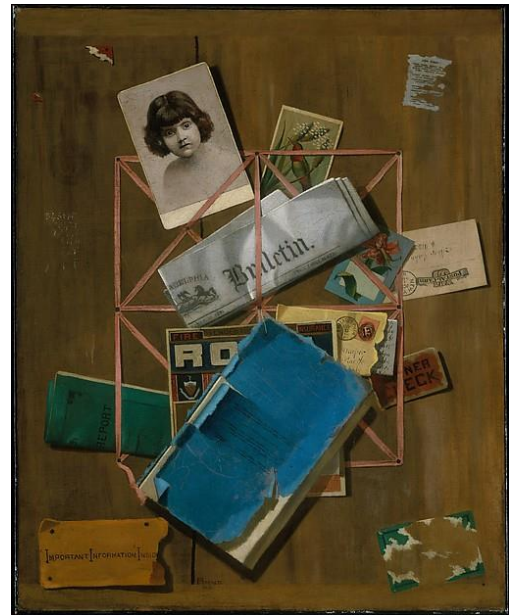
Collages do not need to be illusionistic. Instead, the artistic genre of creating illusionistic images is called trompe-l'œil, another French term that translates to “fool the eye.” The origins of trompe-l'œil is traced back to Greek and Roman architectural interiors where walls were painted to resemble the outside world. Trompe-l'œil received renewed attention in Europe from sixteenth century onwards. Trompe-l'œil became quite a phenomenon amongst Dutch artists as artists experimented with perspective and illusion as a way to demonstrate their expert techniques and to exercise their joy in picture making. By the eighteenth century, French artists such as Louis-Léopold Boilly, became renowned for their trompe-l'œil techniques. Boilly even created furniture that were decorated in trompe-l'œil, such as a desk that featured the illusion of strewn playing cards.

In America, John Frederick Peto (inspired by Vittore Carpaccio) became the master of trompe-l'œil. Peto produced several letter rack paintings between 1879 and 1885—an example is provided below. Additionally, from the late nineteenth century, John Haberle and William Harnette created several trompe-l'œil paintings of American paper currency. Halberle's paintings (also below), received immense public recognition for his meticulous detail of worn out bills. These types of paintings played with the boundary between reality and imitation.





**Left:** Louis-Léopold Boilly (1761-1845), *Trompe-l'œil*, 1804-07, Oil on Canvas, 52.0 x 62.0 cm, Inv. no. R.F. 2002-16, Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.



**Right:** John F. Peto (1854–1907), *Old Souvenirs*, c. 1881-1901, Oil on Canvas, 67.9 x 55.9 cm, Inv. no. 68.205.3, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



John Haberle (1856-1933), *Imitation*, 1887, Oil on Canvas, 25.4 x 35.6 cm, Inv. No. 1998.96.1, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

### - Comparisons with earlier European Fans

In addition to architectural interiors, trompe-l'œil was liberally applied to eighteenth-century European fans. In this period, fans were part of the complex network of courtly behavior and aristocratic social codes, and were indispensable elements for coquetry. Such fans were made



with a variety of materials such as silk, lace, leather, parchment, and painted paper, with the fan guards ranging from mother of pearl, ivory, wood, and tortoiseshell. Additionally, fans could also be painted to resemble different materials such as a leather fan painted to resemble delicate lacework.

Fans were used daily but were also created to commemorate an event such as a wedding or a decisive battle. They were often purchased as tourist souvenirs as during this period, British aristocrats and artists in particular would go on the Grand Tour, a lengthy trip taken around Europe as part of the cultural education of the eighteenth-century British gentlemen.

Fans made frequent use of the *trompe-l'œil* techniques. The fan leaves would often depict famous sites from Italy, or offer a collage of different objects. The fan leaf reproduced below would have been purchased in Italy and the sticks would have been attached back home in England. One side of the fan is meant to resemble a desk scattered with paper. It shows overlapping drawings, pages from a book, ribbons and colored pearls with a cameo in the center. The design on the back shows overlapping letters, a musical sheet, and a drawing. These kind of *trompe-l'œil* fans were made in late eighteenth-century France, Italy and Austria. *Trompe-l'œil* in particular was identified with luxury trades and prized for their technical and artistic values.





Francesco Stagni, *Trompe-l'œil fan*, 1771, ivory sticks and guards with pierced gilt details, paint on chicken skin leaf, 28.4 x 52.0cm, inv. no. 1985-01-28, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK.

### - How to Remember through Images

Fans (such as the Italian fan above) are not collages, but are instead trompe-l'œils of a collage. While designs such as these were celebrated and collected for their amazing illusionary effects, during the French revolution, they took on a more insidious tone. A prime example is the distinct genre of image that became briefly popular after the Jacobin Terror, a turbulent and violent year in French history in which over 53,000 people were executed in the year from 1793 to 1794. With the fall of the Jacobin administration, earlier attempts at a French national paper currency were also devalued. Around this time, trompe-l'œil prints depicting layers of these monetary attempts (“assignats”) were briefly circulated. An example is provided here:



François Bonneville, *Painting of assignats with portraits of victims and profiteers (Tableau d'assignats avec portraits de victimes et de profiteurs)*, c. 1796, colored etching, 21.5 x 38.0 cm, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

In the above print, pristine, torn and dog-eared *assignats* are overlaid on top of each other, alongside laws, identity documents, and portraits of individuals that profited and suffered from these ambitious monetary attempts. In turn, the print offers an impression of a whole rather than parts—images are to be read in relation to one another not on their own. Prints such as these have been read alongside the French Revolutionary incidents in which *assignats* were gathered and ritually destroyed after the fall of the Jacobin political party. Additionally, they have been understood as nostalgic images that allowed the viewer to negotiate their own relationship with the traumatic and terrible national past. There is a tension in the above image between the destruction and ripping of the depicted sheets and the almost perfect trompe-l'œil technique of illusion.

Trompe-l'œils have been closely linked to the production of memory. The historian Rebecca Spang linked together money and memory in an article from 2005. Here, she drew upon the Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud's idea of repetition as a way of acting out the unconscious to propose an idea of the economic unconscious. In fact, during the French Revolution—as was the case with many other historical regimes—money was tied to lifecycles of individual and political systems.<sup>43</sup>

The trompe-l'œil also invites further theoretical considerations. The art historian Richard Taws, summarizing Norman Bryson, analyzed that in the context of the “tableau d'assignats” (the print illustrated above), the trompe-l'œil “asserts the autonomy of the deteriorating objects that constitute its subject matter for in trompe-l'œil we are led to see objects as they ‘really are’ when our backs are turned.”<sup>44</sup>

The French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, in his essay on “Trompe-l'œil” asserted that the technique invited self-reflection and enabled the unconscious to materialize. Trompe-l'œil thus became a method for an artist to demonstrate his own artistic prowess but also create a screen or a veil through which contemporaneous anxieties could be addressed and repeated. Baudrillard referred to trompe-l'œil as “enchanted simulation,” and stated the following:

“these objects are not objects. They do not describe a familiar reality, like a still life... These are...reappearances that haunt the emptiness of a scene. This seduction is not an aesthetic one, that of a painting and of a likeness, but an acute and metaphysical seduction, one derived from the nullification of the real.”<sup>45</sup>

Baudrillard also asserts that the trompe-l'œil offers a reality more than the real. and that it transforms “reality” into a staged world. In other words, by depicting an object in trompe-l'œil,

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<sup>43</sup> See Rebecca Spang, “The Ghost of Law: Speculating on Money, Memory, and Mississippi in the French Constituent Assembly.” *Historical Reflections/Réflexions historiques* special issue on “Money and the Enlightenment” 31:1 (winter 2005), 3-25.

<sup>44</sup> Richard Taws, *The Politics of the Provisional: Art and Ephemera in Revolutionary France* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), p. 148.

<sup>45</sup> Jean Baudrillard, and Mark Poster [ed], *Selected Writings* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2001), p. 157.



the object suddenly becomes a less truthful, a less real version of itself. In such a case, what we forget is that we are seeing an artist's skill of perspective and illusionism rather than the actual object itself. Baudrillard further formulated that the trompe-l'œil "undermine the world's certainty," adding, "The trompe-l'œil does not attempt to confuse itself with the real. Fully aware of play and artifice, it...question[s] the reality of the third dimension, and by mimicking and surpassing the effect of the real, radically questioning the principle of reality."<sup>46</sup>

Before we move onto contextualize this object within early twentieth-century Chinese history and aesthetics, the key question to consider is whether the Harvard fan leaves depict a collage or a trompe-l'œil or perhaps a different variation on the two genres? Additionally, what kind of a memory is this fan addressing, if at all? Is the fan a memory aide or an independent and physically functional object?

### **III: Putting the Fan in context**

In this section, we will look at the social and political context in which the fan was produced and treat *bapo* as a unique genre of the Chinese art history. The question is: under what social conditions did the *bapo* genre emerge?

#### **- An overview of early twentieth-century China**

Starting from the Opium War in 1840, China had experienced a long period of social turmoil, including the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) in the south, the burning and destruction of the Old Summer Palace Yuanming Yuan (1860) by the Eight-Nation Alliance, the self-strengthening movement (1861-95), the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), the Hundred Day's Reform (1898), the Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901), the occupation and looting of Beijing (1900), and the Xinhai Revolution that led to the downfall of the Qing dynasty in 1911. Most of these events took place in the capital Beijing and ended with failure, destruction, and humiliation.

The first decade of the Republican period was also marked by chaos. In 1912, the new government was established in Nanjing and Sun Yat-sen<sup>47</sup> became the first provisional president. It only lasted for about three months, and Sun was succeeded by Yuan Shikai<sup>48</sup>, the high military official of the Qing dynasty and the commander of the Beiyang New Army. Yuan moved the government to his military base in Beijing with an ambition to restore the monarchy. He and his followers resisted the revolution led by Sun Yat-sen and the Nationalist Party, and dissolved the parliament in 1914. In early 1915, Yuan accepted most unequal treaties sent by Japan, and attempted to strengthen his authority by reviving the old Chinese traditions. The political situation in Beijing became even worse when Yuan proclaimed himself as the new Hongxian Emperor in 1916. His reign received widespread objections from all over the country and only lasted over eighty days. After Yuan's death, his followers and military leaders controlled different provinces. They became warlords competing with each other, leading to the further

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>47</sup>In Chinese: 孙中山.

<sup>48</sup>In Chinese: 袁世凯.

fragmentation and turmoil in the society. It was not until the Nationalist Party's Northern Expedition (1926-28) led by Jiang Jieshi<sup>49</sup> (1887-1975) that China became unified again.

### - Bapo and Bogu:

Seldom mentioned in the discourse of Chinese art history, *ba*po has never caught much attention from art historians. Nancy Berliner in the US and Wan Qingli in Hong Kong are two major scholars among the very few who have studied this art type. According to Nancy Berliner, *Bapo* ("the eight broken")<sup>50</sup>, is a unique art form that spans from the late Qing dynasty to the Republican period, sometimes is also called *jipo* hua ("the auspicious broken or the gathered broken")<sup>51</sup>, *dafan zi zhi lou* (knock down a basket of written papers)<sup>52</sup>, *jinhuidui* ("dust pile of miscellaneous brocades")<sup>53</sup>, and *ji jin* ("gathered brocades")<sup>54</sup>. It is believed that *ba* ("eight") is an imagery number that represents abundance, and *po* ("broken") is within the Chinese tradition of auspiciousness, similar to the popular phrase "*sui sui ping an*" (peace and safe forever).<sup>55</sup>

Writer Zheng Yimei (1895-1992) once offered the following definition for the *Bapo* genre:

It is an artists' game. No matter a page from an old book, a fragment of the calligraphy model sheet, or official document, private note, and abolished contract, anything can be imitated to lifelike and becomes a painting. Therefore, it is also called "*da fan zi zhi lu*" (knock down a basket of written papers). However, if the basket of written papers was truly overthrown, it would become an orderless mess. Yet in *jinhuidui* things are intricately organized: some show the front some the back, some only have half of pages and some have folded corners; some seem to be burned, and others have creases. They all fully perform the sense of art that deserves to be appreciated. Artists without a high achievement would not be able to do this.<sup>56</sup>

Although many *ba*po paintings incorporate auspicious motifs, the most common subjects are stone and metal rubbings, calligraphies, fragments of famous paintings, old book pages, handwritten or printed documents, and even new western commodities. Like those on the Harvard fan, these motifs are stacked on the same plane of the painting surface, and often resemble traces of burning, tearing and folding. Sometimes the paper scraps and the rubbings would be arranged in symbolic forms.

*Bapo* had a short lifespan, and was only popular from the late Qing dynasty to the Republican period. *Bapo* is often seen as a response to the two dominant art trends of the time: Western realism and the *bogu* tradition. At the turn of the century, western art was no longer

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<sup>49</sup>In Chinese: 蒋介石.

<sup>50</sup>In Chinese: "八破".

<sup>51</sup>In Chinese: "集破画" or "吉破画".

<sup>52</sup>In Chinese: "打翻字纸篓".

<sup>53</sup>In Chinese: "锦灰堆".

<sup>54</sup>In Chinese: "集锦".

<sup>55</sup>In Chinese: "岁岁平安".

<sup>56</sup> Zheng Yimei 郑逸梅, *Zhen wen yuya wan 珍闻与雅玩*, Beijing: Beijing Press, 1998, p. 232. translation. by Kailin Weng (May, 2015).



unfamiliar. Western oil painting techniques had long been practiced in China, and photography was introduced after the Opium Wars and became increasingly popular. Wan Qingli and Nancy Berliner both argue about the implementation of Western techniques on *bapo* paintings. Berliner has further framed *bapo* painting as Chinese trompe-l'oeil. Additionally, *Bapo* has been read both as a call for a new aesthetic as well as a nostalgic grieving over Chinese art, culture and tradition.



**Left:** Wu Hua, *One of pair of Bapo ("The Eight Broken") paintings*, late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Qing Dynasty, ink and color on paper, 147.3 x 39.4 cm, Inv. no. 84.077.001 a. (Detail on the right)

Just as in the Dutch, American, or French trompe-l'œil examples, *bapo* played with the tension between flatness and three dimensionality. However, such realist representations were not originally endemic to Chinese art. With the arrival of Jesuit artists such as Giuseppe Castiglione, in the early eighteenth century, Western techniques of volume and perspective were increasingly practiced in imperial workshops. Additionally, under the Qianlong emperor, porcelain vessels imitating bronze or wood grains were also creating, indicating an interest in illusionism and forgery.

Chinese connoisseurs often categorized *bapo* under the seventeenth-century Bogu tradition. The term bogu indicates “plentiful antiquities,” or “conversant with ancient learning,”

and bogu emerged out of an obsession with the classical past. Bogu paintings sought to revive the interest in ancient artifacts and by extension, restoring ancient ways of earlier Chinese dynasties. In the early nineteenth century, a painting tradition called bogu huahui also became briefly popular in Shanghai. These paintings combined rubbings of ancient bronzes with images of auspicious flowers. These types of paintings featured well-known bronze models and were made by artists with connections to collectors of ancient bronze and ceramic vessels. However some artists would not rely on rubbings from existing vessels but painted new ones that were directly appropriated from older catalogues. The representation of antique bronzes in such images may signal a certain nostalgia, perhaps antiquarianism, which can be traced by to Tang Dynasty China and ritual reforms under Emperor *Huizong*. The example below shows a bogu huahui featuring rubbings of an ancient drinking cup called the jue.



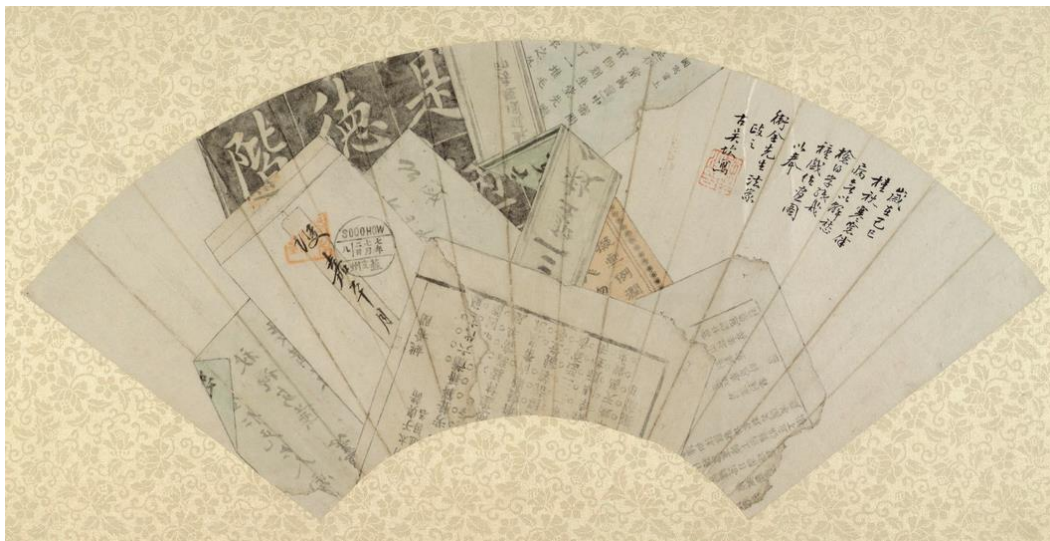
**Left:** Liu Fuchang, *Bogu huahui*, mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hanging Scroll, Wan-go H.C. Weng Collection

**Right:** *Drinking vessel (fu ding jue)*, ca. 13th-12th c B.C.E., Shang dynasty, 21.0 x 18.0 x 9.1 cm, Bronze, Inv. no. S1987.53, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington, D.C.

By comparisons, Bapo often depicted deteriorated state of papers and objects, unlike the pristine ink rubbings of Bogu paintings. Additionally, bapo was adapted onto porcelain, hanging scrolls, snuff boxes, bottles, and of course, fans. An example of a bapo snuff bottle and a bapo fan leaf are depicted below.



Ding Erzong, *An Inside-Painted Glass "Nanjing Documents" Snuff bottle*, 5.7 cm. Sotheby's Sale, Snuff Bottles from the Mary & George Bloch Collection: Part IV, 24 November 2014, lot no. 9. (Detail view on right)



Gu Wukan, *Waste Papers (fan leaf)*, 20<sup>th</sup> century, ink and light colors on paper, 22.5 x 47.9 cm, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY

Although Bapo objects were sometimes given as diplomatic gifts in the early twentieth century, bapo items were largely purchased by the middle class rather than the high literati. Bapo is particularly well preserved in snuff bottles as there were many collectors of snuff bottles in early twentieth century and not many collectors of bapo paintings.

The example above is a snuff bottle which features in clerical script a quotation of the beginning of *Yueyanglou ji* ("An account of the Yueyang Tower") by the Song writer and politician Fan Zhongyan (989-1052). The last image to consider in the context of this case study is a bapo fan leaf from roughly the same time as our object. Consider here whether the Harvard fan relates to either bapo or bogu tradition, or neither. What does it mean that the Bapo

disappeared so quickly? How do you think early twentieth-century Chinese history relates to the image? Can an object such as a fan ever be political?

### SUMMARY

Over the course of this case study, we have moved from the smallest details to the broadest historical contexts. We began by considering the ink rubbings, then moved to why the fan leaves look the way they do, and ended by considering similar objects produced in early twentieth-century China. Here, we have offered some visual, historical, social and even political possibilities of the fan. As a closing exercise, we invite you to revisit both sides of the fan. Do you think there is a connection between the two sides? Does the object still look familiar or unfamiliar to you?

### FINAL QUESTIONS

- Do you think all these objects depicted on the fan leaves create a narrative?
- What are the meanings created by the visual elements on the fan?
- Why was the fan made? Who was the fan made for?
- Does this object depart or align with the earlier literati traditions?
- What cultural, social, or political contexts might account for the *bapo* genre?
- What additional connections can you draw between this fan and the other eleven objects discussed earlier this term?

### TERMS

**Assemblage:** A collage with three-dimensional objects.

**Bapo:** (“Eight Broken”). It is a unique art style in the Chinese art history appeared from the latter half of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century that often paints objects in deteriorated and fragmented forms.

**Bogu:** A term meaning plentiful antiquities, Bogu was a seventeenth-century painting genre that often depicted antiquities.

**Collage:** An artistic technique that brings together parts of different images and objects to create a new whole.

**Fatie:** Rubbings of engraved models of calligraphy.

**Trompe-l'œil:** French for “fooling the eye” trompe-l'œil describes a method of painting that offers an illusion of reality, similar to a modern day photograph.

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