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# Introduction

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The book has grown out of material presented at the Summer Institute of Connoisseurship of Chinese Calligraphy and Painting at the University of Maryland, funded by a generous three-year grant from the Henry Luce Foundation. The Institute, which I directed, was held from 2001 to 2003. It was attended by scholars from Harvard University, Princeton University, The Ohio State University, the University of California at San Diego, the University of California at Los Angeles, the University of California at Santa Barbara, the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Maryland, as well as the Palace Museum in Beijing and the National Palace Museum in Taipei. The institute was established to provide intensive training in connoisseurship through firsthand experience with works of art in the Washington, D.C. area. The goal of the institute was to promote the study both of original works of art and of the fundamental problems in the connoisseurship of Chinese calligraphy and painting, and to enhance the quality of art-historical research and teaching.

As John Walsh, former director of the Getty Center, aptly put it in his convocation speech at the 1999 annual meeting of the College Art Association, one of the most important challenges facing art historians and museum professionals today is that graduate schools have produced art historians with serious weaknesses, particularly a lack of direct firsthand experience with original works of art. Indeed, in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Donald Preziosi and published in 1998, which was called by Norman Bryson of Harvard University “definitely the best introduction to art history currently available,” there is very little, if any, attention to connoisseurship.<sup>1</sup> Walsh called for closer cooperation between art history programs and museums in rectifying this deficiency in our education of both future art historians and museum professionals.

In this country, graduate programs in Chinese art in general and in Chinese calligraphy and painting in particular have not escaped this problem. In fact, many of our advanced graduate students and recent Ph.D.s in Chinese art have received very little, if any, formal training in connoisseurship; many of them could not decipher the cursive- and seal-script calligraphy of the inscriptions or colophons that accompany Chinese paintings, or of the legends of seals used by calligraphers, painters, and collectors, that are found on almost every Chinese painting. Thus, in many cases, they could not even identify important

information about the works of art, let alone make a sound judgment about their quality or authenticity. As to the nature of brushwork in Chinese calligraphy and painting, because new scholars rarely possess experience in creating calligraphy and painting with the pliant brush employed by Chinese calligraphers and painters, they often fail to see patterns in how Chinese calligraphers and painters make decisions and to connect these patterns to the art of the past. It is no surprise that connoisseurship in Chinese calligraphy and painting is often avoided not only by professors in art history but also by graduate students. It goes without saying that to construct art history out of artworks unproven as to their authorship and dates of production tends to produce a “history” without foundation and of little value. If we base our construction of art history on works of calligraphy and painting and on the inscriptions, colophons, and seal impressions that accompany them, we must first make sure of their authorship and identity.

Although the literature on connoisseurship written in Chinese is extensive, so far there is no publication, in any language, in which connoisseurship in Chinese painting and in European painting are discussed together. The only substantial publication in English on connoisseurship of Chinese painting, *Chinese Pictorial Art as Viewed by the Connoisseur* by Robert Hans van Gulik, was published in 1958 in Rome; the book was quite useful when first published but is now considered outdated by most scholars.<sup>2</sup> The other two publications, *Studies in Connoisseurship: Chinese Paintings from the Arthur M. Sackler Collection*, a catalog of an exhibition organized by Marilyn W. Fu and Shen C. Y. Fu (1976), and *Issues of Authenticity in Chinese Painting*, edited by Judith G. Smith and Wen C. Fong (1999), are limited to either works in the collection of a collector (Sackler) or a single painting (*Riverbank* attributed to Dong Yuan of the tenth century in The Metropolitan Museum of Art).<sup>3</sup>

In Chapter 1 (“Reflections on Connoisseurship of Chinese Calligraphy and Painting”), I review traditional Chinese connoisseurship in recent decades to provide the background for subsequent chapters. It is clear, from the rich array of recent Chinese publications on the subject, that scholars in China are acutely aware of the tradition of Chinese connoisseurship as well as the challenges facing today’s scholars, both within and without China. The essay by Cahill (Chapter 2: “Chinese Art and Authenticity”) opens the discussion with wide-ranging reflections on his lifelong experience as a curator, collector, and art historian of Chinese painting. He discusses various factors that bring into question the authenticity of some of the works ascribed to noted Chinese artists. His essay compares the Chinese attitude toward authenticity and forgery with that of Western scholars of Chinese painting and highlights the fundamental issues in

constructing the history of Chinese painting. Silbergeld's essay (Chapter 3: "Three Paradigms for the Consideration of Authenticity in Chinese Art") is, in part, an expansive response to Cahill's piece. Silbergeld addresses the problems inherent in authentication and in trying to understand important and complex art-historical puzzles.

The essay by Richard Spear (Chapter 4: "What Is an Original?") explores the various aspects of the meaning of an "original" work of art in the field of Baroque art. In response to the essays by Cahill and Silbergeld, he provides fascinating comparisons between the Chinese and European traditions of art-historical scholarship. The essay by John Brown (Chapter 5: "Connoisseurship: Conceptual and Epistemological Fundamentals") provides readers with a philosopher's perspective on the basic epistemological concepts in the practice of connoisseurship, with comments on the essays by Cahill and Silbergeld. In her "Afterword: Chinese Brushwork and the Well-Informed Eye" (Chapter 6), Karen Lang comments on all of the essays, exploring the historiography of art history as an academic discipline and the intellectual and philosophical implications of the essays.

These essays, except Lang's "Afterword," were either presented or discussed extensively at the Summer Institute of Connoisseurship of Chinese Calligraphy and Painting at the University of Maryland. It is my hope that this book will encourage reasoned discussion among scholars, art historians, and curators in Chinese art in particular and those in the history of world art in general about fundamental issues in the study of art connoisseurship.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Donald Preziosi, ed., *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> R. H. van Gulik, *Chinese Pictorial Art as Viewed by the Connoisseur* (Rome: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1958).

<sup>3</sup> Marilyn Fu and Shen Fu, *Studies in Connoisseurship: Chinese Paintings from the Arthur M. Sackler Collection in New York and Princeton* (Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1973); Judith Smith and Wen C. Fong, eds., *Issues of Authenticity in Chinese Painting* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999).