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LIU E AND THE WORLD OF A LATE QING COLLECTOR¹

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Taking pleasure in objects will serve to undermine the will (*Wan wu sang zhi* 玩物喪志).²

Of the many newfangled forms of expression that developed in the crucible that was mid-to-late-nineteenth century China, especially in Shanghai, one was a new style or genre of art. In essence a form of painting that posed as collage, it was known in Chinese by a variety of names, including “Paintings of the Eight Broken” (*Bapo tu* 八破圖) or “Pile of Brocade Ashes” (*Jinhuidui* 錦灰堆), and juxtaposed representations of both brushed and printed Chinese characters in a manner that remains at once both

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- 1 An initial statement of some of the ideas discussed below was presented as part of a public lecture entitled “National Collections, National Stories: China and New Zealand” delivered at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in 2014. I would like to take this opportunity to thank both Michael Houlihan, then Chief Executive of Te Papa, for inviting me to give this talk, and Wen Powles, then Te Papa’s International Strategy Advisor, for having suggested to him that I might be invited to do so. An expanded version of that talk was presented at the 22nd Biennial NZASIA International Conference held at the University of Otago in November, 2017, as part of a panel entitled: “Cultures of Collecting: Collecting Culture in late-Qing and Republican China”; I thank my fellow panellists (Richard Bullen, Xiongbo Shi, and James Beattie) for their various responses to my paper. In working on this present version of the paper, the (all too) occasional conversation about Liu E’s great 1905 *fin de siècle* novel *The Travels of Old Derelict* (*Lao can youji* 老殘遊記) with Richard Rigby, an ex-colleague at the Australian National University, has returned to mind. I am also grateful to the two anonymous reviewers of this paper for their insightful comments. Unless otherwise noted, all translations found in this paper are my own.
 - 2 This epigraph is occasionally attributed to the Song Dynasty Neo-Confucian scholar Cheng Hao 程顥 (1030-1085); in actual fact, it derives initially from the “Lü ao” 旅獒 [Hounds of Lü] chapter of the “Zhoushu” 周書 [Book of Zhou] section of the *Shangshu* 尚書 [Book of Documents], for which see James Legge, trans., *The Chinese Classics: Volume III: The Shoo King* (1865; rpt. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), Vol. 3, p. 348 and his translation: “...by finding his amusement in things he ruins his aims”. As Wai-ye Li illustrates in her article “The Collector, the Connoisseur, and Late-Ming Sensibility”, *T’oung Pao* 2nd series 81.4/5 (1995): 273, the context of the phrase is a memorial to the Zhou ruler that makes the distinction between “unusual objects” (*yiwu* 異物) and “useable objects” (*yongwu* 用物) and the “baleful consequences of enjoying the former”.

extraordinarily beautiful and profoundly disturbing.³ In the earliest English-language treatment of this genre of art, Nancy Berliner provides a description of the examples that she has examined:

Common features of these works are the depiction of a variety of inscribed papers with a range of calligraphic styles. Rubbings of calligraphy, pages of printed books, seals, scraps of letters, paintings and other miscellaneous ephemera, all torn, burnt or partially destroyed, are assembled in compositions.... The paper scraps are almost always depicted on the same plane as the painting's surface.... The images are intentionally painted as if to appear pasted onto the surface, an attempt to deceive the viewer's eye...⁴

In a later treatment of the topic, Berliner suggests some connections between this artistic development and its specific historical context: "In the mid-nineteenth century, when Chinese society was in the process of being profoundly altered by technological innovations, Western fashions, and a commercial revolution, as well as being wracked by internal rebellions of extreme violence, a new painting genre was developed.... As well as the somber works mourning the decline of Chinese traditions and culture, there were colorful arrangements of auspicious images representing longevity and prosperity...*Bapo* became a medium for the expression of a myriad philosophies and sentiments."⁵

This newly-developing style of painting embodies a profound engagement with (and anxiety about) issues to do with the materiality of textual and artistic transmission

3 They were also known as "Assembled Broken" or "Broken Luck" (both pronounced *Jipo* but with the first character substituted as in: 集破/吉破), "Assembled Treasures" (*Jizhen* 集珍), or "Overturned Wastepaper Baskets" (*Dafan zizhi lou* 打翻字紙簍). Significantly, in terms of the themes developed in this paper, this genre of painting was also referred to as "Broken-off Letters and Incomplete Writings" (*Duan jian can pian* 斷簡殘篇). The Australian novelist and literary scholar Nicholas Jose takes *Bapo* as the title of his recent collection of stories, with the following explanation: "*Bapo* is an aesthetic of illusion and salvage, of creative retrieval from the destructions of grand historical progress. As a kind of writer's *bapo*, this book is an assemblage of stories that are infected by China, some directly, in content, others indirectly." For which, see *Bapo* (Artarmon: Giramondo, 2014), p. 2.

4 See Nancy Berliner, "The 'Eight Broken': Chinese Trompe-l'oeil Painting," *Orientations*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (February 1992): 61-70 (this quotation, p. 61). One of the images accompanying Berliner's article, a fan painting attributed to the artist Chen Erzhi 陳二指 ("Two-finger Chen") and dated either 1825 or 1885, p. 69, includes the depiction of a torn slip of paper brushed with the phrase "Hugging the Remnants and Preserving the Fragmentary" (*Bao can shou que* 抱殘守缺), a saying that derives from a memorial written by the Han dynasty classicist and librarian Liu Xin 劉歆 (d. 23) (entitled "Yi shu rang taichang boshi shu" 移書讓太常博士書) and which was adopted, as we shall see, by the protagonist of my paper as one of his most frequently employed pennames.

5 "Questions of authorship in *bapo*: Trompe l'oeil in twentieth-century Shanghai", *Apollo*, March 1998, pp. 17-18. A small exhibition of *Bapo*, the first ever such exhibition beyond China's shores, recently closed at the Museum of Fine arts, Boston, curated by Berliner, the Wu Tung Curator of Chinese Art with the museum.

at a time when all the seemingly eternal verities of the Chinese literary and cultural world were under threat, threats both internally generated and externally imposed. As such, it is a genre of painting that serves also as an appropriate and more general metaphor for an uncertain age of transition, and for that remarkable generation of Chinese scholars who sought to make some sense of that restless world they inhabited. One such transitional figure was the late Qing dynasty writer Liu E 劉鶚 (1857-1909).⁶ Nowadays, Liu E seems best known for his “autobiographical fiction” (as Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 once termed it) *The Travels of Old Decrepid* (or *Old Decadent*), or perhaps *The Travels of Old Titbits* (*Lao can youji* 老殘遊記),⁷ which appeared serially in 1905, and which is commonly regarded as amongst the finest vernacular novels of the age.⁸ Published under a pseudonym, the true identity of its authorship only having been publicly established by Hu Shi 胡適 (1891-1962) in 1925, it is a novel that is held to be, at once, also China’s “first political novel”, as C.T. Hsia labelled it, the “last classic Chinese novel,” as another scholar has put it, or, in the words of the Czech scholar Jaroslav Průšek, “the last great apologia of the old Chinese civilization before

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- 6 For a short English-language biography, by Fang Chao-ying, see A.W. Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644-1912)* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943) (hereafter, *ECCP*), pp. 516-518. In Chinese, see particularly Jiang Yixue 蔣逸雪, *Liu E nianpu* 劉鶚年譜 [Chronological Biography of Liu E] (Jinan: Qi Lu shushe, 1981). See also the biography in Wen yuan-ning, *Imperfect Understanding: Intimate Portraits of Chinese Celebrities* (1935; Cambria, forthcoming). Over the course of his life, Liu E made use of some 40 pseudonyms. For a listing, see *Liu E ji* 劉鶚集 [Collected Works of Liu E] (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe), Vol.1, pp. 770-771.
- 7 How to translate the nickname of the novel’s protagonist, and therefore the title of the novel itself, is a problem. Qian Zhongshu (C.S. Ch’ien) discusses the issue in his article “A Note to the Second Chapter of *Mr Decadent*”, *Philobiblon*, II.3 (1948): 8-14. See also Timothy C. Wong, “The Name ‘Lao Ts’an’ in Liu E’s Fiction”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 109.1 (1989): 103-106.
- 8 As with so many Chinese novels, both traditional and modern, the publication details of *Old Decrepid* and its sequels are complicated. In perhaps the best treatment of the issues involved, Timothy Wong concludes that Chapters 1-10, and 12-14 (of what he labels the “Text Proper;” or, in Chinese, “Chubian” 初編) were published in *Fiction Illustrated* (*Xiuxiang xiaoshuo* 繡象小說) between September, 1903-January, 1904, Chapters 1-10 then having been republished in the *Tianjin Daily News* (*Riri xinwen bao* 日日新聞報), the “Sequel” (“Erbian” 二編) of nine chapters, including a re-written Chapter 11 that had been excised from the earlier publication, in 1904, leaving unpublished in his lifetime a sixteen-page long “Fragment” (“Waibian” 外編), for which, see his “Notes on the Textual History of the *Lao Ts’an yu-chi*”, *T’oung Pao*, 2nd series 69. 1-3 (1983): 23-32. In *Renditions*, 32 (1989): 20-45, Timothy Wong offers a translation of the Sequel to the novel. When first published, the novel was divided into fascicles (*juan* 卷) rather than chapters (*hui* 回), and, in traditional manner, was unpunctuated. For a brief recent treatment of the print cultural context of Liu E’s novel, see Xia Xiaohong and Chen Pingyuan (as translated by Michael Gibbs Hill), “In Lithographic Journals, Text and Image Flourish on the Same Page,” in David Der-Wei Wang, ed., *A New Literary History of Modern China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017), pp. 125-133.

its fall”.⁹ Liu E, however, was also a scholar of some considerable note, with particular interests in mathematics, musicology, traditional herbal medicine, and hydrology (all fields in which he published). He was also over the course of his life and at different times a failed businessman (often in co-operation with prospective foreign investors), a sometime official for and expert in river conservancy, a committed follower of the socially engaged and philosophically eclectic Taigu School 太谷學派,¹⁰ perhaps the

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- 9 For which, see, respectively, C.T. Hsia, “*The Travels of Lao Ts’an: An Exploration of its Art and Meaning*”, *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies*, n.s. 7.2 (1969): 40-68; Shuen-fu Lin, “The Last Classic Chinese Novel: Vision and Design in *The Travels of Laocan*”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 121.4 (2001): 549-564; and Jaroslav Průšek, *Chinese History and Literature* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing, 1970), p. 145. On the novel, in English, see also Henry Lem, “Fact and Fiction: Liu E’s Treatment of Characters in *The Travels of Lao Can*”, *PSU McNair Scholars Online Journal*, 5.1 (2011): 86-154; and Donald Holoch, “*The Travels of Laocan: Allegorical Narrative*”, in Milena Doleželová-Velingerová, ed., *The Chinese Novel at the Turn of the Century* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp. 129-149. See also Luke S.K. Kwong, “Self and Society in Modern China: Liu E (1857-1909) and ‘Laocan youji’”, *T’oung Pao*, 2nd series 87.4/5 (2001): 360-392. Although I find myself disagreeing with Holoch’s analysis of the novel, I do agree, more generally, with what he labels Liu E’s “complex and sophisticated conservatism” (p. 146); the central argument of this paper seeks to illustrate the extent to which Holoch’s claim that Liu E’s “...conservative impulse in a dynamic historical context led to aesthetic innovation” can also be said to characterise his activities as a collector and scholar.
- 10 Founded by Zhou Taigu 周太谷 (d. 1832), this mystical and folk religious sect of late imperial Confucianism is also known as the Great Perfection (大成教) or the Yellow Cliff teaching (黃崖教). For a discussion of this dimension of Liu E’s life, see Timothy C. Wong, “Liu E in the Fang-shih Tradition”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 112.2 (1992): 302-306. To Liu E’s mind, the two essential tenets of the sect were “Providing for the livelihood of the folk” (*yang min* 養民) and “Providing for the education of the folk” (*jiao min* 教民). In a letter to close friend and fellow sect member, Huang Baonian 黃葆年 (*jinshi* 1903), dated 1902, Liu E writes: “The general program of sagely efforts is nothing other than these two paths, providing for the education of the folk and for their livelihoods. You, for your part, have taken on the responsibility to educating the minds of All-Under-Heaven, whereas I have accepted responsibility for providing for their livelihoods. We each of us exert all our efforts for such purpose, supporting each other in our various enterprises (聖功大綱不外教養兩途公以教天下為己任弟以養天下為己任各竭心力互相扶掖為之), for which, see Liu Delong, Zhu Xi, and Liu Deping, eds., *Liu E ji laocan youji ziliao*, p. 300. Earlier in the letter, Liu E bemoans the state of the times: “The ordinary man must shoulder the responsibility for the wellbeing of All-Under-Heaven. The great sickness of our state at present is that the folk have lost their livelihoods. The various nations take usury as their mission, the court exploitation as their task, and the pressure on the folk is unendurable. When hard pressed, the minds of the folk turn to instigating chaos” (天下之安危匹夫與有責焉今日國之大病在民失其養各國以盤剝為宗朝廷以股削為事民不堪矣民困思亂). Liu E gives poetic expression to his commitment to the commonweal in an undated poem entitled “New Year’s Eve” (“Chuxi” 除夕) that reads: “The earth’s surface cracks as North Wind blows./ In bleak sadness does this old year go./ “No more rice!” the servant cries./ “Where’s my money?” my creditor claims./ The starving crows in evening’s snow caw./ A solitary goose through frosty mist soars./ If such now are to be my circumstances./ Then piteous indeed is the plight of my fellow man,” for which, see Liu Delong, Zhu Xi, and Liu Deping, eds., *Liu E ji laocan youji ziliao*, p. 46. Note that, in Chapter Twelve of

last great traditional Chinese poet,¹¹ and one of the earliest collectors (and readers) of the Oracle Bones (*Jiagu* 甲骨) that had then been recently unearthed and which are now understood to be incised with the earliest extant examples of the Chinese writing system. In this paper, it is with aspects of Liu E's labours within the collecting world of a late imperial China that I am concerned, understood through a reading, particularly, of his private dairies. However much Liu E seems to have embraced the possibilities presented (both himself personally and the nation generally) by the rapidly changing social, political, and economic circumstances of an empire on the cusp of final dynastic collapse, his habits as a collector seem timeless in their emotional and intellectual engagements with the objects of China's distant past. And yet, as I hope to show below, in contrast to the traditional connotations attributed to my epigraph, the extent to which any attention given to "unusual objects" invariably distracted one from the proper concerns of life, as well as offering Liu E the occasional respite from his otherwise busy life, his activities as a collector appear to have awoken in him an intense curiosity in the rapidly transforming world around him, and tied him into a network of socially and politically engaged reformist scholars. Quite apart from other considerations, for instance, he was intent in harnessing a variety of new technologies of publication to make in private collections of objects more widely available to like-minded scholars.

It is a melancholic truism that great private collections (of antiques, books, painting, calligraphy) tend to be assembled by rich and/or powerful men during the worst of times. This is a circumstance long recognized in the Chinese tradition, and perhaps its most famous expression is that of the great Northern Song dynasty scholar Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072), a man who certainly inhabited difficult times, in the "Preface to the Colophons" of his *Record of the Gathered Past* (*Jigu lu* 集古錄):¹²

10 (*cit.*) *The Travels of Old Decrepid*, Old Decrepid cites the first couplet of Xie Lingyun's 謝靈運 (385-433) poem "Year's End" ("Sui mu" 歲暮) that goes, in the translation of Harold Shadick, "Clear moon lights up snow drifts,/ North wind strong and doleful" (明月照積雪北風顛且哀), for which, see Harold Shadick, trans., *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952), p. 132. Towards the end of the chapter, Old Decrepid writes a poem, the first line of which reads (again in Harold Shadick's translation: "The earth cracks; the north wind howls" (地裂北風號) (p. 140). I should note here that Shadick's translation of the novel is far superior to the severely truncated version of Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, *The Travels of Lao Can* (Beijing: Panda Books, 1983).

11 For which, see Jonathan Chaves, "Translations from Liu E", *The Hudson Review*, 36.2 (1983): 279-286; "[His] poems are among the finest to be written in the classical manner so late in Chinese history; there is a freshness and authenticity about them which earn Liu E the right to be considered one of the few novelists who is equally adept at poetry" (p. 279).

12 On Ouyang Xiu and his collection, see Ronald Egan, *The Problem of Beauty: Aesthetic Thought and Pursuits in Northern Song Dynasty China* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 7-60; and Duncan M. Campbell, Timothy Cronin, and Cindy Ho, trans., "Passages from Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修, *A Record of Collected Antiquity Jigu lu* 集古錄", *China Heritage Quarterly*, No. 24 (December, 2010). See also, importantly, Yun-chiahn C. Sena, "Ouyang Xiu's Conceptual Collection of Antiquity"; and Ya-hwei Hsu, "Antiquaries and Politics: Antiquarian Culture the Northern Song, 960-1127", both in Alain Schnapp, ed., *World Antiquarianism: Comparative Perspectives* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2013), pp. 212-229 and 230-248, respectively.

Although objects frequently accumulate around those who love them, they revert permanently however only to those who possess also, powerfully, the wherewithal to acquire them. For those with the wherewithal but not the love, or the love but not the wherewithal, even when objects are within reach and easy to obtain, possession of such objects will be beyond their abilities.

物常聚於所好而常得於有力之彊有力而不好好之而無力雖近且易有不能致之

Liu E's age was certainly an unsettled one. He was born (in 1857) into exile (in Liuhe County 六合縣, north of the Yangtze River and close to Nanking, rather than to the river's south in Dantu where the family had settled many generations earlier) at the height of the most destructive civil war in human history, the Taiping Rebellion (1852-1864),¹³ a rebellion that for more than a decade visited death and destruction on Jiangnan 江南, traditional China's social, scholarly, and cultural heartland. Sadly, Liu E was also to die in exile, in 1909, in Ili 迪化 (present day Urumqi 烏魯木齊) in Xinjiang, a year after he had been escorted there under accusation, retrospectively, of having profiteered during the Boxer Uprising and the raising of the Siege of the Legations in 1900 by the troops of the Eight-Nation Alliance (八國聯軍).¹⁴ Because the circumstances of the times had led to the enforced breakup of existing private collections (in both southern and northern China), and despite long-standing warnings about the dangers of becoming too obsessed with the accumulation of collections of things, collecting as a practice, both private and imperial, appears to have intensified during the late years of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), across all the various ethnic divides that were such a characteristic feature of the empire. Although Liu E was never to be especially powerful, he did become, occasionally and in somewhat uncertain circumstances,¹⁵ immensely rich, on the basis of which he assembled extraordinary collections (of paintings and calligraphy, coins, pottery, roof tiles, clay seal imprints, and, famously, oracle bones), housed variously in the residences he maintained in Peking, Nanking, Shanghai and Soochow for this purpose. Liu E's collections are ones that are lent additional levels of significance by two particular coincidences of timing. On the one hand, he assembled his collections at a moment during which the Chinese earth was beginning to offer up an entirely new type of material that, once

13 On which, see (for a general narrative account) Stephen R. Platt, *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom: China, the West, and the Epic Story of the Taiping Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012); and (for a more nuanced and detailed examination of the losses of life and property incurred) Tobie Meyer-Fong, *What Remains: Coming to Terms with Civil War in 19th Century China* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013).

14 Liu E's crimes, as stated, were: "Monopolising mining profits, illegal sale of granary rice, private establishment of a salt transport company, conspiring with foreigners, and so on" (壟斷礦利盜賣倉米私設鹽運社勾結外人等).

15 The accusations later levelled against him were that he had been made suddenly rich by trafficking in grain in a starving Peking immediately after the suppression of the Boxer Uprising. More favorable interpretations of his actions at this time suggest that, as well as sponsoring the burial of corpses throughout the city, Liu E negotiated with the Russian troops for the release of rice from the granaries that they were about to put to flame.

properly understood and interpreted, would reshape forever the understanding of the development of the Chinese writing system and, in doing so, prove also the historicity of the Shang or Yin dynasty (ca. 1600-1046 BCE). On the other hand, he assembled his collections during years that are now recognised as an early major phase of the tragic flow overseas of Chinese art, antiques and artifacts, a process that was to continue for much of the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁶

Linguistically, Liu E's literary output serves to complicate that powerful but flawed story of the battle between the vernacular and classical Chinese that was to be played out over the course of the decade after Liu E's death—he was the first man to have read both the past, the present, and the future of the Chinese linguistic spectrum.¹⁷ His life and work (both scholarly and in terms of his entrepreneurship and advocacy of railways and mining in particular), also, complicate the more general narrative about the stark choices that presented themselves to Chinese intellectuals of Liu E's generation between the past and the future, Chinese and foreign modes of thought and action. Just as Liu E moves easily and fluently between the classical and the vernacular languages, so too does he interact effectively with foreigners of all kinds then working in China. It forces us, once again, to re-think our acknowledgment of the levels of indigenous agency amongst late-Qing literary and official circles. In general terms, recent years have seen

16 Critical in this process, in terms of the acquisition by individuals and museums in the United States of America of Chinese part and objects, was John C. Ferguson (1866-1945), a sometime acquaintance of Liu E, on who, recently, see Lara Jaishree Netting, *A Perpetual Fire: John C. Ferguson and His Quest for Chinese Art and Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013). I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer of this paper for pointing out that Ferguson was also responsible for acquiring and gifting to Nanking University a large collection of artwork, explicitly in order that it not leave China.

17 Qian Zhongshu, speaking of perhaps the most famous passage from Liu E's novel where, in Chapter Two, he describes the sound of Little Jade singing, concludes: "...this description of music which, with a modern Chinese writer disinherited of our literary tradition, would be an attempt to raise prose to poetry, is, with a man of Liu E's education and cultural background, clearly an experiment to acclimatise poetry in prose. He made *baihua* prose do the work that hitherto, from Bo Juyi to Wang Yimin, been reserved for *wenli* poetry, and succeeded wonderfully. It is not merely a case of *reddiderit junctura*, making an old thing new by transposing it into a new setting, but a veritable contest of media as well as a transformation of genres", for which, see "A Note to the Second Chapter of *Mr Decadent*", *Philobiblon*, II.3 (1948): 14 (Romanisation altered). See also, Shang Wei, "Writing and Speech: Rethinking the Issue of Vernaculars in Early Modern China," in Benjamin A. Elman, ed., *Rethinking East Asian Languages, Vernaculars, and Literatures, 1000-1919* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2014), pp. 245-301, where he argues that "...in the end, the vernacularization movement did not occur exactly as the May Fourth intellectuals claimed, and this misguided and misrepresented linguistic revolution offers us a fitting perspective on the unique path China took toward becoming a modern state: instead of breaking into multiple nation-states, it was transformed into a 'nation' within the inherited frame of the early modern empire" (p. 296). For a more general survey of the linguistic circumstances during this period of Chinese history, see Elisabeth Kaske, *The Politics of Language in Chinese Education, 1895-1919* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008). As reported by Hu Shi, his fellow May Fourth advocate of the replacement of the classical Chinese language by the vernacular, Qian Xuantong 錢玄同 (1887-1939), labelled Liu E as a "muddle-headed progressive fogey" (老新黨頭腦不清), for which, see Luke Kwong, "Self and Society in Modern China: Liu E (1857-1909) and 'Laocan youji'", p. 385.

some excellent work done on both the history of collecting in China and the intersection between the process of collecting and the development of new scholarly disciplines and endeavors;¹⁸ in this paper and on the basis of a reading of Liu's literary (rather than novelistic) output, I seek to read Liu E back into these interconnected fields of activity in a somewhat fuller way than has been the case hitherto. In doing so, in a context in which we are witnessing in China something of a resistance to, indeed rejection of, imported Western disciplines within a political and cultural context increasingly susceptible to the temptations of cultural nationalism, I hope to complicate the possibility of an unproblematic return to nativist traditions of scholarship.¹⁹ That is, close attendance to

18 See, particularly, Shana J. Brown, *Pastimes: From Art and Antiquarianism to Modern Chinese Historiography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011); Paola Demattè, "Emperors and Scholars: Collecting Culture and Late Imperial Antiquarianism", in Vimalin Rujivacharakul, ed., *Collecting China: The World, China, and a History of Collecting* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), pp. 165-175; and the two of the other China-focused articles in Alain Schnapp, ed., *World Antiquarianism: Comparative Perspectives*, Lothar von Falkenhausen, "Antiquarianism in East Asia: A Preliminary Overview"; and Qianshen Bai, "Antiquarianism in a Time of Crisis: On the Collecting Practices of Late-Qing Government Officials, 1861-1911," pp. 35-66 and 386-403, respectively. Demattè concludes that "... global modernising influences certainly influenced the development of modern archaeology in China, but this transformation in fact happened within the parameters set up by local traditions of antiquarianism and historical studies" (p. 174). Falkenhausen, for his part, argues: "Thirty years ago, it... seemed safe to predict that in China modern archaeology would replace antiquarianism within a generation. But changing historical circumstances have produced a new climate in which antiquarianism has crept back into fashion. Scientific archaeology now has to contend in the public and academic realms with a connoisseurial interest in the material heritage of the past uninformed by the concern with context that is at the center of a properly archaeological approach to the traces of history. This retrogression to protoscientific *wangu* [玩古 "treating antiquity as a plaything"] answers to the desires of the collecting public in the wake of China's ongoing economic boom. In the vernacular realm, a similarly superficial appropriation of the forms of the of the past manifests itself through the pervasive use of ancient styles and decoration patterns in contemporary Chinese architecture and design, where they uneasily coexist side by side with the hallmarks of uncompromising modernity" (p. 56).

19 Representative of this trend, for present purposes, is a recent article by Wang Xuedian 王學典, the Professor of History and Dean of the Advanced Institute for Confucian Studies at Shandong University, entitled "Where is China Headed? New Tendencies in the Humanities and Social Sciences" (*Journal of Chinese Humanities*, 3 (2017): 156-176) where he concludes: "A grave concern in using modern academic categories to study Chinese humanities is that it leads to a dismemberment of classical Chinese scholarship and thought. For example, are Confucius's *Analects* history? Literature? Philosophy? Or maybe politics? Anyone even superficially familiar with the text will recognize that it is all of the above and does not fit nicely into any one of these categories. To take more examples from traditional Chinese learning, where should playing musical instruments and chess or doing calligraphy and painting, or even the classics or masters divisions of the *Sibu* system, be placed in the modern academic disciplines? The current disciplinary division forces a structure on the study of traditional Chinese culture that, until its introduction in the early twentieth century, simply did not exist: Confucian studies were comprehensive and holistic. The Chinese, philosophy, and history departments research Confucianism in their own specialized way, and in practice their work remains divided. The current disciplinary division has imposed an unquestioned structure to the study of Confucian thought that leads to the dismemberment of a previously unitary whole. Therefore, an important problem that all academics engaged in Confucian and national studies have to resolve is the limitation imposed by the current departmental division" (p. 176).

the work Liu E undertook as a collector, and both the languages and vocabulary that he employed in the course of this work, serves to complicate both a simplistic narrative of the rupture between the old and the new in early twentieth-century China, but equally the similarly simplistic (and state-sponsored) narrative about the re-appropriation of that once rejected past in contemporary early twenty-first-century China.

Perhaps we should now enter Liu E's particular world through his own words. In two undated poems in his posthumously published collection of poetry, we find him reflecting on both the allure of collecting and its dangers:

What I Have Intently on My Mind

All day long I fondle these most ancient of bronzes,
Occasionally, as I sit idly here, their elegance seems boundless.
Outside my window, the tree's shadow purloins the rays of the moon,
Inside my chamber, the scent of the flowers requires no breeze.
Reading my paintings, so deep the night that the fish-shaped locks grow cold,
Collating a stele inscription, so long the day that my lamp glows red.
In future years, if I am to be granted a joyful longevity,
Then doubtless there will be those who will call me an old book worm.

遣興

終日摩挲上古銅
有時間坐味無窮
窗前樹影偷遮月
屋裏花香不借風
讀畫夜深魚鑰冷
校碑晝永臘燈紅
他年若享期頤壽
應有人呼老蛀蟲

Laughing at Myself

Old Master Iron loves antiquity as much as he loves sex,
Broad-minded is his connoisseurship, profound his laughter.
In goose formation do the antique demons arrive,
A pile enough to break an ox's back now spread out beside my chair.
At dawn, I open up a scroll, and nightfall finds me sitting still,
Selecting the best on offer and disputing the price.
Prices low or high, regardless, sometimes no agreement can be struck,
But awake or asleep, that rough-hewn arrowhead really must be mine.
Shang beakers and Zhou tripods, stelae of the Qin and Han,
Famous scrolls of the Tang, the Song, the Yuan, and the Ming.
My collection includes fine editions and palace imprints,
Strewn across my bed or piled high upon my shelves.
By day I go searching, by night I polish,
Exhausted of spirit only once my bag is full,
As my creditors, in numbers, press upon me hard.

Alas!

Although my heart is not yet sated, my wherewithal is gone,
Now it is, my good sir, that you really need to rest.

自嘲

鐵公好古如好色
鑑賞寬宏笑深刻
骨董鬼子雁行來
抱負牛腰橫座側
清晨舒卷至日昃
揀選精英論價值
低昂有時未即就
寤寐碌碌思必得
商彝周鼎秦漢碑
唐宋元明名翰墨
家藏精刊殿板書
橫床插架勢劣崩
晝日搜羅夜拂拭
精神疲敝囊橐空
債主紛紜漸相逼
嗚呼
心雖未斃力已窮
此時先生得少息²⁰

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- 20 See Liu Delong, Zhu Xi, and Liu Deping, eds., *Liu E ji laocan youji ziliao*, pp. 47-48 and 49-50, respectively. The original title given the collection by the author was *Poetic Drafts from the Chamber of the Pundarika* (*Fentuoli shi shigao* 芬陀利室詩稿). It was first published only in 1980, after having been collected and edited by Liu E's grandson Liu Huisun 劉蕙孫, at which point it was given this present title. The *pundarika* is the white lotus. The eighth and coldest hell of Buddhism is named after this flower, as the exposed bones of those consigned to this realm are said to resemble the colour of the flower. Jonathan Chaves translated a selection of seven of Liu E's poems in *The Hudson Review*, 36.2 (1983): 279-286, not including either of these poems. Liu E prefaces this collection in this way: "When young, frequent illness interrupted my studies, and so my knowledge of both prose and poetry remained shallow. In middle age, emaciated of frame, I have been forced to scurry from one quarter of the empire to another, and have thus further neglected my studies. But perhaps I should not blame my circumstances entirely, for a certain reluctance to study seems also to be my natural disposition. Now all of a sudden, I find myself to be where I am at the age of forty, no longer worthy of being 'held in awe.' Success? Literary achievement? What possibly can I hope for now? Whenever the spirit catches me, however, I find myself chanting a song, striving neither for excellence, for talent is certainly lacking, nor indeed even for proficiency. In no particular chronological sequence, I record these poems below, simply for my own amusement. On the first full moon of the first month of the *Bingshen* year [1896], I happened to draft this preface" (p. 43). The locution 'held in awe' is a reference to *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), IX.23: "The Master said: 'One should regard the young with awe: how do you know that the next generation will not equal the present one? If, however, by the age of forty or fifty, a man has not made a name for himself, he no longer deserves to be taken seriously,'" for which, see Simon Leys, trans., *The Analects of Confucius* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1997), p. 42.

Or here, from an entry in his diary, we find him sitting amongst his collection in Peking and reflecting on the life of a collector.

28th Day, 7th Month, the *Renyin* year (1902): An overcast day, punctuated by the occasional short shower of light rain. I had no engagements planned for the entire day, and no one happened to pay a call on me. I discharged my idle tranquillity (*qingxian jingyi* 清閑靜逸) by copying out several calligraphic models and reading a few chapters of a book. Suddenly, I found myself reflecting on the fact that this joyful circumstance (*lejing* 樂境) was one that I had seldom experienced before. At the very most a man is granted some seventy or eighty years of life. Once his youth has departed, he becomes, by necessity, intent upon making his fame and fortune, only to find that in old age his ears, his eyes, his hands, and his feet seem no longer fit for purpose. During the thirty to forty or so years in between such stages in life, he is burdened by the cares of family and by the obligation of providing food and clothing; each day he bustles around, in wind and in dust, frequently in vain pursuit of trifling profit. How very difficult it is, then, to find an amount of surplus money in order to collect the books, the calligraphy, the bronzes and stele of the ancients. Furthermore, even when one does have such funds at hand, these things prove not as easy to get hold of as gold, white jade, fine brocade from Zhejiang or damask from Jiangsu. And even once one has managed to collect such treasures from antiquity, the annoyances of one's social obligations, and the usual pandemonium of family life, mean that from dawn to late at night not an idle moment is afforded one to fondle and to appreciate them (*mosuo er wanshang* 摩挲而玩賞). How very few have been days of my life such as today. Alas! I have an album of Huang Zuotian's²¹ 黃左田 containing four leaves each of his painting and his calligraphy and which I had acquired in the *Gengzi* year [1900]. I have had not a moment to take a second look at it until today. When I did finally open it up, it was like meeting with a long-lost friend, and I was overcome by the sense of regret that we had been parted so long. Why then have I so thoughtlessly exhausted myself in pursuit of these things, building up such huge levels of debt in doing so? I pledge, therefore, from this day onwards to eschew this habit, unless the object in question is one that occasions particular excitement and seduction (*dongxin chupo* 動心怵魄). This resolution should serve both to save me some money and to afford me a modicum of peace of mind.

Liu E's diary entry sounds age-old and firmly embedded in collecting practices and habits of mind that stretch back to at least the Song dynasty (960-1279); elsewhere, reading a rubbing of inscriptions of "The Three Watchtowers of Mount Song" ("Songshan san que" 嵩山三闕), he describes the pleasure he experiences, in a marvellous fit of synaesthesia, with an expression to the effect that his "eyes flooded with the fragrance

21 Huang Yue 黃鉞 (1750-1841); a fine calligrapher and painter, he held a variety of high official posts under the Qianlong, Jiaqing, and Daoguang emperors.

of antiquity” (*guxiang yimu* 古香溢目).²² And yet times had changed, and as both collector and scholar of his collections, Liu E was very much a transitional figure; his diaries are otherwise studded with references to telegrams, railways, electricity, electronic funds transfer, department stores,²³ speed,²⁴ the periodical press, lithographic printing,²⁵ photography, mines, shipping, his reading (in manuscript) of Liang Qichao’s 梁啟超 (1873-1929) translation of Jules Verne’s *Deux Ans de Vacance* (under the title *Shiwu xiao haojie zhuan* 十五小豪傑傳), or the various political and social scientific translations carried by the journal *Collected Translations* (*Yishu huibian* 譯書彙編),

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- 22 For which, see Liu Delong, Zhu Xi, and Liu Deping, eds., *Liu E ji laocan youji ziliao*, p. 183. Liu E’s diaries are replete with such expressions of the bliss experienced during close engagements with the objects of the past: he speaks of “fondling it for a long time” (*bawan jiu zhi* 把玩久之), of “caressing it whenever I had a moment free” (*xia ji mosuo* 暇即摩挲), of the extent to which examining a rubbing “induces an excess of joy” (*zhi zule ye* 致足樂也), and so on, for which, see Liu Delong, Zhu Xi, and Liu Deping, eds., *Liu E ji laocan youji ziliao*, pp. 161, 154. In a reprise of an earlier custom instituted by the Soochow book collector Huang Pilie 黃丕烈 (1765-1825), Liu E tells us (in a diary entry dated 1st day of the 1st month of the *Yisi* year [1905]), that on this day, once his guests had departed, he laid out upon his desk some of his prized possessions and “... lit incense and offered sacrifice, out of respect for the command of Heaven” (焚香祭之敬天命也), for which, see *Liu E ji*, Vol.1, p. 715. Lothar von Falkenhausen, in his “Antiquarianism in East Asia: A Preliminary Overview”, Alain Schnapp, ed., *World Antiquarianism: Comparative Perspectives*, pp. 35-66, argues that: “For the antiquarian engagement with the physical traces of antiquity, the literati aesthetics established a crucial personal and performative dimension” (p. 43).
- 23 In 1900, along Fourth Road (四馬路; present-day Fuzhou Road 福州路) in Shanghai, Liu E established the Five Story Shopping Mall (五層樓商場), but it soon went bankrupt.
- 24 There is in Liu E’s diary a marvellous illustration of the extent to which this is a moment in China’s history when time begins to replace space as the significant referent. On the 2nd day of the 3rd month of the *Renyin* year (1902), Liu E journeys from Tientsin to Peking by rail, on a service that had commenced two years previously. He writes: The distance between Tientsin and Peking is traditionally held to be 240 *li*, but I have no way of knowing the distances between the various stations along the way. On this occasion, I will make note of the time taken on the journey, in order to give a general impression of the trip. We departed Tientsin at 9:10am, arrived at Yang Village at 10:05am; departed at 10:11am, arrived at Luofa at 11:02am; departed 11:07am, arrived in Langfang at 11:38am; departed 11:45am, arrived in Anding at 12:28pm; departed 12:30pm, arrived 1:05 at Huang Village; departed 1:10, arrived at Fengtai at 1:45pm; departed 1:52pm, arrived at Yongding Gate crossroad at 2:15pm; arrived at Qianmen at 2:33pm. I append the following chart of the time taken between stations: Tientsin—55—Yang Village—51—Luofa—31—Langfang—28—Anding—35—Huang Village—35—Fengtai—23—Yongding Gate—20—Qianmen (a total of 278) (由天津至北京相傳二百四十里其中某棧至某棧若干里不能知也此以時刻計之可以得概矣九點十分開天津十點五十分開天津十一點二十分至落筏七分開二刻開一點五十分至黃村十分開三刻至豐台七分開二點一刻至永定門杈道二刻三分至前門附表天津—55—楊村—51—落筏—31—廊房—28—安定—35—黃村—35—豐台—23—永定門—20—前門 [278])”, for which, see Liu Delong, Zhu Xi, and Liu Deping, eds., *Liu E ji laocan youji ziliao*, p. 155.
- 25 In 1887, Liu E set up Stone Flourishing Publishing (Shichang shuju 石昌書局), also in Shanghai, but this firm folded quickly also, the result, it is said, of various legal encumbrances. On the print cultural circumstances of Shanghai particularly during the period, see Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2004).

established in Tokyo in 1900 by a group of Chinese students from Jiangsu Province. And accompanying the intrusion into his world of such insistent tokens of modernity, all of which he seemed to take great delight in, into his collections also appeared a bundle of objects, newly unearthed in mysterious circumstances, that, however ancient they were to prove, would also lend themselves to an entirely new understanding of China's most ancient past, and the civilisation's most powerful tool; along with his friend Wang Yirong 王懿榮 (1845-1900), a man who committed suicide as the Western troops occupied Peking and lifted the siege of the Foreign Legations at the conclusion of the Boxer Uprising,²⁶ in 1899 Liu E was amongst the first scholars to realise the significance of the Oracle Bones (甲骨).²⁷ Here below, again from Liu E's diary, are some entries dated from the 10th month of the *Renyin* year (1902) that help us better understand the manner in which he engaged with his growing collection of Oracle Bones:

6th day, 10th month:²⁸ Fine. In the afternoon, Tu Bohou arrived, in order to take a look at some of my rubbings of Song dynasty calligraphic models. Between 3:00-5:00pm, I accompanied [Zhang] Baoting to meet [R.A. Jamieson] to negotiate various matters. In the evening, I washed some plastron writing, and managed to decode several characters, this event bringing me very great delight.

初六日晴涂伯厚來看宋拓帖申刻偕[張]寶廷往晤詹美生商談一切事晚間刷龜文釋得數字甚喜

7th day, 10th month: Fine. In the afternoon, I took a doctor, a Japanese gentleman, to examine Dafu. Between 3:00-5:00pm, I paid my respects on Yang Langxuan and Zeng Mutao,²⁹ but found them both out. I did encounter Liu Ganqing, however, and we spoke with each other at considerable length.... I dispatched the 400 *taels* that [Wang] Hanfu³⁰ had given me the day before. In the night, I composed several items of my work *An Explanation of the Plastron Script*.

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- 26 For a short English-language biography of whom, by Tu Lien-chê, see *ECCP*, pp. 826-828. Wang Yirong swallowed poison and, with his wife, leapt into a well on the day that the Qing court fled from the capital.
- 27 For a brief recent treatment of some of the ironies associated with the timing of the discovery of the oracle bones, see Andrea Bachner, "Oracle Bones, That Dangerous Supplement....," in David Der-wei Wang, ed., *A New Literary History of Modern China*, pp. 156-161.
- 28 As outlined in the "Bibliographical Note on the Diaries" appended to this paper, the fate of Liu E's dairies is a melancholy story of loss and only partial recovery. Immediately preceding the entries quoted below, pages appear to have been torn from the diary, after an entry dated 29th day of the 9th month; the extant diary entries resume on the 5th day of the 10th month.
- 29 Zeng Mutao was the grandson of Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811-1872), the statesman and general, for a biography of whom, see *ECCP*, pp. 751-756.
- 30 Wang Hanfu was Wang Yirong's son.

初七日晴午後延醫日本人為大翻診病申刻拜楊郎軒曾慕陶皆不遇遇劉幹卿談良久...昨日漢輔之四百金取去夜作說龜數則

13th day, 10th month: Fine. In the afternoon, Lian Mengxing came calling. On this very day, he had bought both a “knife coin” and a “saw coin”, for a total of nine *liang*. In the evening, I marked up my copy of the *Etymological Explanation of the Ancient Zhou Script*,³¹ in process of which I grasped the meaning of two further plastron script characters.

十三日晴午後連夢惺來本日買契刀錯刀各一柄價九兩晚圈說文古籀悟龜文二字

20th day, 10th month: Fine. Between 7:00-9:00am, Lian Mengxing came to collect the copies. Between 9:00-11:00am, Zhao Zhizhai from Wei County arrived, bringing with him a box each of plastrons and Han dynasty seals.

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- 31 By Wu Dacheng 吳大澂 (1835-1902), the man who had given Liu E his first official position in 1888, the repair of the dykes of the Yellow River just outside Zhengzhou. Scholar, civil and military official, archaeologist, painter and collector, Wu Dacheng served as something of a bridge between the old world of the private collection and the world of the modern museum. His work, particularly that on jade, also forms a bridge between Chinese scholarship on the objects of its past and scholarship done elsewhere. As he makes plain in his “Preface” to what remains the single most definitive English-language study of the topic, *Jade: A Study in Chinese Archaeology & Religion* (first published in 1912; subsequently much republished under the title *Jade: Its History and Symbolism in China*), Berthold Laufer is explicit in his indebtedness to this man. To his mind, as Wu sort to confirm the central and continuing importance of the Confucian canon by applying to its exegesis new techniques that served to broaden the historical archive available to historians, he was also the man to whom Laufer was grateful for “the restoration of the truth in the place of romanticism with regard to archaeological objects of primary importance” (p. 17). As he states in the “Preface” to his *Ancient Jade: An Illustrated Examination* (*Guyu tukao* 古玉圖考), Wu’s investigation of the cultural and social functions of sixty-three jade items from his collection “Noble men of ancient times would liken their virtue to the properties of jade; jade objects are certainly not simply things to take pleasure in (*wanwu* 玩物). The rules and regulations that govern society are therein preserved; the rituals of the collective ancestral sacrifices are therein archived; the model for the crowns and pendants that adorn both sovereign and minister, the high and the low, are therein given clarity...”. On Wu Dacheng, see Qianshen Bai, “Antiquarianism in a Time of Crisis: On the Collecting Practices of Late-Qing Government Officials, 1861-1911”, in Alain Schnapp, ed., *World Antiquarianism: Comparative Perspectives*, pp. 386-404; Bai Qianshen 白謙慎, “Wan Qing wenwu shichang yu guanyuan shuocang huodong guankui: Yi Wu Dacheng ji qi youren wei zhongxin” 晚清文物市場與官員收藏活動管窺：以吳大澂及其友人為中心 [A Preliminary Study About the Antiquities Market and Collecting Activities of Officials in the Late Qing Dynasty], *The National Palace Museum Research Quarterly*, 33.1 (2015): 439-438; Bai Qianshen, *Wu Dacheng he tade tagong* 吳大澂和他的拓工 [Wu Dacheng and his Rubbing Workers] (Beijing: Haitun shuguan, 2013); and Shen Chen 沈辰, “Guren si yu you lai zhong: Wu Dacheng jiucang yubi liuchuan yishi” 故人似玉由來重：吳大澂舊藏玉璧流傳軼事 [The Importance of Liking the Dead to Jade: Some Forgotten Chapters Concerning the Circulating of Jade Bi Once Collected by Wu Dacheng], *Mei cheng zai jiu* 美成在久 [Orientations], 7 (2015): 6-25.

There were more than 700 of the latter...; and some very large plastrons. Between 3:00-5:00, I paid calls on Mr Rong and Mr Lu, but neither of them was in. Once I had returned to my residence, [Wang] Xiaozhai turned up, and we discussed the transfer of funds. In the evening, I counted up my plastrons and bones, and found that they now totaled some 1300 items. I really can be said to be rich in my holdings.

二十日晴辰刻連夢惺來取抄件已刻濰縣趙執齋來攜龜版漢印各一匣印計七百餘方... 龜版頗有大者申刻拜榮陸二君俱未見歸寓[王]筱齋來與商匯款事晚點龜骨共千三百件可謂富矣

23rd day of the 10th month: Fine. Mister Zhao from Wei County came, and I bought three spear heads, one crossbow mechanism, a Jian'an mirror, a Shang dynasty horn goblet, all for a total of 100 *taels*. In the afternoon, I paid a call on [Gao] Ziheng, in order to wish happy birthday on the occasion of his 60th. That night, I became excessively drunk.

廿三日晴濰縣趙某來賣戈頭三枚弩機一架建安鏡一面商觶一具共百金午後往[高]子衡處祝壽夜間大醉

28th day, 10th month: ... Liu Shaoquan has given me a lute which, when played, gives off a most resonant sound. It really is a treasure that may be fondled, and it is said to date from the Tang dynasty. Between 3:00-5:00pm, I visited Wang Xiaoyu's³² residence in order to have a frank talk with him, taking the opportunity to find out about the provenance of the plastrons, discovering in the course of our conversation that what he had to say confirms the story told by Zhao. This morning, Wang Duanshi had also paid me a visit, and what he had to say also tallied with Zhao's story. Duanshi told me that [Wang Xirong] had purchased plastrons on two separate occasions, on the first for an amount of two hundred *taels*, and on the second some hundred or so *taels*. Xiaoyu had told me that the largest plastrons in [Wang Xirong's] possession were no more than two *cun* across, and that he did not have a complete plastron. The claim by the Debao [zhai (Studio), on Liulichang 琉璃廠,] that they have more than ten complete plastrons, and that they had acquired them for a total of only seventeen *liang* is obviously nonsense. Today, the wind blew hard.

... 劉少泉送一月琴來音極響亮至可寶玩據云係唐琴也申刻至王孝禹處
嚮談並訪龜板原委與趙說相孚今早王端士來其說亦與趙乎端士云文敏計

32 Wang Xiaoyu, also referred to as Wang Guan 王權, worked in the administration of the greatest collector of the age, Duanfang 端方 (1861-1911), Liu E's sometime employer and possible collecting rival, on whom, see *ECCP*, pp. 780-782.

賣兩次第一次二百金第二次一百餘金孝禹云文敏處共極大者不過二寸井而已並未有整龜也德寶[齋]云有整龜十餘片共價十七兩皆無稽之談矣本日大風

5th day, 11th month: Heavy snow. I examined my collection of plastrons and scapula, finding that I now had a total of 1890 items. At night, I dreamed that I was involved in a poetry writing competition...

初五日大雪查龜版牛骨統共一千八百九十片夜夢作詩鍾

Liu E's 1903 catalogue of 1,058 items from his collection, *Iron Cloud's Collection of Tortoise Plastrons* (*Tieyun cang gui* 鐵雲藏龜), is the first study in what became a discipline that one could perhaps label Oracle Boneology (甲骨學).³³ Here is his "Author's Preface" ("Zixu" 自序) to that work, written in the same year that he started work on his novel:

The plastrons (*guiban* 龜板) were unearthed in the *Jihai* year [1899], in the township of Guyouli 古牖里, in Tangyin County 湯陰縣 of Henan Province. It is said that the locals, noticing what they thought might be a grave mound, excavated it and discovered within it shards of bones (*gupian* 骨片). The bones were all stuck together in clumps by mud, but after soaking them in water, some for several days, others for more than a month, the bones gradually started coming loose from the mud that had encased them. After that, the bones were placed in basins and washed clean with boiling water, a process that took some two or three months, after which the writing (*wenzi* 文字) on their surface became visible. At the same time these bones were excavated, so too were the tibia bones of oxen. Of the plastrons, those that are yellowish in colour are rather sturdy, whilst those that are white are brittle and shatter at the slightest application of force, making it difficult to take rubbings from them.³⁴

Once the bones had surfaced, they were obtained (*de* 得) by merchants from Shandong, and all of them were treated as treasures, in the hope that they might earn their owners an excellent return. In the *Gengzi* year [1900], a merchant surnamed Fan³⁵ arrived in the capital with over a hundred pieces. When he was shown them, Wang Yirong of Fushan became quite delirious with joy (*kuangxi* 狂喜) and immediately acquired (*liu* 留) them

33 Of the 1058 items (*pian* 片) illustrated in this book (of his total collection at the time of around 5000 items), three were duplicates, and another four have proved to be forgeries.

34 On this most critical of processes, see Kenneth Starr, *Black Tigers: A Grammar of Chinese Rubbings* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2008).

35 Fan Weiqing 范維卿.

at a considerable cost. Later on, Zhao Zhizhai of Wei County, too, obtained (*de* 得) several hundred items, and these he also sold (*shougui* 售歸) to Wang Yirong. Before long, the Boxer Uprising broke out and Wang Yirong died the death of a martyr (*xunnan* 殉難). In the *Renyin* year [1902], when his son, Wang Chonglie (Hanfu) 王崇烈 (翰甫), then serving in the General Surveillance Circuit, sold off his collections, in order to pay off his accumulated debts, the plastrons were the last items offered up for sale, a total of some thousand pieces, all of which I obtained. Fang Yaoyu of Dinghai, too, had obtained a collection of three hundred pieces from the man surnamed Fan, and these also reverted (*gui* 歸) to me. Further, Zhao Zhizhai travelled through the traditional lands of the states of Qi, Lu, Zhao, and Wei on my behalf, in search of more pieces, and in the course of the year collected more than three thousand pieces. Altogether, then, my collection now totals over five thousand pieces. Although I do not dare claim that all that which was excavated in the *Jihai* year is now in my hands, nonetheless I do believe that what I missed out on is negligible.

Before the invention of the writing brush, people wrote with the lacquer stylus, and before the lacquer stylus, they wrote with a knife pen. And so, the 'Little Seal' character for the stylus was a pictograph of a lacquer stylus, for the people of the Han Dynasty had seen the ancient lacquer stylus writing, but they had not seen any writing done with a knife pen. This is why, when Xu Shen compiled his dictionary, he placed emphasis above all on the ancient Zhou or Greater Seal script, on the basis on the inscriptions on the found on the beakers and tripods that had been unearthed in the mountains and the rivers. Who was to know that, two thousand years later, that we were to be able to witness with our own eyes the actual knife pen script of the People of Yin, is this not a remarkable blessing!

Using the categorization into six types of character (*liu shu* 六書) developed by Xu Shen, to inquire into the inscriptions found on the bells and tripods, one does not find many that accord, as is also the case when one seeks for resemblances within the inscriptions found on the plastrons on the basis of those found on the bells and tripods. That is, the more ancient the inscription, the more difficult it is to make connections between present-day characters and those found in those ancient inscriptions.

...

Of the two categories of item, plastrons and the ox scapula, the latter constitute one or two out of ten. In the early version of this present work, the rubbings of these two types of materials were kept separate, but as they became muddled up in the process of publication, no attempt has been made to separate them again, and no note has been made of this, lest readers object. In the ten pages between Nos. 51-60, 56, 57, and 58 are all scapulae, the rest being plastrons. On this basis, readers may make their inferences.

The plastron script inscriptions are fine and shallow, the plastrons themselves being thin and fragile, thus making the process of taking a rubbing an extremely fraught one. When friends heard that I had obtained such exceptional things, many of them requested of me rubbings, and I had difficulty obliging. But, after all, these inscriptions represent the true and authentic ancient script of the Three Dynasties, and so because as such they deserve to be widely disseminated, I have expended the energies of half a year to have fine rubbings made of a thousand items, and have then had these rubbings reproduced by means of lithography, in order that they be made available to fellow aficionados. Wang Ruiqing of the Metropolitan Area is the man who has made this possible.³⁶

“As it states in the *Book of Change* (*Yijing* 易經), ‘In *gen* 艮 or the mountain do the myriad things find both their completions and their beginnings (易曰艮萬物之所成終而成始也),’” Liu E declares in his “Author’s Preface” (“Zixu” 自序) to the second of his major publications based on his various collections, *Iron Cloud’s Collection of Pottery* (*Tieyun cang tao* 鐵雲藏匱), dated the 1st month of the *Jiachen* year (1904), “And it was only after having researched the various styles of calligraphy developed throughout the dynasties for some time that I suddenly arrived at a proper understanding of the meaning of finding completion: just as the myriad things, by their own accord, find their own beginnings, so too do they, by their own accord, find their completions (余比來研究歷朝書體始恍然於成終之義萬物自成而始亦自成而終).” “In the end,” he continues, “just as objects do not remain forever secret, Heaven never destroys writing” (物不終闕天未喪文). After listing a number of instances from recorded history that show kingly engagement with pottery, Liu E then continues: “From these examples, we can see that, as vessels, although pottery is a slight thing, those items that were made and rectified by the ancients nonetheless are charged with the authority of the sagely ancestors, and this lends their inscriptions an appropriate weight” (可見匱之為器雖微而古人作之正之者皆聖賢之資宜其文字之足重也). He concludes: “This is the second of my publications in the series *Studio for Hugging the Remnants and Preserving the Fragmentary: Writings of the Three Dynasties*, and as such, I hope that the learned and broad-minded scholars of this age who wish to trace the origins of the Great Seal script might find something of use herein. I conjecture that the holdings of my fellow collectors throughout the empire must contain many times the number of items I include here, and so have designed this work to serve as something of a whistling arrow that will signal the commencement of further engagements” (是為抱殘守缺齋三代文字之二世之宏博君子欲考篆籀之原者庶有取焉計海內收藏家所得必數倍於此吾其為之嚆矢也夫).³⁷ In his “Author’s Preface” (“Zixu” 自序) to the third work in this series, his *Iron Cloud’s Collection of Clay Seals* (*Tieyun nifeng* 鐵雲泥封), after recounting the vicissitudes experienced by

36 For which, see Liu Delong, Zhu Xi, and Liu Deping, eds., *Liu E ji laocan youji ziliao*, pp. 87-89.

37 See Liu Delong, Zhu Xi, and Liu Deping, eds., *Liu E ji laocan youji ziliao*, p. 90.

these seals once they had been discovered in a kiln unearthed in Sichuan by peasants looking for mountain herbs,³⁸ Liu E reiterates this commitment to making available for further study items from his collection: “And so, for the moment, I have had rubbings taken from all those seals in my humble collection and have printed these by means of lithography, as an appendage to my earlier publication of the pottery in my collection. Although their inscriptions do not date back to the Three Dynasties, nonetheless they do include the names of officials that in many cases are not noted in the historical records, and so may well be of some small assistance to the archaeologists” (姑以敝藏所有拓付石印附諸匋器之後雖非三代文字然其中官名多為史籍所不載殆亦考古者之一助云).³⁹

The world that Liu E had inhabited was rapidly crumbling away, like the mud that had once encased the oracle bones that he had spent so many careful hours scouring from their surfaces and which had served to protect them for so long. He was himself, above all, fully aware of the seemingly inevitable collapse of a world so precariously poised between the old and the new, the native and the foreign. In Chapter Twelve of his remarkable novel, his protagonist Lao Can, detained in Qi River County (齊河縣) on his journey back to Jinan, the provincial capital of Shandong, by the icing up of the Yellow River, stands above the river and casts his eyes skywards. The sight of the seven stars of the Dipper calls to his mind the last lines from a poem (“Da dong” 大東 [The Great East]) from the *Book of Odes* (*Shi jing* 詩經) that goes (in the translation of Arthur Waley): “In the north there is a Dipper,/ But it cannot scoop wine or sauce” (維北有斗不可以挹酒漿).⁴⁰ As tears flow down his cheeks, only to freeze upon his face, Lao Can reflects: “Now indeed is a time when many things are happening to our country; the nobles and officials are only afraid of bringing punishment on themselves; they think it is better to do nothing than to risk doing something, and therefore everything is allowed to go to ruin. What will be the final result? If this is the state of the country how can an honest man devote himself to his family?” (現在國家正當多事之秋那王公大臣只是恐怕耽處分多一事不如少一事弄的百事俱廢將來又是怎樣個了局國是如此丈夫何以家為)⁴¹

38 “By the time the merchants offered the items up for sale in the capital, more than half of them had been smashed to pieces” (估人齎至京師大半壞裂), for which, see Liu Delong, Zhu Xi, and Liu Deping, eds., *Liu E ji laocan youji ziliao*, p. 91.

39 On these objects (and some illustrations of those held at the University of Chicago), see Tsuen-hsuei Tsien, “Sealing Clays of Han China”, in *Collected Writings on Chinese Culture* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2011), pp. 47-51. I over-translate here the Chinese *kaogu zhe* deliberately, in order to highlight the extent to which Liu E stands between the traditions and practices of the old 考古 (“those who inquire into antiquity”) and the new (“archeologists”) world of Chinese collecting.

40 See Arthur Waley, trans., *The Book of Songs* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 320. Note that in this translation, Waley gives “Ladle” rather than Shadick’s “Dipper”.

41 Harold Shadick, trans., *The Travels of Lao Ts’an*, p. 132.

Liu E appended to his novel an “Author’s Preface” (“Zi xu” 自序) that links itself to a traditional understanding of Chinese literature as being, always, the vehicle of grief. He ends:

We of this age have our feelings aroused by ourselves and by the world, by our families and by our nation, by our society and by all the various races and religions of the globe. The deeper the emotions roused, the more painful the tears. This is why I have written this novel. This game of chess draws now to its conclusion. We grow old. How could we not weep? And I know that many are those that mourn with me.

吾人生今之時有身世之感情有家國之感情有社會之感情有種教之感情其感情愈深者其哭泣愈痛此洪都百鍊生所以有老殘遊記之作也棋局已殘吾人將老欲不哭泣也得乎吾知海內千芳人間萬豔必有與吾同哭同悲者焉⁴²

Very much earlier, a colophon that the Song dynasty poet Li Qingzhao’s 李清照 (1084-ca. 1151) attached to the catalogue of the collection that had been lost to her and her husband Zhao Mingcheng 趙明 誠 (1081-1129), item by item, as the couple fled southwards in the face of northern invasion, provided an eternal warning addressed to all collectors. It ends:

How difficult it was to acquire a collection such as ours; how very easy to lose it. Wretched woman that I am! Since I was eighteen years old till I was fifty-two I have known nothing but misery and ruin. Thirty-four long years! Why? But existence always implies its opposite, and a gathering is always followed by a dispersal, such is the inevitable law. A man loses a bow; another finds it. Is this tale of our collection and its fate at all worthy of record? This is the reason that I have told the story of my life in such detail, hoping that, in the future, it may serve as a warning to people who are passionately keen collectors of antiquities. Written in the Hall of Tranquillity on the 2nd day of the 8th month of the 2nd year of the Shaoxing reign period [1132].

嗚呼余自少陸機作賦之二年至過蘧瑗知非之兩歲三十四年之間憂患得失何其多也然有有必無有聚必有散乃理之常人亡弓人得之又胡足道所以區區記其終始者亦欲為後世好古博雅者之戒雲紹興二年玄默歲壯月朔甲寅易安室題⁴³

42 My translation. For the Chinese text, see Liu E, *Lao can youji* (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1958), p. 2.

43 Li Qingzhao, *Li Qingzhao quanji* 李清照全集 [Complete Works of Li Qingzhao] (Ji’nan: Ji’nan chubanshe, 1990), p. 215.

In this vein, if Liu E's novel strikes a note of finality and completion, his prefaces to those aspects of his various collections that he chose to publicise suggest a possibility of continued engagement with the objects of the past on the part of the scholars (and aficionados) in the hope that that past, now crumbling away, might yet at some future date be restored. Both his collections themselves and his attempts to disseminate the knowledge and wisdom they contained can be understood to represent Liu E's own "Assembled Brokenness".

Shortly after his death, Liu E's collections were sold to pay off his various debts. Rumours persist that the harshness of the punishment administered him was the result of his having offended Duanfang 端方 (1861-1911), the prominent Manchu official and educator, and Liu E's sometime employer, when on one occasion he had asked Liu E for some item or other in his collection and Liu E had refused him. Whatever the truth of such rumours, however, it seems beyond doubt that the bulk of Liu E's various collections ended up in Duanfang's possession. When subsequently and after Duanfang's death, circumstances forced his children in their turn to sell much of his collection to John C. Ferguson, the bulk of the collection was to make its eventual way into the holdings of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, including several of the paintings that Liu E had once owned.

Ironically but fittingly, perhaps, given the vicissitudes of Liu E's remarkable life and the rich resonance of his legacy, the very last entry of Liu E's last extant diary (dated 14th day of the 3rd month of the *Wushen* year, a date that accords with 14 April, 1908), ends with the words "This day, I was as happy as I could be" (本日盡歡).⁴⁴

*Bibliographical Note on the Diaries of Liu E*⁴⁵

The fate of Liu E's diaries over the course of more than a century is a resonant story of loss and partial recovery. Although we have no evidence that would allow us to date precisely when Liu E began to keep a diary and when he ceased doing so (if indeed he did cease to do so, in the gruelling circumstances of the last year of his life), during the late years of the Qing dynasty, as had been the case for much of Chinese history since at least the twelfth century, Chinese men of Liu E's kind and circumstance invariably maintained detailed day-by-day handwritten private diaries throughout their adult lives. The earliest published reference to the existence of his diaries was on 24 March, 1935 when a page from the diaries was published in Lin Yutang's 林語堂 (1895-1976) Shanghai journal *Renjian shi* 人間世 [The Human Condition] (entitled "A Page from Mr. Liu Tieyun's diary" 劉鐵雲先生日記之一葉 and found in No. 24 of the journal). This page was republished in the February 1940 issue (No. 20) of another of the journals established by Lin Yutang, the *Yuzhou feng yikan* 宇宙風乙刊 [Cosmic Wind: First Collection], under the title "Jing tang" 京堂. Three items from Liu E's diaries that

44 For which, see *Liu E Ji*, p. 742.

45 For both the texts of the diaries themselves and the information that informs this note, see Liu Delong, Zhu Xi, and Liu Deping, eds., *Liu E ji laocan youji ziliao*, pp. 143-289; and *Liu E ji*, Vol. 1, pp. 685-746.

made note of his acquisition of the Oracle Bones were published in the December 1936 issue of the journal edited by the Peking Archeological Society (北京考古學社), *Kaogu she kan* 考古社刊; these were stated to be from 20th day of the 10th month, 28th day of the 10th month, and 5th day of the 11th month of the *Xinchou* year (1901-1902; details of which are given below) but in fact come from the corresponding days of diary of the *Renyin* year (1902). In his chronological biography of Liu E, Jiang Yixue makes the same mistake with the dates for Liu E's acquisition of the Oracle Bones, for which, see Jiang Yixue, *Liu E nianpu*.⁴⁶

Sadly, but entirely in keeping with both the tenor of his own times and of subsequent decades, only four volumes of Liu E's diaries remain extant, as follows:

- (i) *Studio for Hugging the Remnants and Preserving the Fragmentary: Diary of the Renyin Year* (*Baocan shouque zhai: Renyin riji* 抱殘守缺 • 壬寅日記). In two volumes (*ce* 冊), covering the period (Vol. 1) 1st month-6th month, and (Vol. 2) 7th month-12th month, of the *Renyin* year (1902), the twenty-eighth year of the Reign of the Guangxu emperor.
- (ii) *Studio for Hugging the Remnants and Preserving the Fragmentary: Diary of the Yisi Year* (*Baocan shouque zhai: Yisi riji* 抱殘守缺 • 乙巳日記). In one volume, covering the period (with the occasional missing page) between the 1st day of the 1st month (正月初一) of the thirty-first year of the reign of the Guangxu emperor (4th February, 1905) until the thirtieth day of the tenth month (十月十三日) of the same year (26th November).
- (iii) *Studio for Hugging the Remnants and Preserving the Fragmentary: Diary of the Wushen Year* (*Baocan shouque zhai: Wushen riji* 抱殘守缺 • 戊申日記). In one volume, covering the period between the 1st day of the 1st month (正月初一) of the thirty-third year of the reign of the Guangxu emperor (2nd February, 1908) until the fourteenth day of the third month (三月十五日) of the same year (14th April).

Two further volumes are documented but were lost when Liu Huisun posted the diaries in his possession to the Nanking Museum sometime after June, 1966, the texts of which have been partially reconstructed from quotations contain in a chronological biography of Liu E that was compiled in the early 1960s:

- (i) *Studio for Hugging the Remnants and Preserving the Fragmentary: Diary of the Xinchou Year* (*Baocan shouque zhai: Xinchou riji* 抱殘守缺 • 辛丑日記). In two volumes, covering the period between the 1st day of the 2nd month (二月初一) of the twenty-seven year of the reign of the Guangxu emperor (20th March, 1901) to the 27th day of the 12th month (十二月二十七日) of the same year of the reign of the Guangxu emperor (5th February, 1902). Before 1959, these two volumes were in the possession of Liu Houze 劉厚澤. In December, of that year they were made over to the possession of Liu Huisun.

46 See Jiang Yixue, *Liu E nianpu*, p. 39.

Biographical Note

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