

Kaikodo essay, July 2000

Two Palace Museums: An Informal Account of Their Formation and History (Ching Yuan Chai so-shih III.)

**Howard: here is the present form of this hastily-written essay. Some dates & biblio. info. need to be filled in; my RA is working on these. I expect to be able to send a final version on disc to Eliz. Knight by the end of the month. A small problem: there appears to be a virus on this disc; I hope I can get it eliminated & not infect Eliz's computer, or yours (if we send it email, as you suggest.)**

Introductory

*note 1*

The essay that follows was cobbled together from two texts. One, written in 1990, is an unpublished "Introduction" intended for the catalog of a planned sequel to the "Masterworks of Ming and Qing Painting from the Forbidden City" exhibition of 1989, which was shown in five U.S. cities to great acclaim. The main text for the excellent catalog of that exhibition was the work of Howard Rogers; the introductory essay was by Sherman Lee. Since Lee's essay covered some basic matters about Ming-Ch'ing painting--forms and materials, broad stylistic tendencies, underlying aesthetic theory, a brief and useful art-historical account of the schools and artists--it seemed unnecessary to rehearse these yet again. Accordingly, I devoted my essay for "Ming-Qing II" to three topics: the changing reception of Ming-Ch'ing painting in the west; the formation of the Palace Museum collection in Beijing (from which the exhibition was to be drawn); and some observations on "New Directions in Studies of Ming-Ch'ing Painting." This last, reread a decade later, seems somewhat outdated and perhaps superfluous, although the argument put forth there for reading the paintings in relation to their original functions and the occasions on which they were presented and hung, insofar as we can reconstruct these, is still far from being accepted by all who write about them.

The second text is a lecture delivered at the National Gallery in Washington D.C. and at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco in connection with the 1996-97 exhibition "Splendors of Imperial China: Treasures from the National Palace Museum, Taipei." Part of that lecture was concerned with the recent history of the Manchu Imperial Collection, later the Peking Palace Museum Collection, leading up the present location of much of it in the National Palace Museum in Taipei. I have tried in what follows to integrate large sections of the two texts into a coherent general account of the vicissitudes of this unmatched collection, including the "great bifurcation" that led to the present situation of two Palace Museums (or must we, following the political accomodation, speak of one Palace Museum in two places?), and their implications for Chinese painting studies. The product of this cobbling that follows, sketchy and insufficiently researched though it may be, is the only available comprehensive account of its subject, at least the only one known to me. If nothing else, it can serve as an outline for a book that needs to be written--and should be written soon, while some of the participants are still alive to relate their versions of events in it.<sup>1</sup>



### From Manchu Imperial Household Collection to Palace Museum

The Manchu imperial collection of paintings as it exists now (however dispersed) was formed mainly in the 18th century, under the Ch'ien-lung Emperor (reigned 1735-95). Some of it was inherited from earlier court holdings, but most of it was acquired during the Ch'ien-lung reign. In tracing how this happened, we must go back to the late Ming, the later 16th and early 17th century. This was a time of great economic and social change in China, change that has loomed large in most recent scholarship on the Ming-Ch'ing period: a shift to a money economy, the rise of a merchant culture,

---

<sup>1</sup>The late Jeannette Elliott was at work on a history of the Palace Museum collection, to be titled The Modern Fate of China's Imperial Treasures, at the time of her death in April, 1996. Since it contains a great deal of information based on interviews, we can hope that it will be completed by someone and published. I myself have a copy of the manuscript.

the emergence of an unprecedented number of people with the means to live elegantly, as only a smaller gentry elite had been able to do earlier. One consequence of this new situation is a great increase in the collecting of art among newly-affluent people. Their advisors included established connoisseurs such as Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555-1636), and members of old families who could be arbiters of gentry values and behavior. As part of a major upsurge in the quantity of printing, books suddenly appear that offer instruction on how to live well: books of the kind that Craig Clunas studied in his Superfluous Things.<sup>^</sup> N<sub>1</sub>—

From the early 17th century, catalogs of private collections are compiled and published--again, in unprecedented number--along with compilations of notes on paintings and works of calligraphy that the writer has seen, and collections of colophons. Far more information than had ever before been available is recorded about the whereabouts and transmission of paintings, in writings by collectors and connoisseurs such as Chang Ch'ou (1577-1643) and Wang K'o-yü, as well as Tung Ch'i-ch'ang, Li Jih-hua, and others. These writings concentrate on works by name artists, and especially on so-called ming-chi, "famous relics" of painting--those that were taken to be major surviving works by noted masters of past. These came to be recognized and identified; people in the know were able to keep up with their movements and changes in ownership.

Great early Ch'ing collectors included, among others, Liang Ch'ing-piao (1620-1691), Kao Shih-ch'i (1645-1704), and An Ch'i (or An I-chou, ca. 1683-after 1744.) Published catalogs record the holdings of An Ch'i and Kao Shih-ch'i; for Liang Ch'ing-piao, perhaps the best (or best advised) connoisseur among them, we have none. Liang held the highest office, that of Grand Secretary, under the Manchu regime. Some 174 paintings bearing his seals are known, according to the study by Sherman Lee and Wai-kam Ho;<sup>2</sup> about a hundred of these passed

<sup>2</sup>Sherman Lee and Wai-kam Ho, "The Nature and Significance of the Collection of Liang Ch'ing-piao," in Proceedings of the International Conference on Sinology, Section on History of Art, Taipei, Academia Sinica, 1982, pp. 101-157.

into the imperial collection, ~~confiscated?~~ or as gifts? from his immediate heirs. Some entered An Ch'i's collection.

The Ch'ien-lung Emperor, himself an undistinguished painter and prolific calligrapher, was fervent both in promoting painting within his academy and in acquiring old works. Avaricious and determined, he set out to get as many of the ming-chi as he could, and was remarkably successful in this project. A large number of those surviving had already funneled into a relatively few early Ch'ing collections, and now were funneled into the imperial collection during the Ch'ien-lung reign. The acquisitions were made (as they had been in earlier reigns) by gift, by purchase, or by one or another kind of confiscation. Many--most?--of the best paintings from the imperial collection bear the seals of major collectors of the immediately preceding generations.

The collection was passed down through later emperors with relatively few additions or losses, although a few works left the court when they were presented to imperial relatives and others. Upon the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty in 1911 and the founding of the Republic of China, the status of the collection became ambiguous, but the Manchu Imperial Household, still residing in the Forbidden City, was permitted to retain possession of it for some years. (A brief article published in the "Talk of the Town" section of the New Yorker in 1996? 97? **check**) relates how the American financier J. P. Morgan was offered, and almost purchased, some of it in 1913-- the "contents of the palaces" at Jehol & Mukden--but not the part in Peking. The writer of the article implies that the great treasures then on view in the Metropolitan Museum showing of the exhibition would have been included in the purchase; he appears unaware that the exclusion of the Peking palace holdings would have eliminated most, perhaps virtually all, of the antique paintings & calligraphy.)

The new Republican government acknowledged officially, in a document of 1916, that the treasures were the property of the

based on my  
discreet discussion  
w/ the Morgan  
Library

What Morgan  
would have  
received in  
would presumably  
have been an enormous holding  
of facts which would  
not that of the article not depicting  
have pleased him while not depicting  
the Chinese people's heritage  
part of their heritage

Manchu Imperial Household, and stated that it intended to purchase them all; but of course it never did.<sup>3</sup> By that time, the contents of the Jehol and Mukden palaces had been moved to Peking.

Some pieces were lost during these years, either used by the Manchu Imperial Household as collateral for loans on which they then defaulted, or simply sold outright to meet their expenses. By 1922, some public outcry about these losses had arisen, since the collection was already being thought of as a national treasure. Some paintings had reportedly been acquired in this way by the great the Shanghai collector P'ang Yüan-chi, or P'ang Lai-ch'en (ca. 1865-1949); however he acquired them, P'ang sold to the Freer Gallery (first directly, on Freer's trips to China, later through agents in the U.S.) a number of paintings that had formerly been in the Palace collection. Freer's close friend Agnes Meyer similarly acquired several paintings from P'ang, including the *Wind and Snow in the Fir-pines* scroll by the Chin master Li Shan, that she presented to the Freer Gallery in 1963.

The last Emperor, P'u-i, was deposed in late 1924, and left the palace with his family and retinue, going first to Tientsin and then, in 1931, to Shen-yang (Mukden) and Ch'ang-ch'un, where he would become the "puppet emperor" of Manchukuo under the Japanese. Shortly after the departure of the Manchu court from Peking, four lists were discovered in the palace of pieces that had been taken by P'u I and his younger brother P'u Chieh, listed there as "gifts to various gentlemen" and "gifts to P'u Chieh." These lists have been published;<sup>4</sup> they include early printed books, paintings, and works of calligraphy. An appraisal and inventory had already been undertaken before P'u I's banishment: the noted collector and connoisseur Lo Chen-yü supervised a group that was grading the objects on a scale of one to five, and marking them. The two imperial brothers took advantage of this project in the summer and

<sup>3</sup>Irons, *The Last Emperor*, 172-3.

<sup>4</sup>Ku-kung i-i shu-chu shu-hua mu-lu san-chung, Beijing, Palace Museum, 1934.

autumn of 1924 to bundle up the pieces that had been given the highest marks, and P'u Chieh smuggled them out of the palace--beginning with books, which could be disguised as the books needed for his study. P'u I later wrote, "We must have removed over a thousand handscrolls, more than two hundred hanging scrolls and album leaves, and about two hundred rare Sung Dynasty printed books." According to one estimate, these comprised about half of the best works in the collection. The paintings in this group came to be called the *tung-pei* [northeast] paintings--they were well known under that name to Chinese collectors and scholars of art in the 1950s-60s. A book published in 1953 by the Hong Kong collector J. D. Chen (Chen Jen-tao) lists the "lost" paintings by period and artists and adds notes on the then-whereabouts of many of them, along with, for some of them, judgements of "genuine work" or "fake."<sup>5</sup>

This is the point at which the history of the palace collection can be said to bifurcate. We will follow the two diverging developments separately, continuing first with the organization of the works of art that remained in the Peking palace into a national museum and their later transport to the south and to Taiwan, and then recounting the movements and disposition of the "lost paintings" taken by P'u-i and his brother.

### The Founding of the Peking Palace Museum and Its Later Vicissitudes

This part of the story has been related in some detail by others (see note 6) and I will only summarize it briefly.

---

<sup>5</sup> Chen Jen-tao, Ku-kung i-i shu-hua mu chiao-chu, Hong Kong, 1953. This book may have been "cribbed" in large part from an earlier publication: I recall finding in the reference reading room of the Harvard Yenching library at Harvard a book that appeared to be more or less identical in contents, published earlier. But I failed to write down the author or bibliographical information.

An inventory of the palace holdings was made after P'u-i's departure in 1924, and in the following year, the Palace Museum was founded as a national museum, on the model of the Louvre, which similarly had been transformed from palace into museum. A noted educator named Yi P'ei-chi was in charge first; he was succeeded in 1933 by Ma Heng, who would head the museum until 1954, when he was in turn succeeded by Chuang Yen, or Chuang Shang-yen, of whom some of us older scholars in the field have fond memories.

Even after the decision had been made to turn the palace and the collection kept ~~there~~ into a national museum, many political and funding problems remained. The museum, which was officially opened to the public on October 10, 1925, was comprised of some palace buildings that had been restored and minimally fitted out for housing the exhibits. An American donor from Chicago named Robert Allerton and Sir Percival David from London were two of the foreign contributors. A number of major pieces of Sung ceramics from the palace collection, including examples of the rare Ju ware, went (or had already gone?) into Sir Percival's hands, and are now in the David Foundation in London; I do not know how, or even if, these two circumstances are somehow related. The years 1928 to 1931 were the "golden age" of the museum. About 100,000 people visited it each year; many publications were issued, and a thorough cataloguing accomplished, which included around nine thousand pieces of painting and calligraphy.

By 1931, the Japanese were threatening Peking; the most important and valuable part of collection was crated--in 13,484 crates from the Palace Museum and some 6,066 from other Peking collections, numbering nearly <sup>twenty thousand</sup> 20,000 in all--and shipped south to Nanking; the art objects were then moved to Shanghai, and then all back to Nanking by 1936. In 1933-34, a court case was brought against Yi P'ei-chi, charging that he had stolen some of the ptgs and other objects and replaced them with copies. Some of the pieces under suspicion were withdrawn from the collection and impounded, to be examined to determine whether they were originals or copies. In the

event, these were never reunited with the the main group, and most of them are still on the mainland. (One of them was Ma Lin's well-known painting of plum-branches titled "Icy Tips," inscribed by Empress Yang and dated in her seal to 1216, which is now in the Palace Museum, Beijing.) The painter-scholar Huang Pin-hung was in charge of a committee to judge them; old connoisseurs such as C. C. Wang and Xu Bangda remember this as their first opportunity to see these great early paintings.

*along with the selection of objects to send abroad for the London exhibition.*

In 1935-6, the Palace Museum sent a selection of paintings and objects to the great exhibition of Chinese art held in London. Fears were expressed about whether they would be safely returned, but fortunately they were. At that time, foreign enthusiasts were impressed by the generosity of the Chinese government in sending so many of the finest pieces. Seen today, the selection of paintings suggests, to the contrary, that the Chinese who made it were being somewhat cagy, trusting that foreign experts at that time would not know the difference: the "wrong" Fan K'uan, the "wrong" Hsia Kuei, the "wrong" Huang Kung-wang, etc. Scarcely any of what are now considered the great pieces were included.

*Masterworks.*

*★  
Check at  
V.H.?  
Howard?  
ping?*

From 1937, under threat of the Japanese invasion southward, the collection was transported up the Yangtze River to inland locations, first to Changsha and Hankow, then to places in Kueichou and Szechwan, briefly in Chungking, then Omei-shan and Loshan. Some crates were taken overland to Hsi-an and Pao-chi in the northwest, and then south into Szechwan. This succession of perilous moves makes up another harrowing story--the huge shipment of crates survived many dangers without loss, through the dedication and skills of the curators and others. Then, in the winter of 1948, this time under threat from the Communists (who would found the P.R.C. in the following year) the collection was moved once more--still in same crates--to Taiwan, accompanying the Nationalist exodus. Of all the crates shipped, not one was lost. (But some 2,900 crates were left behind in Nanking--several years ago my wife Hsingyuan and I visited the City Museum where they are stored, and

were told about them. They are, so far as we know, still unopened, since no one can agree on the ownership of the contents, and on who has the right to open them. Whatever they may ~~may~~ prove to contain, it will very probably not be great works of art, but materials of a lesser order that the Nationalists, <sup>frustrated with reality</sup> ~~having to make~~ fast decisions, felt they could leave behind. There are said to be no paintings in them.)

*On its safe arrival in Taiwan*  
 The collection was installed first at Pei-kou, a village outside Taichung in the center of the island, in a location at the foot of hills. Tunnels or "caves" were dug into the hillside, an act more symbolic (they could be moved to safety quickly in the event of bombing) <sup>sustained</sup> than practical--some of the books and archival materials ~~were~~ in fact <sup>water</sup> damaged when the "caves" were flooded by heavy rainfall. Most of the crates were kept in <sup>large concrete</sup> storehouses outside the tunnels. For a <sup>some</sup> few years, they were virtually inaccessible to outsiders; then a small exhibition hall was built, funded by the San Francisco-based Asia Foundation, where a few exhibitions, limited in size and duration, were held. For the most <sup>part</sup>, the collection was inaccessible to visitors. I went there as a <sup>graduate</sup> student in 1955, ~~when I was~~ working on a dissertation on Yüan dynasty painting, and through the kind accomodation of the curatorial staff and the Director, Chuang Yen, was shown quite a few of the central works of the Yuan masters, paintings I had desperately wanted to study in the originals. I was back in 1959 <sup>with</sup> the National Gallery's photographer Henry Beville, to make color transparencies for inclusion in my Skira book Chinese Painting, which would be published in the following year. Wang Chi-ch'ien was with me, and the two of us, along with Li Lin-ts'an (who would afterwards refer to us as the "Three Painting Worms") by analogy <sup>with</sup> "bookworms") were permitted to look through a number of <sup>crates</sup> ~~cases~~ of paintings. Even more generously, I was given the great privilege of publishing <sup>some</sup> ~~quite a few pieces,~~ <sup>pts</sup> now well known, for the first time.


In 1961-62, the great Chinese Art Treasures exhibition came to the U.S., to be shown in five cities, beginning with the National Gallery

in Washington, D.C. The thousands of slides we made from the paintings while they were in D.C. were distributed in sets of originals, over 700 slides in each, *at cost*, to a large number of institutions where Chinese art was taught or studied, a project that had a huge effect on Chinese painting studies in U.S. Our success in this inspired a larger-scale photographing project, and in the winter of 1963-4 the Freer Gallery photographer Ray Schwartz and I were back in Pei-k'ou again, to photograph most of the paintings in the collection, and <sup>long with</sup> many other objects, <sup>to</sup> form a photographic archive, which was in the end deposited at the University of Michigan. The project this time was funded with grants from three foundations: Luce, Bollingen, and JDR IIIrd. When word of <sup>the</sup> project got around, with the news that virtually the entire collection was being brought out for photographing, Chinese painting specialists converged from all over, like flies to honey. This was another notable occasion in the history of the field.

Photograph  
Henry Bell  
with the museum  
of Harvard Univ

In 1965, the museum was moved to Wai-shuang-hsi near Taipei--again set against hills, again with new "caves" dug <sup>into them--and</sup> installed in a huge palace-style building that <sup>allowed</sup> ~~accomodated~~ the exhibition of far more of the collection than had been possible before. Materials from the Academia Sinica excavations at Anyang were added, and various other additions have been made in the years since then, mainly through private donations. In 1970 an ambitious and memorable international symposium on Chinese painting--the first of its kind--was held there. The National Palace Museum continues to expand, although the core of its collection, and the part that draws visitors and scholars from all over the world, is still the part that came originally from the old Palace Museum in Peking, making up one of the two greatest collections of Chinese works of art assembled in any <sup>single</sup> ~~one~~ place. The other, of course, is the present Palace Museum in Beijing.

### The Formation of Another Palace Museum Collection in Beijing

The works removed from the palace by P'u-i, as related above, were taken first to Tientsin, then to Shenyang, and finally to Ch'ang-ch'un (which became the capital of "Manchukuo"), following the successive moves of the last emperor and his entourage. Some were sold or given away by P'u I. I recall being in the library of the Freer Gallery of Art with Laurence Sickman when the just-published (1962) reproduction volumes of paintings in the Liaoning Museum arrived, and looking through them with him. The sight of several of the paintings reproduced there (including the handscroll attributed to Li Ch'eng) elicited groans from him, and he explained: he and Langdon Warner, together in China, had arranged to purchase groups of paintings from P'u-i for their respective museums, the Nelson Gallery in Kansas City and the Fogg Museum at Harvard. But when the time came to pay off the go-between, according to the *established* ~~familiar~~ Chinese practice, Warner took a New Englandish moralistic *stance* and refused to pay, and the sale was off. Japanese collectors, or dealers acting on their behalf, were more successful in purchasing important works that are now in noted collections such as the Fujii Yûrinkan in Kyoto and the former Abe Collection in the Osaka Municipal Museum. 

What remained in P'u-i's hands was dispersed when Ch'ang-ch'un was taken by the Allied troops in 1945. Paintings, calligraphy, and old books looted from the "palace" were being sold for virtually nothing in the streets of Ch'ang-ch'un, and dealers and other knowledgeable people who had the means and opportunity were snapping them up. As Xu Bangda, elder specialist at the Palace Museum in Beijing, puts it, "A great painting could be had in trade, at that time, for a piece of soap or a towel." Some of the paintings were sold abroad, some through Hong Kong; a collector-dealer named Wang Wen-po, for instance, managed to bring out three early handscrolls, one of them the "Red Cliff" scroll attributed to Ch'iao Chung-ch'ang, which entered the collection of John Crawford. Most of the paintings, however, were eventually recovered by agents for Chinese museums on the mainland, and are preserved in those museums.

A curious historical circumstance, the reasonable decision of P'u I and his brother to smuggle out from the palace smaller works that represented the most value per unit of weight and size, explains why most of the great early handscrolls, album leaves, and other smaller paintings remain on the mainland, while most of the larger paintings, chiefly hanging scrolls, went to Taiwan. Anyone fortunate enough to have seen one of the great autumn exhibitions of early paintings in the large main hall of the Hui-hua Kuan (Painting Exhibition Hall) at the Palace Museum in Beijing, during the period in the 1970s when that building could still be used, will recall the sight that greeted one's eyes on entering: an expanse of ~~handscroll~~ <sup>flat standing</sup> cases filled with early handscrolls and album leaves, with a few hanging scrolls, mostly small, <sup>mounted</sup> on the walls. At an exhibition of the major holdings in early paintings at the National Palace Museum in Taipei, by contrast, one was surrounded by huge wall cases in which impressively large hanging scrolls were displayed, along with a smaller number of handscroll and album-leaf cases along the walls and in corridors. The difference was striking: here were two quite different versions, or visions, of early Chinese painting. For a balanced view one obviously needed to travel to both places.

The history of the National Palace Museum collection now in Taipei, as outlined above, is relatively well-known; a good account of it was published already in 1958 by Chu-tsing Li.<sup>6</sup> The story of the

---

<sup>6</sup> Chu-tsing Li, "Recent History of the Palace Collection," in Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America XII, 1958, pp. 61-75. Li's essay is based largely on "An Account of the Thirty Years ~~of the Thirty Years~~ of the Palace Museum," published (in Chinese) in 1957 by one of the curators, Na Chih-liang. Other English-language writings on the part of the collection that went to Taiwan include two essays published in the 1970s by the then-director of the Museum, Chiang Fu-tsung, "The Origin and Development of the National Palace Museum." in The National Palace Museum Quarterly, v. V no. 4, Summer 1971, pp. 1-12, and "The Transfer of the National Palace Museum Collection to Taiwan and Its Subsequent Installation," in The National Palace Museum Quarterly, v. XIV no. 1, Autumn, 1979, pp. 1-16; and Chang Lin-sheng, "The National Palace Museum: A History of the Collection," in Wen C. Fong and James C. Y. Watt, ed., Possessing the Past: Treasures from the National Palace Museum, Taipei, New York, 1996, pp. 3-25.

formation of the great painting collection now in the Palace Museum in Beijing is by contrast little known, and has never, to my knowledge, been recounted in print. It has seemed wise to make a preliminary attempt at reconstructing it, while it is possible, from the memories of the surviving two of the four people who were principally responsible for forming it, Xu Bangda and Liu Jiu'an. (What follows is based mainly on conversations with them in Beijing in July, 1990. A more detailed and carefully-researched history is of course still needed; what is offered here is only an informal and anecdotal account, which doubtless contains some errors.)

The loss of so much of the original Palace Museum collection, at that time by far the largest and most important single body of Chinese paintings in existence, was a heavy blow to China, depriving it of a major part of its artistic heritage. The Nationalists claimed to be "rescuing" or "preserving" the collection, but time has shown that to have been a political claim: the great paintings that remained on the mainland have on the whole been better preserved than those taken to Taiwan, too many of which are in dangerous states of deterioration. About half of the major extant early paintings, from the Yuan period and earlier, had gone to Taiwan, along with a great many of the finest from later periods as well. Only about 5,000 objects of art, mainly from the Ming and Ch'ing periods, remained in the Imperial City when the Palace Museum was reestablished in Beijing under the People's Republic of China. Today it is a great collection with over a million objects, by far the richest in China, comprising some one-sixth of the total holdings of Chinese museums.

Two circumstances mitigated somewhat the loss of most of the former Imperial collection to Taiwan. First, as related earlier, a great many of the best paintings and works of calligraphy, estimated at "about half the best," had been taken by the last emperor P'u-i.

---

Some of these were sold along the way, or given to relatives and supporters, or otherwise dispersed, and what remained were scattered when the palace was sacked in 1945. The bulk of this body of paintings, however, had remained on the mainland and could be recovered after the P.R.C. was founded. ~~Others~~ had been taken abroad ~~but~~ could be acquired by purchase. <sup>SOME of those that</sup>

The second mitigating circumstance was that the private collections remaining in China were rich in paintings of the later dynasties, the Ming and Ch'ing. For these periods, and to a lesser extent for the early ones, a collection comparable to the one they had lost could still be brought together.

The P.R.C. government, to its credit, was willing to allocate substantial funds and resources to this project. Carrying it out was chiefly the work of four men. The first, Zheng Zhenduo, was a distinguished and productive scholar of Chinese literature and art who rose to the position of Vice-Minister of Culture, and who had the prestige and political clout (including the direct support of Premier Zhou Enlai), in addition to the vision, that were needed to bring it about. He recruited Zhang Heng, better known as Zhang Congyu, a noted Shanghai connoisseur of painting and calligraphy, and gave him a position in the newly-formed Wenwuju or Bureau of Cultural Relics, an organization directly under the Ministry of Culture which administers China's museums and archaeological programs. Zhang had originally been a rich banker and owner of a large and fine collection of Chinese paintings, the Yunhuizhai Collection, but bankruptcy had forced him to sell it (principally to the New York dealer C. T. Loo--many of the paintings are now in U.S. museums.)

Zhang Congyu had belonged to the now-famous circle of artists, collectors, and connoisseurs centered on Wu Hu-fan, whose great collection is now mostly in the Shanghai Museum. Two other noted members of that circle were the aforementioned Wang Chi-ch'ien, who had left China for New York in 1949, and Xu Bangda,

who had stayed in China. In 1950 Xu Bangda, then 39, was brought to Beijing by Zheng Zhenduo, on the recommendation of Zhang Congyu, as the third member of the team, and given a position in the Bureau of Cultural Relics; he was to move to the Palace Museum when it was reestablished in 1953. From late 1951, Zhang and Xu were actively building the Palace Museum collection of paintings and calligraphy through purchase and other means. Liu Jiu'an, the fourth member, joined the Palace Museum staff in 1956; before that he had worked for one of the antique dealers in Liulichang, the books and antiques market of Beijing, and later had been a private dealer, developing through this experience the expertise and eye to distinguish good paintings from bad, genuine from fake.

For these four people, as the two survivors reveal in telling their stories, it was a connoisseur's dream come true. What, after all, determines the quality of life for a serious Chinese painting enthusiast, other than spending as much of it as possible in seeing new and unknown paintings--or, better yet, once-famous paintings that had dropped out of sight--determining their authenticity, and acquiring as many of them as one's means allow? And now they were doing all these things full-time, with virtually unlimited means, little competition, and access, in principle, to all the collections that remained in China. Themselves late products of an incorrigibly elite tradition, they were now functioning as People's Connoisseurs, turning private holdings into a great public collection, a transfer that would have made their gentry-literati ancestors groan with anti-populist anguish. It was a situation rich in ironies and rewards.

During the early years of the P.R.C., as Xu tells it, paintings were acquired in several ways. Some were confiscated from the collections of "political criminals," those who had collaborated with the Japanese or with the Kuo-min-tang (Nationalists), and from "illegal dealers." Some paintings were presented to the museums by collectors to gain political favor or for other reasons--the official explanation, as given now by Liu Jiu'an, is that "their children were not interested in paintings, and they knew they would be better

cared for in the museum." But the bulk of the collection was acquired through purchase. Dealers from Liu-li Ch'ang and elsewhere, as well as private owners, would bring pieces for sale to show to Xu every day, from eight in the morning until noon and again from two to six; Xu would choose the best from among these for purchase. Prices then were very low--"a good hanging scroll by [the 18th century master] Hua Yen might cost a hundred yuan," the equivalent of today's ten yuan or less than two U.S. dollars. Even so, private collectors could not afford them, so there ~~were~~<sup>was</sup>, in effect, no competitors. Would-be sellers would give an asking price; Xu, as he relates, would "argue them down--just as in pre-Liberation days." Inexpensive pieces he could buy freely, without special authorization, while for more expensive items he would turn to Zhang Congyu and Zheng Zhenduo for their support. All the best paintings went to the Palace Museum; lesser ones, and those with special historical value, went to the National Historical Museum. Working this way, they were able to bring together a collection of over 3,000 works of painting and calligraphy by the time the Huihua Guan or Painting Exhibition Hall was opened at the Palace Museum in the mid-1950s.

The purchases were not only from Beijing dealers and collectors, but also from Tianjin and Shanghai. Xu tells of spending three months in Shanghai in 1956, buying hundreds of paintings, many from the great old collections there: the Kuo-yün Lou Collection of the Ku family, formed by Ku Wen-pin (1811-1889) and later owned by his grandson Ku Lin-shih (1865-1933); the large collection of P'ang Yüan-chi, which was sold under pressure by his widow and divided between the Shanghai Museum and the Palace Museum.

Older and more important paintings, the masterworks of pre-<sup>Sung</sup> Song<sup>1</sup>, <sup>Sung</sup> Song, and Yuan that are now the pride of the Huihua Guan, were mostly acquired through other routes. Some were bought outside China, chiefly in Hong Kong or through Hong Kong agents, and brought back. These, by contrast with the ones in China, were

not cheap at all--the "Five Oxen" scroll ascribed to the Tang master Han Huang, for example, cost them 60,000 Hong Kong dollars. Zhou Enlai personally authorized these substantial expenditures of foreign exchange, arguing that however poor the new country might be, recovering as many as possible of the masterworks of China's heritage while it was still possible took highest priority. Two of the finest, the Tung Yüan<sup>Attributed</sup> "Landscape of the Hsiao and Hsiang" and "Han Hsi-ts'ai's Night Banquet" after the tenth century master Ku Hung-chung, were bought from the famous painter-collector Chang Ta-ch'ien, and others were purchased through Hsü Po-chiao, a Hong Kong collector-dealer who is still active.

In particular, the Chinese were attempting to recover as many as possible of the Tung-pei paintings that had been taken by P'u-i. The Palace Museum now claims to own about 500, or half, of these "lost paintings." Others are in the Chi-lin Provincial Museum in Ch'ang-ch'un, the last location of the "Last Emperor's" movable court, and in the Liaoning Provincial Museum in Shenyang (formerly called the Tung-pei Museum), which had received the paintings confiscated from peasants and others of that region into whose hands they had fallen. Among these was the incomparable Ch'ing-ming Shang-ho T'u or "Spring Festival on the River" handscroll attributed to Chang Tse-tuan--now one of China's greatest treasures--which, Xu says, the Russian soldiers who seized paintings from P'u-i as he was about to board a plane to flee to Japan "didn't know enough to steal." This, with three others of the greatest early masterworks--Li Kung-lin's "Pasturing Horses," the scroll of birds and insects by the tenth-century master Huang Ch'üan, and the "Autumn Colors on Rivers and Mountains" scroll attributed to Chao Po-chü--are now in the Palace Museum. They were, Xu relates, among a larger group of early works brought on loan from the Liaoning Provincial Museum to Beijing for photographing and study; and when the Huihua Guan was about to open, the decision was made to keep them, with Zheng Zhenduo's support, to strengthen the Palace Museum's holdings in the early periods. Xu has never

been forgiven for this by the Liaoning Museum's then-director Yang Renkai, as Xu relates with more relish than remorse.

Although the great period of its collecting might be said to have been over by the mid-1950s, the Palace Museum has continued to add paintings and calligraphy to its collection, along with other art objects and archaeological finds, down to the present day. Its collection now contains over 30,000 paintings and 50,000 pieces of calligraphy. Liu Jiu'an, after he joined the Palace Museum staff in 1956, took over from Xu Bangda much of the day-to-day job of judging and choosing paintings offered for sale. He tells of sitting every Sunday morning in what is now the ticket-dispensing building at the north entrance, the Hsüan-wu-men, looking at pieces brought by dealers and collectors, some from Tianjin and Shanghai as well as Beijing. Out of the hundreds offered he would keep "one or two hundred"; these would then be shown to a connoisseurship committee, which would decide whether they merited a place in the collection, and determine prices for them. The more important and expensive acquisitions continued to require the approval of Zhang Congyu and the Bureau of Cultural Relics. After Zhang died of cancer in 1962, and Zheng Zhenduo was killed in a plane crash in 19??, Xu and Liu were deprived of much of their political support; but both survived the Cultural Revolution and the terrible Jiang Qing years, and still participate, although officially retired, in the publishing, exhibition, and augmenting of the Palace Museum's collection.

(I may add a concluding sentence or two later.)