

The Inscription of Remnant Things: Zhang Dai's "Twenty-Eight Friends"*

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The existential dilemma of whether or not to live under a new dynasty, coupled with political restrictions on what human voices might say, inspired nuanced forms of identification with the properties of inanimate objects in early Qing literature.¹ Things (*wu*) helped poets articulate feelings of redundancy or recalcitrance, while in certain cases registering palpable fears of depersonalization.² Historian and renowned prose stylist Zhang Dai (1597–?1684) went further than other seventeenth-century authors in casting “objects of the former dynasty” (*qianchao yiwu*) as protagonists in his responses to the transition.³ In an extensive, yet neglected collection of inscriptions (*ming*) on his family's possessions, Zhang conceived of things as faithful interlocutors, asking what lessons his appointed “friends” (*you*) might impart amid the turbulence of the Ming cataclysm. This unique sequence invites its readers to reflect on how to represent historical trauma not from an anthropocentric viewpoint, but by attending to the experiences of household things.

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1. For a wide-ranging overview of approaches to the representation of “objects from the former dynasty” in early Qing literary culture, see Wai-ye Li, “Shibian yu wanwu.”

2. Wang Fuzhi (1619–92), for instance, having quit the rump Yongli court spent the last seventeen years of his life in a “mud hut” on Stone Boat Mountain, comparing himself to a “recalcitrant stone” (*wanshi*). Wai-ye Li, “Introduction,” 13.

3. On Zhang's biography see Xia Xianchun, *Mingmo qicai—Zhang Dai lun*; Hu Yimin, *Zhang Dai pingzhuan*; and Hu Yimin, *Zhang Dai yanjiu*. For an English introduction to his life and work, see Spence, *Return to Dragon Mountain*.

Inscription—the word *ming* denoting acts of making a lasting mark or authoritatively naming an object—embodied early Qing concerns with the restitution of lost property. Throughout his literary career, Zhang Dai turned to “inscription” (*ming*), a form of classical prose, yet one that typically resembles a poem: a terse message in free verse, sometimes only six or eight characters, purportedly engraved (*ming*) upon the surface of the thing it names.⁴ The number of Zhang’s inscriptions, at least sixty-eight, exceeds the quantity of compositions by this preeminent belletrist in any other prose form. The author’s literary engagement with the ruins of the Ming remains inflected, to an extent unrecognized in current readings of his oeuvre, by an underlying concern with the ethical stakes and material contingencies of writing *on* things.⁵ The twin themes of this austere genre—praise (*zhusong*) and admonition (*jingjie*)—sustained endeavors to reconcile the imperatives of remembrance with pointed moral judgments.⁶ Against this backdrop, early Qing inscriptions on Ming objects work to redeem the pleasures and passions of connoisseurship, characteristic traits of a late Ming sensibility, while assessing the imbrication of such practices in the dispersal and attendant destruction of the transition.⁷ Presenting his words as physical components of the things they describe, Zhang strives to retrieve a sense of durability, while perturbing the positions of self and object, “me” (*yu*) and “you” (*er*). This essay argues that the miniature and comparatively marginal form of the literary inscription, rather than monumental works of fiction, drama, or historical prose, might under such circumstances best articulate fraught sentiments of longing and dislocation, lending succinct expression to the predicament of feeling “left behind” (*yi*).

4. For an introduction to the *ming*-inscription as a literary genre, see Ge Huafei, “Ming, mingwen yu mingti jianlun,” 69–75; Edwards, “A Classified Guide to the Thirteen Classes of Chinese Prose,” 781; 784; Knechtges, “From the Eastern Han through the Western Jin,” 138–39.

5. Zhang also recycled inscriptions attributed to family members as sources for a number of vignettes in what is now considered to be his masterpiece, *Dream Reminiscences of Tao'an* (*Tao'an mengyi*). For a comprehensive study, see Kafalas, *In Limpid Dream*.

6. Xu Shizeng, *Wenti mingbian*, 113.

7. Zhang, in this sense, lends political significance to the attitude of “simultaneous attachment and detachment” (*buji buli*), the “proleptic denial of indulgence and wanton pleasure”—a common theme in earlier writings on connoisseurship. See Wai-ye Li, “The Collector, the Connoisseur, and Late-Ming Sensibility,” 272.

Zhang Dai's "Inscriptions on Twenty-Eight Friends" (Er'shi ba you ming) concurrently broach consequential questions concerning the constraints of life writing in the early Qing.⁸ Zhang, who professed to a "fondness for writing history" (*bao zuo shi*) and regarded his own chronicle of the fallen dynasty, *Book of the Stone Casket* (*Shigui shu*), as his foremost accomplishment, returned throughout his career to the question of what constitutes "biographical verisimilitude," searching across diverse literary and visual media for ways to recover a "presence beyond death."⁹ Beyond his widely cited family memoirs in *Dream Reminiscences of Tao'an* (*Tao'an mengyi*), Zhang engaged in several major biographical projects, from his *Biographies of Righteous Martyrs from Antiquity to the Present* (*Gujin yilie zhuan*)—one of his earliest works, dated to 1628, and the only book he published in his lifetime—to *Encomia on Portraits of the Ming Dynasty Imperishable Worthies of Yue* (*Ming yu Yue sanbuxiu mingxian tuzan*) from 1680, a compendium of 109 posthumous woodcuts of local celebrities, friends, and relatives.¹⁰ Zhang's

8. It remains difficult to date much of Zhang Dai's poetry and prose because his oeuvre circulated in manuscript until the nineteenth century; see Hu Yimin, *Zhang Dai yanjiu*, 202–25. Zhang Dai's self-preface for *Collected Writings of Langhuan* is dated to 1654 but he appears to have added materials to the manuscript throughout the remainder of his life (two pieces were purportedly written when he was 88); see Xia Xianchun, "Qianyan" (Foreword), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 27. Beyond the elegiac mood of the "Twenty-Eight Friends" sequence and Zhang's prefatory concerns with loss, "old things" (*jiuwu*), and "old friends" (*guyou*), I date the collection to the early Qing on the basis of multiple references to his second uncle Zhang Lianfang's burial in Zhang Dai, "Baiding lu ming" (Inscription on a White Ding Ware Censer), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:404. Lianfang died in 1644. His son Yanke, another custodian of four "friends" in the sequence, died in 1646 fighting with the anti-Manchu resistance led by the Prince of Lu. There are, as I discuss in more detail below, affinities between Zhang Dai's short prefaces for two of the friends, "White Ding Ware Censer" and "Small Beauty Chalice," and a vignette, "Zhongshu's Antiques" (*Zhongshu gudong*), evidently composed after Lianfang's death and the dispersal of his collection in Yanke's hands. More generally, in Zhang's collected biographies of his grandfather, uncles, and cousins, sequences that concern the same men he remembers in the "Twenty-Eight Friends" date from the post-conquest years. Zhang's engagement with these biographical projects has been understood as post-facto justification for not committing suicide in 1644. See Campbell, "Flawed Jade," 28.

9. Campbell, "Moral Ancestors, Immortal Images," 3.

10. Campbell, "Flawed Jade," 26. On Zhang's attention to human flaws (*xia*), see Kafalas, "Weighty Matters, Weightless Form," 50–85. Yue refers to an ancient kingdom of the first millennium BCE situated in the northern part of modern Zhejiang. The capital of Yue later became Kuaiji, one of two counties that shared jurisdiction of the seat of Shaoxing prefecture;

inscriptions probe the limitations of straightforward family history, moving from an overt concern with the biographies of his relatives to the lives of their possessions: The “Twenty-Eight Friends” prompt a salient shift in focus from the hierarchical relations among Zhang’s male family members to the horizontal and reciprocal relation of “friendship” between human and thing.¹¹ This reorientation toward the careers of household objects suggests that they afford perspectives on human behavior—registering acts of fidelity or neglect, limning experiences of displacement and damage—that were not readily accommodated in standard biographical formats.

This essay traces the motivations and consequences of Zhang Dai’s material turn from family history to the lives of things, using his inscriptions to examine changing approaches to the status of the object in early Qing literature. Late Ming collectors had personified things as “friends” to model an empathetic understanding for, or eccentric “obsession” (*pi*) with, their possessions: an act that reads as a narcissistic demonstration of individuality, or of the “self loving the self” (*wu ai wu*).¹² Writing across the Ming-Qing divide, Zhang reimagines the meaning of friendship: His “old acquaintances” (*guyou*) now insist on their “otherness” as fragments of a lost world, eliciting critical reflection on the deficiencies of their custodians, resisting service as uncomplicated evidence of human virtue. The “old thing” (*jiuwu*), Zhang’s inscriptions intimate, no longer passes as a mute prop in a collector’s performance of refined taste, but emerges as a self-sufficient witness to trauma, one that observes and seeks to redress human depredations. By attending to the shifting implications of “friendship” with objects, my readings address

Zhang Dai was born in the other county, Shanyin. Zhang’s frequent references to Yue reflect similar tendencies among seventeenth-century writers to “evoke the atmosphere of a place as a cultural, rather than functional or administrative, entity.” Meyer-Fong, *Building Culture*, 8.

11. Zhang only refers to his family’s things as “friends,” in contrast to various artifacts he inscribed for his friends; see his inscription for Chen Hongshou (1598–1652), Zhang Dai, “Zhanghou zhu bige ming” (Inscription on Zhanghou’s Bamboo Armrest), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:398; or Zhao Wofa, Zhang Dai, “Wei Zhao Wofa ming zhang” (Inscribing a Staff for Zhao Wofa), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:401.

12. Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, 61–74; Wai-ye Li, “The Collector, the Connoisseur, and Late-Ming Sensibility,” 295. Zhang Dai’s own writings are often cited in discussions of “obsession” in late Ming literature; see Zhang Dai, “Qi Zhixiang pi” (Obsessions of Qi Zhixiang), *Tao’an mengyi*, 4:72. My readings by contrast recover critical approaches to possession that emerge from Zhang’s inscriptions.

questions whose significance is amplified, yet by no means confined to the events of a dynastic transition: does the personification of things insinuate, or strive to counteract the objectification of humans? Does the conceit of a thing's "biography" merely elucidate the sentiments and experiences of its biographer, or might it cultivate an unselfish responsibility toward the material remains of the past? This essay begins by identifying the centrality of inscription to Zhang's memoirs of the late Ming world, before demonstrating how, as his "state fell and family was destroyed" (*guopo jiawang*), the author turned to admonitions that only left-over things could voice.¹³

Zhang Dai and the Literary Inscription of Things

Across his historical memoirs and biographical writings, Zhang Dai introduces himself as a reader of inscribed objects. Indeed, a number of the most celebrated vignettes in *Dream Reminiscences of Tao'an* are not so much "essays" as retrospectively composed prefaces for literary inscriptions (*ming*).¹⁴ In "Shen Meigang," for instance, Zhang creates a "portrait" of a scholar-craftsman (Shen Shu [1515–81]) and Kuaiji native from the details of his great-grandfather's markings on a box and a fan: The vignette is an extended record of Zhang Dai's reading of Zhang Yuanbian's (1538–88) (courtesy name: Zijin; penname: Yanghe) engraved words.

The entry in *Dream Reminiscences* begins with Shen Meigang's prison sentence for offending controversial Grand Secretary Yan Song (1480–1567), before following Shen's virtuosic experiments as a craftsman in jail, whittling his own tools and making boxes, cases, and an eighteen-rib fan from one fragment of olivewood.¹⁵ The real point of interest for Zhang is that Shen's wife later approached his great-grandfather, Zhang

13. Zhang Dai, "Zixu" (Self Preface), *Tao'an mengyi*, 3. The preface is undated, but suggests that it was composed around 1647. For a full translation, see Owen, *Remembrances*, 133–35.

14. For other examples of vignettes in *Dream Reminiscences* that draw upon inscriptions, see Zhang Dai, "Mu you long" (Wood Like A Dragon), *Tao'an mengyi*, 1:17; "Tian yan" (Natural Inkstone), *Tao'an mengyi*, 1:18; "Huashigang yishi" (Left-over Stone from the Flower and Rock Flotilla), *Tao'an mengyi*, 2:28; "Shen Meigang," *Tao'an mengyi*, 2:35; "Yanghe quan" (Yanghe Spring), *Tao'an mengyi*, 3:46; "Longpen chi" (Dragon Spurt Pool), *Tao'an mengyi*, 3:49; "Songhua shi" (Pine Flower Stone), *Tao'an mengyi*, 7:118.

15. Zhang Dai, "Shen Meigang," *Tao'an mengyi*, 2:35.

Yuanbian, with these hand-carved artifacts as gifts in exchange for an epitaph (*muzhiming*). Yuanbian accepted the commission, yet Zhang Dai shifts focus from whatever it was the epitaph might have said to the inscriptions his great-grandfather engraved onto the small curios. For Zhang Dai, a vocal critic of the rhetorical pretensions of Ming entombed epigraphy, the markings on Shen's box and fan constitute a more fitting memorial to the aspects of Shen's life deemed worth remembering.¹⁶ Zhang's abrupt transition from the public history of Yan Song's political corruption to Shen Meigang's creativity in prison dovetails with his turn from an imposing epitaphic monument to the comparatively miniature inscriptions that adorn Shen's handmade objects.

Zhang Yuanbian composed two inscriptions, the first for Shen Meigang's fan case, and the second for the body of the fan itself. Invoking an analogy to Su Wu (140 BCE–60 BCE)—held for nineteen years by the Xiongnu and starved into submission—Zhang celebrates Shen's self-sufficiency: making tools to make things that might earn a true memorial for his name:

Inscription on the Case:

For nineteen years, the "Gentleman of the Household" carried a staff with yaktail streamers; for eighteen years, the Supervising Secretary held this case.¹⁷ A staff! A case! Both things of the same spoke.¹⁸

Inscription on the Fan:

Scraps of a felt rug from beyond the border, sustenance to eat when starved.¹⁹ A fan in jail, unsullied by dirt and dust; before there was Su now there is Shen, their names shine resplendently.²⁰

16. On Zhang Dai's critique of "flattering epitaphs" and the commodification of Ming panegyric, see "Zhou Wanwei muzhiming" (Epitaph for Zhou Wanwei), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:377. Campbell, "Flawed Jade," 27.

17. The "gentleman" is Su Wu. A *maojie*, or staff ornamented with yaktail streamers, was carried by official emissaries. Shen Shu served as a supervising secretary (*jishizhong*) in the Office of Scrutiny for Rites.

18. Zhang Dai, "Shen Meigang," 35.

19. Su Wu was punished with starvation for refusing to submit to the Xiongnu, yet he survived by eating snow and bits of felt.

20. Zhang Dai, "Shen Meigang," 35. For a partial translation, see Kafalas, *In Limpid Dream*, 72.

After transcribing and hence ensuring the future transmission of the two inscriptions, Zhang Dai attends to the physicality of the engravings, noting that his great-grandfather's *ming* for Shen's objects were first drafted with the brush by Xu Wei (1521–93) (Xu Wenchang *shu*), then engraved by a carver named Zhang Yingyao (Zhang Yinggyao *juan*).²¹ The pair of inscriptions can, Zhang Dai suggests, be seen to constitute a "collection" (*yu zhen cang zhi*), a gathering of "four perfections" (*sijue*)—literature (Zhang Yuanbian), calligraphy (Xu Wei), engraving (Zhang Yingyao) and craft (Shen Meigang)—a palimpsest formed from the traces of different hands. Zhang Yuanbian's inscription was not a solipsistic act, but a collective effort to establish a memorial rooted in Shaoxing, one that his great-grandson worked to restore almost a century later.²² Zhang Dai not only uses the two *ming* as a kernel for his vignette, "Shen Meigang," in *Dream Reminiscences* but recycles these same words as the basis for a further "appraisal" (*zan*) of Shen's woodcut visage in the "Loyal Remonstrancers" (Zhongjian) chapter of *Encomia on Portraits of Imperishable Worthies*.²³ Peeling back sedimented layers of significance to Yingyao's knifework or Xu Wei's brushwork, Zhang recovers a "pseudo-epitaph" for the deceased prisoner: the material history of the two inscriptions, in Zhang's eyes, comes to embody the collaborative and local character of this shared protest against political corruption.²⁴

"Shen Meigang" attests to the centrality of object inscription in Zhang Dai's broader engagement with the project of historical judgment. Nevertheless, in his own inscriptions, writings that invoke the destruction and loss of the transition, Zhang begins to question both the durability of engraved markings and the correspondences between human virtue and thing that his great-grandfather's inscribed slogans presume. If Zhang Dai carefully attends to the quiddity of his great-grandfather's *ming*, physical

21. The antiquarian Deng Zhicheng (1887–1960) claimed to have owned a wooden armrest (*bige*) with an inscription and a painting of a hibiscus by Xu Wei both engraved by Zhang Yingyao, attesting, he notes, to the "name brand" quality of a "Xu and Zhang" collaboration in late Ming China. Deng Zhicheng, "Zhang Yingyao," *Gudong suoji quanbian*, 7:258.

22. Kafalas reads "Xu Wei's calligraphy" and "Zhang Yingyao's carving" as references to other artifacts. Kafalas, *In Limpid Dream*, 72.

23. Zhang Dai, *Sanbuxiu tuzan*, 56. This collection, a project Zhang prepared with Xu Wei's grandson Xu Qin, also includes portraits of Xu Wei and Zhang Yuanbian.

24. On Zhang Yuanbian's fame as a moralistic protestor against Yan Song's illicit execution of Yang Jisheng (1516–55), see Zhang Dai, "Jiazhuan" (Family Biographies), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 4:332–33.

traces that warrant veneration in and of themselves, his own inscriptions possess a less stable objecthood, assuming an increasingly mutable and provisional character. If Zhang Yuanbian commemorates the integrity of a person by praising the properties of an object, Zhang Dai considers how possessions might stand apart from their owners, assuming independent personae, even judging those who failed them. The precarity of the mid-seventeenth century moment perturbed straightforward assumptions of *how* to write on things: what, amid these upheavals, was the purpose of making a mark?

The Twenty-Eight Friends

While Zhang Dai finds in his great-grandfather's miniature monuments resources for an alternative late Ming history of local resistance to corruption, he looks to his grandfather, Zhang Rulin (?1558–1625) (penname: Yuruo), to recover a private model of friendship between human and thing. Zhang Dai's vignette, "Pine Flower Stone," proceeds from Rulin's inscription on a rock from southern Huguang. The rugged physicality of Rulin's engraving (compared to a *moya* carving on an unquarried boulder) is at once an assertion of conquest and a search for unadorned "naturalness," yet its austere demeanor is mitigated by the conversational intimacy and shape-shifting perspectives of his message:

You used to be hairy, shaking it! You were pine.
 But now you've shed it all, petrified. You're a stone.
 While you can swap forms,
 Your integrity remains constant.
 You gaze at me and I smile,
 With you I have complete concord.²⁵

Zhang Dai revives the storyline in his grandfather's inscription for his own vignette: beginning with an account of sacrifices at a riverside shrine in Xiaojiang, where locals sprinkled the blood and hair of butchered animals onto the rock, before turning to the object's "twisted

25. The final lines of the inscription are an allusion to a repeated passage in *The Great Source as Teacher* (Dazong shi) chapter in *Zhuangzi* describing an ideal friendship: "They looked at one another and burst out laughing, feeling complete concord, and thus did they become friends." Zhang Dai, "Songhua shi," *Tao'an mengyi*, 7:118.

corpulence" as it stands at the "foot of the stairs," holding a planter, unfit for other uses.²⁶ The domestication of the found object resembles a kind of enslavement, with Zhang Rulin taming the totemic aura of this blood-spattered, hairy monstrosity, cutting its mane and restricting its movements within the local yamen: These acts culminate in Rulin naming the object "Elder Stone" (*shizhang*), a reference to legendary petromaniac Mi Fu's (1051–1107) obeisance before an anthropomorphized rock dressed in scholar's garb and a paradigmatic example of friendship between the self and inorganic "others" in late imperial literature.²⁷

Harnessing the propulsive rhythm of the carrier-sound *xi* (as if performing a shamanic summons), Zhang Rulin repeatedly calls upon the object, each line addressing a "you" (*er*), as if beseeching the silent rock to talk back. The first two lines mix a selection of body parts ("manes" and "bones") with direct references to the materials of pine and stone, yet, by the final line, Zhang Rulin has removed any stable indicators to person or thing, with the positions of "I" (*yu*) and you" (*er*) becoming almost interchangeable: are "you" looking (*shi*) at "me," or am "I" smiling (*xiao*) at "you"? The inscription proceeds from the physical metamorphoses of the object—its oscillations between wood and rock—to refracting the direction of address, so that these engraved declarations of affinity might be read from the perspective of either human or thing.²⁸ Zhang Dai's retrospective account of Rulin's mark, opening up a gap between inscribed ideal and its inferred context, frames his grandfather's devotion to the rock in terms of its initial subjugation and subsequent neglect: He remains ambivalent as to whether Rulin's claim of empathic understanding redeems, or is vitiated by the thing's

26. For a translation and brief discussion of this essay, see Kafalas, *In Limpid Dream*, 65. Zhang Dai elsewhere commemorates the pride of place "Pine Flower Stone" eventually assumed at his study, Cloudy Grove's Secret Belvedere, a double allusion to Yuan painter Ni Zan's (1301–74) Belvedere of Pure Intimacy (Qingbi) and studio name "Cloudy Grove" (Yunlin); see Zhang Dai, "Yunlin bige sanshou" (Three Poems on Cloudy Grove's Secret Belvedere), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 4:83. On the construction and naming of this study, see Zhang Dai, "Meihua shuwu" (Apricot Blossom Bookroom), *Tao'an mengyi*, 2:32–33.

27. On late Ming and early Qing interest in Mi Fu's rock obsessions, see Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange*, 78–81.

28. The inscription introduces the possibility of a split between the "subject of enunciation" (the subject to whom the act of speaking is attributed) and the "subject of speech" (the subject represented within the text of the speech), a move that "unmoors the first-person pronoun from its contextual and bodily grounding." See Nakatani, "Body, Sentiment, and Voice," 76.

experience of displacement. If “Elder Stone” in its allusion to Mi Fu adheres to established conceptions of friendship with things, Zhang Dai’s own inscriptions, engaging the political dislocation of being “left behind” (*yi*), start to envision less-stable configurations of self and object.

Collected Writings of Langhuan (*Langhuan wenji*) reveals that Zhang Dai authored a considerable number of inscriptions for the possessions of friends and family throughout his literary career.²⁹ Across this larger collection of inscriptions, “left over” family possessions come to embody memories of deceased family members. An inscription on a “Broken Bronze Water Dipper” (“Cantong shuizhong cheng ming”)—“bequeathed” (*yi*) by Zhang’s grandfather, Zhang Rulin, for instance—concludes with an invocation not to “forget the sweat of the hand” (*wuwang shouze*), or the perspiration from the hands of the deceased that clings to objects they have held.³⁰ Despite its “damaged” (*can*) form—with a “mutilated mouth” (*qiang kou*) and “broken legs” (*zhe zu*)—the dipper provides, for Zhang, a means of staying in touch with the physical presence of the past.³¹ Xu Wei, a prevailing influence on Zhang’s poetry and prose, inscribed a “Cracked Gallbladder Vase Chimestone,” identifying the hidden value and creative powers of a disfigured artifact,

29. Langhuan alludes to the tale of Jin dynasty poet (and supposed Zhang family progenitor) Zhang Hua’s (232–300) journey to the “Blessed Land of Langhuan” (Langhuan fudi), a paradisiacal grotto filled with books in archaic tadpole scripts recording Chinese history prior to the First Emperor’s bibliocaust. Zhang Dai returns to the idea of Langhuan throughout his poetry and prose: He offers a record of the Zhang Hua tale based largely on a Yuan-era account; see Zhang Dai, “Langhuan fudi ji” (Record of a Blessed Land of Langhuan), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 2:235–36. The name held personal significance for Zhang Dai as he remembered his grandfather referring to the family’s estate, Happy Garden, as “Blessed Land of Langhuan,” this space became Zhang Dai’s residence following the fall of the Ming; Zhang Dai, “Kuaiyuan ji” (Record of Happy Garden), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 2:266. The final vignette in *Dream Reminiscences* is devoted to Zhang’s dream of his personal Langhuan, a paradisiacal garden of the mind that houses his tomb, see Zhang Dai, “Langhuan fudi” (Blessed Land of Langhuan), *Tao’an mengyi*, 8. 138–39. By naming his collection Langhuan, Zhang presents its contents as a posttraumatic refuge of dream, family memory, and readerly transport. On the history of this collection and its circulation in manuscript, see Xia Xianchun, “Qianyan,” *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 27–35.

30. The *locus classicus* for *shouze* is *The Record of Rites*. *Liji jijie*, vol. 2, 30:830.

31. Zhang Dai, “Cantong shuizhong cheng ming (Dafu suo yi)” (Inscription on a Broken Bronze Water Dipper [Left Behind by Grandfather]), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:394.

intimating the art-making capacities of his own damaged body.³² "Brokenness" and physical "ruin," in the early Qing, tacitly invoke a remnant subject's sense of injury.³³

The central tenets of Zhang's engagement with the literary inscription are distilled in a mini-collection entitled "Inscriptions on Twenty-Eight Friends," a sequence that wavers between pseudo-epitaphic commemoration and empathetic identification with the thing as an interlocutor. This ensemble comprises objects belonging to the author's grandfather Zhang Rulin (two objects), second paternal uncle Zhang Lianfang (?1575–1644) (courtesy name: Erbao; penname: Eryou) (five objects), fourth uncle Zhang Yefang (?1585–1615) (courtesy name: Eryun; penname: Qipan) (four objects), cousin Zhang E (?d. 1646) (courtesy name: Yanke) (four objects), a mysterious brother named Daozi (four objects), and youngest brother Zhang Min (?1605–?73) (courtesy name: Shanmin) (six objects)—in addition to three of Zhang Dai's own things.³⁴ Whereas the collection begins with Rulin ("Elder Stone's" companion), it is bookended by the Zhang family's two preeminent antiquaries: Lianfang, "one of the five greatest collectors south of the Yangzi River," and Zhang Dai's beloved younger brother Min, the "last" of the family's true collectors, an heir to Lianfang, and an avid author of his own

32. Xu Wei, "Podan qing ming bing xu" (Inscription and Preface on a Cracked Gallbladder Vase Chimestone), *Xu Wei ji*, 22:592. Zhang's obsessive devotion to Xu is evident in the preface to his *Langhuan Poetry Collection* relating how his friend Wu Xi dreamt that Xu Wei told him Zhang Dai was his reincarnation. Zhang Dai, "Langhuan shiji zixu" (Self-Preface to Langhuan Poetry Collection), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 474.

33. See Zhang Dai, "Cao shan" (Cao Mountain), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 2:257. Signs of material abrasion and damage resurface across Zhang Dai's inscriptions; see, for instance, the "bloody crinkles" on a Han dynasty jade paperweight: "Lü Jishi Han yu zhaowen dai jiechi ming" (Inscription on Lü Jishi's Han Dynasty Jade Ferule Paperweight), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:408. Zhang elsewhere treats fragility as a central conceit: "It is difficult to hold, one trip and it smashes into a hundred pieces." "Geyao guanji ping ming" (Inscription on a Ge Ware Topknot Tuft Vase), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:404.

34. It remains unclear who "Daozi" refers to: whether it is a rarely used epithet for one of Zhang's brothers or a mistaken transcription in the *Langhuan* manuscripts. Zhang elsewhere addresses his "younger brother Daozi" in "Lu Yungu zhuan" (Biography of Lu Yungu), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 4:366. The Daozi epithet does not appear, however, in any of Zhang's family biographies or in *Dream Reminiscences*. On the confusion surrounding both the names and identities of Zhang Dai's brothers, see Hu Yimin, *Zhang Dai pingzhuan*, 77.

inscriptions.³⁵ Prominent Zhang family members, notably Zhang's great-grandfather Yuanbian (author of inscriptions for Shen Meigang), his father Yaofang (courtesy name: Ertao), and all his female relatives, are excluded from this fellowship of exemplary connoisseurs.³⁶

The collection of friends accommodates a diverse range of material substrates, from jades and maplewood, to lacquer, celadons and porcelain, "purple sand" stoneware, bronze, and an odd assortment of colorful rain-flower pebbles. With the exception of a strange bronze chalice from the Han dynasty, the majority of objects are of specifically Ming provenance, bear Ming reign marks, or passed through the hands of eminent Ming dynasty collectors like Wang Shimao (1536–88) and Xiang Yuanbian (1525–90).³⁷ At least one artifact—Zhang Rulin's orchid pyxis—claims to be a product of Beijing's "Orchard Factory" (*Guoyuan chang*) a lacquer workshop for the imperial court until 1436, foregrounding the unambiguous status of Zhang's friends as remnant things with ties to Ming royalty.³⁸ For each "friend," Zhang Dai composes a brief preface, no

35. Zhang Dai composed an epitaph for Min that precedes his own acclaimed "auto-epitaph" (*ziwei muzhiming*) in *Collected Writings of Langhuan* and is largely devoted to his brother's talents as an antiquarian, describing the detailed steps he took to care for his acquisitions, a process that ends with the inscription of his choice possessions: "When an object entered his hands, he had to caress it day and night, until it emanated a strange sheen; he would wrap it up in unusual brocades and store it in a camphor chest, seeking out 'famous hands' (*ming shou*) for his inscriptions." Zhang Dai, "Shanmin di muzhiming" (Epitaph for My Younger Brother Shanmin), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:372.

36. Zhang elsewhere claims his great-grandfather Yuanbian lived a life of "simplicity and thrift" and it was only following the influence of Zhu Shimen (Rulin's wife's relative)—mentor of Lianfang—that the family started collecting. Zhang Dai, "Jiazhuan," 337. On Zhu Shimen, a figure whose influence on the Zhang family collectors lurks behind the "Twenty-Eight Friends," see Zhang Dai, "Zhushi shoucang" (Master Zhu's Collection), *Tao'an mengyi*, 6:102.

37. Zhang Dai, "Jin Tang xiaokai ming" (Inscription on Jin Tang Smaller Regular Script) and "Baiding lu ming," *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:404, 406.

38. Zhang Dai, "Lanhua xiao chang he ming" (Inscription on a Small Orchid Pyxis from the Imperial Workshop), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:403. On the Orchard Factory see Liu Tong, *Dijing jingwu lue*, 240. Zhang Dai's attention to artifacts associated with the Yongle court and the Xuande reign mark resonates with other early Qing poems on "objects of the former dynasty" that use things from the Ming palaces to chart the upheavals of the transition; see Wu Weiye's (1609–71), "Gong shan" (Palace Fan), and "Xuanzong yuyong qiang jin xishuai pen ge" (Song of Emperor Xuanzong's Gold Inlaid Cricket Pan), *Wu Meicun quanji*, 3:60–63. Wang Jiansheng, *Wu Meicun yanjiu*, 144–48; Wai-ye Li, "History and Memory in Wu Weiye's Poetry," 129–35.

more than two or three lines, "inventorying" the collector, measurements, and surface patina of the thing, before writing a pithy *ming*—the longest runs to nineteen characters, while the shortest is only six.³⁹ The following composition on his fourth uncle's ceramic dish for seal ink paste, a synecdoche for the calligraphic talents of his male relatives, offers an exemplary object lesson:

Inscription on a Ge Ware Seal Paste Pool

Uncle Eryun owned a seal paste pool around two inches in length and half an inch in breadth, with a Chuzhou hue and patches of sparkling patterning.

Look at this swathe of patterning, I'm unable to misprize you.⁴⁰

An implicit correspondence between natural patterning (*wen*) and a metaphoric of cultural refinement (*wen*) resonates with the classical conceit that an inscription should cultivate the virtues to which a gentleman (*junzi*) aspires.⁴¹ Zhang's words similarly adhere to an antiquarian aesthetic of "concision" (*yue*), both approximating the miniature or constricted surface of the object, and directing attention to its physiognomy, converting a singular trait (patches of patterning) into a

39. There is also a surviving commentary on this set of inscriptions by Wang Yuqian (courtesy name: Yanmi; penname: Tianfu). A close friend of the author, Wang, also from Shanyin and a provincial graduate of 1633, composed both interlinear and eyebrow commentary for Zhang Dai's manuscript of *Langhuan wenji*; see Xia Xianchun, "Qianyan," *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 28.

40. Zhang Dai, "Geyao yinchi ming" (Inscription on a Ge Ware Seal Paste Pool), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:405.

41. See, for instance, Lu Ji's (261–303) comments: "The inscription is broad yet concise, gentle and smooth"—"gentle and smooth" refers to the character of the refined gentleman (the Confucian ideal of "humaneness or fellow feeling"); Lu Ji, *Lu Ji ji*, 2. On a metaphoric of *wen* in the decorative arts, see Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces*, 130. Wang Yuqian's commentary on the "Twenty-Eight Friends" searches for correspondences between the language Zhang Dai uses to inscribe his objects and the author's personal character: Zhang's inscription on an elephant-shaped censer describes the object as "upright and not deceptive" (*zheng er bu jue*), which leads Wang to remark: "this is not a description of the burner, but of the author's integrity." Zhang Dai, "Xuanton xiangge lu ming" (Inscription on a Xuan Bronze Elephant Censer), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:405. See also Wang's comment "this is Master Zhang's self portrait" after Zhang Dai, "Songjie yan ming" (Inscription on a Red Pine Inkstone), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:392.

memorable axiom.⁴² As later readers recite Zhang's words, occupying the reflexive pronoun (*zi*), they end up enacting the appraisal his inscription prescribes.

While individual inscriptions focus on the peculiarities and distinctive details of the twenty-eight objects, Zhang Dai asks his readers to approach the ensemble as a single text. In a short preface, the author outlines the central themes of his sequence, foregrounding the relationship of inscription to naming, the recollection of memories, and the conceit of "friendship" with things. In early literary thought, the word "inscription" (*ming*) was defined through paranomastic glossing as equivalent to the word for "name" (*ming*). "Inscribing a cauldron," the locus classicus for *ming* in "Protocols of Sacrifice" (*Jitong*), a chapter now included in the *Record of Rites* (*Liji*), notes, "is to name oneself."⁴³ This act of *making oneself known* is premised on recognizing the virtues of one's ancestors, seeking to selectively display their moral accomplishments ("achievements and brilliance, efforts and toils, honors and distinctions, fame and name") for later generations.⁴⁴ Liu Xie's (465–520) chapter on inscription in his comprehensive survey of classical literary thought, *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* (*Wenxin diaolong*), invokes the *Record of Rites* in defining the genre: "The term *inscription* means to name; to observe things means first *rectifying names*."⁴⁵ Liu Xie links inscription to naming and by extension to the Confucian "rectification of names" (*zhengming*): the ethos that the correct use of names is directly related to the moral activity of "correcting the self" (*zheng shen*).⁴⁶

Adhering to classical prescriptions, Zhang's sequence begins with the topic of naming. Invoking his own cognomen, Tao'an, the preface reflects on the relationship between a personal "name" (*hao* or *ming*) and famous collections of objects, suggesting that the motivation for his twenty-eight inscriptions was the recognition, and a concomitant desire to preserve the "surname" (*xingshi*) of his family's things. While his notional objective is

42. On the value of "concision" as representative of the "plain style" (*zhi*) of antiquity in early theories of inscription, see Owen, "Periodization and Major Inflection Points," 19.

43. Sun Xidan, *Liji jijie*, 1250.

44. Goldin, "The Legacy of Bronzes and Bronze Inscriptions," lv-lvi.

45. Translation adapted from Liu Hsieh, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, 78; Liu Xie, *Wenxin diaolong jiaozhu shiyi*, 92.

46. Makeham, *Name and Actuality in Early Chinese Thought*, 42–44.

to restore "Zhang" family property, the appeal to horizontal relations of friendship suspends hierarchical chains of patrimony among grandfather, uncles, and cousins. By removing his father and his father's things from this collective of "friends," he deftly sidesteps the thorny topic of reclaiming his own inheritance:

Inscriptions on Twenty-Eight Friends (with preface)

Tao'an remarked: Luling had a taste for the uncommon and took "Six Ones" as his sobriquet.⁴⁷ "Old Iron" (Laotie) was fond of antiquities and was renowned for his "Seven Guests."⁴⁸ As for my family's old things, more than half have been lost, yet I still remember their names. They are just like old friends, so I call them "friends."⁴⁹

The "Twenty-Eight Friends" invoke fabled histories of gatherings based on talent or shared aesthetic interests dating back to the Southern Dynasties: groups such as the "Seven Talents of Jian'an," the "Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove," the "Twenty-Four Friends of Jia Mi," and the "Eight Friends of the [Prince] of Jingling."⁵⁰ As Anna Shields notes, these titles were often formed either after a group's activities had come to an end or when leading members had passed away.⁵¹ So too, Zhang Dai recognizes his "old friends" only after more than "half have been lost."⁵²

The author's short preface identifies a model for his collection in Ouyang Xiu's group of "Six Ones" (Liuyi). Forced out of office, Ouyang coined a new literary epithet, "Retired Scholar of Six Ones" (Liuyi jushi),

47. Ouyang Xiu (1007–72).

48. Yang Weizhen (1296–1370).

49. Zhang Dai, "Ershi ba you ming bing xu" (Inscriptions on Twenty-Eight Friends with Preface), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:403.

50. Shields, *One Who Knows Me*, 58.

51. Shields, *One Who Knows Me*, 58.

52. The sequence repeatedly underscores the old age of these choice items. In one of commentator Wang Yuqian's preferred inscriptions, Zhang praises the peculiar "fiery" tinge (*huose*) within the glaze of a Ding ware water dipper inherited from Zhu Shimen's collection by comparing it to the lingering traces of vivacity in an old man: "Born centuries ago, your fire has yet to dwindle out, just like the vigor of an old man." Zhang Dai, "Dingyao shuizhong cheng ming" (Inscription on a Ding Ware Water Dipper), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:405.

placing himself as one more “object” alongside his five possessions: books, his collection of rubbings, a zither, a chess set, and a wine jug.⁵³ Ouyang Xiu did not inscribe his fellow “ones” and Zhang Dai did not place himself within his group of friends or adopt the title of his collection as a cognomen; nevertheless, the reference suggests that Zhang, like Ouyang, was concerned with the way a collector’s sense of self both emerges from, and yet can be hidden or dispersed within his things.⁵⁴ Zhang’s reference to poet-collector and fellow “imperishable worthy” of Yue, Yang Weizhen, meanwhile, resonates with a broader early-Qing investment in promoting the Yuan dynasty, despite its Mongolian heritage, as a “legitimate object” of loyalist longing.⁵⁵ In contrast to the models offered by Ouyang Xiu or Yang Weizhen, however, the relationship between “Tao’an” and his “twenty-eight friends” appears provisional and open-ended: Zhang’s assembly of partly absent presences—a sprawling collection of collections that registers the unfortunate fates of other deceased collectors—fails to secure a titular cognomen; his unruly congregation, in this sense, thwarts a single, straightforward act of ownership through naming.⁵⁶

Zhang similarly perturbs preconceptions of the relationship between an inscribed message and its underlying substrate. The first “object” in the collection, for instance, is a mini-collection of some thirteen rain-

53. Ouyang Xiu, “Liuyi jushi zhuan” (Biography of the Scholar of Six Ones), *Ouyang Xiu shiwen ji*, 44:1130–31.

54. It was not uncommon for Ming literary figures to inscribe a group of objects as their “friends.” See, for instance, Long Ying’s (1560–1622) “Inscriptions on Three Friends of Snowy Crag” (“Xueyan san you ming”), *Long Ying ji*, 9:225. If Long linked his three companions to his cognomen, Li Rihua (1565–1635) took “Six Inkstones” as a studio name, a title based on his prized collection of inscribed writing implements. See Deng Zhicheng, “Liuyan zhai,” *Gudong suoji*, 8:316.

55. Yang Weizhen’s influence on Zhang Dai is especially apparent in Zhang’s ten *yuefu* poems. See Luan Baoqun’s note in Zhang Dai, *Langhuan wenji*, 5:261. See also Zhang’s encomium (*zan*) for a portrait of Yang Weizhen with its reference to his lodging of “Seven Guests” (*qike*) in Zhang Dai, *Sanbuxiu tuzan*, 199. Zhang classed Yang, along with Xu Wei, as one of the “literary” (*wenxue*) worthies of Yue. Yang was portrayed as a worthy Yuan remnant subject by a number of early Qing *yimin*, including Qian Qianyi (1582–1664), Wu Weiye, and Zhu Yizun (1629–1709). Wai-ye Li, “Introduction,” 38.

56. While Zhang is concerned with the collectors in his own family, the selection of “Twenty-Eight Friends” is strewn with the names of other Ming collectors, from such luminaries as Xiang Yuanbian, Wang Shimao, and Zhu Shimen, to less well-known characters like Lü Wenan, Lü Jishi, Qian Zifang, Li Jincheng, and “Wang the Second.”

flower pebbles, souvenirs of Nanjing, amassed by Zhang Rulin, then passed to an uncle, and finally to Zhang Dai. As the reader begins to survey Zhang's group of friends, any sense of a discrete "thing" unspools into an array of colors, as the collection discloses a series of smaller collections. Noting their "unfathomable forms and weird shapes" (*qixing guaizhuang*), Zhang's six-character inscription, itself a marvel of lapidary concision, addresses the "friend" as a collective: "Offering of strange stones, are [you] dissimilar?"⁵⁷ Another one of his "friends" is not a decorative object, but (befitting the prefatory allusion to Ouyang Xiu) Zhang Yefang's collection of eighteen rubbings of "small regular script" from the Jin and Tang, compiled by Wang Shimao: "The finest paper, ink, and rubbing[s]. Alas! The ancients."⁵⁸

Elsewhere in the sequence, Zhang presents his inscription not as a physical mark, but as an imaginative attempt to re-inscribe a surface that already bears engraved script.⁵⁹ Historians of material culture have, as Deng Zhicheng's research on Zhang Yingyao attests, frequently used Zhang Dai's writings as evidence for the appraisal of Ming makers' marks and artisanal brands.⁶⁰ Across his inscriptions, Zhang highlights yet queries the significance of such markings: he flaunts, for instance, the prestige of palace provenance for Zhang Rulin's orchid pyxis and

57. Zhang's six-character inscription is masterfully wrought from two allusions: "Offering of strange stones" (*guaishi gong*) is a reference to Su Shi's collection of 298 strange pebbles that he bequeathed to the monk Foyin; "are they dissimilar" (*jiang wu tong*) is Ruan Xiu's (ca. 270–312) famous response to Wang Yan's question as to the similarities between Daoist and Confucian teachings in *Shishuo xinyu*. Ruan's answer is a diffident affirmation of affinity, one that earned him the title "Three Word Aide" (*sanyu yuan*) and became a euphemism for his intimate friendship with Wei Jie (d. 312). Zhang begins with the three-character allusion to Su Shi's legendary collection, before complementing it with the perfect "three-word aide," one that evokes memories of mutual appreciation between kindred spirits. Zhang Dai, "Yuhua shi ming" (Inscription on Rain Flower Stones), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:403.

58. Zhang Dai, "Jin Tang xiaokai ming," 404.

59. See, for instance, Zhang's inscription for Daozi's square mirror that already bears four characters: "Wintry Pond Autumn Moon" (*bantan qiuyue*). Zhang Dai, "Qian Zifang gujing ming" (Inscription on Qian Zifang's Antique Mirror), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:408.

60. Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, 61, 66–67. Much of this work is based on the following Zhang Dai essays: "Wuzhong jueji" (The Finest Craftsmen of Wu), *Tao'an mengyi*, 1:19; "Pu Zhongqian diaoke" (Pu Zhongqian's Carving), *Tao'an mengyi*, 1:20; "Zhu gong" (Select Craftsmen), *Tao'an mengyi*, 5:77; and "Gan Wentai lu" (The Censers of Gan Wentai), *Tao'an mengyi*, 6:95. There is a significant degree of overlap between Zhang's list of top Ming craftsmen (Lu Zigang, Fan Kunbai, Gan Wentai) and the artisanal markings that adorn his twenty-eight friends.

the attribution of a three-stringed lute to Fan Kunbai, while boasting that Shanmin's bronze censer was superior to a Gan Wentai make, or that Silversmith Shi could "never dream" of matching such a product.⁶¹ Three of the friends are associated with the alluring, yet likely spurious Xuande reign mark, a source of fascination for late Ming sojourners to the temple markets of Beijing and a later focus of loyalist lament.⁶² In another inscription, Zhang dwells on his ability to recognize the identity of a maker, and hence appreciate the value of an object, without having to rely on the presence of a maker's mark, bragging: "Since antiquity there have been many famous paintings that bear no autographs; as for this pot, I took a look and knew right away it was a Gong Chun make."⁶³ Against this backdrop, Zhang Dai presents his inscription on Zhang Yefang's jade hairpin—an object with newfound significance for the remnant subjects who resisted the Manchu command to shave one's head—as an attempt to re-inscribe an artisan's mark:

Inscription on a Cyan Jade Hairpin

Uncle Eryun owned a hairpin of western cyan jade, around three inches in length, the whole thing covered with ornate wyverns. On its surface are twelve characters in seal script, carved in relief: "Thinking of my lord, he is as temperate as jade, made by Lu Zigang."

61. Zhang Dai, "Lanhua xiao chang he ming," "Yang Yao zhi sanxian zi ming" (Inscription on Yang Yao's Sanxian), "Dasheng er fen dang tonglu ming" (Inscription on a Bronze Censer in the shape of a Partitioned-Crotch Cauldron with Corded Ears), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:403, 408, 410.

62. Zhang Dai, "Xuanton xiangge lu ming," "Xuande tianqi he ming" (Inscription on a Xuande Filled-In Lacquer Pyxis), "Xuanton fanfu lianhua shui yu ming" (Inscription on a Xuan Bronze Stacked Lotus Flower Slop Bowl), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:405, 407, 409. See Liu Tong, *Dijing jingwu lue*, 238–39; 242–45. For an early Qing lament, see Wu, "Xuanzong yuyong qiang jin xishuai pen ge," *Wu Meicun quanji*, 3:61–63.

63. Zhang Dai, "Gong Chun hu ming" (Inscription on a Gong Chun Teapot), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:402. Gong Chun was a mid-sixteenth-century artisan, commonly praised as the first potter to make teapots from Yixing "purple sand" (*zisha*) stoneware; see Zhang Dai, "Shaguan xizhu" (Stone Crock Pewter Pourer), *Tao'an mengyi*, 2:34; "Gong Chun hu wei Zhu Zhongshi zuo" (On a Gong Chun Teapot for Zhu Zhongshi), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 2:35. The phrase "autograph" (*kuan*) can refer, here, both to the signatures and seals on a painting and to an artisanal mark on the surface of a decorative object. Zhang similarly invokes the Gong Chun "mark" (*kuan*) in another inscription for one of the "friends": "Li Jincheng Gong Chun tai ming" (Inscription on Li Jincheng's Gong Chun Stand), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:408.

Don't think of me as ugly, accompany my head of white hair, you are my tightly bound friend.⁶⁴

Lu Zigang's stamp was among the most fashionable jade brands in the late Ming marketplace.⁶⁵ Presented as a visual ornament comparable to the patina and textures of other surfaces in the collection, Lu's twelve-character etching is based on a stock allusion to the *Book of Odes*, a common analogy between the qualities of jade and the integrity of a gentleman. Zhang Dai responds to this message on his own terms, offering a wistful and comparatively intimate expression of the companionship the hairpin now proffers in old age, punning on "holding up hair" (*jiefu*) and a "tightly bound" friendship. Zhang's inscription personalizes Lu's generic label, rewording a trademark slogan: Literary inscription as an expression of friendship supplants the artisanal, or merely "physical" act of engraving script. Zhang's disavowal of attachment to makers' marks, nevertheless, fails to conceal the care he invests in determining their details: By foregrounding the dispersal of these old things, he finds a new pretext for the connoisseurship of brands, recasting his calculated performance of discernment as an act of recognizing old friends.

It is not in itself remarkable that an author might compose inscriptions for objects that could not bear engraved words: Zhong Xing (1574–1625), one of Zhang's preferred late Ming poets, "inscribed" an inkstone he encountered in a dream.⁶⁶ What remains striking about Zhang's sequence is the contrast between the precision with which he documents the physical attributes of his "friends" (listing measurements, hues, patterns, textures, distinguishing marks) on the one hand, and underlying themes of disappearance, destruction, and loss, on the other. Zhang's foreword for "Inscription on a Small Orchid Pyxis from the Imperial Workshop" begins, for instance, with an exact précis of this "small round box for steamed cakes, with overlapping branches and leaves, rendered in tough 'iron lines' and gentle 'silver curves,' manufactured in the Yongle

64. Zhang Dai, "Biyou zan ming" (Inscription on a Cyan Jade Hairpin), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:405.

65. Zhou Nanquan, "Ming Lu Zigang ji 'Zigang' kuan yuqi."

66. Zhong Xing, "Mengzhong yan ming" (Inscription on an Inkstone from a Dream), *Yinxin xuan ji*, 42:699. There was a tradition of "empty inscriptions" (*xuming*) on eyes, ears, mouths, or the "heart-mind." See Ge Huafei, "Ming, mingwen yu mingti jianlun," 71.

workshops.”⁶⁷ Such short prefaces, across the sequence, classify and categorize connoisseurial knowledge of materials: Zhang’s description of Rulin’s pyxis, for instance, closely resembles a generic entry on the Orchard Factory “pyxis” in a typology of “precious curios” (*baowan*) from *Night Ferry* (*Yehang chuan*), his comprehensive encyclopedia for erudite sojourners.⁶⁸ The eight-character *ming* by contrast summons an indefinite image, caught between what the pyxis resembles, “coral, amber” (*shanhu hupo*), and what it does not, “neither wood nor stone” (*fei mu fei shi*).⁶⁹ As if grasping for an elusive material memory, Zhang’s words are haunted by the death of his grandfather, the object’s first custodian. His messages to his friends, half of them “lost,” similarly waver between attachment and detachment, presence and absence, leaving the reader unclear as to when he is writing on an extant artifact or re-inscribing memories of a missing thing: the sequence in this sense dramatizes the act of recollection itself, a search motivated through nostalgia for owning the past or for possessing history in fragments.⁷⁰ Wang Yuqian’s comments on Zhang’s preface highlight this retrospective stance: “as for the two phrases ‘they are just like old friends,’ friendship, here, means friendship with the past.”⁷¹ At the same time, the proleptic denial of indulgence through acknowledgment of loss sanctions Zhang’s palpable attachment to the pleasures of gathering together and re-evaluating the features of sensuous things.

A generative tension between the claim of inscriptional permanence and experiences of change and loss, one that emerges across the ensemble of friends, is crystallized in Zhang’s most illustrious inscriptions, on a fragment named “Wood Like a Dragon.” Zhang’s two *ming* for this peculiar piece of petrified driftwood were included in *Collected Writings of Langhuan* as the first two of his sixty-eight inscriptions on objects—they also form a kernel for the vignette “Wood Like a Dragon” (Mu you long), a piece that Philip Kafalas reads as a “suggestive microcosm” for

67. Zhang Dai, “Lanhua xiao chang he ming,” *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:403.

68. Zhang Dai, *Yehang chuan*, 12:498. Other “friends” share similarities with Zhang’s entries in *Night Ferry*; see for example the reference to a “small beauty chalice” on 12:497.

69. Zhang Dai, “Lanhua xiao chang he ming,” *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:403.

70. Chow, “Fateful Attachments,” 364.

71. This line is itself an allusion to Mencius: “Friendship with a man is friendship with his virtue.” Zhang Dai, “Ershi ba you ming bing xu,” *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:403.

Dream Reminiscences as a whole.⁷² Emerging from the Liao Sea to find Prince Chang of Kaiping (Chang Kaiping wang), a pivotal figure in the founding of the Ming dynasty, the object survives the destruction of Kaiping's residence and journeys to the marketplace where Zhang Dai's father, Zhang Yaofang, offers seventeen rhinoceros horn cups in exchange for the charred "dragon."⁷³ Yaofang repurposes the fossilized fragment to earn himself a position as an assistant administrator to the Prince of Lu, before being dismissed for a minor indiscretion: The object consequently emblemizes the vicissitudes of the Zhang family's connections to Ming royalty.⁷⁴

In contrast to previous accounts of this enigmatic artifact, I read Zhang Dai's engraved verse and retrospective preface as a meditation on the challenge of making a mark: this is, in effect, an inscription about the difficulties of inscription. Over half of the piece in *Dream Reminiscences* focuses squarely on failures to devise a fitting name for this elusive thing: Yaofang mistakenly violated a taboo in labelling the object "Wooden Dragon" (Mulong); Zhang's coterie, at a gathering in 1637, came up with five competing names—"Wood Like a Dragon" (Mu you long), "Wood Residing Dragon" (Mu yu long), "Sea Raft" (Hai cha), "Raft Wave" (Cha lang), and "Land Raft" (Lu cha)—filling a whole album with their poetic eulogies.⁷⁵ Zhang's own names draw attention to their inadequacy, emphasizing either provisionality ("Residing...") or vague semblance ("Like...").⁷⁶ Read against this "preface," his inscriptions signify as

72. For the inscription, see Zhang Dai, "Mu you long ming" (Inscription on Wood Like a Dragon), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:389; for the essay see "Mu you long," *Tao'an mengyi*, 1:17. Kafalas offers an elegant reading of this piece as a "microcosm" of *Dream Reminiscences*; see Kafalas, *In Limpid Dream*, 5–7, 14–17.

73. On the resonances between Zhang Dai's reference to Prince Chang of Kaiping and other essays on the founding of the Ming in *Dream Reminiscences*, see Kafalas, *In Limpid Dream*, 15. Zhang Dai also served briefly in the thirteenth prince's court after the Manchus had overtaken Nanjing. For Zhang's recently discovered letters to the Prince of Lu, see Zhang Dai, *Shen Fucan chaoben*, 261–78.

74. Zhang Dai, "Lu wang" (Prince of Lu), *Tao'an mengyi*, 140.

75. Zhang Dai, "Mu you long," *Tao'an mengyi*, 1:17.

76. Zhang also explores the difficulty of naming this wooden fragment in his poetry, composing different poems on the different names the object might possess, with a heptasyllabic "old poem" on "Wood Residing Dragon" (Mu yu long) that matches the rhyme of Su Shi's poem on a "Wooden Fake Mountain" (Mu jia shan) and two poems on "Wood Like A Dragon." Zhang Dai, "Mu yu long you xu" (Wood Residing Dragon with Preface) and

an effort to name a seemingly un-nameable fragment, to inscribe something—whether an “empty vessel” or a “node of interlocking loyalties” to princely pastimes and lost moments of friendship—that cannot be fully inscribed:⁷⁷

I rubbed a mound-like protuberance of the dragon's skull and inscribed it:⁷⁸

In the chasm of night, wind and thunder,
Soaring raft, transforms to stone;⁷⁹
Seas rise up, mountains quake,
Mist and clouds are wiped away;
It is said there is a dragon lodging within,
Call to it and it will emerge!

Furthermore:

He who disturbed the dragon, Master Zhang,
On a mound-like protuberance, inscribed:
What does it resemble?
Autumn tides and summer clouds.⁸⁰

Zhang's *ming* disclose a struggle between a desire to make an authoritative mark on a hard surface (he underscores this physical gesture: “I rubbed the hill on its dragon skull and engraved it”) and the object's status as an elusive, almost intangible entity. The first line of the second *ming*

“Mu you long ershou” (Wood Like a Dragon: Two Poems), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 3:57, 4:117. The differences between these poems further attest to Zhang's shifting views of the object's peculiar identity.

77. Kafalas, *In Limpid Dream*, 16.

78. The “mound-like protuberance” (*chimu*) is a lump in the shape of a *boshan* censer that appears on the top of a dragon's skull. Without this lump the dragon cannot ascend to heaven. Zhang Dai, “Mu you long,” *Tao'an mengyi*, 1:18.

79. A reference to Han official Zhang Qian's (fl. 125 BCE) “soaring raft” (Qian cha), a vessel that carried him from the Yellow River up into the Milky Way. Zhang Dai, “Mu you long,” *Tao'an mengyi*, 1:18.

80. Zhang Dai, “Mu you long ming,” *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:389. My translation follows Kafalas with minor changes; see Kafalas, *In Limpid Dream*, 16.

draws attention to the embodied act of engraving, presenting the mark as an intrusion that disturbs or "agitates" (*rao*) the spirit of the thing, while the second line—the closest Zhang comes to his own "fine name" (*meiming*) for the object—is an image of "autumn tides and summer clouds" (*qiutao xiayun*), numinous impressions of flux and ethereality.⁸¹ Zhang aspires for his inscriptions to resist ossification as a set of mute markings, inviting later readers to reactivate his words as a spoken summons to a still-sentient thing: "It is said that a dragon resides within, call to it and it will emerge."⁸² Zhang's preoccupation with the challenge of naming "Wood Like a Dragon," the central theme in his inscription and the accompanying vignette it inspired, suggests the difficulty of accounting for the competing memories that this enigmatic fragment elicits: his fascination with its shape-shifting body intimates an underlying concern that his inscription will not harm or deny the object's capacity for further transformations. As with his fourth uncle's old hairpin, Zhang's affinity with this consonant thing distinguishes itself apart from "vulgar" claims to merely physical ownership (with the taint of conspicuous consumption): Extolling metamorphosis becomes a way of adapting to uncertainty and ineluctable change.⁸³ Inscription, the act of simply making a mark, manifests Zhang's fraught search for vitality amid charred ruins, or a promise of rebirth within recalcitrant fragments of the recent past.

81. Zhang Dai, "Mu you long ming," *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:389.

82. Zhang incorporates this same line in his sequence of poems on the Happy Garden, a dilapidated estate that he moved into following the fall of the Ming: "Call out, there is supposed to be a dragon residing within." Wang Yuqian's commentary takes this to be a veiled form of self-reference, that Zhang is identifying himself as the sleeping dragon lying in the ruined garden (*wo long que zixie zhao*). Zhang Dai, "Kuaiyuan shizhang youxu" (Ten Pieces on Happy Garden, with preface), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 1:1–2. These correspondences suggest the possibility of a degree of self-projection in Zhang's identification with the "recumbent dragon" concealed within the driftwood fragment. Zhang offers a variant of this same apostrophe in his inscription on a Longquan "fish ear" censer: "call to [them] and [they] will emerge." Zhang Dai, "Longquan yao yu'er lu ming" (Inscription on a Longquan Ware Fish Ear Censer), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:398.

83. These themes resonate with other writings on possession in early Qing literary culture. Compare, for instance, with Li: "[they] harp on the theme of mutability in order to avow distance from the idea of possession" and "The antidote to impermanence is thus not immutable essence, but the recognition and acceptance of different states of being." Wai-ye Li, "Gardens and Illusions," 313, 329.

The Judgment of Things

While the burdens of commemoration conditioned the ways in which inscriptions were written and read, late imperial critics conceived of the *ming* genre as an admonitory apparatus, with writers using the properties of household objects to reprove and correct human behavior.⁸⁴ Wang Yuqian's final comment on Zhang Dai's sequence identifies the significance of this genealogy, claiming that the "Twenty-Eight Friends" as a group are no different from "Yao's warnings" (Yao jie) and the "inscriptions of monarchs" (*diwang zhu ming*), examples of sagely admonitions etched onto tools for moral cultivation.⁸⁵ Such terse inscriptions identify lessons in the basic function of an implement: King Wu's engraved mirror, for instance, teaches self-reflection in six characters, "Look in front, think what's behind" (*jian er qian, lü er hou*).⁸⁶ A sense of the object delivering its own injunctions to an awestruck spectator provided a pretext for later authors to envision *ming* as a mode of thing-like "first-person testimony."⁸⁷ Yao's warnings and King Wu's inscriptions on household artifacts provided a template for the *ming* genre in later periods: Archaists continued to invoke these models throughout the Ming, composing short inscriptions that harness everyday objects to reprimand and reorient a human.⁸⁸ Zhang's readers appear to infer similarities between the scale of the "Twenty-Eight Friends" sequence and King Wu's seventeen engraved maxims on objects ranging from

84. Xu Shizeng, *Wenti mingbian*, 113.

85. Zhang Dai, "Ershi ba you ming bing xu," *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:411.

86. "Wu Wang jianzuo," in Huang Huaixin, *Da Dai liji huijiao jizhu*, 657. "Yao's warnings" is an obscure, now lost text, cited in *Huainanzi*. See Csikszentmihalyi, "Reimagining the Yellow Emperor's Four Faces."

87. Csikszentmihalyi, "Reimagining the Yellow Emperor's Four Faces," 241.

88. See, for instance, the comments on inscription by leading Ming archaists such as He Jingming (1438–1521): "The gentleman inspects names to understand proper conduct and by modelling himself on things can increase his virtue. In composing inscriptions, one takes the proper time for introspection so as to guard against depravity. Was this not where the intent of the ancients resides?" He Jingming, "Zaqi ming" (Inscriptions on Miscellaneous Artifacts), *Dafu ji*, 38. 12a. See also He's student, Li Lian (1489–1569): "The ancients cultivated themselves in movement and rest to guard against evil and follow what is proper, in doing so they adhered to the warnings lodged in things." Li Lian, "Shizhong za qiwu ming sanshisan shou" (Thirty-Three Inscriptions on Miscellaneous Things in My Room), *Lishi jushi ji*, 5:1a.

his mat and armrest to walking stick and wash basin.⁸⁹ And yet, their comments invite reflection on the extent to which themes of "warning" and "self-correction" inform Zhang Dai's writings on his "friends." Beyond commemoration, what other messages might object inscriptions impart? Zhang's claim of "friendship" was not simply an expression of longing for the past, but a move that allowed him to formulate judgments of the relationship between his family's collections and national tragedy. By following the passage of certain possessions from fathers to sons, he implies that his family's greatest accomplishments as connoisseurs were inextricably entangled with some of their worst excesses.

Five of the "friends" come from Zhang Dai's second eldest paternal uncle (Zhongshu), Zhang Lianfang's famed collection: "Inkstone Mountain" (*yan shan*), "White Ding Ware Censer" (*baiding lu*), "Small Beauty Wine Chalice" (*xiao meiren gu*), "Ge Ware Flagon" (*geyao zhi*), and "Ge Ware Topknot Tuft Vase" (*geyao guanji ping*). These objects later passed to his only son, Zhang Dai's sadistic cousin Yanke. Lianfang embodies a family connection to the flourishing artistic milieu of late Ming Jiangnan, while personifying the circumstances of its demise. Yanke, meanwhile, represents the dangers of sentimental excess, with a murderous disposition that emerges from tyrannical obsessions with things. In inscribing several of the objects that passed from Lianfang to Yanke as "friends," Zhang Dai examines the behavior of these two men from the perspective of their possessions, sympathizing with objects as victims of human folly.

After failing the provincial examinations in 1603 and acquiring a "pitch-black ironwood table with a natural aspect" (*tieli mu tianran ji*) from a local official in Huaian, Zhang Lianfang worked to become one of the five top collectors south of the Yangzi.⁹⁰ Zhang Dai remembers his second uncle's villa, built in 1606 at the foot of Dragon Mountain, as comparable to Ni Zan's belvedere and reminisces of sleeping as a child on

89. Zhang, at various points in his *ming*, explicitly cites King Wu's inscriptions; see Zhang Dai, "Cantong shuizhong cheng ming," and "Baoping yan ming" (Inscription on a Precious Vase Inkstone), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:394, 400. For an introduction to the King Wu inscriptions, see Pines, "Confucian Irony?"

90. Alongside Wang Xinjian, Zhu Shimen, Xiang Yuanbian, and Zhou Mingzhong, see Zhang Dai, "Fuzhuan" (Appended Biographies), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 4:342. For a partial translation of excerpts from Zhang's "Family Biographies" and "Appended Biographies," see Campbell, "Flawed Jade; for Lianfang's biography, see 36-39."

Lianfang's houseboat, "Calligraphy and Painting Ship," a craft designed for visiting collectors throughout the Yangzi delta.⁹¹ Lianfang eventually passed away in the midst of the dynastic transition from illness during his service with a local militia: His valiant defense of Wanshui's parapets was defined by an unflagging commitment to the redemptive powers of art, vigorously painting landscapes for friends under candlelight in spite of the danger around him.⁹²

Lianfang's only son, Zhang Dai's impulsive cousin Yanke, sold his father's collection immediately and frittered away the money he made:

Zhongshu [Lianfang] had a single son, E [Yanke], who could not be disciplined and never tried to earn his own living. He instantly depleted Zhongshu's several tens of thousands of taels and the tens of thousands of taels of his official stipend. Zhongshu was fond of antiques and bequeathed his goblets and wine-vases, libation vessels and offering cups, famous paintings and bolts of fine silk to his son, a collection of a thousand myriad things; his son exhausted all of this in a matter of days.⁹³

Zhang Dai was selective in his identification of "friends" from Lianfang's large reserves of antiques (he did not, for instance, care to commemorate the aforementioned ironwood table as an acquaintance), identifying particular things that speak both to Lianfang's fame as a collector and the circumstances surrounding the break-up and dispersal of his collection. A short vignette in *Dream Reminiscences* on "Zhongshu's Antiques" (Zhongshu gudong) begins with Lianfang's acquisition of a "White Ding Ware Censer" (and his "Ge Ware Flagon" and "Ge Ware Topknot Tuft Vase") and concludes with a reference to a "Small Beauty Wine Chalice" obtained when Lianfang finally assumed an official position in 1628 in Henan, the seat of the late Zhou kings. Zhang Dai presents these two sets of objects as bookends to Lianfang's life: his apprenticeship as a youth with Zhu Shimen and the demise of his collection in the hands of his son, Yanke:

Uncle Lianfang followed Weiyang in his youth and became a refined connoisseur. He obtained a white *ding* ware censer, a *ge* ware bottle

91. Zhang Dai, "Fuzhuan," *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 4:343.

92. Zhang Dai, "Fuzhuan," *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 4:343.

93. Zhang Dai, "Fuzhuan," *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 4:344.

and a *guan* ware wine tureen. Xiang Molin wanted to buy them for five-hundred catties, but Lianfang refused: "I want to keep them to be buried with me."

Henan is a "repository of bronze" and so [Lianfang] obtained several cartloads of bronze artifacts. The "Small Beauty Chalice" was one of fifteen or sixteen specimens, with a verdant patina penetrating its bones, like jadeite, or "ghostly pupils," some couldn't look at it properly. It returned to Yanke and was one day lost, or it may have been taken into the Dragon's Lair.⁹⁴

These two memories—Lianfang's refusal to sell his censer to Xiang Yuanbian and the disappearance of the enigmatic "small beauty"—form the basis for Zhang Dai's inscriptions on these two members of the collective. The censer evokes Lianfang's fidelity to his things, attachments that transcend the logic of the market and end up being carried to the grave. The chalice, meanwhile, stands as a witness to the break-up and dispersal of Lianfang's collection, critiquing the decadence and impropriety of Zhang's family members. Just as Yanke's recklessness represents the dark underside to his father's fastidious refinement, Zhang suggests that censer and chalice tell two versions of the same story.

As with each of his friends, Zhang Dai begins with a short description of the object, specifying its dimensions and patina, before composing a terse *ming* that addresses the thing. While in the essay on "Zhongshu's antiques" the White Ding Ware Censer and the Small Beauty Chalice are mentioned as props in an account of Lianfang's personality, in the "Twenty-Eight Friends" sequence they are cast as independent protagonists, with Zhang Dai talking to them directly:

Inscription on a White Ding Ware Censer

Uncle Eryou owned a white ding ware censer, murky like the patterns in pinewood. Xiang Molin of Jiahe wanted to buy it for five-hundred catties, yet Second Uncle declined, and had it buried with him.⁹⁵

Five hundred strings of coins, was I deceived? The offer was declined, so as to be buried with him.⁹⁶

94. Zhang Dai, "Zhongshu gudong" (Zhongshu's Antiques), *Tao'an mengyi*, 6:103.

95. Xiang Yuanbian.

96. Zhang Dai, "Baiding lu ming," *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:404.

In his inscription for the White Ding Ware Censer, Zhang Dai restages the script of Lianfang declining to sell his possession to Xiang, this time taking up the issue with, or even as, the object itself (it is unclear to whom Zhang's "I" ultimately refers). Lianfang claimed that he would take his porcelain to the tomb, a stubborn display of his devotion as a collector staunchly opposed to the lure of money—now the censer's fate of being "buried alive" becomes an expression of its fidelity. "To accompany [them/him] in death" (*xun*), a recurring motif in the art of remnant subjects, recalls the practice of palace ladies being put to death and buried with their lords: The choice of words, here, unambiguously invokes martyrdom and sacrifice at the fall of a dynasty.⁹⁷ What from Lianfang's perspective looks like an untrammelled relationship with his possessions, from the censer's viewpoint appears as forced suicide on behalf of one's master.

Zhang Dai repeatedly alludes to the links between Yanke's tyrannical impulses in the acquisition of material goods and his violence toward women: impatiently smashing rocks from his estate, earning the title "Unbound First Emperor of Qin" (Qiongji Qinshihuang), he abused his slaves, tortured a maid, and almost incited a local revolt following her husband's suicide.⁹⁸ The small bronze beauty's experience in Yanke's possession tacitly registers these depredations, hinting at both the despotic whims and sadistic cruelty that subtend this wealthy family's concern for its property.⁹⁹ In addressing the bronze vessel, Zhang Dai notes "her" superlative beauty, while reciting the line "a chalice that isn't a chalice" (*gu bu gu*), a byword in the late Ming for decadence and ritual

97. On *xun* and the death of palace ladies, see Huang, "Ming Qing huangshi de gongfei xunzang zhi." This resonates with a conversation Zhang Dai records with one of Lianfang's concubines, where she claimed she wanted to be buried with him and "become a Zhang family ghost." Zhang Dai, "Fuzhuan," *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 4:344.

98. Zhang Dai, "Wu Yiren zhuan" (Biographies of Five Eccentrics), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 4:357; Zhang Dai, "Ruicao xiting" (Brook Pavilion of the Auspicious Reed), *Tao'an mengyi*, 8:137.

99. At the end of his biography of Yanke, Zhang Dai emphasizes how he was responsible for the loss of the "friends," in this case the second object in the collection of twenty-eight, a rock comparable to Mi Fu's inkstone mountain (and an anonymous antique bronze); Zhang Dai, "Wu Yiren zhuan," *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 4:358. For Zhang Dai's inscription, see Zhang Dai, "Yanshan ming" (Inscription on an Inkstone Mountain), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:403.

impropriety, one that invokes the specter of Yanke's profligacy and the subsequent loss of the Zhang family collections in his hands:¹⁰⁰

Inscription on a Small Beauty Chalice

Uncle Eryou owned a Han dynasty bronze chalice in the shape of a small beauty; it was a foot and three inches in height. Half embellished with patterns, the whole body in halcyon hue.

A chalice that isn't a chalice, with a perfect halcyon hue.¹⁰¹

Standing apart from the cartloads of ritual artifacts found in the ancestral homes of the Zhou lords, the beauty's seductive "body" (*hunshen feicui*) and "flowery patina" (*huawen*) evoke, in miniature, the role of the femme fatale as emblem of dynastic fall.¹⁰² This alluring, yet "improper" bronze vessel, one whose "ghostly" demeanor deflects its custodian's gaze, emerges as a witness to Yanke's recklessness. Zhang Dai's attention to this sensuous object's "feminine" charms infers Lianfang's decadent taste as a bronze connoisseur (a possible portent of his misplaced priorities), while its loss in Yanke's hands echoes the way his concubines were said to have "scattered overnight," as if "they had been an illusion."¹⁰³ Yanke's erratic behavior appears to be to blame for the beauty's disappearance, yet Zhang Dai holds out the possibility that the object escaped the manmade destruction of the Ming cataclysm, finding refuge beyond the human domain in a treasure-filled "dragon's palace" at the bottom of the sea.¹⁰⁴ Zhang's terse inscription discloses an ambivalent attitude toward the object, as if he is unsure whether the glamorous vessel was ultimately a symptom, or another victim of his family's misfortunes. Were the attachments things elicit to blame for recent tragedies, or were they casualties of human misdemeanor? Whereas Lianfang's censer exemplifies

100. On the rhetorical uses of the line *gu bu gu* from *Analects* VI. 25 (an image of a ritual vessel that had lost its original, and therefore proper, form) in Ming critiques of political corruption, see Hammond, "The Decadent Chalice."

101. Zhang Dai, "Xiao meiren gu ming" (Inscription on a Small Beauty Chalice), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:404.

102. Wai-yee Li, "Women as Emblems of Dynastic Fall."

103. Zhang Dai, "Fuzhuan," *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 4:344.

104. Zhang Dai, "Zhongshu gudong," *Tao'an mengyi*, 6:103.

a loyalty that transcends death, the chalice invokes an uncomfortable family history of overindulgence and dissipation. Zhang Dai's inscription suggests how a single object might inspire conflicting feelings of nostalgia and remorse, longing and critical reflection. Such ambivalence extends to the fate of the artifact: Was the beauty a casualty of Yanke's failures, or did it survive his family's demise? Is Zhang Dai's inscription for his "friend" another pseudo-epitaph mourning "her" death, or—as in the final lines of "Pine Flower Stone" and "Wood Like a Dragon"—a call to see if this enigmatic thing might yet respond? By posing these questions, this recalcitrant bronze vessel resists service as an inscribed monument to the virtues of Zhang's family name.

Zhang Dai's Best Friend

Whereas the majority of Zhang's friends once belonged to his relatives, Zhang also included three of his own objects in the group. These "old things" from the author's personal collection overtly disturb and reshuffle the positions of "you" and "I," self and other.¹⁰⁵ Such a tendency informs perhaps Zhang's most concise, yet poignant inscription, an eight-character motto etched onto his burst-pattern antique zither. Devoid of any descriptive detail or rhetorical amplification, this short piece strips the *ming* down to a simple two-way exchange between subject and object:

Inscription on a Burst Pattern Antique Zither

Tao'an's possession. Exquisite burst patterning: sharp, severe, like the blade of a sword; not a single hair out of place.

I speak to you and you respond to me.¹⁰⁶

Zhang's personal affinity for the *qin* is well-attested to in his biographical prose: in 1616, at the age of nineteen, he organized a society for studying the zither with six like-minded young friends and family members (including an inept Yanke), writing in a manifesto of a desire for the music of his *qin* to merge with the wind in the pines and the rushing waters,

105. See also Zhang Dai, "Chatiao zhang ming" (Inscription on a Maplewood Staff), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:406.

106. Zhang Dai, "Duanwen guqin ming," *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:406.

to form a triad of "standard Shaoxing sounds."¹⁰⁷ Eventually, with a beloved teacher and the two most talented members of his society, Zhang Dai formed a quartet that held captivating performances, as if all four instruments "were played by a single hand" (*ru chu yi shou*).¹⁰⁸ Memories of such intimate friendships, sutured and sustained by the *qin*, inflect his words for the burst-pattern zither: an object that, more than any other thing in the collection, can be understood as Zhang Dai's true friend.¹⁰⁹

Zhang's short inscription can be read as an allegory for a "knower of tones" (*zhiyin*), a term for an intimate companion with a shared understanding of music, or the harmony between two "heart-minds" (*xin*).¹¹⁰ Of all his friends, the antique burst-pattern zither is Zhang Dai's *zhiyin*: Just as the "object of knowledge in the term *zhiyin* is not a person but the communal experience of music that creates the bond between two individuals," so Zhang's inscription is less concerned with personifying an object through description than it is with opening up and sustaining a simple call and response.¹¹¹ From "Wood Like a Dragon" to the "Twenty-Eight Friends" sequence, Zhang's inscriptions address things in the hope that they might react: it makes sense that the most explicit "reply" or signal of assent (*nuo*) comes from his *zhiyin*, the zither.¹¹² The possibility of "you" acknowledging and responding to "me" invokes the power of a sound-producing object to communicate on its own terms with its

107. Zhang Dai, "Shaoxing qinpai" (Shaoxing Qin School), *Tao'an mengyi*, 2:27. See also "Sishe" (Silk Society), *Tao'an mengyi*, 3:39. My translation follows Spence, *Return to Dragon Mountain*, 22.

108. Zhang Dai, "Shaoxing qinpai," *Tao'an mengyi*, 2:27.

109. Zhang returns to the symbolism of the *qin* in two of his most poignant sequences of poems written for deceased friends at the fall of the dynasty. See his ten poems for his "zither friend" (*qinyou*), Zishen, in which he compares himself to a dejected Boya, recounting their escape to the mountains: "Qinwang shizhang you xu" (Ten Poems with a Preface on the Death of a Zither), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 1:11–14; see also his ten poems that use the *qin* to explicitly commemorate the death of Chongzhen, "Ting Taichang tanqin he shi shishou you xu" ("Ten Poems with a Preface to Correspond with Listening to Taichang Play the Zither"), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 4:110.

110. Shields, *One Who Knows Me*, 47.

111. Shields, *One Who Knows Me*, 47.

112. Zhang adapts the structure of "calling" (*hu*) in hope of the object's "assent" (*nuo*) in other inscriptions; see his *ming* on his younger brother Shanmin's censer: "Like a calyx, with a sleek luster, call it (*hu*) a peach and it will respond (*nuo*)." Zhang Dai, "Guanyao fendang tonglu ming" (Inscription on a Guan Ware Bronze Censer in the shape of a Partitioned-Crotch Cauldron), *Zhang Dai shiwen ji*, 5:411.

faithful companion, bringing the lingering tones of the past into the present.

The spectacle of Zhang Dai surrounded by his “Twenty-Eight Friends,” pretending to talk to lifeless artifacts, might be mistaken for a scene of dejected solipsism, a once wealthy man now isolated from contemporary affairs, content to indulge in the companionship of his passive props. Zhang’s desire that his zither recognize him as his closest friend evokes the author’s own curtailed condition as a “left-over” object, one who—befitting initial allusions to Ouyang Xiu’s “Six Ones”—seeks to disperse his identity throughout his collection. And yet, Zhang’s inscription for his zither cannot be reduced to such an interpretation: the pathos of true friendship momentarily suspends simple distinctions between “you” and “I,” self and other, ownership and dispossession. The eloquent instrument provides its interlocutor with a means of finding resilience and continuity amid loss, reinvigorating the remnant subject’s artmaking capacities through things at hand.

Conclusion

Premier belletrist of the mid-seventeenth century, Zhang Dai turned to the material act and literary genre of inscription to reassemble his family members’ displaced possessions, while assessing their failings as custodians. Zhang’s “Twenty-Eight Friends” recalibrate Ming practices of connoisseurship to create a space for the judgment of familial dissipation and its imbrication in dynastic decline. While early Qing thinkers, notably Gu Yanwu (1613–82), condemned the frivolity of late Ming approaches to superfluous things, Zhang Dai found in the rhetoric of collecting a means for reconciling memories of past pleasures with professions of guilt and penitence.¹¹³ Wavering between a search for durability and the experience of dislocation, early Qing inscriptions on Ming things foster an attitude of “simultaneous attachment and detachment,” refuting profligacy by first admitting remorse: interrogating yet refusing to repudiate the allure of sensuous objects. If the point of inscription in classical literary thought was to “rectify” the name of an artifact so as to make one’s “fame” known, Zhang repurposes this terse

113. Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, 31–32; Wai-ye Li, “The Collector, the Connoisseur, and Late-Ming Sensibility,” 299.

form to spurn the uncompromising demands of his peers, accepting contradiction, while refusing to delimit the identities a thing might be forced either to mediate or to assume.

Zhang's twenty-eight inscriptions revivify the cliché of friendship with objects, a literary conceit inherited from leading collectors of previous dynasties, whether Ouyang Xiu, Mi Fu, Yang Weizhen, or Xu Wei. At the heart of this sequence lies a material turn from straightforward family history to the lives of family possessions. Zhang eschews a simple search for corroborating evidence of his relatives' virtues, and instead recuperates the object's own testimony, even allowing "it" to occupy the position of an "I." These inscriptions anticipate a heightened attention to the thing as a witness to historical transitions in early Qing literature: a tendency toward writing biographies of objects that becomes increasingly pronounced in the poetry and plays of later antiquarians.¹¹⁴ In stark contrast to the careers of sentimental things in late Ming vignettes, remnant objects divulge histories that cannot be reduced to, or solely illuminated through, the lives of the men who owned them. Friendship with objects registers the feeling of being "left behind" (*yi*) and yet cultivates a renewed sense of responsibility toward the material remains of the recent past. The human enters into a relation of reciprocity, opening the self up to being formed and transformed by the careful consideration of things.

114. Wai-ye Li, "History and Memory in Wu Weiye's Poetry," 130–32; Zeitlin, "The Cultural Biography of a Musical Instrument."

Appendix 1. Zhang Dai's "Inscriptions on Twenty-Eight Friends"

<u>Title</u>	<u>Owner of Object</u>
Inscription on Rain Flower Stones	Dafu Zhang Rulin (?1558–1625) (Zhang Dai's grandfather)
Inscription on an Inkstone Mountain	Eryou Zhang Lianfang (?1575–1644) (Zhang Dai's second uncle)
Inscription on a Small Orchid Pyxis from the Imperial Workshop	Dafu
Inscription on a White Ding Ware Censer	Eryou
Inscription on a Small Beauty Chalice	Eryou
Inscription on a Ge Ware Flagon	Eryou
Inscription on a Ge Ware Topknot Tuft Vase	Eryou
Inscription on a Cyan Jade Hairpin	Eryun Zhang Yefang (?1585–1615) (Zhang Dai's fourth uncle)
Inscription on a Xuan Bronze Elephant Censer	Eryun
Inscription on a Ge Ware Seal Paste Pool	Eryun
Inscription on Jin Tang Smaller Regular Script	Eryun
Inscription on a Maplewood Staff	Tao'an (Zhang Dai)
Inscription on a Burst Pattern Antique Zither	Tao'an
Inscription on a Xuande Filled-In Lacquer Pyxis	Tao'an
Inscription on a Small Chest with Lamb's Fat Jade Images of the Kun Fish and Peng Bird	Yanke Zhang E (?d. 1646) (Zhang Dai's cousin; Zhang Lianfang's son)
Inscription on Lü Wenan's Gaozhuo Inkstone	Yanke
Inscription on Lü Jishi's Han Dynasty Jade Ferule	
Paperweight	Yanke
Inscription on Yang Yao's Sanxian	Yanke
Inscription on Qian Zifang's Ancient Mirror	Daozi

Inscription on Li Jincheng's Gong Chun Stand	Daozi
Inscription on a Ding Ware Water Dipper	Daozi
Inscription on a Xuan Bronze Stacked Lotus Flower Slop Bowl	Daozi
Inscription on a Stone of White Translucent Jade	Shanmin Zhang Min (?1605– ?73) (Zhang Dai's youngest brother)
Inscription on a Bronze Censer in the shape of a Partitioned-Crotch Cauldron with Corded Ears	Shanmin
Inscription on a White Ding Ware Inkstone Vase	Shanmin
Inscription on a Stoneskin Inkslab	Shanmin
Inscription on a Guan Ware Bronze Censer in the shape of a Partitioned-Crotch Cauldron	Shanmin
Inscription on Wang the Second's Xu Family- Owned Teapot	Shanmin

GLOSSARY

baiding lu	白鼎爐
baowan	寶玩
Cantong shuizhong cheng ming	殘銅水中丞銘
Cha lang	槎浪
Chang Kaiping wang	常開平王
Chuzhou	處州
Daozi	道子
Deng Zhicheng	鄧之誠
diwang zhu ming	帝王諸銘
er	爾
Erbao	爾葆
Er'shi ba you ming	二十八友銘
Ertao	爾弔
Eryou	二酉
Eryun	爾蘊
Fan Kunbai	范昆白
fei mu fei shi	匪木匪石
Gan Wentai	甘文臺
geyao guanji ping	哥窑卣鬲瓶
geyao zhi	哥窑卮
Gong Chun	龔春
gu bu gu	觚不觚
<i>Gujin yilie zhuan</i>	古今義烈傳
Gu Yanwu	顧炎武
guyou	故友
guopo jiaawang	國破家亡
Guoyuan chang	果園廠
Hai cha	海槎
hao	號
hao zuo shi	好作史
huawen	花紋
hunshen feicui	渾身翡翠
Jitong	祭統
Jiahe	嘉禾
jian er qian, lü er hou	見爾前, 慮爾後
jiefa	結髮

jingjie	警戒
jiuwu	舊物
juan	鐫
junzi	君子
Kuaiji	會稽
Kuaiyuan ji	快園記
<i>Langhuan wenji</i>	瑯嬛文集
Laotie	老鐵
<i>Liji</i>	禮記
Li Jincheng	李錦城
Liu Xie	劉勰
Liuyi jushi	六一居士
Lu cha	陸槎
Lü Jishi	呂吉士
Lü Wenan	呂文安
Lu Zigang	陸子岡
meiming	美名
Mi Fu	米芾
ming (inscription)	銘
ming (name)	名
ming shou	名手
<i>Ming yu Yue sanbuxiu mingxian</i> <i>tuzan</i>	明於越三不朽名賢圖贊
moya	磨崖
Mulong	木龍
Mu you long	木猶龍
Mu yu long	木寓龍
muzhiming	墓志銘
Ni Zan	倪瓚
nuo	諾
Ouyang Xiu	歐陽修
pi	癖
Qipan	七磬
qixing guaizhuang	奇形怪狀
qianchao yiwu	前朝遺物
qiang kou	戕口
qin	琴
Qiongji Qinshihuang	窮極秦始皇

qiutao xiayun	秋濤夏雲
rao	擾
ru chu yi shou	如出一手
shanhu hupo	珊瑚琥珀
Shanmin	山民
Shen Meigang	沈梅岡
Shen Shu	沈束
shi	視
<i>Shigui shu</i>	石匱書
shizhang	石丈
sijue	四絕
Su Wu	蘇武
Tao'an	陶庵
tieli mu tianran ji	鐵黎木天然几
Wanshui	宛水
Wang Shimao	王世懋
Wang Yuqian	王雨謙
wen (natural patterning)	紋
wen (cultural refinement)	文
<i>Wenxin diaolong</i>	文心雕龍
wu	物
wu ai wu	吾愛吾
wuwang shouze	毋忘手澤
xi	兮
xin	心
Xiang Molin	項墨林
Xiang Yuanbian	項元忭
xiao	笑
Xiao meiren gu ming	小美人觚銘
Xiaojiang	滿江
xingshi	姓氏
Xiongnu	匈奴
Xu Wei	徐渭
Xu Wenchang shu	徐文長書
xun	殉
yan shan	硯山
Yan Song	嚴嵩
Yanke	燕客

Yanghe	陽和
Yang Weizhen	楊維楨
Yang Yao	楊繇
Yao jie	堯誠
<i>Yehang chuan</i>	夜航船
yi	遺
you	友
yu	余
Yuruo	雨若
yu zhen cang zhi	余珍藏之
yue	約
zan	贊
Zhang Dai	張岱
Zhang E	張萼
Zhang Lianfang	張聯芳
Zhang Min	張岷
Zhang Rulin	張汝霖
Zhang Yefang	張燁芳
Zhang Yingyao	張應堯
Zhang Yuanbian	張元忬
zhe zu	折足
zhengming	正名
zhengshen	正身
zhiyin	知音
zhongjian	忠諫
Zhongshu gudong	仲叔古董
Zhu Shimen	朱石門
zhusong	祝頌
zi	自
Zijin	子蔭

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