

An Examination of *Caoshu Dayanming* (Cursive Inscription on the Large Inkstone) by Jin Nong and Analysis of Its Value

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Abstract

Jin Nong (1687-1763 A.D, Qing Dynasty) was famous well-known as a calligrapher and artist in history, but less known that he was also expert in inkstones. He was so immersed in the inkstone learning. He named himself Bai-Er-Yan-Tian-Fu-Weng, which means the one who has lots of inkstones. Jin Nong wrote and published *Dongxinzhai Yanming* (Inkstone Inscriptions from Dongxin Studio), which was the first private book published about inkstone study. This volume was published when Jin Nong was 47 years old, and it was the source book to learn more about Jin Nong's study in inkstone, paintings, calligraphy, knowledge, friendship relation before middle aged, and more. However, Jin was so knowledgeable that he used many a lot of quotations from classics so that it is difficult to understand what the true main meanings Jin wanted to show from the inscriptions on inkstone. Unfortunately, there were few reviewers commented on *Dongxinzhai Yanming*. The author wrote this article to show Jin's main true meanings from *Caoshu Dayanming* (Cursive Inscription on the Large Inkstone). It is wonderful to find that Jin Nong learned Xingcao (cursive) from Yang's works, (Yang Ningshi, 873-954 A.D. Five Dynasties) and deeply affected by Yang. *Caoshu Dayanming* unfolded Jin's study on calligraphy and Xingcao before us. It is so meaningful.

Keywords: Jin Nong, Caoshu Dayanming, Dongxinzhai Yanming, Pomegranate writing on the wall, Broom Writing

I. Introduction

Jin Nong (1687-1763) is known as one of the Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou and famed for his painting and calligraphy, but people seldom know that he was also well-versed in the study of inkstones. He had a fervent love for inkstones, calling himself “the wealthy man who owns 102 inkstones.” His work *Dongxinzhai Yanming* was published in the 11th year of the reign of Emperor Yongzheng (1733), when he was 47 years old; it was the first privately published anthology of inkstone inscriptions in the history of the study of inkstones, containing 95 inscriptions¹ that he had created. Jin Nong’s fervor for inkstones as well as his motivation for writing inkstone inscriptions is clearly described in the author’s preface to *Dongxinzhai Yanming*:

“From before until now, I have not had any other hobbies. Only the inkstone has been my constant companion. Even if I have no money, when I see an inkstone that I like, I will save money to buy it by spending less on food and clothing. Even if I were in dire straits, I would not abandon my good companion. I can tell the difference between good and bad stone, just as I know to make friends with virtuous people and stay away from the vile. Whenever I receive one or two pieces of good stone, I ask an experienced craftsman to make an inkstone of fine quality and antiquated charm. During the time I lived in the North, I did this every day and made an inscription for each of these inkstones. I did it only for my own pleasure, just like how Tao Hongjing appreciated the white clouds in the mountains in his poem.²”

It was because he loved inkstones; spent his days with inkstones; grew to know about, collect, and make inkstones; as well as created inkstone inscriptions that he wrote *Dongxinzhai Yanming*. As for the source of the inkstones, the author’s preface also provides an explanation:

“Everywhere I go, friends take out the good inkstones in their collection and ask me to create inscriptions for them. Therefore, I have the chance to look at all the wonderful inkstones in people’s collections and comment on their quality, just as Xu Shao of the Eastern Jin and Chu Pou of the Western Jin commented on their contemporaries. Even underage servant boys and concubines whose looks have faded ask me to make inscriptions for the inkstones they use, whether they be round or oval. As a result, the number of inscriptions I have made is considerable.³”

From the above description, one can get a glimpse of how popular inkstones were in those times as well as Jin Nong’s fame in the inkstone world. Furthermore, these inkstone inscriptions were not all made for inkstones owned by Jin Nong himself; many of them were made at the request of others. Even inkstones used by children and aged concubines were appraised and had inscriptions created for them, de-

noting a wide range of sources. As for the meaning of the inscriptions, it is as he said: “Among them, three out of ten are admonitions, while seven out of ten are in praise of beauty. The admonitions are like mottoes, while those that praise the inkstone or its owner are like the inscriptions one would find on a bell, tripod, or religious vessel.”⁴ Basically, they fit the ancient literary form of “inscription,” which both celebrates beauty and serves to exhort people. *Dongxinzhai Yanming* is of great value as a reference for understanding Jin Nong’s study of inkstones, who he associated with before middle age, his thoughts, and even his views on calligraphy. However, it is a pity Jin Nong’s inkstone inscriptions are succinct in words, rich in meaning, and abundant in allusions, making them difficult to interpret. So far, no commentary has been written for the work since its publication, and thus few scholars have discussed it; when the work is indeed mentioned, it is often done so in passing, even misinterpreting the words. This paper focuses on *Caoshu Dayanming* (Fig.1), one of the passages from the anthology, since Jin Nong prided himself on his clerical script and dry brush clerical script, and he has never been known to use the wild cursive script in his works. In the past, when scholars studied Jin Nong’s running-cursive script, they often believed it to be rooted in Yan Zhenqing’s regular script, influenced by Wang Duo’s calligraphy, and derived from the clerical script. *Caoshu Dayanming* reveals Jin Nong’s style of cursive calligraphy and triggered the author’s curiosity, thus the effort was made to delve into and investigate the matter. This paper adopts the traditional approach of collecting and sifting through annotations for an in-depth analysis that is based on facts in order to avoid vagueness and superficiality, and to reveal the profoundness hidden within the inscription. Lastly, the paper analyzes the significance of the inscription in order for scholars to understand Jin Nong’s views of calligraphy and the origins of his running cursive from the early years of his career.

II. Textual analysis and interpretation of *Caoshu Dayanming*

Caoshu Dayanming is as exactly as the title indicates: an inscription created by Jin Nong for a large inkstone he used often to write cursive script calligraphy. The author once studied the nomenclature of the 94 inkstone inscription titles in *Dongxinzhai Yanming*, and they can be divided into two major categories. In the first category, the inscription titles do not include the name or the studio name of the owner of the inkstone; those inscriptions were in principle created for inkstones used by Jin Nong himself. In the second, the name and the studio name of the owner of the inkstone are included in the inscription title; most inscriptions fall into this category, and were made for other people’s inkstones. The nomenclature of inscription titles in the first category can also be roughly divided into two major sub-categories. The first sub-category contains inscription titles that indicate the inkstone’s appearance, carvings, or characteristics, such as *Inscription on the Crane Inkstone*, *Inscription on the Gull Inkstone*, *Inscription on the Gourd Inkstone*, and so forth; the second sub-category contains inscription titles that indicate the use of the inkstone, of which there are 6, including *Inscription on the Inkstone for Writing I Ching*, *Inscription on the Inkstone for Annotating Laozi*, *Inscription on the Inkstone for Annotating Books*, *Inscription on the Inkstone for Editing Books*,

Caoshu Dayanming, and *Zuo Hanli Yanming*. If *Inscription on the Inkstone for Writing I Ching*, *Inscription on the Inkstone for Annotating Laozi*, *Inscription on the Inkstone for Annotating Books*, and *Inscription on the Inkstone for Editing Books* highlight Jin Nong's lesser-known scholarly pursuits, then *Caoshu Dayanming* and *Zuo Hanli Yanming* fully demonstrate Jin Nong's identity as a calligrapher and provide first-hand material for academics to study his calligraphy. Here is an example from *Zuo Hanli Yanming*, the key part being as follows:

“The stone was nearly round, thus an inkstone resembling the full moon was fashioned from it; from faraway Hezilin near the South Sea it came. It rubs ink like slicing through the hide of a rhinoceros with a newly sharpened *Dashi* knife. I now command a hundred immortals with my brush, allowing me to write like the way Cai Yong wrote the *Xiping Stone Classics* of Hongdu.”⁶

The first two parts describe the shape of the inkstone. The stone was almost a perfect circle, so when a craftsman was carving it into an inkstone, it was made in the form of the full moon. The third part⁷ notes the origin of the stone; it is a stone from Zhaoqing, Guangdong, and happens to be a Duan stone, which is known as the premier of the four types of top inkstones in China. Next, the inscription sings praises about how quickly the ink rubs onto the inkstone, comparable to slicing through rhinoceros hide with a newly-sharpened knife from *Dashi*⁸. He then exercised his imagination and imagined himself, with the help of this inkstone, wielding a brush moistened with ink and commanding all sorts of deities and spirits, as if he were Cai Yong from the Eastern Han Dynasty writing out the *Xiping Stone Classics*⁹ of Hongdu (Fig.2). From this inscription, we can see Jin Nong's reverence of Cai Yong, and how the monumental event of Cai Yong having the Five Classics engraved in stone, resulting in the *Xiping Stone Classics*, became Jin Nong's greatest goal in life. Quan Zuwang said that Jin Nong was proficient in the analysis of Chinese characters, well-versed in various ancient texts, and able to correct erroneous characters¹⁰. Jin Nong himself said, “When it comes to inscriptions on steles, from the Wufeng Carvings of the Western Han Dynasty to the various clerical scripts of the Han and Tang dynasties, I have tried my best to mirror them in both spirit and technique.”¹¹ He worked hard in his research and study of the clerical script for no other reason than to emulate Cai Yong: “To correct erroneous texts on stone steles, to have inscriptions engraved in stone and placed in the Taixue (Imperial Academy) for the imperial court”¹² as well as “to follow in the footsteps of Cai Yong of the Eastern Han Dynasty, who had the *Five Classics* engraved in stone and erected at the Taixue”¹³. It was not simply about making a name for himself with calligraphy. The value of this inkstone inscription lay in its revelation of Jin Nong's aspirations in life, but unfortunately it has not received enough attention from researchers.¹⁴

The significance of *Zuo Hanli Yanming* to the research of Jin Nong has been briefly revealed above, while *Caoshu Dayanming*, made for an inkstone used by Jin Nong himself, is the focus of this paper. This article will present the original texts first followed by annotations and translations to arrive at the main ideas and analyses, as shown below:

Pomegranate writing on the wall and broom writing / is a game for the immortals. With a bushel of ink and sixteen yards of paper / no one is better at wild cursive than Yang Fengzi.

[Annotations]

Pomegranate writing on the wall:

Tang Dynasty, Lu Yan¹⁵: “Passing by Mount Shen of the town of Donglin in Huzhou in the nineteenth day of the eighth month of the first year of the reign of Emperor Shenzong of Song, and writing a quatrain on the wall with a piece of pomegranate skin inscribed with the self-proclaimed name of ‘Huishanren’ on a wall in Shen Donglao’s House.” The neighbors to the west are rich and worried about not having enough, while my friend of the east is poor but happy. He brews white wine for the sake of hospitality, and scatters gold for the sake of collecting books.¹⁶

Song Dynasty, Ye Mengde: *Anecdotes Written While Escaping the Summer Heat*, Vol. 2: “Traveling from Donglin to Wushan for some fifty li to the southeast, the Shen family has been prominent there for many generations. During the Yuanfeng period of the reign of Emperor Shenzong of Song, there was a famous thinker called Dong Lao, who collected books and enjoyed the company of guests. As his house was located on the thoroughfare connecting Donglin and Qiantang, scholars and tourists always visit him because of his good reputation, and Shen never tired of receiving them with hospitality. Once, a man dressed in blue cloth and a fur coat came; he called himself Huishanren and had an air of unworldliness about him; he drank all day, but did not get drunk. At dusk, he took a leftover piece of pomegranate skin, and wrote a poem on the wall that said: ‘My neighbors to the west are rich and worried about not having enough, while my friend of the east is poor but happy. He brews white wine for the sake of hospitality, and scatters gold for the sake of collecting books.’ Then he bowed, went out the door, crossed the stone bridge, and left. Shen chased after him, but the man could not to be seen anyway, meaning it was Lu Dongbin. Many famous scholars of the time composed poems in reply to that poem, and those poems were passed down in history. Su Zizhan, who was an Assistant Prefect in Hangzhou, also wrote a poem in reply based on Han Tuizhi’s *The Biography of Mao Ying*: “Lu Dongbing used pomegranate skin to write on the wall; could it be because he no longer has any use for the calligraphy brush?”¹⁷ ” Even though the poem was used to record an actual event, other things were being implied.”

Broom writing:

The “broom” is a brush made by binding young reeds together, while “broom writing” refers to “flying white script.” Legend has it that Cai Yong of the Eastern Han Dynasty once saw craftsmen writing on the wall with brooms dipped in white powder at the Hong Du Art Academy. Inspired by their work, he returned home and created the “flying white script.” With each stroke of the brush, characters flecked with streaks of white are created, as if the ink had run low, resulting in a unique script style.

Jin Nong's *Ode to Feibai for Chu Jun of Geyang* written in the Qing dynasty reads, "You once said you had invested great efforts in the flying white script, and wished for me to write a song on your behalf. I know of flying white script as something rare, inspired by the craftsmen of the Han dynasty. The brush is like a broom yet not a broom, and is wielded with special techniques in an orderly manner. The script is as if a dainty bird were spanning its wings in a backdrop of snow, or as if threads of shining silk intersected on a loom. If you are able to master the art with a delicate touch, then you possess a dexterity comparable to the deity of carpentering and engineering."¹⁸ "

Wild cursive:

In the *Self-descriptive Notes* written by Huaisu, he says, "The frenzy that Zhang Xu displayed when writing cursive script caused people to refer to him as Mad Zhang; Now, when Huaisu exhibits signs of frenzy when writing cursive, I refer to him as the mad monk. To take after Mad Zhang as a mad monk, there seems to be no reason not to do so."¹⁹ "

Liu Yantao: *A General Theory of Cursive Script*: "Works written in wild cursive are the artworks of cursive script. The style is invented by Zhang Xu and made renowned by the mad monk Huaisu, who is known for his grotesque, rapid strokes."²⁰

Yang Fengzi:

Old History of the Five Dynasties, Volume 128, Book of Later Zhou 19, Biographies 8: "Yang Ningshi is of Huayin origin. His father, Yang She, was reappointed to serve at court after the Tang dynasty was succeeded by Liang, but was later demoted from chancellor to left vice director, a title under which he served till death. All his writing is delicate; it is bright, energetic, richly expressive, and highly commended by his peers... In the winter of the inaugural year, he died in Luoyang at the age of eighty-five, and was bestowed the honorific title of grand martial arts instructor of the crown prince. Yang Ningshi excelled in song, poetry, and the writing of ceremonial text. On the blue and pink walls of Luoyang temples and shrines are inscriptions recording his history, including the pseudonym of "Fengzi" (son of the wind) for his indulgence and lack of restraint."²¹ "

The *Supplementary Biography* appended to the *New Edition of the Old History of the Five Dynasties with Three Appendices, Biography of Yang Ningshi* states, "Although Yang Ningshi held offices at court over the course of five eras, he did so idly due to heart disease, and was for this reason regarded as a "Fengzi." His brushwork is particularly unrestrained and takes after the style of Ouyang Xun and Yan Zhenqing, but is even more irrepressible. As he was long a resident of Luoyang, he freely visited the Buddhist and taoist temples and shrines. Upon beholding magnificent mountains and rivers, he lingered and admired them for their beauty. Where he finds cracks in the nooks of wall, he looked around and wrote, humming lyrics while composing his writings as if he had found a kindred spirit that he must protect at all costs. Otherwise known by his pseudonym or name, he is referred to as "Guisi Ren(Man of Guisi)" or "Yang Xubai",

as “Xiwei Jushi (Layman Xiwei)”, or the “Guanxi Laonong (Old Farmer of Guanxi)”.. The veracity of writings attributed to him cannot be verified; however, in commentaries his script style is second only to Yen Zhongshu.²² ”

[Translation]

In the old days, when Lu Zu (Lu Dongbin) visited Shen Donglao in the Eastern Forest, he used pomegranate skin to write a poem on the wall for fun; Cai Yong observed artisans writing on the wall with brooms at Hong Du Men Academy, and was thus inspired to create the “flying white script.” From the above examples, the freedom, irreverence and lack of restraint of cursive script is because it is a game of the gods. With a large, capacious inkstone, a bushel of ink, and sixteen yards of paper, I can write and draw at will with unruly recklessness. Nevertheless, it is impossible not to be awed and amazed by Yang Fengzi of the Five Dynasties when speaking the wild cursive script!

[Main Idea]

I propose the examples of Lu Dongbin using pomegranate skin to write on the wall and Cai Yong creating the flying white script from observations of artisans writing at Hong Du Art Academy to elucidate my own understanding of cursive script. Cursive must be free from convention, expansive and irrepressible with occasional drying of the brush, as if the writer were playing a game of the gods. Thus, I am able to deduce that my idea of the paradigm of wild cursive is Yang Ningshi of the Five Dynasties, otherwise known as Yang Fengzi.

[Analysis]

As this inscription is entitled *Caoshu Dayanming*, it is evident that the inkstone in question is extremely suitable for writing cursive script due to its large capacity. The first sentence, “pomegranate writing on the wall,” alludes to Lu Dongbin and is recorded in many related texts. For the majority, the sentence refers to Lu Dongbin’s act of writing a poem on the wall in exchange for the hospitality he enjoyed using the skin of a pomegranate that had been eaten after visiting Shen Donglao in the Eastern Forest and being received by the host. The intriguing part of the story is why Lu abandoned the brush and chose to write with pomegranate skin instead; what a curious tale! This is precisely why Su Shi once wondered, “Lu Dongbin used pomegranate skin to write on the wall; could it be because he no longer has any use for the calligraphy brush?”²³ ” In fact, the gods are gods precisely because their actions are beyond what the ordinary person can comprehend. The act of writing with pomegranate skin on the wall perfectly exemplifies the gods’ playful, nonchalant attitude toward the circumstances of life. It is said that Lu Dongbin was extraordinarily talented in calligraphy. For instance, the *Shulin Chronicles* recorded that “In the era of Emperor Huizong of Song, Lu once disguised himself under the pseudonym of Chang Shuzi, and created works of cursive script that resembled in appearance wilted vines and quivering threads while

wandering through the various temples. People eagerly brought him paper for him to write upon, yet he rarely bestowed the honor.²⁴ ” Dong Qichang, a theorist of the Ming Dynasty, commended Lu highly for his accomplishments after reading his calligraphy works that have been passed down through the ages, saying, “The calligraphy of Lu Dongbin is the first and foremost among the gods. The style we see today, for instance the poem written for Donglao, resembles that of Zhang Xu.”²⁵ ” In other words, Dong Qichang considers Lu Dongbin’s calligraphic style to be extremely similar that of the master of cursive script, Zhang Xu.

“Broom writing” refers to “flying white script. Legend has it that Cai Yong of the Eastern Han Dynasty once saw craftsmen writing on the wall with brooms dipped in white powder at the Hong Du Art Academy. Inspired by their work, he returned home and created the “flying white script.”²⁶ ” *Theory of Eastern Discourses* by Huang Bosi (Song dynasty) states that, “Where the streaks like billowing hair are white, the uplifting motion resembles flying.”²⁷ As can be seen, flying white script “flies” due to the swift and uplifting motion of the brushstroke; and it is “white” because when the brush passed quickly over the paper, the surface of the paper comes into contact with ink for a shorter period of time, leaving streaks of white as if the brush is depleted of ink. Judging from the history of script evolution, the script based on which Cai Yong wrote “flying white script” must be the clerical script, a style prevalent at the time. Subsequently, the characteristics of flying white script came to be applied toward all types of script styles, transforming into a unique technique of movement. This is why Liu Xizai says “The style of cursive script running dry begins with the flying white script.”²⁸ ” Cai Yong’s flying white script can no longer be found today. Nevertheless, the six large characters on the inscription tablet for the *Tablet of the Immortal Crown Prince*(fig.3) by Wu Zetian (Tang dynasty) is an important basis for understanding the flying white script in the later ages. Jin Nong displayed great interest toward flying white script, mentioning it frequently in his poetry²⁹ . He also put the technique into practice by incorporating it into his works, forming a unique trait by which the artist can be recognized.

Following the above investigation of the respective sources and meanings of “pomegranate writing on the wall” and “broom writing” and returning to the concept of “broom writing using pomegranate skin,” we can deduce that Jin Nong coined this phrase to exemplify his understanding of cursive script. Overall, cursive script is the style with the greatest degree of freedom among all of the calligraphy styles in China, and the most artistic. After Zhang Zhi created the modern cursive script late in the Han dynasty and Wang Xizhi and his son Wang Xianzhi continued to practice the script, Zhang Xu and Huaisu in Tang dynasty evolved the style into wild cursive, enabling the script to attain the pinnacle of its artistic value. There are many records of Zhang Xu and Huaisu engaging in writing after becoming intoxicated in the history of calligraphy. As Du Fu notes in his poem *Song of the Eight Immortals of the Wine Cup*, “After three cups Zhang Xu becomes the master of cursive, taking off his cap and showing his pate off to the dignitaries, but when he wields his brush it’s as if the clouds billow over.”³⁰ ” *Old Book of Tang*: “Xu is of the Wu people of Suzhou. A drunkard, each time he becomes heavily intoxicated he yells and swaggers before

he writes, or dips his head in head before taking up his pen. After he recovers and beholds his works, he believes them to be by the hands of the gods and not to be replicated. The world knew him as Zhang Dian (Mad Zhang).”³¹ This particular paragraph aptly describes the frenzy with which Zhang Xu writes in a drunken state. Huaisu, who came slightly after Zhang Xu, was also known as he who is perpetually drunk. The *Self-descriptive Notes* now housed at the National Palace Museum is admired for the marvellously varying strokes and brushwork that simply defies our understanding. For instance, “Two or three lines written drunk in a twinkling, never to be replicated in a sober state.” “The mind and the hand drive each other to form curious strokes, creating characters so odd and grotesque yet so fitting and harmonious. All are eager to know the secret to such flourish, but Huaisu himself has no inkling.”³² The above records emphasize these two aspects: One, the frenzy under which the artist writes; and two, the extreme simplification of the characters that are ever-changing and fantastic in shape. As can be seen, after Zhang Xu and Huaisu gave cursive a new outlook, the script is no longer used for practical purposes. Calligraphers who utilize the script are not simply writing for writing’s sake, but engaging in a game or a performance. Therefore, wild cursive has become a form of artistic expression for the calligrapher that is of the greatest artistic value among all the scripts of China. Thus clarified, we can now understand that Jin Nongs “pomegranate writing on the wall” symbolizes how Lu Dongbin the immortal writes in an unorthodox way, as if calligraphy can be written at will, as if he were playing a game. This is why the following sentence contains words such as “immortals’ game.” “Broom writing” is one of the defining traits of flying white script, emphasizing the rapid frenzy with which the characters are formed by the brush. Where the brush passes over the paper, streaks of white appear, leaving varied and richly textured strokes that invite profound contemplation and offer the viewer strong visual stimulation.³³

The script of wild cursive began with Zhang Xu and was perpetuated by Huaisu. Due to the creative motives of the calligraphers and the status they were in while writing, we can observe that with the writer foregoing the desk, relinquishing the use of paper and small script, and adopting the standing position, they moved toward creating calligraphy works of greater spatial dimensions³⁴. As evidenced by the development of paper-making technology in China, “During the Han and Jin dynasties technologies were not yet sufficiently advanced for making large paper sizes. All classical calligraphy works are written on paper approximately 24.5 cm in height, such as the *Pingfu Tie (A Consoling Letter)*. In the Tang and Five dynasties, papers of larger sizes began to be produced reaching heights of 28.9 cm or even 30-45 cm.”³⁵ “It is evident that the restrictions in paper size was not entirely conducive to the creativity of writers using wild cursive and other styles requiring expansive space. After paper-making technologies progressed considerably in the Ming dynasty, writers began using paper longer in length vertically. From the works of late Ming that remain to this day, “most are written on paper from 150 to 200 in length on average”³⁶. Dimensions of this scale are without a doubt beneficial to the flourishing strokes of semi-cursive and cursive script, thus strongly contributing to the romantic style of writing primarily expressed through semi-cursive in late Ming. For this reason, Jin Nong writes in *Caoshu Dayanming* directly after the line of

“a game for the immortals” the statement “bushel of ink and sixteen yards of paper. If the “bushel of ink” is directly linked to the enormous size and capacity of the inkstone, then the “sixteen yards of paper” refer to the gigantic paper size required to aptly express the unique traits of wild cursive, enabling the artist to unleash his creativity and embody his vigor. This not only elucidates Jin Nong’s understanding of the calligraphy style of wild cursive, but also coincides with the practices of calligraphers after paper-making technologies progressed to a certain level late in the Ming dynasty.

At the end of the inscription are the words “no one is better at wild cursive than Yang Fenzi.” *Guangyun*, *Yangyun*: “To give way, is to give way and recommend.” The word can thus be further interpreted to mean to esteem and commend. This signifies that for Jin Nong the most iconic calligraphy for wild cursive is Yang Ningshi, otherwise known as Yang Fengzi³⁷ during the Five Dynasties (873–954). The *Treatise on Calligraphy During the Xuanhe Reign* describes Yang Ningshi as “fond of writing, especially frantic cursive. In his decade of residence in Luoyang, he wrote upon all the walls of the temples and shrines. With flourishing strokes, he demonstrated his lack of restraint as if a madman.”³⁸ Living in an era of great political turmoil during which thrones are frequently usurped and royal blood is shed, Yang Ningshi nevertheless managed to serve office during the Later Liang, Later Tang, Later Jin, Later Han, and Later Zhou dynasties, five in total, without endangering his life. Therefore, it seems there is a method to his madness—perhaps a feigned personality that safeguards and protects. Upon visiting temples and shrines, he meets blank, empty walls with joy. Sitting and surveying the premises, he becomes frantically excited, and writes as he sings songs and lyrics, just like the way Mad Zhang and Huaisu writes calligraphy on the walls when they are intoxicated with wine. Perhaps this is his only way to release the pent-up energy and dissatisfaction engendered by a harsh political climate. From this perspective, the madness he displays is then perfectly normal and natural. Impromptu wall writing also coincides with the concept of “game” as previously described by Jin Nong, as they entail the same type of mentality. Yang Ningshi’s mural calligraphy was already well received by his contemporaries; for instance, Huang Tingjian of the Song dynasty once said, “When I was previously in Louyang, I saw everywhere the writings of Master Yang on the walls of temples and shrines, with each character and flourish more intricate than the last. His calligraphy and the paintings of Wu Daozi are no doubt the greatest artworks of Luoyang.”³⁹ Giving the mural calligraphy of Yang Ningshi equal status as the paintings of Wu Daozi and referring to them as the “greatest artworks of Luoyang” is veneration indeed. This is also the reason Yang’s mural calligraphy was preserved up until the middle of the Northern Song dynasty. However, as mural calligraphy is a spontaneously created art form, it is difficult to preserve and impossible to imprint for future generations. As such, none of the works still exist today for contemplation and appreciation, a great pity indeed.

Four calligraphy works of Yang Ningshi still existent today, including *Jiu Hua Tie* (*Chive Blossoms Couplet*), *Lu Hong Cao Tang Shi Zhi*, *Shenxian Qiju Fa* (*The Life of the Immortals*), and *Xia Re Tie* (*Book of Summer Heat*). Texts included in collections include *Yun Shi Tie* (*Book of Shifting Clouds*) in *Ru Tie* (*Calligraphy of Ru*), and *Pacing the Void* in *Xi Hong Tang Tie*. Among them, *Xia Re Tie* (Fig.4) and *Shenxian Qiju Fa* are written in

unruly running cursive. Although the work is not large in size and thus not comparable with the grandeur of mural calligraphy, it exemplifies some of the characteristics of Yang's cursive calligraphy style. Below is an analysis of the *Xia Re Tie* to explore Yang's cursive script style. This work is currently housed in the collections of the Beijing Palace Museum, and included inscriptions and postscripts by Wang Qinruo (Song), Xian Yushu (Yuan), Zhao Mengfu (Yuan) and Zhang Zhao as well as the annotations of the Qianlong Emperor.

The writing is curious and antiquated with fluid, soaring strokes, a stunning rarity indeed. The style is comparable with Yan Zhenqing, peerlessly magnificent; nevertheless, as Yang disliked the restrictions of paper, few of his work remain for posterity and are extremely precious. (Postscript by Wang Qinruo)⁴⁰

The calligraphy of Yang Ningshi is known for being immediately recognizable, and is not obscure or difficult to decipher. This book is profound yet carefree, a true miracle worthy of collection. (Postscript by Zhao Mengfu)⁴¹

Previous commentators refer to Yang's style of calligraphy as "drawing inspiration from the characteristics of Yan Zhenqing and Liu Gongquan;⁴²" judging from this book, this remark stands true. Some of the characters written in semi-cursive, such as "chi (start), hsia (summer), ti (body) and chang (long)" do display hints of Yan's writing style. The entire volume is composed of fluid and soaring strokes with changeable, transient composition and style, making it impossible to predict the next point of departure upon the completion of one character. As if it were child play, the work proceeds according to no rules, carefree and naive. This is why Wang Qinruo describes the work as "curious and antiquated" while Zhao Mengfu speaks of it as "immediately recognizable." Nevertheless, despite the appearance of disorderliness and lack of polish, the work is in fact profoundly rooted in classical techniques and faithful to philosophy of calligraphy, so much so that only the well-informed are able to see the nuances concealed. This perfectly exemplifies Yang Ningshi's great mastery of calligraphic style, for it is this mastery that enables him to display his expressiveness to the largest extent using techniques that appear to know no inhibition. This is perhaps the exact reason why Jin Nong speaks so highly of Yang.

III. Analysis of the value of *Caoshu Dayanming*

Inkstone inscriptions are mostly short, succinct, abbreviated, but profound due to the small surface area of the inkstone. Jin Nong in particular is fond of incorporating allusions, adding to the difficulty of deducing his inscriptions. Having interpreted the inscription to this level of detail, its meaning is now evident to us; however, what we further need to consider is what is the meaning of this inscription for Jin Nong himself? What information does it provide? As mentioned at the beginning of section 2 of this article, Jin Nong wrote both *Caoshu Dayanming* and *Zuo Hanli Yanming* for his own inkstones. If *Zuo Hanli Yanming*

is written to portray his interests and passions, which is to amend the Five Classics and write stone inscriptions, thereby achieving enduring renown, then *Caoshu Dayanming* is equally of direct reference value in enabling our understanding of Jin Nong's views of cursive script and his ultimate aspirations.

Throughout his life, Jin Nong composed a large number of writings that can from the angle of script style can be roughly divided into five categories, including the clerical script, running cursive, regular script for scripture writing, regular-clerical, and a variant of the clerical script-flat brush script⁴³. The academic world has to date acquired an extremely rich understanding of Jin Nong's choice of calligraphy scripts, the evolution of his style, and the relationships between the different scripts. Apart from the five abovementioned scripts, however, none of the works by Jin Nong that remain today are written in running cursive, or even proper cursive. Jin Nong's running cursive is often based on semi-cursive and regular script, or resembles regular script adjusted into a mix of running cursive and regular. Sometimes the style incorporates the structure of cursive, while those that feature greater freedom of expression become closer to running cursive. Regarding Jin Nong's imitation of the running cursive script, Jiang Shi made the following commentary in the Qing dynasty:

Mr. Dongxin's writing is simple, antiquated, and upright. Derived from the clerical script of the Han, it overflows into running cursive, just as an old tree bears flowers and blooms in breathtaking beauty.⁴⁴

Huang Dun highly agrees with this comment and further elaborates by saying that:

The word "overflows" aptly describes the unique traits of Jin Nong's running cursive. The diagonal stroke from middle to left and the angle of flicking gestures are all derived from clerical script. Therefore, "overflow" in this instance refers to technique. However, as character composition for the cursive scripts is still based on traditional models of calligraphy, and as Jin's style is based on both that of Yan Zhenqing's as well as he beloved flat brush script, the end result is a unique running cursive that's exclusive to Jin Nong.⁴⁵

That is to say, Jin Nong's character composition for his cursive script is still based on traditional models of calligraphy. *Four Assorted Poems on the River's Short in Winter, Verse 1*, written by Jin Nong when he was 35 years of age, mentions his emulation of *Lantingji Xu* by Wan Xizhi in his younger years, and the difficulty he encountered in comprehending the nuances of the work⁴⁶. Additionally, under the influence of his instructor He Zhuo who venerated Yan Zhenqing⁴⁷ as well as his acquisition of *Tale of Magu Mountain Fairy Altar in Regular Script book*, large print edition⁴⁸, Wang Xizhi and Yan Zhenqing became his two main sources of emulation for running cursive.

As *Caoshu Dayanming* is written by Jin Nong to describe the large inkstone he himself uses for writing cursive scripts, we can boldly surmise that the meaning of the inkstone inscription lies in declaring that, in the process of Jin Nong's development of his running cursive, Yang Ningshi was an indispensable source of influence. We can thus deduce that Jin Nong engaged in research and emulation of Yang's techniques and style. When, though, did Jin Nong engage in emulation of Yang's works? This can be roughly calculated by analyzing the time at which this inkstone inscription was written. This inkstone inscription was included in *Dongxinzhai Yanming*, published when Jin Nong was 47 years of age. However, the inscription was already present in the *Hing Shu Yan Min Ce* published when Jin Nong was just 44. Although the books and poetry written by Jin Nong that are still available today show no evidence of direct simulation of Yang's style and techniques, Jin Nong is in the first place not one to directly copy or mirror another's work (fig.5&6). His strength instead lies in learning from the work of others and making it his own, and this can be observed from his incessant pursuit of innovating his calligraphy style by transcribing the *Huashan Tablet* over and over again. Today, none of Jin Nong's works in pure cursive script still exist⁴⁹, but this inkstone inscription shows us that Jin Nong was once profoundly committed to the perfecting of his cursive script. The line of verse reading "with a bushel of ink and sixteen yards of paper" furthermore indicates that Jin Nong once followed in the footsteps of his contemporaries, the succession of romantic calligraphers that emerged since late Ming, by wielding bold, flourishing strokes on high walls and large scrolls of paper. Although for certain reasons Jin Nong ceased to continue along this path of artistic creation, the flying white script that he developed in the process of learning cursive script became the backbone for his clerical script and dry brush clerical script. The composition of cursive script and the sense of freedom that Jin Nong gained from emulating Yang Ningshi's style also became the signature traits of his running cursive throughout his lifetime. Even at the age of 64, he proudly compared the bamboo he drew to "the cursive of Yang Fengzi" in his *Notes to Painting Bamboo*.⁵⁰ From youth to old age, he remained faithful to his idol, a fidelity that is even more unusual and worthy of notice in a man as proud and opinionated as Jin Nong. If we were to examine in greater detail the heritage and innovations that the works of both artists show in terms of the influence of previous generations, the slight tension that seems to pervade shows us that although Jin Nong looks up to Yang Ningshi, his admiration extends beyond appreciation of Yang's outstanding form and technique. For Jin Nong, emulating Yang Ningshi is the path to something even greater: the opportunity to innovate, excel, and surpass. With a conscious effort to break free of convention, he is at a constant struggle to balance reality and ideal, and calligraphy serves as both the outlet for relieving grievances and the means to seek self-identification and independence.

This inkstone inscription provides additional information on the inspiration for Jin Nong's running cursive, and fully supplements our understanding of Jin Nong's views on calligraphy, and is therefore of unquestionable importance.

IV. Conclusion

To date, scholars both domestic and abroad have through research acquired a profound understanding of Jin Nong from the three primary aspects of painting, calligraphy, and literature. The majority of such research, in particular, entails painting and calligraphy while investigation of the literary aspects of Jin Nong's works is comparatively light with the main focuses being poetry and various types of notes. Although this imbalance can certainly be attributed to Jin Nong's title as one of the Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou and his prevalent image as a calligrapher, we must pay particular attention to the fact that Jin Nong regards himself as a scholar and poet, and that he identified himself as such all throughout his life. Creating works of calligraphy and painting for the sake of making a livelihood was for him a decision made out of necessity rather than by choice. Jin Nong only became committed to painting after the age of 60, as can be evidenced by the large numbers of notes to paintings that he wrote during this stage in life.⁵¹ In terms of calligraphy, at apart from the running cursive and clerical scripts which he perfected before reaching middle age, all of his other scripts continued to evolve and mature after he failed in the great literary examinations. In other words, investigation of Jin Nong's painting and calligraphy must focus on the period after he reached the age of 50. In contract, however, Jin Nong's life experience, acquaintances, artistic endeavors and literary and poetic efforts before the age of 50 are likely to be overlooked by researchers for the very same reason. Sometimes, even, important facts are wrongly deduced and interpreted without rigorous research and analysis. As such, two of Jin Nong's poetry collections, *The Collected Works of Mr. Dongxin* and *Dongxinzhai Yanming*, both published in the 11th year of Yongzheng (1733) when he was 47 years old, are particularly important in offering an overview of the first half of his life. Therefore, profound investigation and analysis of these two poetry collections are vastly conducive to acquiring in-depth understanding of Jin Nong by supplementing the gaps in current research. Studies focusing on Jin Nong's commitment to inkstones is especially lacking, even to the degree of being uncharted waters. This article is therefore an initial attempt at completing textual analysis and interpretation of *Caoshu Dayanming* one of the texts included in *Dongxinzhai Yanming* after the author became aware that such research is direly needed in the field. Although the conclusions reached in this article are rudimentary and await further studies, the author hopes to draw attention to this aspect of Jin Nong, thereby contributing to greater scholarly interest in the famed calligrapher and artist.

Notes

- 1 Note: There are 94 titles in the anthology with one inscription under each title, the exception being *Inscription of the Ordinary Monk with Little Use Writing Scriptures on the Clouded Mountain of Ink and Wash*, which has two, making the total number of inscriptions 95. Jin, Nong. *Collection of Jin Nong's Works, Miscellaneous Works of Mr. Dongxin, Dongxinzhai Yanming, Author's Preface*. Ed. Yong Qi. Hangzhou: Zhejiang People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 2016. pp.228-229.
- 2 Same as note 1.
- 3 Same as note 1., p.229.
- 4 Same as note 3.
- 5 There is also the *Inscription on the Inkstone for Writing The Divine Farmer's Materia Medica*, which was made by Jin Nong for his own inkstone dedicated to the study of herbal medicine. It can be found in Jin Nong's *Album of Inkstone Inscriptions in Running Cursive*, but is not included in the later *Dongxinzhai Yanming*.
- 6 This inscription was first included in the *Album of Inkstone Inscriptions in Running Cursive*, and later again in *Dongxinzhai Yanming* with the text slightly altered. The version included here is the one from *Album of Inkstone Inscriptions in Running Cursive*.
- 7 The term "South Sea" may be used to refer to Guangdong since the province faces the South China Sea, thus the term was used in the inscription. *Hezi* is another name for chebulic myrobalan, an evergreen tree native to India, Myanmar and southern China whose fruit can be used as medicine. *Volume 25 of Qu Dajun's Guangdong Xin Yu* talks about the trees of Guangdong, and has records of *hezi* trees for reference. *Hezi*, or *kezi*, resembles the wingleaf soapberry in form; the flowers are white, and the fruit is yellow like olives; the flesh and the skin of the fruit are attached, and the best are those that have six ridges. In Guangzhou's Guangxiao Temple, there used to be fifty or sixty of such trees. They bore small fruit that did not have a tart taste; most of them had six ridges. They were sent to the imperial court, but now that is not so. The temple used to be the residence of Lu Fan. When he lived here in exile, he planted many Chinese chestnuts and *kezi* trees. In the first year of the reign of Emperor Wu of the Song Dynasty (420), the Indian monk Guṇabhadra came to this place, pointed to the *hezi* trees, and said to the people, "This is a forest of chebulic myrobalan, which is from the West; it would be appropriate to call this place Kelinzhizhi after the trees." That is why the temple's name became Helin. In the temple, there is a spring for the monks to wash their bowls. When vessels made of *hezi* root is used to scoop the water, the water does not taste salty. Every seventh and eighth month of the year, the fruit becomes ripe, and so the monks of the temple would boil the fruit to make beverages for visitors; combined with licorice, the color of the beverage is like new tea, and it is said to be able to make white hair and mustache black again. It is not known when the *hezi* trees were cut down, but now there is only a bohdi on the left side of the temple, four banyan trees in front of the temple, and two fountain palms at the gate. In a poem, I wrote, "Lu Fan's garden is a picture of the past, yet the forest of *hezi* is long gone. White

grass grows in a flowery palace, and only cattle and sheep can be seen.” Note: Guangzhou’s Guangxiao Temple is an important Zen monastery, not far from Zhaoqing, where Duan inkstones are produced. Jin Nong may have used the scene of the *hezi* trees to refer to the hometown of the renowned inkstones.

- 8 A *Dashi* knife is a knife made in ancient Arabia. Du Fu wrote in his poem *A Song for the Arab Sword of Lord Commander Zhao of Jingnan, Minister of Ceremonies*: “Ah, with the Master of Court Entertainments’ horn-bow of a hero, we might make comparison with this precious Arabian sword.”
- 9 The *Xiping Stone Classics* is the earliest and most influential stone engraving of the classics in China, and is of special historical significance. In the fourth year of the reign of Emperor Ling of the Eastern Han Dynasty (175), Cai Yong, Yang Ci, Zhang Xun, and Han Yue received permission to correct and revise the texts of seven classics—including the *I Ching*, the *Book of Documents*, the *Lu Poetry*, the *Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial*, the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, the *Gongyang Zhuan*, and the *Analects*—and to have them rewritten in the “bafen” clerical script, a type of clerical script that was prevalent at the time. Calligraphers would then write the classics in cinnabar on stone, and artisans would engrave the characters. The entire process took nine years to finish. The classics were engraved on forty-six steles, eleven *chi* high and four *chi* wide, which were erected in front of the gate of the Taixue (Imperial Academy), located outside the Kaiyang Gate of Luoyang, as a model for the various classics as well as Chinese characters. Source: National Museum of History, https://www.nmh.gov.tw/study_117_103634.html.
- 10 Quan, Zuwang. “Mr. Dongxin Writing of Stirrups.” *The Quan Zuwang Collection of Compilations and Annotations*. Ed. Zhu Zhuyu. Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 2000. pp.1162-1163.
- 11 Jin, Nong. *Collection of Jin Nong’s Works, Dong Xin Zhai Yan Ming, Preface*. Ed. Yong Qi. p.229.
- 12 Same as note 10.
- 13 Jin, Nong. *Collection of Jin Nong’s Works, Mr. Dongxin: The Sequel, Preface*. Ed. Yong Qi. p.79.
- 14 Here is another example of Jin Nong’s reverence for Cai Yong. In *The Collected Works of Mr. Dongxin*, there is *A New Edition of Four Volumes of Humble Hand-copied Poems Along with Five Miscellaneous Poems in the Collection of My Daughter*: No. 5: “After the scrolls and books have been compiled, the hair on the top of my head has become sparse / my daughter, look after them well, as Cai Yong’s daughter did for her father’s work / let hat boxes peel and bamboo baskets fall apart, but do not mistreat these scrolls of clerical script.” The first sentence talks about how Jin Nong’s hair has thinned after all the hard work of compiling *The Collected Works of Mr. Dongxin*. In the second sentence, he compares himself to Cai Yong, and his daughter to Cai Wenji, who is Cai Yong’s daughter, and bids his daughter to care for the collection of his handwritten works well.
- 15 Lu Yan, courtesy name Dongbin, is a hermit living in the mountains. Grandson of Lu Wei, Vice Minister of Rites, and a native of Yongle, Hezhong Prefecture (also known as Puban). He took part

in the imperial examinations during the reign of Emperor Xizong of Tang, but did not pass. At a tavern in Chang'an, he met Zhongli Quan and found Tao, and his whereabouts became unknown. Four volumes of poetry. See *Quan Tangshi*, Vol. 856. Beijing: China International Cultural Press, 1996. p.2738.

- 16 Same as note 14. p.2747.
- 17 Ye, Mengde. *Anecdotes Written While Escaping the Summer Heat, Volume 2*. Taipei: The Commercial Press Taiwan, 1966, Taiwan 1st ed. p.91.
- 18 Jin, Nong. *Collection of Jin Nong's Works, Mr. Dongxin: The Sequel*. Ed. Yong Qi. pp.84-85.
- 19 Li, Zhoyu. *Self-descriptive Notes*. By Huaisu. Tokyo: Nigensha, 2008. pp.28-30.
- 20 Liu, Yantao. *A General Theory of Cursive Script*. Xi'an: Shaanxi People Publishing House, 2013. p.117.
- 21 Xue, Juzheng et al. *Old History of the Five Dynasties, Volume 128, Book of Later Zhou 19, Biographies 8. New Edition of the Old History of the Five Dynasties with Three Appendices*. Ed. Yang, Jialuo. Taipei: Tingwen Publishing, 1985, 4th ed. pp.1682-1684.
- 22 Yang, Jialuo, ed. *Supplementary Biography appended to the New Edition of the Old History of the Five Dynasties with Three Appendices, Biography of Yang Ningshi*. Taipei: Tingwen Publishing, 1985, 4th ed. p.1684.
- 23 "Lu Dongbin passes through the Eastern Forest of Huzhou to visit Shen. Becoming intoxicated, he wrote on the walls of Donglao's home with the skin of a pomegranate, saying, "The neighbors to the west are rich and worried about not having enough, while my friend of the east is poor but happy. He brews white wine for the sake of hospitality, and scatters gold for the sake of collecting books." Su Shi of Xi Shu heard of this tale and composed three lyrics. Donglao, or Old Shen as he calls himself, is otherwise known by the people of Huzhou. All of his sons compose poetry, an astounding thing indeed." Verse 1: The world may believe poverty a disease, but the gods believe it to hold the path toward enlightenment. While white wine engages friends to stay over, Master Huang is not seen searching for his volumes. Verse 2: Monks believe that enlightenment leads to ascension, and master Huayueh can leave behind just a relic. Suddenly writings in red ink are seen in the yellow garden, as if court orders in red ink on ceramics have been delivered. Verse 3: Following three years of harsh, unsheltered living, it's as if life were coming to an end. If Lu Dongbing used pomegranate skin to write on the wall, could it be because he no longer has any use for the calligraphy brush? Su, Shi. *Su Shi Poetry Collection, Volume 12-II*. Ed. and annotated Wang Wen-Gao and Feng Ing-Liou. Taipei: Xuehai Publishing, 1984, reprint. pp.588-590.
- 24 Ma, Zonghuo, ed. *Shulin Chronicles, Volume 3. Shulin Critique: Shulin Chronicles*. Beijing: Wenwu Publishing, 2003, 2nd impression. p.338.
- 25 Dong, Qichang. Ed. Tu, Youhsiang. *Essays of the Painting and Zen Studio, Volume 1, Critique of Classical Calligraphy*. Nanjing: Fenghuang Publishing & Media, 2005, 1st impression. p.42.

- 26 “The flying white script originates with Cai Yong, who saw artisans writing with brooms at Hong Du Art Academy and thus created the script.” Li, Chuo, ed. *Shangshu Gushi*. Taipei: The Commercial Press Taiwan, 1966, 1st ed. p.10.
- 27 Huang, Bosi. *Theory of Eastern Discourses*, Volume 2. Taipei: The Commercial Press Taiwan, 1966. p.91.
- 28 Liu, Xizai. *Overview of Art, Volume 5. Liu Xizai Essay Collection*. Nanjing: Jiangsu Ancient Books Publishing House, 2001, 1st ed., 2nd impression. p.165.
- 29 Regarding the relationship between flying white script and Jin Nong’s calligraphy and painting, Huang Chun offers detailed explanations in the article entitled “Critical Biography of Jin Nong’s Calligraphy” for reference. *Fenglaitang Collection-Selection of Huang Chun’s Calligraphy Critiques*. Beijing: Rongbaozhai Publishing House, 2010. pp.390-392.
- 30 Du, Fu. Annotated, Chou, Zhaoao. *Detailed Annotations to the Poems of Du Fu, Volume 2*. Taipei: The Liberal Arts Press, 1976, reprint. p.138.
- 31 Ouyang Xiu and Song Chi. *The New Book of Tang, Collected Biographies 127, Cultures and Arts (Mid)*. Ed. Yang, Jialuo. *New Edition to the New Book of Tang, Attached Index 7*. Taipei: Tingwen Publishing, 1976, 1st ed. p.5764.
- 32 Huaisu. *Self-descriptive Notes*. Tokyo: Nigensha, 2008. pp.32-34.
- 33 This inkstone inscription is rarely mentioned by scholars. Nevertheless, Jin Dan interpreted in his article entitled “Jin Nong and Dry Brush Clerical Script” the meanings of “immortals’ game” and “broom writing” as follows:

In *Caoshu Dayanming*, he writes, “Pomegranate writing on the wall and broom writing is a game for the immortals. With a bushel of ink and sixteen yards of paper, no one is better at wild cursive than Yang Fengzi.” This verse clarifies the meanings of “flying white” and “flat brush script;” broom writing is clearly flying white script, while immortals’ game refers to the immortal Wuguang engaging in the writing of clerical script. In other words, Jin Nong’s flying white script and flat brush script techniques undergo great evolution compared with that of the ancients, and become truly his own.

Jin Dan interprets broom writing as “flying white script” with reason. However, his opinion that “immortals’ game” means “inferring that immortal Wuguang engages in the writing of flat brush script” is something the author of this article cannot agree with. It can be deduced that Jin Dan made such an interpretation simply because in this article Jin Dan writes of Jin Nong’s dry brush clerical script, and the most distinguishing feature of Jin Nong’s dry brush clerical script is as Jin Dan identifies “Firstly a cross-wise sweep, then a diagonal pull. If the cross-wise sweep originates from “flying white script” then the diagonal pull is from ‘flat brush script’ techniques.” Prior to the above cited paragraph, Jin Dan points out that the tenth script in the *Fifty-six Scripts* identifies the origin of flat brush script as ‘In the Yin dynasty the immortal

Wuguang engaged in writing in flat brush script, otherwise known as flat brush clerical script today.' He also says, 'Tsao Xi in the Han dynasty combined the hanging needle, dripping droplet and Li Si small clerical script from ancient texts into one. People commented on the style as "a pleasing small clerical script with drooping branches that are strong in color and straight in shape, like the leaf of leeks.'" Therefore, upon seeing Jin Nong write of "immortals' game" in *Caoshu Dayanming*, he naturally believed "immortals" to mean Wuguang who wrote in flat brush script. However, we must be aware that whether it is the "flat brush script" or "flat brush clerical script" mentioned by Jin Dan, or the "hanging needle," "dripping droplet" or Li Xi small clerical script referred to in ancient texts, all of these scripts refer to "clerical script. Jin Nong's *Caoshu Dayanming*, nonetheless, is an interpretation of cursive script. If the "immortals' game" here does indeed mean flat brush script as stated by Jin Dan, then we must as a matter of course identify the relationship between flat brush script and cursive script. Why would Jin Nong, in an inkstone inscription discussing cursive script, give mention to flat brush script? We must also deduce the causal relationship between "pomegranate writing on the wall" in the first line of this inkstone inscription and "immortals' game" in the following line. Unfortunately, these nuances were not addressed in Jin Dan's article, making his interpretation substantially less convincing.

- 34 Examples include *For Zhang Xu* by Li Qi written in the Tang dynasty reading "When the mood comes I spray across the empty walls, with strokes as flourishing as the comets;" or the prologue "Zhang Xu" to the *Theory of Classical Calligraphy* by Tsai Xitsong written in Tang dynasty reading "With a surge of interest, the brush is released, or applied to the wall, or placed on the screen, and images seem to automatically appear as if alive and moving, and the wall is left with no spaces blank." Speaking of Huaitsu, Do Ji writes in his poem "Suddenly he shouted three or five times, and wrote a million characters across the surrounding walls" (*Complete Collection of Tang Poetry, Volume 204*), while *The Shulin Chronicles, Volume 3* on Huaitsu records that "each time he becomes intoxicated and inspired, there are no temples walls, inner walls, clothing and utensils that he does not write upon. Even in his Self-descriptive Notes, he, write "Two or three lines written drunk in a twinkling, never to be replicated in a sober state." *The Shulin Chronicles, Volume 3*. As such, wild cursive can often be written on any object of any size including clothing, utensils and screens, and not just on small pieces of paper. Walls, in particular, are a primary choice for the expressive representation of creativity, hence the practice of mural calligraphy in the Tang dynasty.
- 35 Xie, Zhiliu. *Introduction to Appreciation of Ancient Calligraphy and Paintings*. Taipei: Xuehai Publishing, 1982.p.43.
- 36 Chen, Chin-Chung. *Formats of Classical Calligraphy and the Calligraphic Styles of the Eras*. Taipei: Huacheng Publishing, 1997, 1st revised ed. p.165.

- 37 *Summary of the Collection of Rhymes Old and New, Eastern Rhymes*: “The wind again manically blows,” while *Dictionary of Correct Characters, Radical of Wind* reads “Wind, today frenzy is commonly referred as the wind, or otherwise written as ‘madness.’”
- 38 Unknown. *Treatise on Calligraphy During the Xuanhe Reign, Volume 19*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1985, new Beijing edition, 1st ed. pp.438-439.
- 39 Huang, Tingjian. *Inscription and Postscript of the Valley Verse*. Taipei: The Commercial Press Taiwan, 1965. p.42.
- 40 Zhang Zhao and Liang Shizheng, ed. *Treasure Coffers of the Stone Moat, Volume 13. A Collection of Chinese Historical Writings on Calligraphy Art*. Ed. Xu Juan. Beijing: Encyclopedia of China Publishing House, 1997. p.352.
- 41 Same as note 40.
- 42 Shao, Bowen. *Shao's Records of Hearsay*, Chapter 16. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1997, Hubei 2nd print. p.171.
- 43 Categorized by Huang Dun. Huang, Dun. “Critique of Jin Nong’s Calligraphy.” *Fenglaitang Collection-Selection of Huang Chun’s Calligraphy Critiques*. Beijing: Rongbaozhai Publishing House, 2010. p.381.
- 44 Jiang, Shiba. *Assorted Essays of Mr. Dongxin. Collection of Jin Nong’s Works, Mr. Dongxin: The Sequel*. Jin Nong. Ed. Yong Qi. p.306.
- 45 Huang, Dun. “Critique of Jin Nong’s Calligraphy.” *Fenglaitang Collection-Selection of Huang Chun’s Calligraphy Critiques*. Beijing: Rongbaozhai Publishing House, 2010. p.385.
- 46 Jin, Nong. *Four Assorted Poems on the River’s Short in Winter, Stone Etching Ceremony at Dongxin Studio*: “Reading internal history recorded in Lantingji Xu, I witness a masterpiece passed down through the ages. Browsing flourishing strokes of fragrant ink, I see the work of Li Bai the great poet. Previously housed in the collections of Hermit Liu. Fruits may fall but writings remain, brilliant and inspiring still. In the old biographies of the seven ancients, celebrated inscriptions follow. It’s a pity I worked for the undeserving, for the famed works have all been taken. The box is no more but the pearl remains, whatever loss I experience it is my own doing. In my youth I strove to emulate, but the work would put a bride to shame. I still behold and keep what I have created, placing them in boxes to keep them from soiling. This one downfall supersedes all I have been taught, for the best of the brew I have failed to savor. Jin, Nong. *Collection of Jin Nong’s Works, The Collected Works of Mr. Dongxin*. Ed. Yong Qi. p.19.
- 47 Jin Nong began seeking instruction from He Zhou at around the age of 21 or 22. He Zhou learned calligraphy during the Wei-Jin dynasty while Yan Zhenqing’s style emulates that of Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi and thus most closely resembles the style prevalent in the Jin dynasty. In the inscription entitled *Old Text for the Yan Zhenqing Pagoda*, He Zhou writes, “Master Yan’s calligraphy is closest to that of Jin with its unique composition. If this tablet can precisely emulate his style

and inherit his spirit, it will be deemed a worthy successor of Wang and his son.” It is surmised that, under the influence of He Zhou, Jin Nong probably collected imprints of Yan Zhenqing’s works and became committed to emulating his style.

- 48 Jin Nong’s acquisition of *Tale of Magu Mountain Fairy Altar in Regular Script* book can be inferred from two sources of information. Firstly, according to *Viewing Yan Zhenqing at the Magu Immortal’s Shrine on a Visit to Jinshoumen on the River, Book of Rubbings of the Yan Zhenqing Shrine on Mihai Mountain* by Mi Fu composed by Li E, Jin Nong was at the time 29 years of age. Li, E. *Fanxie’s Cabin Collection*. Marked and ed. By Chem Jiouxi. (Shanghai, Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 2012.pp.40-41. The second source is the *Inscription to the Magu Immortal’s Shrine* composed at the age of 34 years for the original tablet collected by Renhe Xuzhen included in *Collection of Jin Nong’s Works, Mr. Dongxin, Supplements to the Dongxin Collection*, pp.153-154.
- 49 Apart from writing poetry, essays, inscriptions and letters in running cursive, Jin Nong has almost never used running cursive for composing verse written in conventional formats, such as hanging scrolls, double scrolls, and couplets.
- 50 “On paper from the inner archives of Yumi in the Five Dynasties, I open the window to paint bamboo under a clear, pleasant sky. Do not hastily compare the cattail and the reed, for this s the cursive of Yang Fengzi.” Jin, Nong. *Collection of Jin Nong’s Works, Miscellaneous Works of Mr. Dongxin, Mr. Dongxin’s Notes to Painting Bamboo*. Ed. Yong Qi. p.252.
- 51 Jin Nong once mentioned in the preface to the *Notes to Painting Bamboo* that, “Mr. Dongxin began learning how to draw bamboo after the age of sixty without knowing which venerated predecessors to emulate. Enclosing himself in the gardens he planted hundreds and thousands of bamboo, learning from their appearance and arrangement.” In the preface to the *Notes to Painting a Buddha*, he also once said, “Upon first attempting to paint bamboo, I learned from the plant itself. After beginning to draw the wild plums by the river, I remained unaware of the achievement of Ting Yehtang. I sketched the magnificent horses of Kurykans to the east, and turned to the painting of Buddhas thereafter, seeing them often in my dreams for as much as three years long, hence the creation of the *Notes to Painting a Buddha*, a volume of 27 texts.” The above two quotations outline the directions in which Jin Nong endeavored to master the art of painting after the age of 60.

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