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TREASURES THROUGH SIX GENERATIONS

Chinese
Painting and
Calligraphy
from the
Weng
Collection

APRIL 11 –
JULY 13, 2009



Shen Zhou, 1427–1509, Ming dynasty, ***Xie An's Excursion on the Eastern Mountain***, dated 1480.

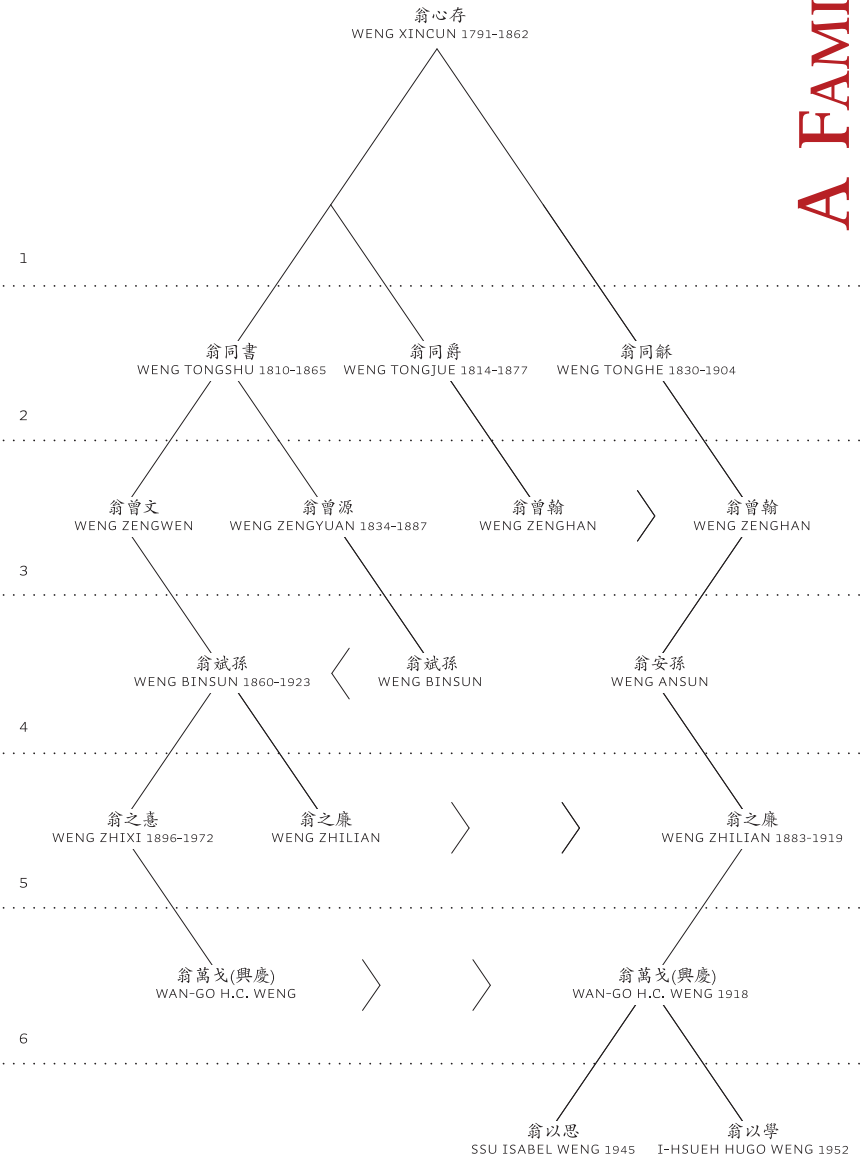
COVER: Weng Tonghe, 1830–1904, Qing dynasty, ***Calligraphy of the Character Hu (Tiger)***, dated 1890.

Assembled primarily during the 19th century, the Weng collection has survived dynastic changes, warfare, and a move from one side of the world to the other, to remain unscathed in the care of one family. Weng Xincun 翁心存 (1791–1862), the family patriarch, began the collection, with a particular interest in books. His son Weng Tonghe 翁同龢 (1830–1904), a distinguished statesman, was a discerning collector who continued to develop a significant collection of paintings and calligraphy. Today, this fabled collection is based in the United States with Wan-go H. C. Weng 翁萬戈 (b. 1918), Weng Tonghe's great-great-grandson. The safekeeping of these works by one family for around 200 years exemplifies the respect, responsibility, and loyalty to one's forebears that lies at the heart of Confucian values.

In the 19th century, the Qing-dynasty 清朝 (1644–1911) government respected and valued the Weng family, whose members were exemplars of the scholar-official class. The Weng ancestral home in Changshu 常熟, not far from Suzhou—a complex of halls, pavilions, and courtyards—is now a museum that conveys the modesty, wisdom, and refinement of this esteemed family.

Wan-go H. C. Weng left China for the United States when Japan attacked Shanghai in 1937, but returned in 1948 to bring the family collection back to the United States for safekeeping, months before the founding of the People's Republic of China, when the country would be virtually closed off from the world for the next 30 years. A filmmaker, poet, historian, and artist, Weng has committed himself to the preservation and study of his cultural heritage. He was the earliest adviser to The Huntington's Chinese garden, Liu Fang Yuan 流芳園, or Garden of Flowing Fragrance, which opened in February 2008.

A FAMILY TREE



Passing on the family name is of key importance in Chinese culture. The transfer of a son from one branch of a family to another by internal adoption, an old tradition very rarely practiced today, was essential in ensuring the survival of the family name and lineage. A father with several sons would bestow one on a brother who had none; ideally, every male would have an heir who would pass on the family name. The Weng family observed this practice (indicated here with arrows) for several generations.

This family tree shows the members of the Weng family responsible for the continuity of the collection through six generations. Weng Tonghe, who formed the collection, had no son. He therefore adopted Weng Zenghan, one of his brother Weng Tongjue's sons. The fourth and fifth generations of Weng Tonghe's branch also had no male heirs, so these generations adopted from the lineage of Weng Tonghe's eldest brother, Weng Tongshu.



HIGHLIGHTS

The works in this exhibition represent about 15 percent of the collection acquired by Weng Tonghe, a highly respected scholar-official who held several important positions in the Chinese government. He served as tutor to two emperors, Tongzhi 同治 (r. 1861–75) and Guangxu 光緒 (r. 1875–1908). Collecting art offered him a respite from the demands of his work, yet it required tremendous discipline, scholarship, and knowledge. Among the paintings and calligraphy in the exhibition are works by famous artists from the 12th to the 17th centuries, including several by Chen Hongshou 陳洪綬 (1598–1652), one of Weng Tonghe's favorite painters. The layers of allusion and compelling artistic expression of these works reveal Weng's lifelong commitment to scholarship and his cultivated taste.

One of the earliest works on display is a handscroll by Liang Kai 梁楷 (13th century), who was especially well known for his Buddhist and Daoist figure paintings, but who from about 1201 to 1204 served as a painter at the court of the Southern Song. Not many of his works survive, and *Frontispiece to a Daoist Scripture* (ca. 1201–4) is the only known example of his courtly style. Made with fine ink lines in a technique called *baimiao*, the painting depicts six narrative scenes



Liang Kai, active early 13th century, Southern Song period, *Frontispiece to a Daoist Scripture* (detail), ca. 1201–1204.



irrigation for agriculture and a crucial artery for trade. Wang Hui's expansive yet refined treatment of the Yangzi theme in this scroll makes it one of his greatest paintings. Visually summarizing 3,915

miles of river, Wang Hui highlights various cities, settlements, and scenery along the way with descriptive details and delicate brushwork.

A final section in the exhibition highlights works by members of the Weng family. They were not only

collectors and preservers of their ancestral collection of art but also practitioners of poetry, painting, and calligraphy. Just like the artists they admired, the Weng family members respected the accomplishments of past masters. Their works reveal both profound scholarship and inventive self-expression.

Calligraphy of the Character Hu (Tiger) (1890), a hanging scroll by Weng Tonghe, is a dramatic single character *hu* or "tiger," written in ancient cursive script. *Hu* was regarded as a powerful talisman against harmful spirits, and Weng Tonghe's *hu* is especially compelling because of his prominent status and auspicious



Chen Hongshou, 1598–1652, Qing dynasty, ***The Three Hermits: Plum, Chrysanthemum, and Narcissus*** (detail), dated 1651.

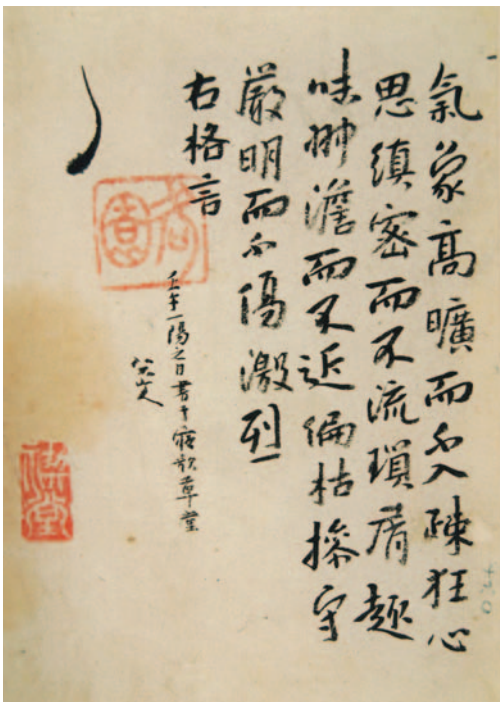


of human activity surrounding a seated figure emanating radiance and accompanied by a group of divine beings.

By the 18th century, Chinese painters had transformed their use of the brush from a discipline that required technical skill to a means of artistic expression. Whether they were producing calligraphy or paintings, however, artists based their innovative creations on the foundations of past masters. The works in the exhibition from the mid-17th century to the 19th century were produced by some of the greatest scholar-painters of the period. The model book of calligraphy by Zhu Da 朱耷 (1628–1705) illustrates the convergence of individualistic artistic expression with the instructive exemplars of past masters. Wang Yuanqi 王原祁 (1642–1715) and Wang Hui 王翬 (1632–1717) were two of Weng Tonghe's favorite painters. Their compelling use of the brush in painting reflects the styles of earlier painters but also provides a means of self-expression.

The largest work on view is *Ten Thousand Li up the Yangzi River* by Wang Hui, in which the artist traces China's greatest river in about 53 feet of imaginatively layered brushwork. The Yangzi is the longest river in Asia, flowing eastward from the Dangla Mountains in the Qinghai-Tibetan plateau to the East China Sea. It is a source of

Zhu Da, 1628–1705, Qing dynasty,
Calligraphy in the Styles of Early Masters, dated 1702.





Wang Hui, 1632–1717, Qing dynasty, *Ten Thousand Li up the Yangzi River* (details), dated 1699.

timing. He wrote the calligraphy during the first month of 1890, the year of the tiger, when he turned 60. At that time, Weng was at the height of his career as teacher and trusted adviser to the Guangxu emperor, who had just taken over executive duties.

A delicately painted handscroll by Wang H. C. Weng, *Elegant Gathering at Laixi Residence* (1986–90), is one of the more recent works in the exhibition. “Elegant gathering” (*yaji*) describes a meeting of cultivated individuals who exchange ideas and sentiments through poetry, calligraphy, music, and painting—an event that has been at the center of Chinese *literati* life for centuries. As recorded in the painting, such an event was held in May 1985 at Laixi Residence, the home of Wang and his wife, when six of the most respected historians of Chinese painting and calligraphy met to view the Weng collection. The scholars from China were seeing the famous collection for the first time, elated to know that it had not been lost but remained intact and was well cared for.

The Chinese tradition of *yaji* 雅集 also is exemplified by the undated *Small Landscape* by Wang Hui. Its scroll mount is covered with inscriptions by friends and relatives of the painting’s collectors. They offered comments on Wang’s painting more than a century after its creation.

Wang Hui, 1632–1717, Qing dynasty, *Small Landscape* (detail), undated.



April 14, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m.

Lecture

Free. No reservations required.

Peter Sturman, associate professor of Chinese painting and calligraphy at the University of California, Santa Barbara, speaks on Qing period calligraphy, with a focus on Weng Tonghe.

**April 18–May 30, Saturdays,
9–10:30 a.m.**

Tai Chi Series

Members: \$140.

Non-Members: \$160.

Learn *tai chi* in the tranquil setting of the gardens in this seven-part class led by instructor Kathy Zenju Chyan.

**May 6, 7, 8, Wednesday, Thursday,
Friday, 9 a.m.–noon**

**Traditional Chinese
Floral Arranging Series**

Members: \$85. Non-Members: \$95.

Join Rosa Zee, certified instructor from the Chinese Floral Art Foundation, for this three-part series that includes an opening day lecture and demonstration, followed by two days of hands-on floral arranging.

**May 9 & 16, Saturdays, 9 a.m.–noon
Chinese Brush Painting
and Calligraphy Workshop**

Members: \$75. Non-Members: \$95.

Join artist Peifang Liang for this two-part workshop and learn basic techniques in Chinese brush painting and calligraphy. Students create a traditional Chinese brush painting, complete with poem and signature.

May 14, Thursday, 4:30–5:30 p.m.

Curator Tour

Members: \$15. Non-Members: \$20.

Join curator June Li for a private tour of the exhibition as she provides insights into this distinguished collection of Chinese painting and calligraphy.

May 16, Saturday, 6 p.m.

**Family Evening: Musical
Performance with Marc Yu**

Members: \$12. Non-Members: \$17.

Ten-year-old “child prodigy” pianist Marc Yu has performed internationally at leading venues, such as London’s Royal Albert Hall and New York City’s Carnegie Hall. His repertoire ranges from Mozart to Tchaikovsky. The exhibit will be open for viewing prior to the performance.

May 21, Thursday, 7 p.m.

**Erhu Performance:
Karen Hua-Qi Han**

Members: \$25. Non-Members: \$35.

Renowned *erhu* virtuoso Karen Hua-Qi Han performs on this ancient Chinese two-stringed instrument. A concert soloist worldwide, she has collaborated with the Paris Opera Orchestra, the New York Pops Orchestra, and the London Royal Philharmonic.

May 30, Saturday, 9 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

**A Taste of Art: China
Through the Five Senses**

Members: \$75. Non-Members: \$95.

Maite Gomez-Rejón, chef and art educator, leads participants through the Chinese garden, Liu Fang Yuan, and the exhibition,

while discussing how the natural landscape has shaped and inspired Chinese art, literature, and poetry. Students then prepare a meal that would have been enjoyed by an ancient Chinese scholar.

May 30, Saturday, 9–11:30 a.m.

**Children’s Workshop:
Chinese Brush Painting**

Members: \$20. Non-Members: \$25.

Artist Peifang Liang introduces the traditional art of Chinese brush painting while guiding students through basic techniques. A visit to the Chinese garden as well as the exhibition offers a glimpse into the past among centuries-old works of art. Ages 7 and up with one accompanying adult.

June 13, Saturday, 9–11:30 a.m.

**Children’s Workshop:
Cooking up a Fortune**

Members: \$25. Non-Members: \$30.

Art educator and chef Maite Gomez-Rejón leads children through the exhibition and the Chinese garden to show how the natural world can inspire us. Young writers become young chefs in the kitchen, baking fortune cookies with inscriptions inside as they learn the true history of these delicious desserts. Ages 7 and up with one accompanying adult.

June 23, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m.

Lecture

Free. No reservations required.

Hao Sheng, curator of Chinese art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, talks about Weng Tonghe’s experiences as a collector, as revealed in his diaries and his inscriptions on paintings.



Register for events by calling 626-405-2128. Seating is first-come, first-served.

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