

## THE GREAT ERA OF ART COLLECTING IN CHINA Emperor Taizong and his followers

In 618 AD when the Tang dynasty was founded, the Imperial Storehouse had merely three hundred scrolls, but all of them were regarded as treasures handed down from the Sui dynasty.<sup>1)</sup> This small collection, however, only began to grow when on the throne sat Emperor Taizong 太宗 (626–649 AD) – one of the greatest art collectors of all times. An excellent scholar and calligrapher, interested in art himself, Taizong almost fanatically began to buy art from private individuals.<sup>2)</sup> As a result, by the year 632 AD in the imperial collection there were already over 1,500 scrolls of calligraphy.<sup>3)</sup>

The Imperial Storehouse was much more than simply a repository for art works. It was an exclusive institution uniting excellent intellectuals, artists and capable officials, who also were outstanding experts in art. Its core constituted a counsel of three authorities: Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558–638 AD) – once Emperor Taizong’s teacher of calligraphy; Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643 AD) – a brilliant officer and the emperor’s adviser; and Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 (597–658 AD) –

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<sup>1)</sup> Acker (1979: 127).

<sup>2)</sup> In sponsored by the Emperor Huizong 徽宗 (1100–1126) the *Xuanhe Huapu* 宣和画谱 (Catalogue of Paintings of the Xuanhe Emperor [Huizong]), there is a following description of Emperor Taizong as an artist as well as a patron of art: “...Taizong was good at *fei bai* 飞白 (flying white) and gave some of his pieces in it to his top officials. He promoted the study of calligraphy at court, to great effect. His own calligraphy was superb.” Quotation after Ebrey (2008: 234). Based on XHHP (1964: 1.2–3).

<sup>3)</sup> Ledderose (1979: 26). Based on XTS (1930–37: 57.11a).

a historian.<sup>4)</sup> All three were very skilful in calligraphy as well as art experts. The ability to examine the authenticity of the scrolls was enormously important, because in the face of the wholesale copying of Qin dynasty art work that had appeared on the market, it was unthinkable to admit works of questionable value to the palace collection. Nonetheless, it was not only a matter of prestige, but also a feeling of certainty and satisfaction. Disappointment with possession of a counterfeit has always been one of the most unpleasant feelings for every collector. Therefore, Emperor Taizong chose outstanding specialists, whose opinions were always esteemed, and their seals regarded as evidence of an art work's genuineness.<sup>5)</sup>

One might ask what made this calligraphy so attractive or what factors induced connoisseurs to collect it on such a large scale? It seems that the answer resides in their very spiritual attitude towards written words. Yu Shinan tried to explain it in such a way:

“Although written words have substance (zhi 质), their appearance is based on nonintervention. They move or rest in accordance with their yin and yang forces, and they take on form by embodying images of material things. As they convey the nature of man who writes them and share in the transformations of nature, their principles never stop changing. Therefore, to understand the mysteries of calligraphy you must meet them with your spirit. They cannot be attained through conscious effort. Subtle skill in calligraphy comes from enlightenment of the mind and cannot be attained with the eye.”<sup>6)</sup>

For collectors, even a short piece of calligraphy may have had an enormous value which was, nevertheless, subjected to a few conditions, such as genuineness, aesthetics and originality of style and, above all as it seems, a spiritual message based on pure feelings transferred by an author of the piece to the written words. One such priceless work of calligraphy once belonged to

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<sup>4)</sup> The committee of calligraphy experts with Liu Guyan 柳顾言 as a head was already established around 598 ad with the command of the Prince of Qin – Emperor Taizong before his enthronement. Ledderose (1979: 25).

<sup>5)</sup> Mi Fu 米黻 (1051/52–1107 AD), who possessed works sealed by Chu Suiliang wrote: “All the pieces that passed through the *chen-kuan* [Zhenguan 贞观 era (626–649 AD)] imperial collection were found by later generations not to be false. People with understanding should take this as an authoritative mirror”. Quotation after: Ledderose (1979: 108, see also 51, 26).

<sup>6)</sup> Quotation after: Egan (1989: 386). Based on SYJH (1871: 1. 18a).

Emperor Taizong who subsequently gave it to Wei Zheng as a reward for his merits. It was a short letter starting with a reflection on a fresh weather after an unexpected snow, therefore called *Kuai Xue Shi Qingtie* 快雪时晴帖 (Clear Day After Sudden Snow) – written by Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361 AD) to his friend. Wei Zheng handed down this letter to his sons and grandsons, who finally must have sold it to private collectors.<sup>7)</sup> The piece of paper with merely four lines of twenty-eight words expressing Wang’s excitement on a clear day and his greetings to his family members has been extremely cherished by every connoisseur who would later become its owner. It is most likely that for many of them the letter was the essence of feelings captured in the words, whose form gave pure aesthetic rapture.

During the reign of Emperor Taizong the calligraphy by Wang Xizhi gained, in general, an enormous significance. Largely, it was the merit of the emperor himself, who not only highly esteemed the art of Wang Xizhi but also wrote his biography.<sup>8)</sup> It is striking, however, that in his absolute admiration for the old master’s calligraphy the ruler did not find pleasure in collecting the works of his son – Wang Xianzhi 王献之 (344–386 AD) – equally talented and comparably successful.<sup>9)</sup> Moreover, the emperor even criticised Wang Xianzhi’s calligraphy calling its characters “skinny and emaciated like wintry trees”. However, the emperor’s point of view was not necessarily dictated by the aesthetic reasons in particular – as Lothar Ledderose supposes – but rather by the fact that Chinese critics in general tended to prefer father to son, if it happened that they had both achieved a comparable standing in the same field.<sup>10)</sup> Consequently, Taizong’s liking for the art of the older master Wang led to an obsessive search for his genuine works. According to ancient sources from this time, in the palace collection were assembled 2,290 pieces attributed to Wang Xizhi – nonetheless, the imperial expert Chu Suiliang gave his approval to only 266 (according to different sources the number can vary from 240 to 290) of them.<sup>11)</sup> All they were mounted in 128 scrolls: 50 pieces in *kaishu* 楷书 style

<sup>7)</sup> One of the collectors was Su Shi 苏轼 (1037–1101 AD) from the Song 宋 dynasty (960–1279 AD), who in fact possessed three versions of this letter. The original piece Su Shi probably sold to Mi Fu. It is worth adding that nowadays this piece of calligraphy is in the Palace Museum in Taipei. Ledderose (1979: 72, 99).

<sup>8)</sup> Ledderose (1979: 25).

<sup>9)</sup> Ledderose (1979: 25).

<sup>10)</sup> Ledderose (1979: 25).

<sup>11)</sup> Ledderose (1979: 28, n. 83); Ebrey (2008: 218). To verify discrepancies in number of genuine works by Wang Xizhi see: FSYL (2003: 21; 165, 167, 171).

(8 scrolls), 240 in *xingshu* 行书 manner (40 scrolls), and 2,000 pieces of *caoshu* 草书 (80 scrolls).<sup>12)</sup>

Apart from the numbers we also have knowledge about the individual characteristics of some of them. We know, for instance, that the imperial collection treasured the *Yue Yi lun* 乐毅论, a piece of calligraphy praising Yue Yi 乐毅 – a famous warrior from the third century.<sup>13)</sup> The original text was created almost one hundred years earlier by a minister of the Wei dynasty – Xiahou Xuan 夏侯玄 (209–254 AD). Yet, in fact, it is because of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy that the name of Yue Yi was truly extolled. Every connoisseur who had seen Wang's *Yue Yi lun* admired it, and considered as the foremost example of the regular script. Shortly after the piece was made in 348 AD, it became the source of many copies, such as the version from the time of the Liang 梁 dynasty (502–557 AD) treasured in the imperial collection of Wen Di 文帝 (r. 581–618 AD), or other six works produced in 639 AD by Feng Chengsu 冯承素 – a professional copyist at the Taizong's court. The version from the Taizong's collection was regarded rather as genuine, as it was mentioned in the first place among other Wang Xizhi's works in the cataloguing list drawn up by Chu Suiliang.<sup>14)</sup>

There also were other excellent works by Wang Xizhi, such as *Huang Tingjing* 黄庭经 (Book of the Yellow Court, 356 AD)<sup>15)</sup> declared by Chu Suiliang as original, or *Dongfang Shuo huazan* 东方朔画赞 (the Eulogy to a Picture of Dongfang Shuo, 356 AD).<sup>16)</sup> Nonetheless, the most precious piece of calligraphy cherished above all by Taizong was the *Lantingqi Xu* 兰亭集序 (Orchid Pavilion Preface), which reveals the emperor's authentic passion for collecting.<sup>17)</sup>

<sup>12)</sup> Ledderose (1979: 26). Based on XTS (1930–1937: 57. 11a.) Wei Shu 韦述 (d. 757 AD) author of *Tang Wei Shu xu shu lu* 唐韦述叙书录 (Record of Accounted Calligraphies from the Tang Dynasty Palace Collection by Wei Shu) mentioned 290 pieces of *xingshu* and 2000 pieces of *caoshu*. FSYL (2003: 4.165).

<sup>13)</sup> Ledderose (1979: 69).

<sup>14)</sup> Ledderose (1979: 69–70); FSYL (2003: 3. 88–100).

<sup>15)</sup> *Book of Yellow Court* is one of the oldest Taoist texts composed of seven-character verses which, in a very poetic and esoteric style of language, allude to methods of meditation. See: Robinet (1993: 58).

<sup>16)</sup> Dongfang Shuo 东方朔 was a Gentleman-in-Attendance, who served his wit at the court of the Han Emperor Wu Di (147–87 BC). See: Declercq (1998: 20–59). The original text of the Eulogy to Dongfang Shuo's Picture (painted by an anonymous artist) was written by the poet Xiaohou Chen 夏侯湛 (243–291 AD). See Ledderose (1979: 71).

<sup>17)</sup> Chuang (1970: 1–17); Chuang (1971: 1–17); Ledderose (1979: 19–24); Sullivan (2008: 104–105).

The *Lantingqi Xu* was composed early in the last month of spring 353 AD, when Wang Xizhi and his learned friends gathered at the Orchid Pavilion on the northern slopes of the Kuaiji 会稽 Mountains in order to carry out the spring ceremonies of purification.<sup>18)</sup> In high spirits from drinking wine (poured in cups floating on the water of a winding channel), the scholars composed poems, which at the end of the day were collected by Wang Xizhi. Wang himself wrote a preface to the poems. His foreword consisted of 324 characters written on the spur of the moment. Apparently, the artist must have been very satisfied with his work, as he made a lot of copies, although none of them attained the same artistic value as the original. Apart from the aesthetic meaning, the *Langtingqi Xu* also was appreciated because of its literary significance and the fact that it was the only text composed in *xingshu* by Wang Xizhi himself.<sup>19)</sup>

This precious piece of art comprising a text tinged with melancholy combined with thoughts on the passing of life must have been secretly treasured in Wang Xizhi's family for a few generations. At the end of the sixth century the manuscript came into the hands of the Buddhist monk Zhiyong 智永 – Wang Xizhi's seventh generation descendent – who, being a calligrapher himself, produced many copies in the style of his great ancestor.<sup>20)</sup> A legend says that Zhiyong before his death entrusted the *Langtingqi Xu* to his disciple Biancai 辨才.<sup>21)</sup> Having heard about this, Emperor Taizong – whose desire was to collect all possible Wang Xizhi's works – requested that Biancai submit the scroll to the imperial collection. In vain, Biancai refused three times, claiming that the work had been lost. Not putting any faith in Biancai's assurance, Taizong decided to send an excellent calligraphy expert – the censor Xiao Yi 萧翼 disguised as a travelling Confucian scholar to the monk's temple (Shaoxing 绍兴 region in Zhejiang 浙江 province) in order to get his confidence and finally

<sup>18)</sup> For an English translation of the *Lantingqi Xu* see: Owen (1996: 283–284).

<sup>19)</sup> Wang Xizhi usually copied earlier famous texts, only short letters composed himself; see Ledderose (1979: 19).

<sup>20)</sup> “The story of the *Langting Manuscript*” was composed in 714 AD by He Yanzhi 何延之, and then included by Zhang Yanyuan into his *Fashu yaolu*. It was translated by Han Chuang in his article “Hsiao I gets the Lan-t'ing Manuscript by a Confidence Trick”. See: Chuang (1970: 1–5); Ledderose (1979: 20). The original version is in: FSYL (2003: 3.124–131).

<sup>21)</sup> According to another source, whose author was Liu Su 刘隸 (contemporary of He Yanzhi), the *Langtingqi* was first given to the Emperor Xuandi 陈宣帝 (569–583 AD) of the Chen 陈 dynasty (557–589 AD), and then went back into possession of several monks, *inter alia* Zhi Guo 智果, who was supposed to pass it into the hands of Biancai. See: Chuang (1970: 5); Ledderose (1979: 20 n. 39).

succeed in bringing the wanted piece of calligraphy to the Palace. A few days were enough to forge a friendship between Xiao Yi and Biancai. The censor apparently must have impressed the monk with his knowledge and, moreover, his “own” (but *de facto* borrowed from the Palace) collection of a few scrolls by Wang Xizhi. Thus provoked, Biancai drew from the beams under the roof the *Langtingqi*, which he later presented to the scholar. Xiao Yi, however, insisted on saying that the piece shown by Biancai was not genuine. Desperate and angry, the monk went out of the house leaving the manuscript on the table. Xiao Yi waited for a while, and when Biancai attended a fasting ritual, the censor secretly came back to the building and on the pretext of leaving a cap asked the temple novices to open a door. Then, he grabbed the *Langtingqi* and other Wang Xizhi’s works left on the table and headed straight to the superintendent of the courier office. There he revealed his true identity and reasons for the mission. The story ended when Biancai, called to come and see the Censor, fainted seeing a fellow scholar. Afterwards, Xiao Yi leapt onto a horse and rode back to the Palace carrying his precious treasure. Extremely pleased the emperor included the script into the imperial collection, and ordered it to be copied several times on paper, as well as carved in a stone. Nonetheless, the *Langtingqi* did not remain in the palace collection; after Taizong’s death, it went with him to his tomb, where it was finally destroyed when Taizong’s burial place was robbed at the end of the Tang dynasty.<sup>22)</sup>

Apart from the calligraphy, the imperial collection of Taizong also contained paintings which became highly esteemed only after the rise of the cursive or “grass hand” calligraphy as a fine art.<sup>23)</sup> The method of acquiring works of painting for the imperial collection was based on a donation system, which means that the high level officials, such as Xiao Yu 萧瑀 (574–647 AD), or members

<sup>22)</sup> Su Shi in his poem *Sunshen Liao qiu Momao ting shi* 孙莘老求墨妙亭诗 (Answering Sunshen Liao’s request for a poem for his Ink Marvels Pavilion, 1072 AD) mentioned: “After Orchid Pavilion’s silken paper entered Chao Tomb, Copies left among the living still soared like dragons.” See: Egan (1989: 395). There also is a valuable comment by Lothar Ledderose on the *Langtingqi*’s fame, which is worth quoting: “It seems somehow uncomfortably symptomatic that it was the lost *Lant-t’ing hsü* [*Lantingxu*] that was to emerge as the most celebrated work in the history of Chinese calligraphy. Its fame bordered on the mythical, and the descriptions of it and of its history became ever more detailed and legendary. What is even more astonishing is that *Lant-t’ing hsü* in addition to be glorified also became a stylistic model: it has been studied by calligraphers for centuries although nobody has ever seen the original! Knowledge of its style could be gained only through copies, and it was known that the copies differed among themselves and therefore could not be exact.” Ledderose (1979: 20).

<sup>23)</sup> Acker (1979: LIII).

of the noble families, such as Xu Shanxin 许善心, Yang Su 杨素 (d. 606 AD) and Chu Anfu 褚安福 were obliged to present “pictures and paintings” to the Emperor.<sup>24)</sup> On the basis of the Zhang Yanyuan’s 张彦远 (ca. 815-ca. 880) records we can image that the Inner Storehouse was like a “jungle” or “thicket”, in which to find any particular object was almost impossible.<sup>25)</sup> Therefore, we can assume, that in Taizong’s collection there must have been the most representative works by nearly all the important painters.<sup>26)</sup> This means that for sure there were paintings by such masters as Gu Kaizhi 顾恺之 (c. 344–406), Lu Tanwei 陆探微 (active c. 450–490 ad) and Zhang Sengyou 张僧繇 (active c. 490–540 AD), whose pieces were considered as the highest level of art, treasured in any age and by every esteemed collector.<sup>27)</sup> Nevertheless, apart from the top-level art works, there also must have been paintings by other famous artists. As an indicator may serve a list compiled by Zhang Yanyuan in one of his dissertation chapters titled “On Grading By Name and Price”.

The author classified works of art by the most representative artists according to “the three periods of antiquity” (*san gu* 三古).<sup>28)</sup> The first one was called the High Antiquity (*shang gu* 上古), and included: four masters of the Later Han dynasty (25–220 AD), such as Zhao Qi 赵岐 (108–201 AD), Liu Bao 刘褒, Cai Yong, Zhang Heng 张衡 (78–139 AD); four masters of the Wei 魏 dynasty (220–264 AD): Cao Mao 曹髦 (242–260 AD), Yang Xiu 杨修 (175–219 AD), Huan Fan 桓範, Xu Miao 徐邈; one master of the Wu 吴 dynasty (222–280 AD): Cao Buxing 曹不兴, and one master of the Shu 蜀 dynasty (221–263 AD): Zhu Gelinag 诸葛亮. The second period called the Middle Antiquity (*zhong gu* 中古) included works by such artists as: the eight masters of the Jin 晋 dynasty (265–420 AD): Ming Di 明帝, Xun Xu 荀勗, Wei Xie 卫协, Wang Yi 王廙, Gu Kaizhi, Xie Zhi 谢稚, Ji Kang 嵇康, Dai Kui 戴逵, and four men of the Song 宋 dynasty (420–479 AD): Lu Tanwei, Gu Baoguang 顾宝光, Yuan Qing 袁倩, Gu Jing Xu 顾景秀. The third period called the Lower Antiquity (*xia gu* 下古) covered works by the following artists: four masters from the Southern Qi 齐 dynasty (479–502 AD), such as: Yao Tandu 姚昙度,

<sup>24)</sup> Acker (1979: 204).

<sup>25)</sup> Thus, in 632 AD the emperor gave an order to sort the scrolls out and make a thorough classification. Acker (1979: 204).

<sup>26)</sup> Acker (1979: 204).

<sup>27)</sup> Zhang Yanyuan wrote that they were priceless, and “If one should by chance acquire (even so little as) a square inch (of their work), one ought to keep it sealed in a box.” Acker (1979: 195; 199).

<sup>28)</sup> Acker (1979: 196–198).

Xie He 谢赫, Liu Tian 刘填 and Mao Huiyuan 毛惠远; four men from the Liang 梁 dynasty (502–557 AD): Yuan Di 元帝, Yuan Ang 袁昂, Zhang Sengyou, Jiang Sengbao 江僧宝; four artists from the Northern Qi 齐 dynasty (550–589 AD): Yang Zihua 杨子华, Tian Sengliang 田僧亮, Liu Shagui 刘杀鬼, Cao Zhongda 曹仲达; two men from the Western Wei 魏 (535–556 AD): Jian Shaoyou 蒋少游 and Yang Qide 杨乞德; Gu Yewang 顾野王 of the Chen 陈 dynasty (557–589 AD) and Feng Dijia 冯堤伽 of the Northern Zhou 周 (557–589 AD) dynasty. In the end, Zhang Yanyuan considered modern artists of the Recent Antiquity, which means those working during the Sui dynasty (589–618 AD), such as: Dong Boren 董伯仁, Zhan Ziqian 展子虔, Sun Zhangzi 孙尚子, Zheng Fashi 郑法士, Yang Qidan 杨契丹, Chen Shanjian 陈善见 and those working during the Tang dynasty, such as: Zhang Xiaoshi 张孝师, Fan Zhangchou 范长筹, Yüchi Yiseng 尉迟乙僧 (Visa Irasanaga),<sup>29)</sup> Wang Zhishen 王知慎, Yen Lide 阎立德 and Yen Liben 阎立本.

Certainly, we can't say that the imperial collection included works of all artists mentioned above, and it almost certainly missed some art pieces especially those from the early times.<sup>30)</sup> Nonetheless, its content must have been satisfactory enough to call it *dabei* 大备 – which means “largely equipped” or “largely complete”.<sup>31)</sup> This immense accumulating project tried to sustain Empress Wu Zetian 武则天 (690–705 AD) – the only woman in the history of China with the title of Empress – who, through her favourite Zhang Yizhi 张易之 (d. 705 AD), summoned to court all the painter-artisans who were to restore the paintings in the Inner Storehouse.<sup>32)</sup> Nevertheless, the result of this project was rather ominous for the imperial collection. In fact, Zhang Yizhi commanded the artisans to make precise copies and mount them exactly as the old once, in order to replace them and take the originals. After his death, they were acquired by the Junior Guardian Xue 薛, and after Xue's death, they fell into the hands of Prince Fan 范 of Qi 岐 – the younger brother of the later Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (712–756 AD). Yet, all these transactions were officially forbidden, as according to the imperial order all paintings amassed in the households of Junior Guardian Xue, Prince Fan and the Chancellor Wang Fangqing 王方庆

<sup>29)</sup> Visa Irasanaga or called in Chinese Yüchi Yiseng, came to the Tang court around the middle of the seventh century recommended by the king of the Kingdom of Khotan. He was one of the most eminent painters of Buddhist icons in early Tang dynasty. See: Schafer (1985: 32).

<sup>30)</sup> Acker (1979: 204 n. 3).

<sup>31)</sup> “*Gu bing fu tushu. Wei zhi da bei.*” 故丙府圖書。謂之大備。Acker (1979: 204).

<sup>32)</sup> Acker (1979: 128).



(d. 702 AD) had to go back to the Imperial Storehouse.<sup>33)</sup> Prince Fan, who must have been terribly afraid for his life decided to set fire to the acquired paintings rather than mention that he had possessed them at all.

In Chinese artistic culture, making copies from original works of art has been generally perceived in two ways – either positively or negatively. Those copies made in order to learn a master's style or simply to take pleasure from imitating famous paintings were mostly considered as useful,<sup>34)</sup> but those intended from the beginning as counterfeits - the goal of which was deception - were regarded as acts worthy of nothing but condemnation. As we see then, the line between copy/repetition and fake was basically very thin and its understanding depended on the copyist or the other person's intention. Yet, it occurred that the purpose of using copies might have changed according to certain circumstances, for example the loss of the original version. The case was with a work painted by a Tang dynasty artist called Fa Ming 法明.<sup>35)</sup> The painting was deposited and kept for some time in the imperial *huayuan* 画院 (Painting Gallery). One day, however, someone noticed its disappearance, causing a great perturbation among those who were responsible for the security of art treasures. For fear of being punished, the decision was taken to replace the lost piece with a copy made once by Kang Ziyuan 康子元. The record says that it was Kang himself who entered into possession of the original work of art. After the painter's death the piece went into hands of his son, who in turn sold it, and from then on the fate of the painting has remained unknown.

During the Kai Yuan 开元 era (713–741 AD), the search for art pieces became once again a matter of great importance. Emperor Xuanzong, who himself was a very skilful calligrapher nominated in 722 AD the Vice-President of the Left Grand Secretariat of the Heir Apparent – Zhang Fei 张悱 for the position of “Imperial Commissioner for the Searching-out of Writings and Paintings”. Certainly, there must have been a few methods of acquiring art works, although two of them – based on a system of reciprocal gifts exchange – seem to have been very popular. This involved acquiring pieces from those who were seeking certain offices or ranks, or gratifying those who would search for works of art on behalf of the emperor. Zhang Yanyuan mentioned the case

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<sup>33)</sup> Acker (1979: 129).

<sup>34)</sup> About coping in Chinese painting, its status, role and educational dimensions see: Jacoby (2009: 163–185).

<sup>35)</sup> Acker (1974: 108 (*yuan* 9)). The Polish translation of the passage about the copy by Kang Ziyuan, see: Jacoby (2009: 190).

of Mu Yu 穆聿, a foreign trader,<sup>36)</sup> who during the Middle Kai Yuan era was made a member of the Hall of the Assembled Sages thanks to his “unusual knowledge of pictures and writings”. However Mu Yu’s fame also had a dark side, as he used to blackmail people in order to obtain their treasures. Apart from Mu Fu, there must have existed a whole network of art dealers, such as Wang Chang 王昌 from Liaodong 辽东, Ye Fang 叶丰 from Kuozhou 括州 (Zhejiang), Tian Ying 田颖 from Chang’an 长安, Du Fu 杜福 and Liu Yi 刘翌 – both from Luoyang, and Qi Guang 齐光 from Henei 河内 employed by the Imperial Command in order to find precious pictures and manuscripts.<sup>37)</sup> Their profession, however, was regarded as deplorable, because, as dealers they could not keep the works of art for themselves but had to sell them.

Unfortunately many works from the Emperor Xuanzong’s collection were destroyed and dispersed at the time of the rebellion of An Lushan 安禄山 (703–757 AD). The following emperor – Suzong 肃宗 (756–762 AD) apparently wasn’t very interested in preserving or collecting art. Moreover, he distributed some pieces among members of the Imperial Clan, who subsequently sold them into other hands. Finally the works found their place in certain “houses of amateurs”,<sup>38)</sup> however, there is no explicit information, about their location. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that some of the works of art went into private family collections, called “Repositories of Pictures and Writings”, where the tradition of hoarding and collecting art works must have already been well established during the Kai Yuan era.<sup>39)</sup> They might have been, inter alia, the collections of the Marshal of the Palace of the Prince Bin 邠 – Dou Zan 窦贽 (Xuchangxian 许昌县, Henan 河南), Junior Amender of the Emperor’s Faults – Xi Yi 席异 (Anding 按定, Gansu 甘肃), Supervising Censor – Pan Lushen 潘履慎 (Xinyang 荥阳, Henan), the Department Director in the Treasury Department of the Board of Revenue – Cai Xiji 蔡希寂 (Jiyang 济阳, to the northwest of Lanfengxian 兰封县, Henan), the Grand Secretary of the Department of the Imperial Chancellery – Dou Shao 窦绍, the Chief Executive District Magistrate in Xizhou 歙州 (Anhui 安徽) Teng Sheng 滕升, Lu Yao 陆曜 from Luoyang, the Monk Fei 胙 of a Buddhist Temple of Happiness – Fuxian 福先福先, the

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<sup>36)</sup> The author calls him precisely: “Shang Hu” 商胡, which means a “bearded businessman”. See: Acker (1979: 205). However, it can be understood as a “foreign businessman”, as Chinese people in general perceived foreigners as bearded men, what is very noticeable among tomb figurines from the Tang dynasty presenting bearded foreigners often sitting on camels.

<sup>37)</sup> Acker (1979: 205–207).

<sup>38)</sup> Acker (1979: 129).

<sup>39)</sup> Acker (1979: 207–209).

Chief of Personnel of the District of Tong Guan 同官 – Gao Zhi 高至 from Bohai 渤海 (Shaanxi 陕西), the Registrar of the Supervisor of Education of the Sons of the State (*Guo zi zhu bo* 国子主簿) – Chao Wen 晁温 from Taiyuan 太原 (Shanxi 山西), the Chief of Personnel of Huxian 鄜县 (Shaanxi) – Cui Manqian 崔曼倩, the Chief Administrator of the Palace of the Prince Yong 永 – Chen Hong 陈闳 from Ying Chuan 颖川 (Anhui), the Censor of the Court of Outside Investigations Xue Yong 薛邕 and Guo Hui 郭暉.

The campaign for hoarding works of art must have been renewed during the reigns of Emperor Daizong 代宗 (762–779 AD). However, it failed when it came to a few rebellions between 781 AD and 786 AD. Especially the revolt in 783 AD organised by General Li Xilie 李希烈 (d. 786 AD) was very damaging. It forced the Emperor Dezong 德宗 (779–805 AD) to flee and leave the capital abandoning his art collection to the mercy of the rebels, which meant that the content of the Inner Storehouse was dispersed once again.<sup>40)</sup> Wars and riots were always the most harmful factors leading to art destruction in China, especially because the most precious pieces of art had been accumulated in imperial palaces which were terribly plundered each time they were attacked. The sorrow and regret resulting from the loss of art is palpable in the records of Zhang Yanyuan who, in addition to the praise for rulers' thorough search for art pieces, revealed how risky it was to collect art treasures in one very obvious place, such as the imperial palace.<sup>41)</sup>

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<sup>40)</sup> Acker (1979: 129).

<sup>41)</sup> Acker (1979: 131).

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