

The Painting and People Behind Fang Shishu's "In Imitation of Dong Yuan's 'Mist and Fog in Summer Mountains'"

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Abstract

Fang Shishu's (1692-1751) "In Imitation of Dong Yuan's 'Mist and Fog in Summer Mountains'" is in the collection of the National Palace Museum. In his inscription on the painting, Fang mentions that he had the fortune to view the entire original handscroll and do an imitation of it, referring to a work now in the Shanghai Museum by the Five Dynasties artist Dong Yuan (fl. 10th c.) entitled "Summer Mountains." On the colophon paper of that handscroll, Fang left a note that reads, "In the second Qianlong year (1737), the Student of Painting Fang Shishu washed his hands to reverently view [this painting]." In the following line, he wrote, "Viewed together with Fang Zhenguan of Tongcheng, Cheng Sili of Andong, and Xu Jian of Wuxian." Of the collection seals found on "Summer Mountains" is also one that reads, "The private collection of Wang Lingwen." Lingwen was the style name of the major salt merchant Wang Tingzhang of Yangzhou. Fang Shishu once was a tutor in the home of Wang, who also engaged the services of Huang Ding (Zungu, 1660-1730), under whom Fang studied and advanced in landscape painting. In 1738, Wang Tingzhang had *Anthology of Fang Zhenguan* printed. Fang Zhenguan was renowned in the Jiangnan area during the late Yongzheng reign, while Fang Shishu along with Wang Nanming and Cheng Sili were the three pillars of painting. Cheng Sili was also the teacher of Xu Jian, and Wang engaged Xu Jian as a tutor at his home for seven years as well.

Over the past three decades, the ideas of region and network have become prevalent in art-historical studies, as seen in the relationship between Anhui merchants, salt merchants, and artists. Fang Shishu recorded the artworks he saw, his ideas, his poetry on paintings, the friends with whom he associated, and other personal matters, which were all interrelated. Fang's imitation of "Summer Mountains" is by no means a mechanical copy, but has been edited to a considerable extent. Although working from a renowned painting, Fang adapted the pattern of hills with rocks and trees to edit and

repeat the contents. This ready-made vocabulary of patterns to create artworks focusing on the idea instead of forms brings out the spirit through the material, as seen in this painting.

Keywords: Fang Shishu, “Summer Mountains,” Wang Tingzhang, Tianyong Studio, imitation

(Translated by Donald E. Brix)