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YUAN HONGDAO'S "A HISTORY OF THE VASE"

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> In the hands of a Master, a single flower or a solitary branch of bamboo may occasion the weightiest of disquisition, just as the flowers of Aloe Pavilion needed a Li Bo to give them lustre.[2]

Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 notes the completion of his "A History of the Vase" (*Ping shi* 瓶史), translated below, in two letters, both ascribed to the 27th year of the reign of the Wanli Emperor (1599) and both written whilst Yuan was in Beijing. To his friend Tao Wangling 陶望齡(1562-1609), then living in Shaoxing, he writes: "My 'Expansion of the *Zhuangzi*' (*Guang Zhuang* 廣莊) was written last winter, whereas 'A History of the Vase' was completed this

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[2] Lu Yunlong 陸雲龍, "Cuiyuge pingxuan Yuan Zhonglang xiansheng xiaopin" 翠娛閣評選袁中郎先生小品 [A Collection of the Occasional Essays of Master Yuan Hongdao, Selected and Commentated upon by the Master of the Belvedere of Halcyon Pleasures], *Huangming shiliujia xiaopin* 皇明十六家小品 [Occasional Essays by Sixteen Masters of the Great Ming Dynasty] (1632) (Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1997), Vol. 21, 1927. The reference here is to a poem by Li Bo 李白, the third in a series entitled: "Qingpingdiao ci" 清平調詞. Witter Bynner, trans., *The Jade Mountain: A Chinese Anthology* (New York: Anchor Books, 1964), provides the following rendition, under the title: "A Song of Pure Happiness (Written to Music for Lady Yang)": "Lovely now together, his lady and his flowers/ Lighten for ever the Emperor's eye,/ As he listens to the sighing of the far spring wind/ Where she leans on a railing in the Aloe Pavilion." (42).

spring; I enclose copies of both these works for your judgement".[3] Writing earlier that year to his brother-in-law and fellow Southern Literary Society member Li Xueyuan 李學元, Yuan proves both more forthcoming about the nature of the work and somewhat less modest about its merits: "I have recently also composed 'A History of the Vase', in 13 sections, wherein I provide both a record of flower nomenclature and the traditions associated with the various flowers; as such, it is of a kind with Lu Yu's 陸羽 (733-804) *Classic of Tea* (*Chajing* 茶經)[4] and the Old Dolt's *Record of the Tree Peony* (*Mudan zhi* 牡丹志)[5] and is a most eye-catching work. Regrettably, however, I find myself quite without the energy to make a copy for you".[6]

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[3] "Da Tao shikui" 答陶石簣 [In Reply to Tao Wangling], Qian Bocheng 錢伯城, ed., *Yuan Hongdao ji jianjiao* 袁宏道集箋校 [The Complete Works of Yuan Hongdao: Annotated and Collated] (hereafter *YHDJJJ*), 3 vols. (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1981), Vol. 2, 779. Yuan Hongdao (*zi* Zhonglang 中郎, Wuxue 無學, Liuxiu 六休; *hao* Shigong 石公, Shitou jushi 石頭居士; 1568-1610) was from Gongan County, Huguang Province. For short biographies of Yuan Hongdao in English, see L. Carrington Goodrich & Chaoying Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368-1644* (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1970) (hereafter *DMB*), Vol. 2, 1635-38 (by C.N. Tay); and W.H. Nienhauser, ed., *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 955-56 (by Ming-shui Hung). Ren Fangqiu 任訪秋, *Yuan Zhonglang yanjiu* 袁中郎研究 [Research on Yuan Hongdao] (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1983) includes a useful chronological biography (*nianpu* 年譜) of Yuan. For English language studies, see two articles by Jonathan Chaves, "The Panoply of Images: A Reconsideration of the Literary Theories of the Kung-an School", in Susan Bush & Christian Murck, eds., *Theories of the Arts in China* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 341-64 and "The Expression of the Self in the Kung-an School: Non-romantic Individualism", in Robert E. Hegel & Richard C. Hessney, eds., *Expressions of the Self in Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 123-50; two articles by Richard John Lynn, "Tradition and the Individual: Ming and Ch'ing Views of Yüan Poetry", in Ronald C. Miao, ed., *Studies in Chinese Poetry and Poetics* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1978), 321-75 and "Alternative Routes to Self-Realization in Ming Theories of Poetry", in Susan Bush & Christian Murck, eds., *Theories of the Arts in China*, 317-40; and the full-length study by Chih-p'ing Chou, *Yüan Hung-tao and the Kung-an School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). For English translations of a selection of the prose and poetry of Yuan Hongdao and his brothers, see Jonathan Chaves, trans., *Pilgrim of the Clouds: Poems and Essays by Yüan Hung-tao and His Brothers* (New York & Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1978); and more recently, Duncan Campbell, "The Epistolary World of a Reluctant 17th Century Chinese Magistrate: Yuan Hongdao in Suzhou", *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* (2002), 4 (1): 159-193.

[4] For a translation of this work, see Francis Ross Carpenter, trans., *The Classic of Tea* (Boston & Toronto: Little, Brown & Company, 1974).

[5] Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China: Volume 6: Biology and Biological Technology: Part !: Botany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 407 notes that a work with this title was produced in around 1580 by Zhu Tongji 朱統鋆 a prince of the imperial house and a descendant (in the eighth generation) of Zhu Quan 朱權 (1378-1448), for whom, see *DMB*, Vol. 1, 305-07. The relationship between the author of this work and the pseudonym used here by Yuan Hongdao (Yusou 愚叟 [Old Dolt]) is not otherwise attested, however, and the work is in any case no longer extant.

[6] "Da Li Yuanshan" 答李元善 [In Reply to Li Xueyuan], *YHDJJJ*, Vol. 2, 763. Ren Fangqiu, however, ascribes both these letters, and therefore the completion of "A History of the Vase", to the following year (1600), by which time Yuan Hongdao had been promoted to

Yuan Hongdao was in his thirty-second year at the time and was serving in the Capital as an Instructor in the Directorate of Education, a post he had taken up during the 3rd month of the year. We know from his younger brother's biography of him that Yuan was throughout his life particularly concerned with issues of interior decoration,[7] and in this respect his "A History of the Vase" is an expression of one aspect of this interest. That is, for all his self-avowed distaste for the actual labour of gardening ("Without having to endure the ordeal of grafting and weeding, watering and bending my back…"), he nonetheless both "truly enjoy[ed]" flowers and appears knowledgeable about them, albeit in a somewhat bookish manner.[8] Equally, however, as a man uncommonly convinced of his own talents and aggrieved that the times were such that these talents had not been accorded appropriate contemporary recognition (and reward), his "A History of the Vase" offered him something of a pretext whereby he could invest the flowers with his "own sense of grievance and [his] own unparalleled individuality".

This Yuan Hongdao does by establishing the ideal type of the "recluse of grace and learning" (*youren yunshi* 幽人韻士), a man who "relinquishes all things to other men under Heaven" and who possess only "the mountains and the rivers, flowers and bamboo", things that in themselves "invoke no questions of fame or reputation and [which] lie quite beyond the reach of our impatient scramblings for fortune". Whereas his own personal circumstances are such that he cannot yet aspire to this ideal, his authentic self is nonetheless defined by the highly individual quality of his engagement with flowers". As such, Yuan's "A History of the Vase" is an important early example of the burgeoning late Ming literature of connoisseurship that has been so well analysed by Craig Clunas.[9] In a world within which everything, including knowledge, had become commodified, taste was marshalled as "an essential legitimator of consumption".[10] Significantly, Yuan Hongdao sites his particular excursion into the culture wars of the period within that most sacred

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the post of Secretary in the Bureau of Ceremonies in the Ministry of Rites, for which see his *Yuan Zhonglang yanjiu*, 158-64.

[7] Yuan Zhongdao (1570-1624) 袁中道, "Libu yanfengsi langzhong Zhonglang xiansheng xingzhuang" 吏部驗封司郎中中郎先生行狀 [An Account of the Conduct of Master Yuan Hongdao, Director of the Bureau of Honours of the Ministry of Personnel], Qian Bocheng, ed., *Kexuezhai ji* 珂雪齋集 [Jade White Studio Collection] (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1989), Vol. 2, 763: "He was addicted to the interior decoration of small chambers and the arrangement of his rooms was always exquisitely designed".

[8] By contrast, Zhang Chou's 張丑 (1577-1643?) *Pinghua pu* 瓶花譜 [A Register of Vase Flowers], a work which carries a preface dated 1595 and with which Yuan's "A History of the Vase" shares an amount of text, is a far more practical and technically-minded treatment of the topic. On Zhang Chou, see *DMB*, Vol. 1, 51-53; for a translation of his work, see Hui-lin Li, trans., *Chinese Flower Arrangement* (1958). Despite this, "A History of the Vase" was to prove influential in the development of the Japanese art of flower arrangement.

[9] See his *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

[10] *Ibid*., 171. More recently on this aspect of late Ming China, see Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1998).

and highly ritualised of spaces, the scholar's studio.[11]

In a related but more specific way, Yuan Hongdao's "A History of the Vase" is best understood also in the context of his developing ideas about the nature and role of literature. The year 1599, during which he had completed the work, was also the year in which he revised the earlier drafts of his "Biography of Xu Wei" (*Xu Wenchang zhuan* 徐文長傳), a biography that, as I have argued on an earlier occasion,[12] represented Yuan's first major foray into the intense, bitter and often dangerous literary polemics of the late Ming period, a preoccupation that was to prove all-consuming for much of the rest of his short life. Just as flowers and plants belong to an autonomous world that works to a schedule of birth and death that differs from that of the human world ("flowers … have their periods of wakefulness and of sleep, their own 'dawns' and their own 'dusks'"), the same is true, by analogy, of the developmental trajectories of the various literary genres, and the hierarchies both between and within these genres are similarly a matter more of innate properties rather than externally imposed and eternal standards.

"A History of the Vase" was published during Yuan Hongdao's lifetime, as part of his *Pinghuazhai ji* 瓶花齋集 [Vase Studio Collection], the earliest extant edition of which is dated 1606. The work was included in all subsequent major editions of Yuan Hongdao's writings, whilst versions of the text also soon found their way into various late Ming and early Qing dynasty collectanea. This present translation is based on the text as found in Qian Bocheng, ed., *Yuan Hongdao ji jianjiao*, Vol. 2, 817-28. The Hangzhou editor Lu Yunlong included the "Introduction" to the work in his selection of Ming dynasty occasional essays, published in 1632, and provided an interlinear commentary on it. I have incorporated this commentary (in italics) within my translation; his overall comment on the piece serves as the epigraph to my "Translator's Introduction". Lin Yutang, *The Importance of Living* (London & Toronto: Heinemann, 1938), provides a partial English translation of the work, under the title "The 'Vase Flowers' of Yuan Chunglang" (334-41). A complete French translation of a significantly different version of the text is included in L. Vandermeersch, "L'arrangement de fleurs en Chine", *Arts Asiatiques* (1964), 11: 79-140. In her customary fashion, Wai-Yee Li provides a brief but enlightening discussion of Yuan's "History" in her "The Collector, The Connoisseur, and Late-Ming Sensibility", *T'oung Pao* (1995), 81(4/5): 269-302. In preparing this translation, I have consulted all three of these works.

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[11] For a general treatment of this topic, see Chu-tsing Li & James C.Y. Watt, eds., *The Chinese Scholar's Studio: Artistic Life in the Late Ming Period* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1987)

[12] See Duncan Campbell, "Madman or Genius: Yuan Hongdao's 'Biography of Xu Wei'", in Dov Bing, S. Lim & M. Lin, eds., *Asia 2000: Modern China in Transition* (Hamilton: Outrigger Publishers, 1993), 196-220.

"A History of the Vase"

Introduction

Having eschewed the pleasures of both song and sex, it is to the mountains and the rivers, to flowers and to bamboo that the mind of the recluse of grace and learning turns in pursuit of its divertissements. Mountains and rivers, flowers and bamboo invoke no questions of fame or reputation and lie quite beyond the reach of our impatient scramblings for fortune. The ordinary man, stuck as he is along the precipices of hubbub and within the swamps of profit, his eyes blinded by worldly dust and sand, his heart taxed by his various schemes and calculations, finds himself without the time to enjoy the pleasures afforded him by such things, even were he of a mind to do so. The recluse of grace and learning, by contrast, seeks to avail himself of every opportunity to take possession of that which happens to come his way, if only for the duration of a single day. Dwelling as *he* does in a place of non-contestation, the recluse of grace and learning is defined by the fact that he relinquishes all things to other men under Heaven; only the mountains and the rivers, flowers and bamboo, these, even were he prepared to relinquish them to others, others would not necessarily be willing to accept. So it is that he lives therein in peace, his possession of these things incurring no calamity [*Beneath the laughter his anger and resentment run deep indeed*].

Alas, this is a matter of the recluse, the conduct of a hero of considerable resolve, whereas all my life, although I have desired to be such, I have proven incapable of insisting upon it. Fortunately, however, it has been my lot to have oscillated between spells in office and periods of reclusion and if I cannot hope to obtain that which everybody else hastens towards and competes over, I do nonetheless wish to doff my bamboo hat on the heights and to wash my chin-straps in the flowing waters.[13] In this pursuit I have been fettered by the minor official postings that have come my way and the only joys afforded me have been the cultivation of flowers and the planting of bamboos. Even in this respect, my official residences have proven small and mean and moreover I have constantly been transferred hither and thither, so I have had no alternative but to have recourse to gall-bladder shaped vases and cut flowers, changing their arrangements in accordance with the alternation of the seasons. In this way, all the most famous blossoms in the possession of the men of the Capital have all of a sudden become objects of display upon my table. Without having to endure the ordeal of grafting and weeding, watering

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[13] A reference to a passage from the *Mencius* 孟子 (IVA.8): "Mencuis said, 'How can one get the cruel man to listen to reason? He dwells happily amongst dangers, looks upon disasters as profitable and delights in what will lead him to perdition. If the cruel man listened to reason, there would be no annihilated states or ruined families. There was a boy who sang, "If the blue water is clear/ It is fit to wash my chin-strap./ If the blue water is muddy/ It is only fit to wash my feet" '." (See *Mencius*, D.C. Lau, trans. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 121).

and bending my back, I have luxuriated in the joy of smell and sight afforded me by flowers, never needing to covet the flowers I pick or compete for those that I happen to encounter [*Ah – joy indeed!*]. All this, I can write about, and yet such things are but the momentary pleasures afforded one's mind, and to which one should never become habituated at the cost of forgetting that great joy inspired within one by the mountains and the rivers themselves [*A reminder to himself as much as to anyone else!*]. I, Master Stone, have made the following record therefore, listing below both the nomenclature and the rankings of the vase, to be shared with all men who are afflicted by the same craze as myself but whose circumstances are similarly impecunious [*"…to be shared with… [the] similarly impecunious" – excellent, truly excellent*].

One: Nomenclature

So bitterly cold is the climate of Yanjing that most of the famous flowers of the south cannot survive here; those few that do grow are inevitably in the possession either of powerful eunuchs or large estate holders. Having no reason even to lift the curtain of such personages, the poor Confucian scholar can but pick up that which is close at hand and easily obtainable. In this respect, selecting flowers is akin to choosing friends. Although I may well desire to befriend those extraordinary and untrammelled scholars of the mountains and the forests, they for their part lose themselves amidst the deer and the wild boar, hiding themselves away within the thick grasses, and I have had no opportunity to encounter them. For this reason, then, those men who live in important districts and large cities who have been identified as being scholars of outstanding abilities and who have commonly been accepted as such are the ones that I wish to befriend, choosing those amongst them those who are close at hand and easily met with.

So too it is that from amongst the various flowers I select only those that are close at hand and easily obtainable: as the winter gives way to spring, it is the flowering plum and the crab-apple that I pick; in spring, it is the tree peony, the white peony and the pomegranate; by autumn, it is the cassia, the lotus and the chrysanthemum; and during winter, it is the wintersweet. Within my single chamber, the fragrance of a Xun Yu alternates with the powder of a He Yan,[14] as these flowers each take their turn as my guest. Although I pick only those flowers that are close at hand, in the end I do not dare to be excessive in my choice and if I find myself without any flowers at all, I prefer to make an arrangement with a shoot or two of bamboo or a couple of branches of cypress to serve in their stead. In the words of the song: "Even if you have no old men ripe in judgment,/ At least you have your statutes and laws", and so how could I allow the vulgar men of the wells and

[14] Of the first of these men Xun Yu 荀彧 (163-212), it was said that wherever he happened to sit would remain fragrant for three days afterwards; in the " Appearance and Behaviour" chapter of the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 [A New Account of Tales of the World], we are told that He Yan 何晏 (ca. 190-249) was never without a powder puff in hand.

the marketplaces to besmirch the ranks of the worthy, thus earning for myself the undying ridicule of some latter-day Huangfu Mi for merely pretending to the reputation of a recluse?[15]

Two: Hierarchy

Of the three thousand concubines once found within the palaces of the Han dynasty, it was Zhao Feiyan alone who claimed pride of place; although Xing and Yin were both similarly favoured by the emperor's attentions, they could but stand by and gaze at her, tears streaming down their cheeks. This serves to highlight the fact that when faced with sublime beauty, lesser beauty is forced to bow its head in acknowledgment; rare and beautiful things tend always to transcend their own categories.

What a crime it would be, then, to have a woman of surpassing beauty ride in the same carriage as a crowd of lesser concubines or to ask a good and virtuous man to yoke himself to one of ordinary talents? Of the flowering plums, it is the Double-leaf, the Green Calyx, the Jade Butterfly, the Hundred-leaf and the Light Yellow that constitute the highest varieties; with the crab-apple, it is the "Western Palace", and the Purple Brocade varieties that are the best; the Yellow-stemmed, the Green Butterfly, the Watermelon Stalk, Big Red, and the Dancing Green Lion varieties of the tree peony are pre-eminent; the Crowning Fragrance, Yellow Emperor's Robe, Precious Adornment white peonies that are the most superior varieties; it is the Deep Red Double-flower variety of the pomegranate that is most desired; with the lotus, it is the Azure Flower Brocade-border variety; with the cassia it is the Ball and the Early Yellow varieties; as to the chrysanthemum, it is the Variegated Crane Feather, the Xi Shi, and the Cut Floss varieties; and finally, with the wintersweet, it is the Fragrance of the Mouth of the Musical Stone variety.

All these flowers are famous and by rights the studio of the impecunious scholar can never hope to display them all. I have made mention only of the above varieties simply so as to deliver judgement upon their multifarious fragrances in order that the extraordinary amongst the flower kingdom do not find themselves surrounded by the ordinary beauties of the boudoir. And yet, a single word of praise proves more glorious even than donning the splendid robes of office, and so, serving today as I do as the Donghu of Stamen Palace, fixing for all time the *Spring and Autumn Annals* of the Forest of Flowers, how can I not write with utmost seriousness and in all possible trepidation? As Confucius himself has said: "This principle, I will myself henceforth adopt".[16]

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[15] *Shi jing* 詩經, Poem # 255, for which see Arthur Waley, trans., *The Book of Songs* (New York: Grove, 1960), 253. Huangfu Mi 皇甫謐 (215-82) was the author of the *Gaoshi zhuan* 高士傳 [Biographies of the High-Minded].

[16] In the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (Duke Xuan, 2nd Year), Donghu of the state of Jin is praised by Confucius himself as being the paragon of the fearless historian, for which see James Legge,

Three: Vessels

The vases used to hold one's flowers need to be fine and delicate; after all, one would not have the concubines Yang Guifei and Zhao Feiyan wait upon one in the privy, or invite poets such as Xi Kang, Ruan Ji, He Zhizhang or Li Bo to join one for a drink in a tavern.

I remember once having seen an old beaker in the collection of a man of Jiangnan, the bluish-green glaze of which seemed so deep as to enter the very bones of the pot, its mottled sandstone under-glaze gathered in clumps. It was a veritable Golden Chamber for flowers. Somewhat inferior to this beaker are the products of the Imperial, the Elder Brother, the Elephant and the Dingzhou kilns, all of which, with the delicate splendour of their sheen, constitute the meditation cells of the Flower Spirit.

In general terms, it is appropriate for the vases placed in one's studio to be small and squat, and both the copperware (whether of the flower beaker, copper goblet, ritual jar, rectangular-mouthed Han ewer, plain warming vessel, or flat ewer shape) and the porcelain vessels (of the paper-mallet, goose neck, herb sack, lower jar, lower purse, milfoil stalk, reed-mallet shape) should all be diminutive in size of manufacture before they are fit playthings for the man of elegance. If not, how would they differ from the vessels used during ancestral rites in one's Clan Hall? Even were they to be ancient, they would nonetheless seem vulgar. Furthermore, although flowers vary in terms of their natural sizes, even the tree peony, the white peony, and the lotus, all of which are large of form, should not be exempted from this rule.

I have heard that flowers placed in copper vessels long buried underground and thus saturated by the breath of the soil, remain as brilliant of hue as they were whilst still on their branches, and if still in bud, they bloom quickly and prove slow to fade. If a vase is sturdy enough, then the same is true of pottery. This makes one aware of the fact that precious antique vases are not mere baubles. Impecunious and unimportant scholars, however, have not the wherewithal to possess such things, and even to get hold of a porcelain vase or two from such kilns as those of the Xuande [1426-35] and Chenghua [1465-87] reign periods makes one feel like a beggar who has suddenly come into a fortune. With winter flowers it is appropriate to use pewter flutes for, in the harsh cold of the north, even copperware is susceptible to cracking when it freezes over, this being true not just of porcelain. One can also throw a pinch or two of sulphur into the water.

Four: Water

Water from the Azure Cloud Temple of the Western Hills near the Capital, from Torn Silk Lake or from Dragon King Hall may all be used, whereas water taken from beyond High Ridge Bridge is of a most inferior grade. All

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trans., *The Chinese Classics: The Ch'un Tsew with the Tso Chuen* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), Vol. 5, 290-91.

water used in vases should have weathered the effects of wind and sun. However sweet the taste of water from places such as Mulberry Garden, Full Well, Sandy Hole or Mother Wang's Well, flowers do not flourish when standing in it. On the other hand, bitter water is most especially tabooed for its taste proves brackish in the extreme and it is inferior even to water that has been used to preserve plums. The method for storing water is as follows: as it is being poured into the vats for the first time, throw in a burning lump of coal. If this is done, the water will last for years without going off; quite apart from being perfect for preserving flowers, such water may even be used for brewing tea.

Five: Consonances

When arranged in a vase, cut flowers should neither be too many nor too few. At most, only two or three varieties should be used, most exquisitely arranged only when their relative heights and densities are disposed in a painterly fashion. It is a taboo to place vases in pairs, to arrange them in a uniform manner or in rows, and it is also a taboo to bind the stems of the flowers with rope. What may be termed orderly in the case of flowers is in fact a matter of irregularity and asymmetry, of a naturalness of manner, somewhat akin to the wilfully disjunctive flow of the prose of Su Shi of the Song dynasty, or the poems of the Tang poet Li Bo in their resistance to the rules of prosody. This constitutes true orderliness! If the leaves and stems are merely arranged symmetrically and the reds and whites simply balanced, the arrangement will resemble nothing so much as the trees that grow within the courtyards of provincial-level officials or the ornamental pillars that stand at the gateway of a tomb. How could this possibly constitute orderliness!

Six: Taste

The room should contain nothing more than a single unadorned table and a simple rattan bed. The table should be thick and wide, finely worked and glossy of finish. Tables with lacquered borders, golden-painted beds with mother-of-pearl inlays or vase stands decorated with flowers, all of which are much in evidence here in the Capital, should be stored away out of sight.

Seven: Malignities

It is not appropriate to burn incense beside a vase of flowers for the same reason that it is inappropriate to add fruit to one's tea; if tea can be said to embody its own authentic flavour, not captured by the words "sweet" or "bitter", so too do flowers have their own authentic fragrances, not to be replicated by the smoke and flames of incense. It is the solecism of the

philistine to act in a manner that detracts from that flavour as much as it is to destroy that fragrance. Cut flowers, when assailed by the poison of burning incense, immediately wither and dry up; incense is their keenest adversary. Both stick and blended incense are especially to be avoided for both contain secretions of the musk deer. Long ago, Han Xizai maintained that with cassia flowers it was appropriate to burn "Dragon's Brain" camphor, aloes-wood with the rose-leaf raspberry, "Four Perfections" incense with orchids, musk with the magnolia, and sandalwood with the gardenia.[17] But this is no different from adding meat to a dish of bamboo shoots, the very sort of thing much in evidence in the kitchens of officials or to be had from street stalls, and not at all to the taste of the man of refinement! As to candle soot and coal smoke, these too serve to damage flowers, and should never be allowed to do so. To call all such things the malignities of the flowers is perhaps appropriate?

Eight: Bathing

The Capital is prone to the occasional dust storm and when the wind begins to howl one quickly finds that an inch of dust has settled upon one's cleanest windowsills and most spotless side-tables. To the sovereign of the vase, such a circumstance proves most vexatious and constitutes the greatest possible disgrace. One's flowers, therefore, require a daily bathing. After all, even Nanwei and Qingqin, those two beauties of old, would not have earned their fame had they not made their toilet everyday with bandoline and powder, with brush and oil. Were I today to allow my few leaves and fading blooms to stand with their faces besmirched and their skins covered in filth, never undertaking the labour of their toilet and allowing the dust to cause them to wither and die, what then would I have left to view?

Just as flowers experience their own gamut of emotions, from that of happiness to that of anger, so too do they have their periods of wakefulness and of sleep, their own "dawns" and their own "dusks", and if the efforts of the flower-bathers are to serve as life-giving rain, they need to accord with the flowers' own schedules. Days on which a wan sun shows through the light clouds, or a fine moon rises at sunset, constitute the flowers' "dawn"; when the wind howls and the rain seems endless, or when flowers find themselves standing under a scorching sun or out in the bitter cold, such times constitute the flowers' "dusk". When their pale red lips bask in sunlight and their seductive bodies find protection from the buffeting wind, this is their happiness; when they seem drunk and confused or withdrawn of spirit, when their hues appear indistinct, this is their sorrow. When their stems droop to rest upon the balustrades, as if unable any longer to resist the breeze, this is when they are dreaming; when their captivating eyes glance around with

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[17] The best short introduction to the topic of aromatics in China is Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China: Volume 5: Chemistry and Chemical Technology: Part II: Spagyrical Discovery and Invention: Magisteries of Gold and Immortality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 134-54.

distain and their radiance dazzles one's eyes, this is their time of wakefulness.

At "dawn", they should stand in an empty courtyard or within a large hall; at "dusk", within a tiny room or secluded chamber; during their times of sorrow, they should sit with bated breath and on the edge of their chairs, when happy, amidst laughter and jollity, when in their dreams the blinds should be lowered and the curtains drawn, when waking, their toilet should be attended to. Only in this way can their true natures be given pleasure and their spells of activity and repose be properly regulated. It is best to bathe them during their "dawns", next best to do so during their sleep, and lastly, to do so when they are happy. To bathe them during their "dusks" or when they are sorrowful is to do little more than to mete out punishment upon them and is not something that I would ever do.

The method of bathing flowers is to sprinkle them lightly with the purest water and drawn from the sweetest spring, like a shower of gentle rain arousing somebody from his drunken stupor, like the pure dew that seeps beneath the skin. One's hands must never touch the flowers directly, nor should one ever use one's fingernails to pluck them. Their care should never be entrusted to an ordinary bondservant or a slovenly maid. The flowering plum is most appropriately bathed by a recluse, the crab-apple by a guest of grace and refinement, both the white and the tree peonies by a glamorously adorned young girl, the pomegranate by a lascivious bondmaid, the cassia by a precocious son, the lotus by a seductive concubine, the chrysanthemum by an extraordinary man besotted with the ancients, and the wintersweet by an emaciated monk. Winter flowers, however, are by nature averse to bathing; they for their part should be protected from the elements by thin silk gauze. If these precepts are abided with, both the spirit and the colour of the flower will manifest itself of its own accord and their lives will be prolonged. How then could I arrogate to myself this beneficence?

Nine: Subordinates

Flowers have their subordinates, just as those within the palace have their imperial concubines and ladies within their boudoirs have their concubines and serving maids. Many are the beautiful and bewitching flowers and plants of the mountains, flirting and dallying; how could one ever be short of favourites?

The flowering plum takes the yellow winter jasmine, the winter Daphne, and the camellia as its bondmaids. For the crab-apple, it is the apple, the red crab-apple, and the lilac; for the tree peony, it is the Rugosa, the rambler, and the Banksia rose; for the white peony, it is the opium poppy and the hollyhock; for the pomegranate, it is the crape-myrtle, the big red tree peony, the thousand-leaf pomegranate and the common hibiscus; for the lotus, it is the mountain alum and the tuber rose; for the cassia, it is the hibiscus; for the chrysanthemum, it is the yellow and the white camellia and the begonia; for the wintersweet, it is the narcissus. Each bondmaid has her own inimitable bearing and each reigns supreme throughout her own respective season.

With their contrast between the gaudy and the understated, the elegant and the vulgar, each of these bondmaids is ranked according to her own merits. Both the demeanour and the personality of the narcissus, for example, tend towards the ethereal, like Liang Yuqing, the maid who served the Weaver Girl. The camellia, by contrast, is nubile and beautiful, the winter Daphne exceedingly perfumed, the rugosa rose graceful, the hibiscus bright and gaudy, like Shi Chong's bondmaid Xuanfeng or Jingwan of the Yang family. Both the red crab-apple and the apple are seductive and approachable of disposition, like Xiechou, Scholar Pan's concubine. The opium poppy and the hollyhock stand handsome beside the wattle fence, like Sikong Tu's favourite Luantai. The mountain alum is chaste and retiring with the air of a recluse, like Yu Xuanji's Luqiao. The grace of the yellow and the white camellias is superior even to their beauty, like Guo Guanjun's Chunfeng. The lilac is thin, the tuber rose aloof, the begonia charming but with a hint of pedantry about her, like the serving girls of Zheng Kangcheng and the Flourishing Talent Cui. I am unable to come up with appropriate analogies for each and every one of the others but the important thing to keep in mind is that they are all famous. Soft and pliant, slender and artful, suffuse with the air of jollity, how could they possibly prove inferior to the pomegranate of Su Shi or the spring grasses of Bo Juyi?

Ten: Connoisseurship

Xi Kang was partial to metalwork, Wang Ji to horses, Lu Yu to tea, Mi Fei to rocks and Ni Zan to cleanliness, and all these men invested these things with their own sense of grievance and their own unparalleled individuality. In my observation, in this world of ours, all those men whose conversation proves most unpleasant to the ear and whose appearance is most hateful to the eye are precisely those who are without obsessions. When one is truly obsessed with something, one drowns oneself in it and becomes completely besotted by it, pursuing it as if one's very life depended upon it. What time do such men have to spare for thoughts of money or of servants, of office or of trade?

As soon as one of the ancients afflicted by the obsession for flowers heard in conversation mention of a rare flower, he would seek to track it down in the deepest valleys and along the highest ridges, not shrinking from doing injury to his legs, heedless of either bitter cold or scorching sun, unconscious of the chaffing to his hands or the encrusted mud and dripping sweat. When a particular flower was about to burst from bud, he would have his pillow and his mattress moved and sleep beside it so that he could observe the flower as it grew from tiny to fully-blooming, observe it as it wilted and then dropped forgotten upon the ground, only then quitting its side. He would either gather around him a thousand plants and ten thousand varieties in order that he may gain an exhaustive understanding of the entire process of their transformation or he would restrict himself to a single branch and a couple of rooms so that he could experience to the fullest that particular flower's delight. A single sniff

of a leaf was enough to tell him whether that plant's flower would be large or small; with a quick glance at the roots he would know if the flower was to be red or white. This may be called the true love of flowers, and this I call a true craze.

My own cultivation of flowers, by contrast, is merely a way for me to overcome the tedium and loneliness of my idle days, not at all what may be termed a true craze. Were I truly to be crazed by the flowers, I would already have become a man of the cave entrance to Peach Blossom Source,[18] not a man still mired in the dust of the officialdom of this world of ours!

Eleven: Appreciation

Flowers are best appreciated with a cup of tea in hand, second best amidst conversation, worst of all whilst drinking wine. As to wine from the Palace Winery and Zhejiangese tea, along with all kinds of lewd or vulgar conversation, these are the very things that the Flower Spirits most detest and revile. For my part I would far prefer then to sit like a rotten stump with my mouth tightly shut rather than incur the ire of the flowers. The appreciation of flowers is, I believe, a matter of both proper time and rightful place, and when the time is not right, it is boorish in the extreme to entertain guests casually.

The appropriate circumstances for the appreciation of winter flowers is after the first fall of snow, during a break in the snow, under a new moon, within a warm room. The appropriate circumstances for the appreciation of spring flowers are clear days, days that retain a slight nip in the air, within a lavish hall. Summer flowers are most appropriately appreciated after a shower of rain, in a bracing breeze, within the shade of a fine tree, beneath the bamboo, whilst standing in a riverside belvedere. For autumnal flowers, it is under a chill moon, at sunset, upon an empty flight of steps, along a mossy pathway, besides jagged rocks entwined by ancient vines that provide the most appropriate circumstances for their appreciation. To pay no heed to wind or sun, not to choose a fine spot, to seek to appreciate flowers when one's mind is wandering and not at all on the matter at hand, this is surely little different from viewing flowers in a brothel or in a tavern.

Twelve: Taboos

The Song dynasty scholar Zhang Zi's *Flowering Plum Classifications from the Hall of Jade Radiance* is an exquisitely written work that I have long

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[18] A reference to Tao Qian's 陶潛 (365-427) " Taohua yuan ji" 桃花源記 [Peach Blossom Spring], for a translation of which, see Cyril Birch, ed., *Anthology of Chinese Literature: From the Earliest Times to the Fourteenth Century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 188-90.

admired. Modelling myself on his example, therefore, I have come up with the following maxims, to be displayed within my Studio of the Vase.[19]

There are fourteen things that bring pleasure to the flowers: clear windows, spotless side tables, ancient tripods, Song dynasty inkstones, the soughing of the wind in the pines, the burbling of a brook, a host both susceptible to enthusiasms and with poetic sensibilities, a visiting monk conversant in the art of brewing tea, a gift of wine presented by a visitor from Jizhou, houseguests skilled in painting flowers, the arrival of a particularly rich and light-hearted friend, transcribing books on the cultivation of flowers, a brazier singing away in dead of night, and wives and concubines busy editing anecdotes about the flowers.

There are twenty-three things that serve to defile flowers: a host always too busy receiving guests, a philistine who makes an unannounced appearance, twisted branches, an uncouth monk discoursing about Chan, dogs fighting beneath the window, the singing boys of Lotus Seed Lane, the raucous tunes of Yiyang, an ugly woman wearing a cut flower in her hair, discussions about promotion and transfer, false declarations of love, owing somebody an as yet unwritten but socially obligated poem, a rich man drumming one for the repayment of one's debts, having recourse to rhyming dictionaries when composing poetry, disorderly piles of tattered books, Fujianese brokers, forged Suzhou paintings, mouse droppings, the slime trails left behind by snails, haughty servants, the wine running out as soon as the drinking games have begun, living next door to a tavern, a desk piled high with poems full of expressions such as "yellowest gold" and "whitest snow" and "the auspicious clouds hanging above the Central Plains".

The philistines of the capital are especially prone to vying with each other to frolic in this manner and, whenever the flowers begin to bloom, they unfurl their crimson screens.[20] As I see it, many are those who defile the flowers, few there are who truly enjoy them. And if one is honest about the matter, one realises that even amongst one's own set there are some who occasionally infringe these principles. It is for this reason that I have compiled this set of protocols, to serve as a constant reminder, to myself as much as to anyone else.

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[19] In the preface to his *Yuzhaotang meipin* 玉照堂梅品 [Flowering Plum Classifications from the Hall of Jade Radiance], Zhang Zi 張鎡 (1153-after 1211) tells how he put on display within his hall his fifty-eight rules for the appreciation of the flowering plum "as warning to all comers, for although the men of this age all know of the excellence of the flowering plum, they are incapable of loving and respecting them", for which, see *Laoxuean biji (wai shiyi zhong)* 老學庵筆記（外十一種） (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1993), 792.

[20] Zhang Zi lists as one of his fourteen "Abominations": "Unfurling crimson screens in front of the flowers" (792)

Appendix:

In compiling this glossary of flower and plant names found in Yuan Hongdao's "A History of the Vase", I have consulted the following works:

1. Chen Haozi 陳淏子, *Huajing* 花鏡 [A Mirror of Flowers] (1688; Beijing: Nongye chubanshe, 1962) (*Huajing*).
2. Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China: Volume 6: Biology and Biological Technology: Part I: Botany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) (Needham).
3. Chen Junyu 陳俊愉 & Cheng Xuke 程緒珂, eds., *Zhongguo huajing* 中國花經[China Floral Encyclopaedia] (Shanghai: Wenhua chubanshe, 1990) (ZGHJ).
4. L. Vandermeersch, "L'arrangement de fleurs en Chine", *Arts Asiatiques* (1964), 11: 79-140 (Vandermeersch).

Apple *pinpo* 蘋婆 *Malus pumila* [ZGHJ, 320]

Begonia *qiu haitang* 秋海棠 *Begonia evansiana* [ZGHJ, 417-18]

Camellia *shancha* 山茶 *Camellia Chinensis* [*Huajing*, 102-04]

Cassia *muxi* 木樨 *Osmanthus fragrans*

" Ball" (*qiuzi* 毬子)
" Early Yellow" (*zaohuang* 早黃)

Chrysanthemum *ju* 菊 *Chrysanthemum sinesis* [*Huajing*, 374-81]

" Cut Floss" (*jianrong* 剪絨)
" Variegated Crane Feather" (*zhuse heling* 諸色鶴翎)
" Xi Shi" (Xi Shi 西施)

Crab-apple *haitang* 海棠 *Malus spectabilis* [*Huajing*, 185-86]

" Purple Brocade" (*zijin* 紫錦)
" Red Crab-apple" (*linqin* 林檎 *Malus asiatica* [*Huajing*, 184-85])
" Western Palace" (*xifu* 西府)

Crape-myrtle *ziwei* 紫薇 *Lagertroemia indica* [ZGHJ, 177-80]

Cypress *bo* 柏 *Juniperus chinensis*

Daphne

"Winter Daphne" (*ruixiang* 瑞香 [*Daphne odora*]

Flowering Plum[21] *mei* 梅 *Prunus mume* [*Huajing*, 248-49; Needham, 420-23; ZCHJ, 111-16]

"Double-leaf" (*chongye* 重葉)
"Green Calyx" (*lu'e* 綠萼)
"Hundred-leaf" (*baiye* 百葉)
"Jade Butterfly" (*yudie* 玉蝶)
"Light Yellow" (*xiang* 緗)

Gardenia *zhanbo* 薝蔔 *Gardenia florida* [Vandermeersch, 127]

Hibiscus *furong* 芙蓉 *Hibiscus* [ZGHJ, 397-98]

Common (*mujin* 木槿 [*Hibiscus syriacus*])

Hollyhock *shukui* 蜀葵 *Althaea rosea* [*Huajing*, 334-35]

Jasmine

"Yellow Winter" (*yingchun* 迎春 [*Jasminum nudiflorum*])

Lilac *dingxiang* 丁香 *Syzygium oblata* [*Huajing*, 107-08]

Lotus *lian* 蓮 *Nelumbo nucifera* [*Huajing*, 348-50]

"Azure Flower Brocade-border" (*bitai jinbian* 碧臺錦邊)

Magnolia *hanxiao* 含笑 *Michelia figo* [Needham, 113]

Mountain Alum *shanfan* 山礬 *Symplocos candata* [*Huajing*, 118-19]

Narcissus *shuixian* 水仙 *Narcissus tazetta* [*Huajing*, 370-71]

Orchid *lan* 蘭 *Cymbidium*

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[21] The "Flowering Plum" is the bane of Chinese-English translators; so important in the Chinese context, the *mei* has no definitive European name. For a short treatment of the issue, see Hui-lin Li, "Mei Hua: a Botanical Note", in Maggie Bickford, ed., *Bones of Jade, Soul of Ice: The Flowering Plum in Chinese Art* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1985), 245-50.

Pomegranate *shiliu* 石榴 *Punica granatum* [*Huajing*, 198-200]

" Deep Red Double-flower" (*shenhong chongtai* 深紅重臺)
" Thousand-leaf" (*qianye* 千葉)

Poppy

Opium (*yingsu* 罌粟)

Raspberry

Rose-leaf (*tumi* 酴醾 *Rubus commersia* [*Huajing*, 260-61])

Rose

Banksia (*muxiang* 木香)
Rambler (*qiangwei* 薔薇)
Rugosa (*meigui* 玫瑰)
Tuber (*yuzan* 玉簪)

Tree Peony *mudan* 牡丹 *Paeonia suffruticosa* [*Huajing*, 94-100]

" Big Red" (*dahong* 大紅)
" Dancing Green Lion" (*wuqingni* 舞青猊)
" Green Butterfly" (*ludie* 綠蝶)
" Watermelon Stalk" (*xiguaxiang* 西瓜瓤)
" Yellow-stemmed" (*huanglouzi* 黃樓子)

White Peony *shaoyao* 芍葯 *Paeonia albiflora* [*Huajing*, 305-10]

" Crowning Fragrance" (*guanqunfang* 冠群芳)
" Precious Adornment" (*baozhuang* 寶妝)
" Yellow Emperor's Robe" (*yuyihuang* 御衣黃)

Wintersweet *lamei* 蠟梅 *Chimonanthus praecox* [*Huajing*, 100-01; ZGHJ, 167-69]

" Fragrance of the Mouth of the Musical Stone" (*qingkouxiang* 磬口香)