Fu Wen (paintings dated 1744-1765) 傅雯

"Eagle on Rock" 蒼鷹

Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper
127.5 x 46 cm. (50 1/4 x 18 1/8 in.)

Inscription:
"A work in ink presented for the judgment of Master Nien by Fu Wen of Lu-shan."

Artist's seal:
x-ts'un Lao-nung ("The old farmer from x village")

Collector's seal:
Ch'un-hui-ko yin

On an upthrust rock beside a flowering shrub perches a fierce bird of prey, an eagle whose back-turned gaze seems fixed on some potential catch. Sharp strokes of ink enliven the surface of the painting, creating dynamic patterns of energy that are softened only slightly by the warm color applied to the shrub and the bird itself. The scratchy and spontaneous nature of many of the strokes indicates that ink was applied not solely with a brush but also with the tip of the artist's fingernail, which when split could function like the nib of a pen. Paintings featuring virile birds and animals were popular during the Ch'ing dynasty (figures 1-2), especially among the Manchus and their supporters, who consciously upheld the martial traditions of the founders of their dynasty. The Master Nien for whom the present work was painted cannot be identified precisely but he was most likely Nien Pin or Nien Fu, sons of the important official Nien Keng-yao (d.1726), who, like the artist, was a Chinese bannerman, hereditary bond-servant to the Manchus.

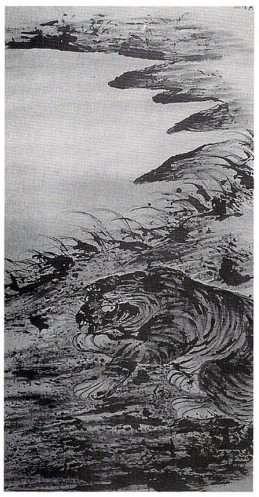

Fig.1. Kao Ch'i-p'ei: "Tiger," after Klaas Ruitenbeek: *Discarding the Brush*, Amsterdam, 1992, cat. 39, p. 170.

Fig.2. Huang Shen: "Eagle on Rock" 1755, after *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting*, Cleveland, 1980, cat. 269, p. 368.

Fu Wen was born in Feng-t'ien, the present Shen-yang (Mukden), capital of Liaoning province, into a Chinese bannerman family. This system had been instituted in 1601 by Nurhaci, founder of the Ch'ing dynasty, when he organized the men under his command, together with their families, into groups of three hundred; in 1615 these companies were hierarchically grouped under eight Banners: yellow, white, red or blue in color and either plain or bordered in style. The success of the expansionist Manchu state against the Mongols, Chinese, and Koreans living in the areas bordering on the Manchu homeland resulted in many captives who became household slaves or bondservants of their conquerors. Possibly since these very successes tended to prove the efficiency and strength of Banner organization, that system was gradually extended and applied to the captives themselves: eight Mongol Banners were set up on the same pattern in 1634 and by 1642 there were eight Chinese Banners as well. Enrolled in the latter were the Chinese captured during the first major Manchu victories in the early 1620s; Shen-

yang and Liao-yang were captured in 1621 and it was likely then that the Li family of Li Shih-cho, the Kao clan of Kao Ch'i-p'ei, and the Fu family of Fu Wen became hereditary bondservants of the Manchus. Fu Wen was enrolled in the bordered red banner.

Posts as diverse as the textile commissioners at Nanking, the directors of the Imperial Porcelain Manufactory at Ching-te-chen, and a great majority of the provincial governorships were filled by Chinese bannermen. Although Manchu dependence on such intermediates was greatest during the early reign-eras, at the very end of the dynasty the first Chinese ambassador to the United States, and subsequently to Russia, Austria, and Holland, was also a Chinese bannerman. There is no evidence to suggest that such bannermen were especially gifted in administrative skills or specially trained for the positions that they held. What did recommend them over all others was the absolute fealty they owed and paid directly to the person of the emperor. Possessed of access to the highest levels of political power, such men commanded social prestige far beyond that to which their actual status might otherwise have entitled them. Thus it was that some were courted by those with worldly ambitions, by such artists as Yuan-chi (catalogue 12), Cheng Hsieh, Kao Feng-han (catalogue 14), and Lo P'ing.

A total of at least fifty-four Chinese bannermen are recorded as painters and calligraphers; most dwell today in well-deserved obscurity. Their importance to us lies not in their artistic achievements—for, aside from Li Shih-cho, Kao Ch'i-p'ei, Chu Lun-han, and Fu Wen, their achievements are artistically insignificant—but rather in the historic styles they more-or-less successfully followed. All of these men, the majority of whom served as high officials in either the central or the provincial administrations, followed the Orthodox tradition of landscape painting as defined by Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555-1636).

Whereas the Manchus had initially welcomed with enthusiasm all Chinese officials willing to serve them in their early hour of need, when their goal changed from one of conquest to that of governing, such men were far from assets as the rulers sought to entice the far more essential southerners—from such eminent families as that of Wang Shih-min—into active support of their regime. Manchu support of the orthodox Southern School of painting, then, was determined by the same basic aim as that which motivated their sponsorship of the special *po-hsueh hung-tz'u* examination: both sought to assure the literati class that the Manchus would uphold traditions and conventions essential to the continued existence of that class in return for their participation in the consequent stabilization of Manchu rule.

Note should also be taken here of the technique of finger-painting, for such was practiced by Fu Wen, Li Shih-cho, Li's cousin Chu Lun-han, and his uncle Kao Ch'i-p'ei, and during the 18th century the technique was said to have been invented by the Shun-chih emperor. In fact, as was pointed out by Fang Hsun in the late 19th century, finger-painting was known already during the T'ang dynasty and, in extant paintings, appears sporadically during the middle Ming period. It remains true, however, that it was the Shun-chih emperor who revitalized that unusual technique and provided the immediate model for a host of Manchu and Chinese-bannermen followers. The emperor's figure paintings depict subjects derived from Ch'an Buddhism as well as from popular Taoism—a religious combination probably of less significance than the origin of all such subjects in works of the T'ang period. It seems clear that the Shun-chih emperor was especially attracted in figure painting by the expressionistic styles of such as Wu Tao-tzu, and may thus have been interested in the subjects and techniques especially associated with those styles. Finger-painting was one such special technique practiced during the T'ang period and that historical association would certainly have enhanced its attractiveness as an acceptable alternative to the far more rigorous technical demands of the brush. It is surely not without significance that virtually all recorded Ch'ing dynasty finger-painters were either Manchus or Chinese bannermen; few, however, were able to raise its usage beyond the level of mere aestheticism to the realm of the truly artistic inhabited by Kao Ch'i-p'ei, Li Shih-cho, and Fu Wen.

The bordered red banner of which Fu Wen was member was charged with the defense of the capital, so he would have been stationed in or near Peking; his rank was the mid-level *hsiao* or Lieutenant. The 18th century text *Tu-hua Chi-lueh* noted of Fu Wen that "military administrators are men of the world, so he excelled at banter and joking..." The means by which Fu learned to paint is not known but all biographers mention Kao Ch'i-p'ei (1660-1734), another Chinese bannerman, as his model (figure 3); since Kao too held office in Peking during the last years of his life, it is very likely that Fu Wen studied with him directly. According to the *Tu-hua Chi-lueh*, Fu "excelled at poetry and painting and in everything was quick and sharp-witted; within a short time he could complete several tens of scrolls, and his inscriptions too were not commonplace..."

The defining moment in Fu Wen's career came in 1744 when he was appointed a Palace Attendant, charged with providing paintings for various court needs. One of the first of these was an imperial donation in 1744 to the Jen-tz'u Ssu or "Temple of Humane Compassion" of a painting of the Buddha surrounded by the heavenly host—more than one-hundred figures in a scroll measuring over ten feet high and twenty feet long. In subsequent years the Ch'ien-lung emperor ordered Fu Wen to paint for numbers of temples in the city, including the Fa-yuan Ssu, located just to the south of the palace, for which Fu painted thirty-six scrolls, each more than ten feet tall, portraying the "Thirty-six Manifestations of the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin." The *Tu-hua Chi-lueh* noted that Fu "especially liked to travel with monks, so most of his best realized works are to be found in the huts of Buddhist priests." These paintings as well as the large-scale religious paintings, none of which seem to have survived, were all rough and spontaneous works done at least partially with the sharpened nail of a finger. In contrast stand the landscapes done directly for the court, which are all in orthodox style and were painted mainly with the brush (figure 4). It is noteworthy that none of Fu Wen's court paintings appear in the 18th-19th century catalogues of the imperial collection held in Peking or are owned today by the Palace Museum in Taiwan or in Beijing; rather, all of his works were recorded in the *Nei-wu-pu Ku-wu Ch'en-lieh-so Shu-hua Mu-lu*, which catalogued paintings held in the two summer palaces of the Manchus at Feng-t'ien and Jehol, and those still extant are now owned by the National Central Museum in Taiwan, repository of the contents of the summer palaces. These circumstances suggest very strongly that Fu Wen was a frequent companion of the emperor during his periods of relaxation and rejuvenation in the Manchu homeland.

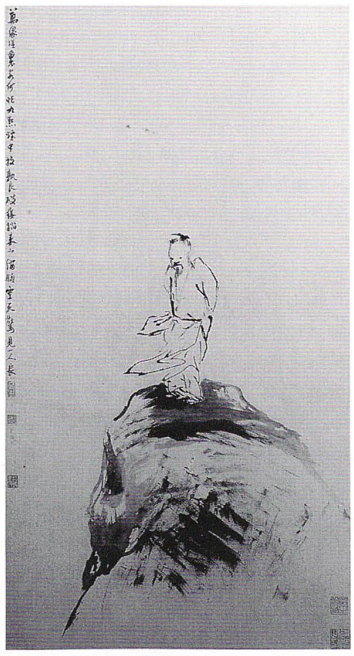

Fig.3. Kao Ch'i-p'ei: "Standing Along on a Lofty Ridge," after Howard Rogers: *Masterworks of Ming and Qing Painting from the Forbidden City*, Lansdale, 1988, cat. 62, p. 62.

Fig.4. Fu Wen: "Returning Boat by Distant Shore," after *Ku-kung Shu-hua T'u-lu*, vol. 13, Taipei, 1994, p. 305.

In later years, according to the *Tu-hua Chi-lueh*, "he was made use of by members of his banner." Fu Wen also worked for such Manchu nobles as Prince Shen or Yin-hsi (1711-1758), with whom Fu was living when he met the Yangchou painter-official Cheng Hsieh (1693-1765). A poem by Cheng suggests the nature of Fu's life at this time:

For long he has occupied for various princes
the visitor's seat of honor,
Submitting to petty slights
just like all poor people;
Year after year he sells his paintings
but the spring wind grows cold,
With frozen hands he applies his pigments
and washes unevenly.

Cheng's poem suggests that during his latest years Fu Wen was no longer working at court but was dependent on the hospitality of various Manchu princes, generous hosts at times but, like many patrons, careless at other times of the feelings of their dependents.