The Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou:
Eighteenth-Century Paintings of Yangzhou
高鳳翰（1683-1749）是位多才多艺的艺术家，擅长诗、书、印各方面，《三絕傳》（圖2）可見他數位在在這些方面的才華。就以書法而言，其所寫四體書各有不同。如第一頁寫於蓬萊山附近的大樹，書風溫潤如蓬萊仙山，筆墨揮灑之處，更見風華。第二頁則題寫高鳳翰之書畫兼備，書法工整用筆，字字清潤，最後則在鶴園所題寫之詩書，字體流暢，筆法自然，書風奔放，筆力雄健，可謂書法之傑出代表。其書風獨具一格，不同於其他書畫家。高鳳翰之書法，書寫於當代及現代，一直以來備受人們的推崇和愛戴。
金雕《八璞圖畫》/《畫錄書卷》

金雕 (1687-1769) 的這位作品 [圖5] 製作了馬匹不同的姿態。自古以來，馬匹是人們重要的交通工具，故此古人馬關係十分密切。圖中人物企盼所著繪的正是人類在馬匹上所投望，並現著在衣環中。相信是源自《八璞圖畫》的圖案，金雕在畫中同時也表達了馬匹和人物優雅美麗的姿態。

書上的題字是金雕自創的「種種」書體，用筆方正，棱角分明，豪放自然，豪放不凡，頗具筆墨氣氛。這種筆體字有著不凡之處，書法家劉衛華之言表示，這種筆體字的字跡往往簡略，而每字之中又有一筆筆為突出，通過書寫而能顯出由力的意，例如「馬」字之形，正好表現「種之」特點。故此，整幅字布局錦幄又顯得渾然一體。

李方青《梅蘭菊竹松冊》

李方青 (1687-1756)的冊書《梅蘭菊竹松冊》中，書寫《四君子》、「三友」的詩句。在裝飾的首卷中，梅蘭竹石之花，構成了一幅高潔的人物畫。這本冊書不僅有墨書的詩句，還結合了書畫。書法家黃任之言表示，這種書體字的變換往往簡略，而每字之中又有一筆筆為突出，通過書寫而能顯出由力的意，例如「馬」字之形，正好表現「種之」特點。故此，整幅字布局錦幄又顯得渾然一體。
Introduction

During the mid-18th century, Yangzhou, a city in the Jiangsu province, prospered as the salt industry boomed in the surrounding provinces. When the property of the merchants in Yangzhou grew significantly, the painting craze also flourished. Among the different stylistic approaches that flourished in Yangzhou, the “Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou” is the most favourite with the salt merchants and local residents. There are a number of different combinations or groupings for the so-called “Eight Eccentrics” after the term first introduced in 1873. In total, there are altogether 15 artists involved in the list, including Hua Yan (1682-1766), Gao Fenghan (1683-1749), Li Shan (1686-ca.1760), Wang Shishen (1686-1759), Jin Nong (1687-1763), Huang Shen (1687-1772), Gao Xiang (1688-1753), Zheng Xie (1693-1765), Li Fangying (1697-1756), Bian Shoumin (1684-1752), Luo Pin (1733-1799), Chan Zhuang (1678-1758), Min Zhen (1730-after 1788), Li Min (1691-1755) and Yang Fa (1696-ca. after 1762). As there is no substantive conclusion of which eight members, the term can only be considered as a collective designation for the group of artists who share certain common characteristics in their life and art.

Among these artists, many of them were initially scholar-painters who followed the literati tradition in their artistic pursuit. They became professional painters during the course of their life that they had to sell their paintings and calligraphy to earn a living. For this reason, they were attracted to Yangzhou, a large commercial city of their time. In stylistic terms, their paintings differ largely from the Orthodox School which follows the art-historical tradition; instead, they focused on the expression of their own feelings and temperament. Their art was considered “eccentric” since they did not adhere to the conventionally accepted manners and habits.

The “Eight Eccentrics” found their most outstanding achievement in the painting of flowers and birds and the so-called “Four Gentlemen” painting of plant blossoms, orchids, bamboo and chrysanthemums. However, since the “Eight Eccentrics” lived close to the lower class people, they were familiar with the darkness of life and the suffering of the people, their paintings were thus given a new dimension of meaning. These artists also authored for the art market of Yangzhou by switching their art to suit the taste of the patrons in terms of subject and technique. This is the reason why they were so popular among the patrons.

However, after flourishing for less than a hundred years, the salt industry finally declined in the 19th century. The painting centre was then switched from Yangzhou to the new commercial city Shanghai. The innovative spirit and the mutual relationship between artists and merchants that had been developed in Yangzhou was continued in Shanghai.

Hua Yan Two scholars versifying

Hua Yan (1682-1756) was renowned for painting birds-and-flowers, landscapes as well as figures. In this hanging scroll (fig.1), two scholar are sitting in the shade of trees. While one of them is holding a fan, the other is sipping tea leisurely. The depiction of the figures faces is similar to the style of Gao Ying (ca.1494-ca. 1552), and the drapery of the robe is drawn by smooth and flowing lines. With refined taste and exquisite technique, Hua Yan depicted not only the figures’ appearances, but also their feelings and emotions. The composition is carefully constructed to highlight the two scholars. Forming the focus of the painting, they occupy the spacious part of the painting, while the other parts are filled with trees, rocks and water. In addition, the bodies of the two scholars are large in proportion. This tradition can be traced back to the Tang and Song dynasties (960-1368) figure painting. The old trees are painted with both wet and dry brushstrokes, and the rocks are dyed by moist ink. Hua Yan used light and clear colours to represent a fresh and clean environment after rain. Although Hua Yan extracted the painting skills from other masters, he could make something new and paint in his own way.

Hua Yan’s careful arrangements rendered a quiet, beautiful and relaxed atmosphere that characterizes this painting. It symbolizes his desire to lead a tranquil life and his wish to sweep the dust away by his brush.

Gao Fenghan The three excellence: poetry, painting and calligraphy

Gao Fenghan (1683-1749) was a multi-talented artist trained in the realms of poetry, painting, calligraphy and seal-carving. This album by Gao Fenghan is entitled The three excellence (fig.2) because it combines all aspects of his talent. The first painting in this album is a scene of Tianchishan near Suzhou, where misty clouds create a heaven-like landscape, and the two conversing monks also convey such atmosphere. The second one depicts the scenery of the canal near Yangzhou, with the bending willows swaying gently in the breeze. The third one depicts an odd-looking pine tree outside the temple of the land God in Shandong province. The execution of pine tree displays Gao’s powerful brush manipulation. The fourth painting is a tree in autumn executed in the style of Li Cheng (919-967). It also incorporates elements of cursive script in the outline of the tree branches.

Each of these paintings is accompanied by a poem in a different calligraphic style. Gao was also famous for his seal carving. This album of paintings features twenty-seven seals, making it an excellent example of Gao’s celebrated art forms. Some of the inscriptions on his seals are related to his life experiences. For example, the seal “hou shang you yue” reveals that he painted with the left arm instead when he was unable to paint with his right arm after being poisoned in prison. This album was executed three years before his right arm was crippled, showing his well control of techniques.

Li Shan Wisteria and paradise flycatcher

Li Shan (1686-ca.1760) followed the meticulous court painting style when he was a court painter at his early stage. He then transformed his style to a
bolder and freer manner at his later stage. This painting (fig. 3) marks his transition of style. In this painting, Li Shan drew a pine tree with gnarled trunk accentuated by repeated circular dry brushstrokes. The rock in the foreground was executed with bold and moist brushwork which was influenced by Xu Wei (1521-1593) and Shi Tao (1642-1707). The contours of wisteria were outlined by thin and light ink while the petals were painted by white pigment which are similar to the style of Yun Shouping (1633-1690). The wisteria scattered over the trunk enriches the composition and furnishes the painting with elegance.

On the upper left of the branch is a paradise flycatcher observed at an unusual low angle. It is painted with light ochre colour with vivid posture. Two long tail feathers of the paradise flycatcher have long been related to the ribbons worn by ancient courtiers and officials. Moreover, the Chinese name of “paradise flycatcher” (shoudui) is a pun on the word “longevity” (shou). Paintings of these kinds of subjects symbolizing prosperity and longevity were popular commodities in Yangzhou at that time.

Wang Shishen  
Orchid and bamboo
Wang Shishen (1686-1759) excelled in painting flowers, especially flowers of the four seasons. His excellence in flower painting puts him at a par with Shitao, Huang Yan, Li Shan and Chen Zhaon. In his elegant bamboo painting (fig. 4), Wang used the traditional technique to depict the two groups of orchids. One group of orchid is drawn on the rock on the upper part of the painting; the other group is treated with a few bamboo shoots on the lower ground. As opposed to the outlining technique of painting the orchid, the bamboo is rendered in the shou (sourdless) method. Wang painted with dry and light ink by restraining his use of ink to convey the sense of simplicity and elegance. Another artist featured in this exhibition, Li Fangying, painted in a different way as compared to Wang Shishen. His painting is executed in a freer and spontaneous style, revealing the individuality of the “Eight Eccentric” artists. (see also Album of plant blossoms, orchid, chrysanthemum, bamboo and pine by Li Fangying)

Jin Nong  
Eight horses / Calligraphy in qisb (lacquer script)
This album (fig. 5) by Jin Nong (1687-1765) illustrates different postures of horses. From ancient times, horses provide great convenience for human to travel a long distance; therefore, there is a long history for the close companionship between horse and human. In this album of paintings, some leaves depict the horses as a tribute accompanied by the grooms. One of the grooms can be identified as a foreigner by his facial appearance and the clothes he wears. The unstrained character of horses is also depicted in this album. This can be seen in one leaf that shows a horse loaded with a saddle and a bridle, but it is not accompanied by any human beings. The paintings are executed in Jin Nong’s personal idiom. The outline of the horses is applied with a brush style reminiscent of the gravures and techniques and the result has an archaic appeal.

The inscription on this album is executed in a style created by Jin Nong himself, called qisb, or lacquer script. The brush manipulation shows deliberately squared off characters. Allegedly, this was achieved by cutting off the tip of the brush. The effect is as odd as the horse in the picture. The brush style of this inscription is similar to his work Calligraphy in qisb (lacquer script) (fig. 6), while the latter is more restrained. (see also The horse 1796 by Jin Nong)

Huang Shen  
Figures
Huang Shen (1687-before 1772) was renowned for his figure paintings. The subject and figures of this painting (fig. 7) were similar to other paintings by him on fin du siecle*. This kind of subject symbolizing prosperity and high position in court (see also Wisteria and paradise flycatcher by Li Shan) was very popular among merchants and officials in Yangzhou. As a professional painter, Huang Shen was prolific in producing paintings with such kind of subjects.

This painting belongs to the meticulous style of Huang Shen at his early stage. It is different from his paintings of later years with bold brush strokes derived from his running script. Under the influence of his mentor Shangguan Zhou (1665-1756), the figures of this painting are more naturalistic. Besides, the hair, jewels and the pattern on the robe are all depicted delicately with fine details. For the clipping of the robes, Huang Shen opted for bold and vigorous brushstrokes instead. The bounding hairline of strip of cloth not only links the three figures but also provides a graceful rhythm by its flowing lines. The twist of the back of the female attendant indicates Huang Shen’s pursuit of “eccentricity”. His students (see also Figure by Li Qiao) and followers inherited his style.
Therefore, Huang Shen had a great impact on the Shanghai School of Painting as well as many ceramic paintings in later periods.

*Note: The painting of Jindai was depicted by the story of Han Qi (1608-1675), a famed official of the Sung dynasty (960-1279). When Han served his official term in Yangzhou, a rare species of poeyi Jindai was bloomed at his courtyard. He, together with Wang Anshi (1021-1086), Wang Gui (1091-1185) and Chen Shengzhai (1011-1079), placed Jindai on their headgear. All of them rose to Prime Minister one after another.*

**Zheng Xie Bamboo and rock / Free copy of Huaisi's autobiography**

Zheng Xie (1693-1763), alias Bangqiao, was equally proficient in poetry, painting and calligraphy. He is also renowned for painting bamboo, orchids and rock. According to the inscription of this painting (fig.5), Zheng depicted the scene outside a window during a rainy night. This is a typical combination of bamboo and rock by Zheng to represent the slender bamboo shoots standing side by side with a large towering rock. Zheng likes to represent the bamboo in a slender and simplified form. Although slender in appearance, the bamboo shoots are stiff and straight. The bamboo leaves are depicted in light and dark ink tonal variations to represent the moisture in the air during the rainy night. The tall and upright towering rock is devoid of ink dots, which is Zheng's usual way of depicting rocks. Zheng is also renowned for his calligraphy. On this painting, the inscription is done in running script, but his most distinguished style of calligraphy is called liufenbanshu or bangqiao style.

In this calligraphy (fig.9) written in liufenbanshu, the text is extracted from the autobiography of monk Huaisi (725-785). In his typical liufenbanshu, Zheng incorporates the calligraphic elements of seal script, clerical script, regular script, running script and curve script into a single piece of work. In general, the characters look slightly flat, while individual brushstrokes seem to randomly loop large. Although the characters differ with each other in their formal appearance, they integrate harmoniously to form a well-balanced piece of calligraphy.

**Li Fangying Album of plum blossom, orchid, chrysanthemum, bamboo and pine**

Li Fangying (1697-1756) excelled in painting plum blossom, orchid, bamboo, chrysanthemum and pine, however, in his old age, he particularly loved to paint plum blossom. Plum always blossoms first in early spring to greet the coming of the new season. Because it can stand cold weather, it receives high praise for its firm and indomitable character.

This album (fig.10) was painted when Li Fangying was just dismissed from office, showing that his painting style became more spontaneous and uninhibited. In this leaf, two overlapping branches of plum blossom grow from the top of the painting. The branches with grotesque distortion are executed with bold and dry brushstrokes. Several pale flowers blossoming on the tree branches are outlined with light ink. The painting technique of the branches and flowers are completely different, but the result is harmonious. Li Fangying hated to paint indifferently but wanted to create something new and strange, as shown in the first line of the poem on this leaf, "if a painting is not strange and odd, it is totally mediocre and vulgar". Li Fangying took plum blossom as a model in his painting to express his feeling, because plum blossom symbolizes purity, constancy and spirit of never stooping to anything. An artist's seal "one's lifelong friend" is impressed on this leaf, revealing that plum blossom was not only a painting model, but also a close friend of him.

**Luo Pin Ghost amusements**

Luo Pin (1733-1799) was famous for his ghost paintings at his time. This scroll of Ghost amusements (fig.11) reveals his creative imagination in painting ghosts. The depiction of ghosts is unique and grotesque in individuality. There are all kinds of tall, short, fat and skinny ghosts with vivid facial expressions and postures. Luo Pin applied large area of dark ink as background to highlight the ghosts and to create a bizarre atmosphere. At the end of the scroll, a skeleton is holding an arrow and an hourglass. It symbolizes the quick passage of time and exhorts people to treasure time. The accurate proportion of skeleton and the decoration of hourglass are more or less influenced by the West.

Luo Pin claimed that he could see ghosts wandering around in town in daytime. According to him, the ghosts were afraid of the rich by walking gently alongside the walls while bullying the poor by tapping their shoulders and stepping on their feet. Luo lived in the bustling city of Yangzhou for a long time and he was not unfamiliar with the dark side of mankind. Therefore, similar to his contemporary satirical ghost literatures, he painted ghost to satirize the human world.