

The Story of a Stone: Mi Fu's Ink-Grinding Stone and its Eighteenth-Century Replications

In 1790, a prodigious ink-grinding stone (*yanshan*) in the shape of a hand resurfaced in Beijing, attracting the curiosity of local antiquarians. Its shape was as exceptional as its provenance: designed for Li Yu (937–978), it was among the treasures of Mi Fu's (1051–1107) legendary collection. Weng Fanggang (1738–1818) studied the stone first-hand and shared his discoveries in an essay written on a long scroll made up of four representations of the stone, two paintings and two rubbings. Guided by the new principle of objectivity, Weng sought to discard all apocryphal accounts of its history and properties in favour of fresh, empirically grounded evidence. Why then present this material in a painting? This essay reconstructs the efforts made by Weng Fanggang and his artists to capture the most authentic image of the stone, examining the many ways academic rigour became inextricable from artistic imagination in the late eighteenth-century antiquarians' pursuit of the past.

Keywords: Mi Fu; scholar's stones; rubbing; antiquarianism; Weng Fanggang.