

Liu Zhou's Rubbing-Paintings: Antiquarianism in Qing Dynasty, Artistic Significances, and Pictorial Inventions

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Abstract

Liu Zhou (1791–1858) has long been celebrated as a pioneer in “entire-form rubbings” (全形拓) and as a monk who excelled in both Buddhism, epigraphy, and the arts. Long before the emergence of entire-form rubbings, the tradition of rubbings had developed for more than 1000 years. As more and more collectors and antiquarians commissioned Liu Zhou, his entire-form rubbings’ practical function was highlighted — documenting the shape and content of objects faithfully. However, although realistic representation is the key function of entire-form rubbings, their use and functions are diverse and divergent. Using *Buddha Worship Painting* as the major example, I argue that Liu Zhou’s entire-form rubbings have two predominant roles—as study material for antiquarians and as an “ink play,” i.e., a playfulness-oriented painting. All of which could be exemplified by one of the earliest and most well-known existing works of Liu Zhou, *Buddha Worship Painting*. His rubbing-paintings thus epitomize his art philosophy, pictorial inventions, artistic reflections, and the broader historical background of antiquarianism in the Qing dynasty.

Keywords: “entire-form rubbings”, Liu Zhou, antiquarianism in art history

1. Introduction

Liu Zhou (1791–1858) has long been celebrated as a pioneer in “entire-form rubbings” (全形拓) and as a monk who excelled in both Buddhism, epigraphy, and the arts. Long before the emergence of entire-form rubbings, the tradition of rubbings had developed for more than 1000 years. In Chinese history, “rubbing” refers to the technique that could duplicate the surface of certain objects on paper. Using black ink or red ink, the final rubbing could be both black-and-white or red-and-white. This technique has been treated as the predominant method for making copies of a prominent stele due to its calligraphic value, historical value, and textual importance. By pounding the ink pad on the paper against the stele, the craftsman achieves a “bodily vision” when seeking to make the image clear by physically touching, pounding, and brushing. Imprinting the surface of an object upon the paper accurately depicts the minor details of the object, serving as a realistic portrayal or visual documentation. As the stele was an unremovable object placed on the ground, the rubbings transformed this three-dimensional entity into a two-dimensional image on the carriable light paper.



Figure 1. Liu Zhou and Cheng Geng, *Buddha Worship Painting* (礼佛图), ink and color on paper, 27.2 x 264.4cm, 1836. Zhejiang, Zhejiang Provincial Museum.

As rubbing prevails in Chinese history, its limitations start to be revealed: the traditional rubbing could only cover a façade or a rectangular surface of one object. To solve this problem, entire-form rubbings appear to capture the information of one object's three-dimensionality. As their name reveals, entire-form rubbings could foster a three-dimensional representation of the object, recording its "entire form" rather than a partial form as in traditional rubbings. One example of such entire-form rubbings is the *Buddha Worship Painting* (Figure 1). In this painting, a stone Buddha statue from the fourth year of the Tianping era (532 CE) is vividly depicted by Liu Zhou, with the rubbings showing the different façades of the statue. Cheng Geng, as a collaborator, painted Liu Zhou four times (four figures dressed in brown) as if he is worshipping the statues from all directions. As opposed to the one façade depicted in normal rubbings, multiple facades are rubbed and combined with each other based on a thoughtful design. The final composition of rubbings simulates a stone Buddha statue in its three-dimensional form. Since the object has four façades and each entire-form rubbing could capture two, Liu Zhou presents both the front view and the back view separately.

While the traditional rubbings focus on documenting the information on one surface, the entire-form rubbings record more than one surface and its shape. With the more information contained in such representation, entire-form rubbing has been regarded as a new development of traditional rubbing and is celebrated as a faithful representation. Among the antiquarians, Liu Zhou gained fame for his ability to make entire-form rubbings, which was praised and advocated by one of the most important antiquarians during that time — Ruan Yuan.¹

As more and more collectors and antiquarians commissioned Liu Zhou, his entire-form rubbings' practical function was highlighted — documenting the shape and content of objects faithfully. However, although realistic representation is the key function of entire-form rubbings, their use and functions are diverse and divergent. Using *Buddha Worship Painting* as the major example, I argue that Liu Zhou's entire-form rubbings have two predominant roles — as study material for antiquarians and as an "ink play," i.e., a playfulness-oriented painting. All of which could be exemplified by one of the earliest and most well-known existing works of Liu Zhou, *Buddha Worship Painting*. His rubbing-paintings thus epitomize his art philosophy, pictorial inventions, artistic reflections, and the broader historical background of antiquarianism in the Qing dynasty.

2. Entire-Form Rubbing as a Study Material for Antiquarians

In *Buddha Worship Painting*, the stone Buddha statue from the fourth year of the Tianping era is realistically depicted as two entire-form rubbings, in both the front view and the back view. As the making process indicates, the entire-form rubbing is based on a predesigned composition, with each flat surface rubbed, painted, or wood-block printed.² Each rubbed area may not be the same size as the original object because rubbing could reduce its size. In other words, entire-form rubbing is a realistic representation of an object based on design and using techniques such as normal rubbing, downsized rubbing, painting, and printing. The entire-form rubbings of the Buddha statue show its relief, each figure, character, fissure, and damages. Liu Zhou does not present a Buddha statue in its ideal form or represent its aging faithfully.

The intention of making entire-form rubbings of this statue is revealed by Liu Zhou's inscription, "I have collected no less than a thousand rubbings of Buddha statues' inscriptions from the Six Dynasties, Tang, and Song dynasties. They have been compiled into a book. In the previous year, I had the opportunity to visit the Mingwu cave and the Youhong cave and obtain rubbings of more than three hundred different types of Buddha statues. It is unfortunate that I couldn't acquire a single stone Buddha statue, but my admiration for them remains unwavering, as if I have forgotten hunger and thirst. This unexpected gain [of this stone statue and its rubbings] spanning over a thousand years is a great blessing. Thus, I inscribe these four characters, and to all future possessors, they serve as proof of my sincerity, which knows no bounds." In his account, he discovers this important stone Buddha statue, which is rare compared to other bronze Buddha statues. This discovery and the rubbing of this statue are prominent because they compensate for his pursuit of collecting rubbings, documenting inscriptions, and making them into a book.

As the focus of inscriptions revealed by his account, the entire-form rubbings in the painting show the inscriptions clearly and intend to provide the information embodied in them. To fully understand the connections between rubbings, the focus on text, and their connections to Liu Zhou, a full examination of antiquarian study in China is required, which started in the Song dynasty.

During the Song dynasty, people began to pay attention to antiquities, ancient art forms, and the philosophical understandings of the ancients. As a key component of this general trend toward antiquarianism, literature started to return to ancient forms. The "Literary Reform Movement of Ancient Prose", also known as "guwen yundong"

¹ Sang Zhen, (2015). "Liuzhou and Early-Stage Entire-form Rubbings 六舟与早期全形拓." *Chinese Calligraphy 中国书法*, 01(05), 139.

² Wang Yifeng, (2018). *Ancient Brick Floral Arrangement 古砖花供*. (Zhejiang: Zhejiang People's Publishing House 浙江: 浙江人民出版社), 258.

(古文运动), originated during the Tang and Song dynasties, aiming to transform the style of writing and move away from the trend of ornate and artificial compositions. Its main objective was to advocate for a return to the study and emulation of classical prose from the Three Kingdoms and Han dynasties. During the Tang dynasty, the style known as “pianwen” (骈文) prevailed, which excessively emphasizes parallelism, antithesis, allusions, and strict metrical patterns. This form of prose asks for formalistic perfection, which suppresses the free expression of opinions and downplays the importance of the content. In the early Song dynasty, this ornate and hollow writing style flourished, devaluing the substantial contents. Moreover, during the reign of Emperor Zhengzong of Song, the Xikun School popularized and made a heroic effort in advocating the beautiful verses instead of contents. Against this backdrop of the popularity of “pianwen”, Song literati seek a revival of the ancient prose originally from the Three Kingdoms and Han dynasties. This style of writing places heavy emphasis on the intellectual developments of the author rather than the literacy skills of the author. As this style of writing has been advocated, the literature and other materials from the Three Kingdoms and Han dynasties attracted a new round of attention and became a reference for studying.

Resonating with the revival of the ancient prose style, a renewed interest and study in ancient artifacts also emerged, which later became known as “the study of metal and stone” (金石学). This trend of study focuses on the study of ancient bronze inscriptions and stone steles, primarily involving the recording and textual analysis of written materials with the aim of supplementing historical records and validating ancient texts. This antiquarian study could be exemplified by “Three Rite Diagram” (三礼图) by Nie Chongyi — a comprehensive illustrated book of ancient Chinese ceremonial rituals. As a comprehensive guide, Nie compiled, compared, and reexamined previous scholars’ work on ancient rituals, symbolic gestures, and ceremonial processes. Featuring illustrations and detailed analysis of each ritual artifact, this book betrays a scholarly interest in ancient material cultures and a comprehensive effort in categorizing their functions, categories, and use within the larger ceremonial context.

As the newly published book yielded a more accurate and comprehensive knowledge of the antiquities, this antiquarianism began to appear in material form. One of the most significant manifestations of such antiquarianism happened during the reign of Emperor Huizong of Song, under the name “New Rites and Etiquette of the Five Ceremonies during the Zhenghe Era” (政和五礼新仪). As a book on court ceremonial rituals of the Emperor Huizong, “New Rites and Etiquette” was compiled by Zheng Juzhong and others under the command of Emperor Huizong and officially promulgated in the first year of the Zhenghe era (1111 CE). As an official book, “New Rites and Etiquette” covers various aspects of the court ceremonies — the procedures of the emperor’s daily activities, the hierarchy and the roles of officials, the handling of diplomatic affairs, and the conduct of imperial banquets and sacrifices. The book played an important role in systematizing and standardizing the ceremonial practices of the Song dynasty. As an authoritative text on court ceremonies during the Song dynasty, it brought about a series of modifications and innovations in ritual practices, including both a systematized effort in reorganizing antiquarian knowledge as well as the production of bronze vessels in the ancient forms. According to Chen Fang-mei, before Emperor Huizong, there were at least five instances of ceremonial reforms during the Song dynasty: the “Kaibao Tongli” (开宝通礼) during the reign of Emperor Taizu; the “Lige Xinbian” (礼阁新编) in the Qianxing era (1022–1023) of Emperor Renzong; the “Taichang Xinli” (太常新礼) in the fourth year of the Jingyou era (1037), during the reign of Emperor Zhezong; the “Taichang Yingeli” (太常因革礼) during the Jiayou era (1056–63) of Emperor Renzong; and the “Chao Hui Yizhu” (朝会议注) in the tenth year of the Xining era (1077) under Emperor Shenzong.¹ However, as opposed to the previous reforms, “New Rites and Etiquette” places a heavy emphasis on the artifacts, including the production of ritual bronzes in ancient forms (e.g., Zhenghe Tripod).²

Outside the royal domains, the antiquarians of “the study of metal and stone” were also interested in the steles and rubbings. Ouyang Xiu (1007–72), often celebrated as the pioneer of “the study of metal and stone” and the first major collector of stele inscriptions, collected 1000 rolls of rubbings and compiled a comprehensive catalogue on stone inscriptions.³ Besides Ouyang Xiu, Liu Chang’s “Records of Ancient Artifacts of the Pre-Qin Period (先秦古器记),” Lv Dalin’s “Archaeological Illustrations (考古图),” Li Gonglin’s “Archaeological Illustrations (考古图),” and Zhao Mingcheng’s “Records of Metal and Stone Inscriptions (金石录)” all provide documentation on ancient artifacts or rubbings, with a particular focus on the interpretation and attention on inscriptions. As Yunchiahn C. Sena points out, the advanced printing technology and the emergence of a developed publishing industry fostered the circulation of those antiquarian writings, bringing more people to the

¹ Chen Fangmei, (2001). “The Rise of Song Dynasty Antiquities Studies and Song Dynasty Imitations of Ancient Bronzes 宋古器物學的興起與宋仿古銅器.” *Taida Journal of Art History*, 01(10), 56-7.

² Ibid.

³ Hung Wu, (2003). *Writing and Materiality in China*, ed. Judith T Zeitlin. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 36.

study of ancient objects and accelerating the advancements of “the study of metal and stone”.¹

Building off the scholarly and methodological developments of the Song dynasty, the Qing dynasty witnessed a revival of “the study of metal and stone.” One of the key scholars who led this revival was Gu Yanwu (1613–1682). During the Ming dynasty, the “Lu-Wang School of Mind (陆王心学)” gained popularity and refers to the philosophical tradition and teachings associated with the scholars Lu Jiuyuan and Wang Yangming. It emphasizes the significance and importance of the mind or heart (心) as the source of knowledge and moral understanding. With its belief in “mind” or “heart” as the fundamental principle of the universe, the “Lu-Wang School of Mind” gradually moved away from the spirit of “engaging in the world (经世)” and focused primarily on the study of the mind itself. Against this background, Gu Yanwu advocated “understanding the essence of the Six Classics and applying it to current affairs (明六经之旨，通当世之务)”.² His distinct interest in applying learning to practical use along with his evidential scholarship usher in an era of practical scholarly pursuit, which had a profoundly beneficial impact on scholars of the Qing Dynasty. This new trend of scholarship, known as the “Qian-Jia School of Thought (乾嘉学派)”, is famous for its evidential scholarship (as opposed to philosophical investigations in the “Lu-Wang School of Mind”) and restores the ancient Confucian classics.

While the study of stele could be based on both rubbings and transcriptions, Qing scholarship started to favor rubbings over handwritten transcriptions. As art historian Wu Hung pointed out, the Song scholarship utilizes rubbings to conduct textual study — “the writer single-mindedly focused on the inscription and disregarded other aspects of the stele such as its material, shape, decoration, and condition.”³ Those scholars put a great deal of effort into identifying each ancient character and paid close attention to textual information embodied in rubbings. This epigraphy still attracted scholarly interest during the Qing dynasty, such as Qian Bian’s “A Study on the Inscriptions and Marks of Ancient Objects from the Sixteen Changle Hall (十六长乐堂古器款识考)” and Ruan Yuan’s “Inscriptions and Marks of Ancient Clocks, Tripods, and Ritual Vessels in the Jigu Study (积古斋钟鼎彝器款识).” However, transcriptions were the major way of conducting textual research during the early Qing dynasty. One of the key scholars, Gu Yanwu, preferred visiting steles in person and did transcriptions with ink and brushes.⁴ However, later scholars, such as Weng Fanggang and Huang Yi, noticed the shortcoming of transcriptions for their potential inaccuracy and favored rubbings as reliable sources for evidential scholarship.⁵

This evidential scholarship based on antiquities and their rubbings has been further developed during the Qing dynasty in terms of depth and breadth. Following Ouyang Xiu’s analysis and focusing on inscriptions, there were scholars like Weng Danian with his “Inscriptions of Metal and Stone Inscriptions from the Tao Studio (陶斋金石文字跋尾),” Han Chong with his “Inscriptions of Metal and Stone Inscriptions from the Treasure Iron Studio (宝铁斋金石文跋尾),” Fang Shuo with his “Inscriptions of Metal and Stone Inscriptions from the Pillow Classics Hall (枕经堂金石跋尾),” and Qian Daxin with his “Tail-end Verifications of Metal and Stone Inscriptions from the Hidden Research Hall (潜研堂金石文字跋尾).” There were also scholars specialized in studying stone classics such as Gu Yanwu’s “Study of Stone Classics (石经考),” Hang Shijun’s “Anomalies in the Study of Stone Classics (石经考异).” The study on the specific stele also prevails, for instance Zhang Chou’s “Interpretation of the Yihemei Inscription (瘞鹤铭辨),” Wang Shihong’s “Study of the Yihemei Inscription (瘞鹤铭考),” Gu Yuan’s “Explanatory Text of the Inscription on the Han King Qizhi Stele (宋韩蕲王碑释文),” Weng Danian’s “Study of the Tantan Stele from the Old Studio (旧馆坛碑考),” and Pan Zuyin’s “Collection of Han Dynasty Stone Inscriptions at the Jiugu Tower (纠古楼汉石纪存).” There were also scholars dedicated to studying variant characters in inscriptions, such as Luo Zhen’s “Variant Characters in Steles (碑别字),” Luo Zhenyu’s “Supplement to Variant Characters in Steles (碑别字补),” and Zhao Zhiqian’s “Records of Variant Characters from the Six Dynasties (六朝别字记).” As evinced by those scholars and their books, there was a comprehensive interest in stone classics, steles, and their inscriptions. Many books even devoted themselves to one single stele, which reveals Qing evidential scholarship’s interest in both encyclopedic study and case study.

As evidential scholarship became dominant during the Qing dynasty, rubbings started to play vital roles among collectors, epigraphers, and scholar-officials. According to Qingbo Zazhi, during the Song dynasty, rubbings of the ancient steles were in great demand and were sold by traveling merchants south of the Yangzi River at high

¹ Yunchiahn C Sena, (2019). *Bronze and Stone: The Cult of Antiquity in Song Dynasty China*. (Seattle Washington: University of Washington Press), 65-66.

² Gu Yanwu, (2009). *Collected Works of Tinglin 亭林文集*. (Beijing: Beijing Erudition Digital Technology Research Center 北京愛如生數字化技術研究中心), 64.

³ Hung Wu, (2003). *Writing and Materiality in China*, ed. Judith T Zeitlin. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 38.

⁴ Wang Yifeng, (2018). *Guzhuan Huagong 古砖花供*. (Zhejiang: Zhejiang People’s Publishing House 浙江: 浙江人民出版社), 137.

⁵ Ibid.

prices.¹ Ouyang Xiu also called himself “Mr. Six One (六一居士)”. The “one” in “Mr. Six One” refers to 1000 rolls of rubbings collected by Ouyang, including both the ones of bronzes as well as stone inscriptions.² During the Qing dynasty, this craze for rubbing collecting re-emerged. According to a famous rubbing collector Weng Tonghe during the Qing dynasty, “On the sixth day of the first month in the eighth year of the Tongzhi era (1869), I visited the Baoming Studio and came across two volumes (out of a total of eight) of the ‘Fengshu Tie’ and two volumes of the ‘Ru Tie,’ both of which were owned by Ye Dongqing. These works had exquisite inscriptions and colophons by Su Zhai. I immediately expressed my desire to purchase them. It asks for several hundred taels of gold in exchange.”³ As it reveals, two books of rubbings could equal several hundred taels of gold, which proves its scarceness and popularity.

Because of the popularity of rubbings, Liu Zhou attracted many commissions for his precious ability to represent the antiquities faithfully. For example, with the commissions of Cheng Hongpu, Liu Zhou was commissioned to Xin An five times, which produced thousands of rubbings.⁴ However, one of the key figures who advocated for Liu Zhou’s entire-form rubbings was Ruan Yuan, who fostered Liu Zhou’s fame. Ruan Yuan, as a prominent figure in the “Qian-Jia School of Thought”, was one of the most important antiquarians and scholar-officials during Liu Zhou’s time. Liu Zhou records his encounter with Ruan Yuan: “In Autumn Residence Studio, during leisure time, I imitated Qian Shunju’s method of using layers of silk and ash to make rubbings from the small pieces of gold and stone I collected, creating scroll-like works. Then, on the joyous occasion of my esteemed teacher Songxi Elder’s birthday celebration, I presented a thousand varieties of rubbings collectively called ‘Qiansui Tu.’ Ruan Yuan wrote a postscript for it, and it immediately garnered much attention and praise, as it was considered a pioneering work among antiquarians.”⁵ As it reveals, Liu Zhou’s innovative artwork attracted the attention of Ruan Yuan and suddenly became popular. Also, Liu Zhou in this account underscores his identity as an antiquarian (金石家) instead of a craftsman or artist. Later, Ruan Yuan wrote a poem to praise Liu Zhou as an “antiquarian-monk(金石僧)” and commissioned him to do entire-form rubbings for Ruan’s collections.⁶ Notably, the name, “antiquarian-monk”, distinguishes Liu Zhou from rubbings craftsmen and highlights his identity as an antiquarian and scholar. According to Xue Shidong, “Ruan Wenda once referred to Liu Zhou as an ‘antiquarian-monk.’ Liu Zhou was always amazed by this. Ruan Wenda once wrote a collection of sixteen characters from the works of Liu Dongsheng and presented it as a gift in the form of a book inscription. This couplet was once displayed on the walls of the study hall. When Liu Zhou came to Ningbo and visited the teacher, he looked around the four walls, but he was particularly drawn to these sixteen characters. His heart could not forget such a gesture from the Prime Minister!” As this account indicates, Liu Zhou was highly appreciative of Ruan Yuan’s praise, which fostered his fame as an “antiquarian-monk.” Since Liu Zhou was famous for rubbings, many scholars and antiquarians commissioned him for rubbings, such as Wu Kangfu, Cheng Hongpu, and Ruan Yuan.⁷

While various antiquarians asked Liu Zhou for rubbings, Liu Zhou also devoted himself to epigraphy. One of the largest contributions he made was his special focus on Buddha statues. According to himself, “I have often said that in recent years, the field of gold and stone studies has expanded to encompass even the minutest details, including clay sculptures, clay coin molds, and seal molds. Only in the past few decades have these items gained recognition and become cherished by antiquarians and collectors.”⁸ While previous antiquarians have paid close attention to steles and bronzes, Buddha statues and their inscriptions have not been closely examined and documented. As Liu Zhou claimed, as an antiquarian, he shed new light on those neglected materials.

As evidential scholarship published systematic studies, antiquarians valued more the rediscoveries of important antiquity or even its fragments. “Compilation of Gold and Stone Inscriptions (金石萃编)” is one of the most comprehensive studies on stone inscriptions. It consists of a total of 160 volumes and was written by Wang

¹ Hung Wu, (2003). *Writing and Materiality in China*, ed. Judith T Zeitlin. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 36.

² Ouyang Xiu, (2009). *Collected Works of Ouyang Wenzhonggong 歐陽文忠公集*. (Beijing: Collected Works of Ouyang Wenzhonggong 北京愛如生數字化技術研究中心), 272.

³ Weng Tongsu, (1989). *Diary of Weng Tonghe 翁同龢日記* (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company 北京: 中华书局), 672.

⁴ Wang Yifeng, (2018). *Ancient Brick Floral Arrangement 古砖花供*, 128.

⁵ Lu Yi, (2011). “The Visual Game: An Interpretation of Liuzhou’s ‘Hundred Years Picture’ 视觉的游戏——六舟《百岁图》释读.” *Oriental Antiquities 东方博物*, 01(04), 10.

⁶ Sang Zhen, (2015). “Liuzhou and Early-Stage Entire-form Rubbings 六舟与早期全形拓,” 139.

⁷ Wang Yifeng, (2018). *Ancient Brick Floral Arrangement 古砖花供*, 164.

⁸ Liu Zhou, (1999). *Chronological Record of Inscriptions and Paintings from the Baosu Studio 宝素室金石书画编年录*. (Beijing: Beijing Library Press 北京: 北京图书馆出版社), 494-5.

Chang, a Qing dynasty scholar. Completed in the 10th year of the Jiaqing era (1805), it primarily focuses on cataloging inscriptions from various dynasties. In total, it includes more than 1,500 different types of stone inscriptions. With comprehensive studies and documents such as this book, antiquarians shift their focus to rediscovering important materials and taking field trips.¹

One of Liu Zhou's key attributions to evidential scholarship is his rediscoveries and his rubbings of those findings. His book says, "Wherever my youthful travels took me, even in the depths of remote mountains and valleys, if I encountered cliff carvings, I would personally make rubbings of them. And when I came across ancient bells, tripods, and ritual vessels in the collections of connoisseurs, I would also make rubbings of their complete forms."² As an antiquarian, Liu Zhou favors field trips and making rubbings of his discoveries. One of Liu Zhou's most important findings is fragments of the "Changuo Mountain Stele (禅国山碑)." "Changuo Mountain Stele" is a stele with a unique calligraphy style and is located in Changuo Mountain, which is situated in present-day Zhejiang Province, China. The inscription on the stele dates back to the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD) and was commissioned by Emperor Dezong. When Liu Zhou visited the "Changuo Mountain Stele", he dug and rediscovered fragments of the original steles with more than ten lines of characters.³ His book documents his feelings: "It brings great joy and excitement to discover something that has not been explored or explained by previous scholars. [...] It is enough to be proud and satisfied with my own research and exploration in the field of bronze and stone studies. Xu asked Qu about my fragments, and I found that each character is worth its weight in gold. To supplement what Wu Cha, a guest from my hometown, did not include in his Ming-era book 'Guoshanbei Examination,' is also enough to boast among fellow scholars."⁴ His account not only reveals his excitement but also points out his distinct contributions to evidential scholarship by finding those important fragments.

The Buddha statue from the fourth year of the Tianping era in *Buddha Worship Painting* belongs to such a rediscovery. In 1836, Liu Zhou visited the Ruyi Temple Buddha Hall in Xin'an and saw this Buddha statue. It was created on the tenth day of the sixth month in the fourth year of the Tianping era and was commissioned by Jin Fengshou and supported by the Jin Yangcheng brothers as part of their offering. Carefully made, Liu Zhou's entire-form rubbings depict both the front side and the back side of this statue, with the inscriptions clear and cognizable. With those two sides, Liu Zhou documents both the details of each facade as well as the shape of the statue. Different from normal rubbings, entire-form rubbing highlights the spatial arrangements of inscriptions. According to Cheng Geng's inscription on the painting, "I [Cheng Geng] deeply admire it, and, as a token of my admiration, he [Liu Zhou] offers me a rubbing. I intend to present it as an offering in my humble abode, where it will be cherished as a precious treasure forever." In Cheng's perspective, not only the statue is sacred, but the entire-form rubbing also holds religious efficacy, which should be treasured in the household. The entire-form rubbing thus becomes a manifestation of the real Buddha statue and deserves worship. On the other hand, it also shows that Liu Zhou liked to gift others the rubbings of his rediscoveries and collections. The entire-form rubbing is therefore a by-product of the field trip and a gift for friends and fellow antiquarians.



Figure 2. The rubbing of a stamp in *Buddha Worship Painting*.

¹ Wang Yifeng, (2018). *Ancient Brick Floral Arrangement* 古砖花供, 114.

² Liu Zhou, (1999). *Chronological Record of Inscriptions and Paintings from the Baosu Studio* 宝素室金石书画编年录. (Beijing: Beijing Library Press 北京: 北京图书馆出版社), 415.

³ Wang Yifeng, (2018). *Ancient Brick Floral Arrangement* 古砖花供, 100.

⁴ Liu Zhou, (1999). *Chronological Record of Inscriptions and Paintings from the Baosu Studio* 宝素室金石书画编年录. (Beijing: Beijing Library Press 北京: 北京图书馆出版社), 400-2.

In *Buddha Worship Painting*, Liu Zhou reframes his experience of rediscovery as “the unexpected connection with bronze and stone (金石奇缘).” This phrase appears on Liu Zhou’s rubbing of a stamp (Figure 2). The word yuan (缘) is often regarded as a Buddhist concept that refers to an unexpected connection in destiny. Considering the reason for making this rubbing, Liu Zhou’s inscription says, “I have collected no less than a thousand recorded titles of Buddha statues from the Six Dynasties, Tang, and Song dynasties. They have been compiled into a book. In the previous year, I had the opportunity to visit the Mingwu cave and the Youhong cave and obtain rubbings of more than three hundred different types of Buddha statues. It is unfortunate that I couldn’t acquire a single stone Buddha statue, but my admiration for them remains unwavering, as if I have forgotten hunger and thirst. This unexpected connection spanning over a thousand years (世缘) is a great blessing. Thus, I inscribe these four characters, and to all future possessors, they serve as proof of my sincerity, which knows no bounds.” With a passion for collecting inscriptions on Buddha statues, Liu Zhou had only previously collected bronze Buddha statues. However, the Buddha statue from the fourth year of the Tianping era was the first stone Buddha statue he obtained. Notably, he mentions that he seeks to obtain rubbings when traveling. The “great blessing” explains Liu Zhou’s use of “the unexpected connection (奇缘)” and demonstrates the luckiness of such encounters. The Cheng Geng inscription says, “Liu Zhou, accompanied by his close friend, discovered Six Dynasties statues in the northern outskirts of Xin’an. With a gentle wipe, the brilliance of the treasures dazzled the eyes.” Cheng Geng’s account not only underscores this great rediscovery but also attributes this great discovery to Liu Zhou, which affirms Liu Zhou’s identity as a great discoverer.

The entire-form rubbings also serve as an alternative to field trips and help antiquarians who are interested in the inscriptions on the Buddha statues. As mentioned above, the *Buddha Worship Painting* reflects Liu Zhou’s keen attention not only to the shape of the Buddha statue but also to the inscriptions. His entire-form rubbings belong to his systematic effort in compiling those statues’ inscriptions and incorporating this new material into “the study of metal and stone”. The ancient characters in Buddha statues (normally from 420 to 589 CE) could compensate for the study of steles, bronze, culture, and history in ancient times. With this portable painting, antiquarians no longer need to do field trips, visit the statue in person, or collect the real statue. They could use entire-form rubbings on this painting to conduct textual research, investigate the stylistic development of Chinese characters, and identify the original text based on the damaged characters. With the depiction of its whole shape by using two entire-form rubbings, antiquarians could also study the shape, and the historical and artistic significance of this statue based on the entire-form rubbings. In this sense, the entire-form rubbings in *Buddha Worship Painting* serve as study material for antiquarians.



Figure 3. “Liu Zhou’s Ink Play,” Liu Zhou’s stamp under his inscription in *Buddha Worship Painting*.

3. Entire-Form Rubbing as “Ink Play”

Liu Zhou has a stamp under his inscription in *Buddha Worship Painting* (Figure 3); it reads, “Liu Zhou’s ink play.” “Ink play” (墨戏) could also be translated as “playing with ink” or “ink game.” By linking his entire-form rubbings with this expression of playing, Liu Zhou expresses another use or attitude toward entire-form rubbings.



Figure 4. Liu Zhou, *Rubbings of Zhou Boshan Vessel and Flower*. Zhejiang, Zhejiang Provincial Museum.

The expression “ink play” is associated with games and appears in one poem by Liu Zhou. In “Prince Rui ordered the rubbing of ancient ritual vessels and the addition of contemporary floral motifs (瑞郡王命拓古彝器并补时卉)”, it says, “To establish a firm friendship like unyielding gold and solid stone, lasting for six thousand years, just as a brick and a catty. Through a fortuitous game (偶然游戏), a bronze vessel is formed, where plum blossoms and chrysanthemums gather and partake in the mystical realm of the dragon’s illusionary meditation.”¹ By claiming “a fortuitous game”, Liu Zhou expresses a sense of play in his artistic treatment of rubbings. What the poem refers to is another art practice of Liu Zhou, in which he uses entire-form rubbings to make a bronze vessel as a flower bottle. One example of such a practice is the rubbing of the Zhou Boshan vessel and flower (Figure 4). In this painting, Liu Zhou uses entire-form rubbings to depict “Zhao Boshan Vessel” with painted flowers. With the rubbings of different parts, Liu Zhou recreates a realistic representation of this vessel, which resonates with his poem: “Through a fortuitous game, a bronze vessel is formed.” This painting not only resonates with this sense of play but also confirms it. At the end of his inscription, the same stamp is imprinted: “Liu Zhou’s ink play”.

This sense of play is also reflected in another expression used by Liu Zhou. In “Painting of Cleaning Patina,” Liu Zhou’s inscription says, “It is said that a mustard seed contains the universe, transforming into infinite billions, but it still retains a childlike appearance (孩儿气象).” His emphasis on “childlike appearance” reaffirms a sense of play in his entire-form rubbings. This idea of playing has its roots in the making of entire-form rubbings.

According to art historian Wu Hung, the general process of making traditional rubbings could be explained as follows: One should first prepare the target object and clean the dirt and moss on its surface. Every sunken line should be paid special attention to for its clarity. Then a piece of paper is laid face up over an engraved object. Usually with water-based adhesive, the paper is tightly attached to the object by using a “palm brush” to eliminate its wrinkles and folds. After the paper spreads smoothly, the maker uses brushes to tap the surface again and again until the wet paper sinks into the sunken part, whether it is a carved line or a fissure. In other words, the rubbings should exhibit the surface faithfully, including both the artistic information, the damage, and the traces of age. The maker then uses the ink pad to lightly tap the paper with ink. When it is finished, the rubbing will be immediately removed from the object.²

¹ Wang Yifeng, (2015). “Ancient Brick Floral Offering: The Art of Complete-Form Rubbing and Its Connection with Liuzhou 古砖花供:全形拓艺术及其与六舟之关联.” *Journal of the National Museum of China 中国国家博物馆馆刊*, 01(03), 119.

² Hung Wu, (2003). *Writing and Materiality in China*, 46-7.

Therefore, the rubbing maker's goal is to make the imprinted surface as clear as possible, whether it is a carved line or a fissure. Making is rarely about artistic freedom but about mechanical reproduction. Through repetitive tapping and brushing, a "bodily vision" is realized: the rubbing maker feels and reproduces the surface through bodily interactions.

On the other hand, according to Wang Yifeng, Liu Zhou's entire-form rubbings could be conducted in at least five ways: First, move the paper to rub different parts of the object with an illusionistic composition. Second, partially imprint the necessary parts of the object with other parts that have been faithfully painted. Third, drawing the shape of an object. And then rubbing or painting the parts according to the design composition. Fourth, without the actual object, painting by imagination or imprinting with similar objects. Fifth, using a wooden block to print the shape and rubbing the details and other parts.¹

Hence, the making process of entire-form rubbings entails many designs and artistic decisions. No matter which method is used, the maker should design a composition because the round object cannot be directly imprinted on the paper. To achieve three-dimensionality and mimic the vision of real eyes, Liu Zhou also has to choose an angle of view. With the designed composition and the viewing angle, Liu Zhou could then utilize different methods to simulate the target object, including rubbing, painting, and wooden-block printing. As Lu Yi points out, Liu Zhou's rubbings resemble a jigsaw puzzle.² The realization of entire-form rubbings is a jigsaw puzzle of different parts of the target object, with the goal of creating a realistic representation.

In *Buddha Worship Painting*, Liu Zhou did a jigsaw puzzle to represent the Buddha statues. With the desired composition, he rubbed, painted, or printed each façade with ink. At the end, the illusionistic combination of those parts is an "ink play" with varied techniques and a jigsaw puzzle in his mind.

While the making process serves as a jigsaw puzzle for Liu Zhou, Liu Zhou also exhibits playfulness in a different way. The man dressed in yellow is Liu Zhou, who started his worship from the right. As the scroll started from the right to the left, Liu Zhou paid homage to the Buddha image on the right side of the statue. Then, Liu Zhou kneels in front of the left side. On the left section, Liu Zhou worships the other two sides accordingly. In Chinese painting tradition, different figures on a handscroll depict the same person at different times because the handscroll has a chorological viewing experience as it unrolls. With convention in mind, the handscroll explicitly depicts Liu Zhou's worshipping experience at the Buddha statue in a chronological manner. However, those figures also hold another layer of meaning, as revealed in the inscriptions: "Taking on a thousand different manifestations, offering homage to Buddhas in all directions (化身千百意, 供养十方佛)." Wu Lizi (Cheng Geng) created this image for me based on the above sentence, thus inscribed at the end. As it reveals, the painter, Cheng Geng, painted this painting based on the concept of "taking on a thousand different manifestations to worship". As it reveals, the four Liu Zhou in this painting are not only a chronological depiction but also four manifestations of Liu Zhou at the same time. In this sense, the entire-form rubbings are not just two views of the statue but two statues of the same space, resonating with the line "Buddhas in all directions". Thus, the painting creates a visual pun, and entire rubbings hold double meanings.

4. Conclusion

As study material for antiquarians, entire-form rubbing provides information on inscriptions, texts, ancient writing styles, and the spatial relationships of different facades, while the antiquarians do not have to visit in person. As a game, entire-form rubbings are not only an "ink play" but have double meanings. The seriousness of evidential scholarship and the playfulness of the game are all embodied in the entire-form rubbings. In those two roles of entire-form rubbings, Liu Zhou also exhibits two divergent facades. As an antiquarian, Liu Zhou paid close attention to inscriptions and evidential scholarship. With rediscoveries during the field trip, Liu Zhou incorporated the inscriptions of Buddha statues as the new materials for "the study of bronze and stones." As an artist, he focuses on "playing" and artistic creations. Using entire-form rubbing as a visual pun and a jigsaw puzzle, Liu Zhou not only creates a game for himself but also provides one for the viewers.

Although this essay is a case study of Liu Zhou's *Buddha Worship Painting*, it nevertheless points out some common threads in Liu Zhou's oeuvre, as to his use of stamps, his artistic concept, and his common working process. Those analyses could be applied to his other works, which would develop a more comprehensive understanding of Liu Zhou and his art practices.

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¹ Wang Yifeng, (2018). *Ancient Brick Floral Arrangement 古砖花供*, 258.

² Lu Yi, (2011), "The Visual Game: An Interpretation of Liuzhou's 'Hundred Years Picture' 视觉的游戏——六舟《百岁图》释读," 12.

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