

Notes on Keng Chao-chung

By Thomas Lawton

ALTHOUGH RECOGNIZED as one of the most discerning of Ch'ing dynasty connoisseur-collectors, Keng Chao-chung 耿昭忠 (1640-1686) remains a strikingly enigmatic figure. His well-known collector's seals, which appear on many of the finest ancient Chinese paintings, are eloquent proof of his virtually infallible judgment in matters of quality and authenticity. That unusual degree of discernment is all the more remarkable in light of the fact that Keng died when only 47 *sui*.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Keng Chao-chung apparently never compiled a catalogue of his extensive holdings. Examples of his colophons on scrolls that had been in his collection are extremely rare, lending a special importance to the few that have survived. Among those are four short colophons written by Keng Chao-chung on album leaves in the Freer Gallery. The first colophon appears opposite a round album leaf depicting plants and insects. The painting, a work attributed to the tenth-century court painter Huang Chū-ts'ai 黄居采,¹ was acquired by Charles Lang Freer in 1911.² (see cover of this issue). Keng Chao-chung's colophon (Pl. 87), written only two years before his death, can be rendered:

“[In painting] grasses and insects, such artists as
Ku Yeh-wang³ and T'ang Kai⁴ are the most able,

¹The third son of Huang Ch'uan 黄筌 (active ca. 900-965), who was a native of Szechwan and a noted court painter in Shu specializing in precise, brightly colored representations of birds and flowers. Huang Chū-ts'ai continued the academic painting style developed by his father. In 965, Huang Chū-ts'ai accompanied the last ruler of Shu to the Sung capital of K'ai-feng. His work was greatly admired by Sung T'ai-tsung (r. 976-994) and he was appointed painter-in-attendance in the Imperial Painting Academy.

²Height: 9¼ inches (23.4 cm.); width: 9¾ inches (23.8 cm.). Ink and color on silk. Another version of this composition appears in *Sung-jen hua-ts'e* 宋人畫冊, pl. 77. That painting is attributed to an anonymous Sung artist. Imperial seals of the Ch'ien-lung (r. 1736-1795) and Chia-ch'ing (1796-1820) emperors are affixed to the album leaf.

³A native of Soochow, Ku Yeh-wang lived during the period of the Kingdom of Ch'en 陳 (557-588). He was a precocious scholar. His paintings seem always to have been rare. *Hsüan-ho hua-p'u* 宣和畫譜 (preface dated 1120) records only a single work by Ku, a scroll depicting insects and grasses.

⁴Little information is available concerning T'ang Kai other than that he worked during the Five Dynasties and that he excelled in painting animals, fruit and aquatic life.

Keng Chao-chung

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Plate 87 ALBUM LEAF carrying a painting attributed to Huang Chū-ts'ai (see cover of this issue). On this side, Keng Chao-chung's colophon: "[In painting] grasses and insects, such artists as Ku Yeh-wang and T'ang Kai are the most able. . . ."

because they can portray the inner nature of things through their outer form, and reveal the macrocosm in microcosmic images. In handling this type of subject matter, [Huang] Chū-ts'ai succeeds in imbuing minute insects and tiny blades of grass with vitality. When [Huang Chū-ts'ai] is compared to the earlier artists, how do they dare not yield? Keng Chao-chung inscribed in the *tuan* month of the *chia-tzu* year [i.e. February 15 – March 15, 1684]."

草蟲以顧野王唐垓諸人爲最。蓋能契物理於象外。參造化於毫端也。居采圖此。能伎織蟲小草各具生意。方之前人。豈敢多讓。

甲子端月耿昭忠題

The three other colophons are written opposite well-known album leaves in the Freer collection.⁵ The paintings and colophons were originally part of an album of eighteen leaves entitled, *Li-tai ming-pi chi-sheng* 歷代名筆集勝, all of which are recorded in P'ang Yüan-chi's 龐元濟 (ca. 1865-1949) catalogue, *Hsü-chai ming-hua lu* 虛齋名畫錄 (preface dated 1909), *chüan* 11:9a-15b. Fourteen more leaves from that album, now in the Hui-hua-kuan 繪畫館, Peking, are reproduced

⁵ Reproduced: *Chinese Figure Painting* (Washington, D.C., 1973), entries 52 and 53. Osvald Sirén, *Chinese Painting: Leading Masters and Principles*, vol. III, pl. 265.

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Plate 88 ALBUM LEAF carrying a painting by Chou Wen-chū. On this side, Keng Chao-chung's colophon: "In Chou Wen-chū's painting of [palace ladies] bathing children. . . ."

and discussed in *Sung-jen hua-ts'e* 宋人畫冊.⁶ Unfortunately, none of Keng Chao-chung's colophons on those paintings has been reproduced. The whereabouts of the eighteenth painting from the album, a square leaf attributed to Liang K'ai 梁楷 (active early 13th century), remains unknown.

Two of the colophons (Plates 88, 89) are written on paper bearing the seal *Chin-su-shan ts'ang-ching chih* 金粟山藏經紙. That seal is said to have been found on Sung dynasty *sūtra* paper belonging to the Chin-su Temple, located at the foot of Chin-su Mountain in Chekiang province.

The colophon facing the first of the two leaves traditionally attributed to the tenth-century court painter Chou Wen-chū 周文矩,⁷ (Pl. 88) can be rendered:

"In Chou Wen-chū's painting of [palace ladies]
bathing children, the countenance and manner of
each attains the utmost in marvelousness and correct-

⁶Plates 1, 3, 5, 14, 16, 17, 27, 39, 53, 57, 79, 80, 86.

⁷Active from 916-975, Chou Wen-chū served as painter-in-attendance at the court of Li Yü 李煜 (r. 961-976), the last ruler of Southern T'ang. The Sung critic Mi Fei 米芾 (1036-1101) states that the only feature which distinguished the work of Chou Wen-chū from that of the T'ang court painter Chou Fang 周昉 (active 780-810) was his use of *chan-pi* 顛筆, or "tremulous brushstroke". That characteristic type of brushstroke is traditionally said to have been developed by Li Yü for his calligraphy.

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Plate 89 ALBUM LEAF carrying another painting by Chou Wen-chü. On this side, Keng Chao-chung's colophon: "*The delicacy, elegance, dignity and beauty. . . .*"

ness. [Chou Wen-chü] himself can emulate the ancient [masters] who preceded him, and [among] later [artists] none can approach him." Signed, "Keng Chao-chung of Hsiang-p'ing."⁸

周文矩浴嬰圖。神彩風致。各臻妙理。自可前追古人。後無來者。

襄平耿昭忠

The inscription facing the second leaf (Pl. 89) reads:

"The delicacy, elegance, dignity and beauty [of the figures in this painting] are such as to prove [that the painting] belongs among the marvelous works of Chou Wen-chü". Signed, "Keng Chao-chung of Ch'ien-shan".⁹

織秀端妍。審屬周文矩妙蹟。

千山耿信公

In the original album, the third colophon, written opposite a

⁸Hsiang-p'ing Hsien, located in present-day Liao-ning province.

⁹A spur of Ch'ang-pai Mountain 長白山, the Ch'ien-shan forms the mountainous spine of the Liao-tung Peninsula.

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Plate 90 ALBUM LEAF carrying a landscape by Yen Tzu-yu. On this side, Keng Chao-chung's colophon: "*Yen Tzu-yu's painting style. . .*"

landscape by Yen Tzu-yu,¹⁰ appeared immediately after a leaf attributed to his brother, Yen Tzu-p'ing 閻次平. Keng's colophon (Pl. 90) reads:

"Yen Tzu-yu's painting style and [that of Yen] Tzu-p'ing [show the two album leaves are] surely worthy of the brothers." Signed, "Hsin-kung."

閻次于畫法與次平誠堪伯仲。

信公

Keng Chao-chung's calligraphy is neat, but undistinguished. His comments about the individual paintings are frustratingly vague, providing no insight into his knowledge of Chinese aesthetics or any indication of how he acquired the paintings. It is exactly this paucity of information that explains, in part, why no study has ever been made of the full extent of Keng Chao-chung's collection, how he assembled it, or what happened to all of the paintings after his death. However, some general information about the Keng family is known.¹¹

¹⁰Younger son of Yen Chung 閻仲, who served as court painter under Sung Hui-tsung (r. 1101-1126) and Sung Kao-tsung (r. 1127-1162). Both Yen Tzu-yu and his elder brother, Yen Tzu-p'ing 閻次平, continued the style of their father in painting landscapes and figures, but their work is said to have been more refined. Both sons served as court painters under Hsiao-tsung 孝宗 (r. 1163-1189) of Southern Sung.

¹¹The best source available concerning the various members of the Keng family in English is *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, pp. 415-417.

The Keng family were originally natives of Shantung province, but one of Keng Chao-chung's ancestors emigrated to Kai-chou 蓋州 in Liao-tung 遼東. No doubt the geographical proximity of their new home to the Manchu heartland was a compelling reason for the support which several generations of the Keng family gave to the Manchus during their conquest of China. His grandfather, Keng Chung-ming 耿仲明, was awarded the title of Huai-shun Wang 懷順王 in 1633, in recognition of his military victories in the Manchu cause. In 1642, when the Banner system was extended to the entire Chinese army on the Manchu side, Keng Chung-ming became a Chinese bannerman attached to the Plain Yellow Banner. As a reward for his victorious campaigns against the followers of Chu Yu-lang 朱由榔 (1623-1662), the Ming prince Kuei Wang 桂王, Keng Chung-ming received the title of Ching-nan Wang 靖南王 in 1648. In spite of Keng Chung-ming's many military accomplishments and his official honors, he chose to commit suicide on December 30, 1649, rather than face charges resulting from an inquiry into the actions of his subordinates in receiving and concealing runaway slaves.

Keng Chung-ming's eldest son, Keng Chi-mao 耿繼茂, was with him at the time he died and was placed in command of his father's troops. During his long career, Keng Chi-mao's brutal but successful actions against Ming loyalists won him many honors from the Manchu rulers. Keng Chi-mao strove to bind the fortunes of his family even more closely with those of the Manchu nobility; before his death in June, 1671, he witnessed influential marriages for his three sons. In their youth, all three sons had accompanied Keng Chi-mao on his military expeditions. But in 1654, Chi-mao petitioned the throne requesting that his eldest son, Keng Ching-chung 耿精忠, together with Keng Chao-chung, his second son, be sent to wait upon the Emperor. Keng Chao-chung was only 15 *sui* at the time. The early Manchu rulers understood the importance of strengthening their ties with Chinese sympathetic to their administration and Chi-mao's request was granted; the Emperor awarded both sons the title of *Tzu* 子 ("viscount") of the first rank. The Emperor also arranged marriages for the two sons. Keng Ching-chung was married to a daughter of Haoge 豪格 (1609-1648); Keng Chao-chung was married to the daughter of an Imperial Princess of the Second Degree, *To-lo hsien-chu* 多羅縣主, who was the granddaughter of Prince A-pa-t'ai 阿巴泰 (1589-1646). As the husband of an Imperial Princess, Keng Chao-chung received the title *To-lo-o-fu* 多羅額駙, a title equivalent to that of *Fu-ma* 駙馬 under earlier dynasties.

According to the funerary epitaph composed by Hsü Ch'ien-hsüeh 徐乾學 (1631-1694) and recorded in *Kuo-ch'ao pei-ch'uan chi* 國朝碑傳集,¹² Keng Chao-chung was born during the second month of the *keng-chen* 庚辰 year of the Ch'ung-te 崇德 period (March 22/April 20, 1640) and died during the first month of the *ping-yin* 丙寅 year of the K'ang-hsi 康熙 period (January 24/February 21, 1686). Hsü also

¹²Chüan 6:10b-12b.

records that following his marriage, Keng Chao-chung was given the honorary position of *T'ai-tzu shao-pao* 太子少保 ("Junior Guardian of the Heir Apparent") and the title *Ho-she-o-fu* 和碩額駙. Subsequently, his honorary title was raised to that of *T'ai-tzu shao-shih* 太子少師 ("Junior Preceptor of the Heir Apparent"), and another honorary title, *Kuang-lu tai-fu* 光祿大夫 ("Minister of Banqueting"), was conferred upon him. Keng Chao-chung's first wife died when he was 23 *sui* and he then married a woman *née* Yü 喻, who received the title *I-p'in fu-jen* 一品夫人, a title normally given to the wife of a *Kuang-lu tai-fu*.

In 1656 Keng Chi-mao received imperial permission to send his third son, Keng Chū-chung 耿聚忠, to the court, where he was married to a daughter of Yolo 岳樂 (1625-1689). Like his brother, Keng Chū-cheng then received the title *Ho-she-o-fu* and the honorary position of *T'ai-tzu t'ai-pao*.

The fate of all members of the Keng family was seriously compromised by the precipitous actions of Keng Ching-chung. In 1671, on the death of his father, Keng Ching-chung was placed in charge of his father's posts and inherited the title *Ching-nan Wang*. In 1674, when as part of the San-fan Rebellion 三藩之亂 (1673-1681), Keng Ching-chung supported rebel forces in Fukien, the K'ang-hsi Emperor decreed that Keng Chao-chung and his younger brother, Chū-chung, be seized. But the following year an Imperial edict absolved the two brothers of any role in Keng Ching-chung's revolt and their former titles were restored.

In 1676 the rebel forces commanded by Keng Ching-chung took Ch'ao-chou 潮州 on the eastern border of Kwangtung province. Keng Chao-chung was awarded high military rank and ordered by the Emperor to go to Fukien to take over his brother's post. Finally, after considerable delay and negotiation, Keng Ching-chung surrendered his forces in November 1676.

In spite of the well-founded suspicion the Manchus must have felt toward Keng Ching-chung, the other members of the Keng family apparently remained in favor. In 1678 the Emperor permitted Keng Chao-chung to have the remains of his grandfather, Keng Ming-chung, reinterred in the family cemetery at Kai-chou, Liaotung. However, Manchu resentment against Keng Ching-chung for his part in the San-fan Rebellion finally resulted in his execution by quartering in Peking in 1682. His son, Keng Hsien-tso 耿顯祚, was decapitated, and the family's property was confiscated. Once again, both Keng Chao-chung and Keng Chū-chung were spared, probably because the Emperor honestly felt they had played no part in the uprising and because of the loyalty and military accomplishments of their father and grandfather.

During Keng Chao-chung's final illness, the K'ang-hsi Emperor sent medicines prepared by his own physicians, and when Keng died in 1686, he was buried with all the honors befitting his noble rank. He received the posthumous title *Chin-hsi* 勤僖. According to Hsü Ch'ien-hsüeh, it was Keng Chao-chung's son, Keng Chia-tso 耿嘉祚, who had him buried together with his first wife in T'ang Hsien 唐縣, Honan province.

Keng Chia-tso's seals occasionally appear on paintings together

with those of his father, suggesting that the collection remained intact after Keng Chao-chung's death.¹³ Further support for the assumption that Keng's paintings were not immediately dispersed comes from the report that Tao-chi 道濟 (1641-ca. 1720) was able to see the collection during his visit to Peking from 1689-92, because of the influence of the Manchu connoisseur Po-erh-tu 博爾都 (died 1701).¹⁴ In addition, An Ch'i 安岐 (ca. 1683-ca. 1744), who was an infant when Keng Chao-chung died, mentions having seen a copy of *Hsia-ching shan-k'ou tai-tu t'u* 夏景山口待渡圖 in his collection.¹⁵ During the 18th century the bulk of Keng's collection was acquired by the Ch'ien-lung Emperor.

These random facts reveal something of the unsettled social and political world in which Keng Chao-chung lived. But they tell us virtually nothing about his keen interest in art collecting or about how he managed to acquire such an impressive collection. Although Keng Chao-chung's name is not recorded in any of the standard biographical dictionaries of Chinese artists, there is at least one painting extant attributed to him.¹⁶ Keng Ching-chung's precipitous action in siding with the southern rebels during the San-fan Rebellion appears to have overshadowed every other event in the lives of that generation of the Keng family. However, it is one of the ironies of history that if Keng Ching-chung's infamy dominates in official records, the seals and colophons of his younger brother, Keng Chao-chung, are considerably more famous today. They have, in fact, come to be regarded by scholars as reliable indications of quality.

¹³There is some confusion between the seals of Keng Chao-chung and those of Keng Chia-tso illustrated in Victoria Contag and Wang Chi-ch'ien 王季遷, *Seals of Chinese Painters and Collectors*, p. 564. Chia-tso and Hui-hou 會侯 are erroneously listed as two of Keng Chao-chung's *hao*. Seals 1, 3, 8, 9, 12 and 15 are those of Keng Chia-tso. In the supplement, p. 674, seals 18, 19, 24 and 25 belong to Keng Chia-tso.

¹⁴Cheng Cho-lu 鄭拙廬, *Shih-t'ao yen-chiu* 石濤研究, Peking, 1961, p. 28.

¹⁵*Mo-yüan hui-kuan* 墨緣彙觀, *chüan* 3, entry on Tung Yüan 董源's *Hsiao-hsiang t'u* 瀟湘圖.

¹⁶The large hanging scroll, executed in ink and color on silk, is an extremely competent copy of a scroll entitled *Wen-hui t'u* 文會圖, now in the National Palace Museum, Taiwan (reproduced: *Ku-kung ming-hua san-pai-chung*, pl. 92). The Palace Museum scroll, which is attributed to Sung Hui-tsung, bears a number of Keng Chao-chung's seals, indicating that it was once part of his collection (*Ku-kung shu-hua lu*, *chüan* 5, p. 58). In his long inscription written on the upper left section of his copy, Keng Chao-chung curiously describes his work as having been based on a composition by Chou Wen-chü.