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**“THE BRUSH-REST AND THE TEA STOVE.”**  
**XU CISHU’S BIOGRAPHY**

**Introduction**

This article offers an analysis of all of the sources concerning the scholar Xu Cishu 許次紓 (1549-1604), with the dual intent of compiling his biography and shedding light on the origins of his *Chashu* 茶疏 (*Treatise on Tea*, from here on CS),<sup>1</sup> an important book on the subject and the only piece of Xu’s writing that survives. Translations of his epitaph and the two prefaces to the CS are also included.

Xu Cishu’s *Treatise on Tea* is considered one of the most representative works on the subject from the Ming dynasty and it distinguishes itself from other contemporary texts through the thoroughness and originality of its content. As the author never undertook a career in government, however, the information we have on his life is rather sparse. The only modern biographical dictionary that has an item on Xu Cishu is *Mingren Zhuanji Ziliao Suoyin* (from here on MRSY), which reports a few facts drawn from his obituary that was written by Feng Mengzhen.<sup>2</sup> Xu Cishu’s biography has

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<sup>1</sup> For the abbreviations of book titles employed in this essay, please refer to the list at the beginning of the bibliography. The translation of official titles is based on Hucker, 1985. For the conversion of dates from the Chinese to the Western calendar please refer to concordances in Xie 1993. Chinese terms and titles have been Romanized with Pinyin, following the indications reported in Yin, 1990. I want to express my special gratitude to Prof. Wu Zhihe from Taiwan Cultural University, for his precious help and guidance. I also want to thank Prof. Marco Ceresa for his patient reading of the manuscript.

<sup>2</sup> MRSY, p. 485. The item dedicated to Xu Cishu in this dictionary reports the dates 1549-1604, but the text of the same item then states that he died in the 23rd year of Wanli reign (1595).

been analysed solely by scholars involved in the history of tea, within their prefaces to translations and republications of the CS, in studies on developments in tea drinking or in the compilations of catalogues of treatises on this subject.<sup>3</sup> The figure of Xu Cishu drew considerable attention after the erroneous dating of his death and of the composition of the CS by Nakamura Takashi and Nunome Chofu. In any case, all studies done to present take into account only a portion of the documents concerning this writer and none offers an in-depth and comparative analysis of the sources.

This study will take into account all of the sources on Xu Cishu, which include his epitaph, the two prefaces, the text and the postscript of the CS, the letters and diary by Feng Mengzhen, as well as a short biography composed during the Qing dynasty. In view of their detailed content, from which we can construct vivid portrait of Xu Cishu, translations of the most significant documents have been provided. These sources also serve as examples of the kind of commemorative writing that was highly valued at the time for its elegant style. Translations of substantial parts of other sources are available in the notes.

### Sources on Xu Cishu's Life

Biographical sources on the author of the CS include:

a. *Xu Cigong Ranming Muzhiming* 許次公然明墓誌銘 (Xu Cigong Ranming's Epitaph),<sup>4</sup> written by Feng Mengzhen<sup>5</sup> 馮夢禎 (1548-1605)<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Wan Guoding, 1958, n. 58. Nakamura Takashi (Nunome e Nakamura), 1976, p. 330. Wu Zhihe, 1985, pp. 411-414; 1996, pp. 173-182. Nunome Chofu, 1987, vol. 1, pp. 50-51; 1990, p. 175. Wu Juenong, 1987, pp. 263-264. Meng Qing'en and Yu Liangzi, 1992, p. 598. Ruan Haogeng, 1999, pp. 233-245. Wang He, 1999, pp. 825-26.

<sup>4</sup> In the title of the epitaph (tomb tablet inscription), the character *shu* 舒 in his proper name was substituted with the term *gong* 公, honorable (Hucker, 1985, n. 3388).

<sup>5</sup> Feng Mengzhen (*zi*: Kaizhi 開之), scholar and official, was native of Xiushui (Jiaxing; Zhejiang). He obtained the *jinsi* degree in 1577 with high honours and filled different positions in the Hanlin academy, alternating the service with long periods of retirement. In 1593 Feng was appointed Assistant Prefect (Hucker, 1985, n. 4425) of Guangde (in today's Anhui province). Then he was transferred to Nanking and reached the position of Chancellor at the National University (*ibid.*, 542, 3541). As a consequence of a critique by the Censorate, in 1596 Feng retired to Hangzhou, where he built a residence on the shore of Gushan islet, in the middle of the West Lake. The most important biographical sources are: *Nanjing Guozijian Jijiu Feng Gong Muzhiming* (Epitaph for the Honourable Feng, Chancellor at the National University) in

This text dates to the period between the end of 1604 and Feng's death<sup>7</sup>, and is contained in *juan* 13 of *Kuaixue Tang Ji* 快雪堂集 (from here on KXTJ), a collection of Feng Mengzhen's scripts published in 1616.<sup>8</sup> The epitaph is concerned mainly with moral and intellectual virtues of Xu, but also contains important information about his life and family. It closes with a eulogistic composition consisting of fourteen four-character verses.

b. *Ti Ranming Chashu Xu* 題然明茶疏敘 (Preface to Ranming's CS) by Yao Shaoxian<sup>9</sup> 姚紹憲. This preface is dated "spring of the year *dingwei*" (1607) and is contained in all editions of CS.

c. *Chashu Xiaoyin* 茶疏小引 (Introductory Note to the CS) by Xu Shiqi<sup>10</sup> 許世奇. This preface is dated "summer of the year *dingwei*" (1607) and appears in the *Baoyan Tang Miji* 寶顏堂秘笈 edition (from here on

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*Muzhai Chuxue Ji*, 51, pp. 1299-1302; also biographies contained in *Xu Nanyong Zhi Liezhuan*, 29, pp. 47r-48r; *Ming Fensheng Renwu Kao*, 45, pp. 54r-v.

<sup>6</sup> The MRSY (p. 625) and the DMB (p. 343) report the dates 1546-1605. The epitaph of Feng indicates a date of death of 8-12-1605, at the age of 58 (cf. *Muzhai Chuxue Ji*, 51, p. 1302). Therefore, the resulting year of birth would be 1548, not 1546. To confirm this, in the diary of Feng we find reference to his 51st birthday celebrated on the "twenty-second day of the eight moon" in 1598 (cf. KXTJ, 56, p. 8v), from which it is possible to calculate the exact date of his birth as 23-09-1548.

<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, Feng's diary makes no reference to the composition of this inscription in the period following Xu Cishu's death.

<sup>8</sup> The KXTJ was compiled by Huang Ruheng (cf. *infra*, note 54) and was published in Nanjing in 1616. It is composed of 64 *juan* and contains all the writings of Feng Mengzhen. The collection takes the name of the studio that Feng constructed in honour of the *Kuaixue Shiqing Tie* 快雪時晴帖 (Clearing After a Sudden Snowfall), the famous piece of calligraphy by Wang Xizhi (303-361) in his possession. The section that contains the epitaphs is made up of *juans* 11-16.

<sup>9</sup> Yao Shaoxian (*zi*: Shudu 叔度), native of Changxing, north of the prefecture of Huzhou (Zhejiang). He was the third of three Yao brothers, friends of Feng Mengzhen (KXTJ, 53, p. 16r-v.). The most senior person (*zi*: Bodao 伯道) named in CS in reference to tea cultivated in the Gorge of the Shining Moon (cf. *infra*, note 98; see also CS, p. 2r) and was the addressee of several letters contained in the "Epistles" section of the KXTJ.

<sup>10</sup> Xu Shiqi (*zi*: Caifu 才甫), native of Hangzhou. He edited the first edition of CS. This person is not mentioned in Feng's diary.

BYTMJ),<sup>11</sup> but not in the one contained in Chashu Quanji 茶書全集 (from here on CSQJ).<sup>12</sup>

d. *Chashu*. Within the CS and the author's postscript there are many passages with autobiographical information.

e. *Kuaixue Tang Riji* 快雪堂日記, diary kept by Feng Mengzhen with irregular frequency between 1587 and 1605.<sup>13</sup> This script is contained in *juans* 47-62 of KXTJ. It has been possible to find 25 episodes where Xu Cishu appears.

f. Six letters from Feng Mengzhen to Xu Cishu contained in the section "Epistles" (*chidu* 尺牘) of KXTJ (*juans* 32-44). They are personal communications written in a fairly laconic style and relating to facts unknown to us. These letters are not dated.<sup>14</sup>

g. The paragraph "Xu Ranming" in the first *juan* of *Dongcheng Zaji* 東城雜記 (Miscellaneous Notes from the Eastern Quarter) by Li E 厲鶚 (1692-1752).<sup>15</sup> This work dates to 1728 and contains annotations on people and places in the eastern quarter of Hangzhou, where both the author and Xu Cishu lived. Li E drew most of his information for the Xu Cishu biography from KXTJ, adding some personal comments.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The BYTMJ (Secret Collection of the Baoyan Studio), an important *collectanea* from the Ming period, supposedly based on the holding of the library of Chen Jiru (1558-1639. ECCP, pp. 83-4; MRSY, p. 608) and published by Shen Dexian. It is composed of five sections published in different years: the first dates back to 1606; the fourth, which contains the CS, dates to 1620.

<sup>12</sup> The CSQJ (Complete Collection of the Treatises on Tea), compiled by Yu Zheng 喻政 in 1613. It is the first collection of texts specifically dedicated to tea. The work is divided into four sections, where 25 titles are collected, from the *Chajing* by Lu Yu (Cf. *infra*, note 96) to the treatises slightly preceding his compilation, to which are attached a fifth section with a paper composed by Yu Zheng himself. The CS is contained in the fourth section. On the different versions of the CS, Cf. *infra*, note 60.

<sup>13</sup> It is appropriate to note the complete absence of annotations in the diary between the periods September 1591 – April 1593, February 1594 – January 1595, February – August 1596, March – December 1597, February – July 1598, February 1601 – January 1602.

<sup>14</sup> From the materials examined, even in the rare cases in which temporal indications are present in the letters, it was not possible to single out corresponding references in the diary.

<sup>15</sup> ECCP, vol. 1 pp. 454-55.

<sup>16</sup> The paragraph on Xu Cishu is found at pp. 12v-13r.

## Xu Cishu's Biography

The branch of the Xu clan, to which Xu Cishu belonged, settled in Hangzhou six generations before him, after leaving the Dong'an district in Hebei.<sup>17</sup> The first two outstanding figures in the family, registered as popular class,<sup>18</sup> were the father of Cishu, Xu Yingyuan 許應元 (1506-1565; *zi*: Zichun 子春; *hao*: Mingshan 茗山) and his younger brother, Xu Yingheng 許應亨 (*hao*: Shiwu 石屋). They earned the title of *jinshi* in 1532 and 1544, respectively,<sup>19</sup> qualifying within just over a decade of each other. The two brothers were among the most well-known scholars in Hangzhou during the Jiajing reign (1522-1566) and became known as “the two Xus”.<sup>20</sup>

Xu Cishu's father demonstrated a noticeable talent for literature from an early age. In 1525 he passed the provincial exam<sup>21</sup> and in 1529 he made an unsuccessful attempt at the metropolitan exam. In the next session, three years later, he passed and thereafter began his career in administration as the prefect of Tai'an.<sup>22</sup> Xu Yingyuan lost the opportunity to join the Hanlin Academy after refusing to pay a visit to a high official in the capital. Around that time, his poetic compositions began to circulate and arouse interest in literary circles, also gaining admiration from Li Kaixian 李開先 (1502-1568).<sup>23</sup> Xu Yingyuan was dismissed from his post shortly after, following a

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<sup>17</sup> In the Ming era, the district of Dong'an corresponded to the southern part of the present day municipality of Langfang, to the southeast of Beijing.

<sup>18</sup> Their district of origin and the social class of their family are indicated in the records of the candidates who passed the national exams. Cf. Wenshizhe Chubanshe, 1982, p. 682.

<sup>19</sup> QTXZ, *Jishi*, pp. 8r-v.

<sup>20</sup> QTXZ, *Jixian*, p. 21v. Other relevant biographies of Xu Yingyuan are: *Guangxi You Buzhenshi Xu Gong Yingyuan Muzhiming* (Epitaph for the Honorable Xu Yingyuan, Administrative Commissioner of Guangxi) by Hou Yiyuan (1511-1585), in *Guochao Xianzhenglu*, 101, pp. 13r-15v; the biographies contained in *Xiyuan Wenjian*, 12, pp. 34v-35r; 82, pp. 8r-v; 85, p. 34r; *Ming Fensheng Renwu Kao*, 43, pp. 44r-45v.

<sup>21</sup> His brother, Xu Yingheng, passed the provincial exam in 1540. Cf. QTXZ, *Jishi*, pp. 16v, 17r.

<sup>22</sup> Present-day Tai'an is to the south of Jinan, in Shandong province.

<sup>23</sup> DMB, p. 835-837; MRSY, p. 213. Scholar and playwright. For what concerns his poems, Yingyuan was considered a follower of the Archaist literary current of the first half of the seventeenth century, lead by Li Mengyang and He Jingming, that supported the recovery and imitation of antique models. Xu Yingyuan's compositions were modelled after the style of the

disagreement with a superior. He was subsequently recalled into service as a magistrate in Taizhou,<sup>24</sup> but after a year he was forced to resign due to the death of his father. In 1538, after three years of mourning, he obtained a post as Vice Director of the Bureau of Irrigation and Transportation in the Ministry of Works,<sup>25</sup> a position he held until 1544, when he was transferred to Kuizhou as a prefect.<sup>26</sup> In 1549 he was promoted to Surveillance Vice Commissioner<sup>27</sup> in Sichuan Province. Following a plot against him organised by his predecessor, he was transferred to the province of Guangxi. There he managed to capture three rebel leaders of the Zhuang minority that for some time had been occupying the local garrison while they raided and pillaged the area. In 1555 he became minister of the Pasturage Office<sup>28</sup> in Liaodong;<sup>29</sup> the following year, he received a post under the Provincial Administrative Commission<sup>30</sup> of Yunnan, but the death of his mother forced him to resign before assuming the post. In 1559 he returned to work and was appointed a vacant post in Fujian, where he provided logistical support for the troops fending off the attacks of Sino-Japanese pirates, who at that time raged along the coast of China.<sup>31</sup> In 1562 he was promoted to the position of Surveillance

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early poets of the Tang dynasty and were very appreciated at the time for their vigour and flowing style. Cf. *Huangming Cilin Renwu Kao*, 8, p. 16r-v; *Mingshen Jishi*, 18. Xu Yingyuan's works include the following titles: *Shuibu Gao*, *Yitang Gao*, *Chunqiu Neizhuan*, *Guoyu-Shiji Chao*, *Han Yu*.

<sup>24</sup> In Jiangsu Province.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Hucker 1985, n. 8251, 7279, 3462.

<sup>26</sup> Present-day Fengjie, east of the Three Gorges of the Yangtze River, originally part of Sichuan Province, today under the municipality of Chongqing.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Hucker 1985, n. 10.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 8234.

<sup>29</sup> In the Ming period, the province comprising part of present-day Liaoning and a strip of the coast of Hebei.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Hucker 1985, n. 4770.

<sup>31</sup> On the pirate attacks during the Jiajing reign, Cf. Geiss 1988, p. 490-505.

Commissioner<sup>32</sup> in the province of Yunnan and the year after that he became the Provincial Administrative Commissioner<sup>33</sup> of Guangxi.

Xu Cishu (*zi*: Ranming 然明) was born in 1549.<sup>34</sup> He was the second child of Yingyuan, and the last one he had by his first wife, Bao 包. Bao died around 1552 – when Cishu was only three – afterwards Madam Zhang 張 (? – 1603), his father’s second wife and the mother of his younger brothers, took up caring for him.<sup>35</sup> Presumably around his twentieth year he married a woman nee Ping 平, who died a few years later, around 1574, and of whom was born his only son, Xu Zhaonan 許兆男.

Of the four sons of Xu Yingyuan, Cishu was the only one to inherit his father’s predisposition for literary studies.<sup>36</sup> He was handicapped, however, and it was probably due to his physical impairment that he never entered into a career in civil service. Liberated from worries over the government exams, he was able to focus on his own studies and dedicate himself to different interests. Xu Cishu developed a strong preference for the writings of the taoist philosopher Zhuang Zi, even adopting the nickname (*hao*) Nanhua 南華, from a title attributed to the thinker in the early years of the Tang dynasty.<sup>37</sup> Beyond this, we find verification of a marked interest in Buddhism that he

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Hucker 1985, n. 12.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 4770.

<sup>34</sup> When not otherwise specified, the facts on Xu Cishu’s life are from Feng’s Epitaph.

<sup>35</sup> The fact that Zhang was the official second wife and not a concubine is indicated by her title (Cf. *infra*, note 90) and is confirmed by the fact that upon her death an epitaph was dedicated to her, an honour never given to ordinary concubines (Cf. Dardess, 1996, p. 88). In the diary of Feng Mengzhen we find the following references in regards to this: “26th day [4th month, *Guimao* year: 05-06-1603] ... Xu Ranming came to thank me for my condolences. He stayed and we ate lunch with Huang Wenqin ...” (KXTJ, 60, p. 12v); “4th day [11, *Guimao*: 06-12-1603] ... Xu Ranming came with his younger brother Shaoyu to ask me for an epitaph for his mother. They gave me two pieces of silk fabric as a present.” (*Ibid.* 60, p. 22v); “23<sup>rd</sup> day [11, *Guimao*: 25-12-1603] ... Xu Ranming came with his brother to thank me, indicating as well a few corrections to make in the epitaph ...” (*Ibid.* 60, p. 23r). The epitaph of which he writes is not among those contained in the KXTJ.

<sup>36</sup> In the biography of Xu Yingyuan and Xu Yingheng in the QTXZ, Xu Cishu is the only descendent of the two Xu’s to be named: “...the son Cishu carried on his activities”. Cf. QTXZ, *Jixian*, p. 21v.

<sup>37</sup> *Nanhua Zhenren* 南華真人, conferred in 742 (Cf. *Jiu Tangshu*, 9).



shared with many intellectuals of the time.<sup>38</sup> Xu Cishu acquired a certain notoriety for his literary style, and moved among circles of the Hangzhou elite. Feng Mingzhen – who already knew Xu Cishu’s cousins Pingyu 平輿 and Lingci 令慈, sons of Xu Yingheng – described him as a “famous scholar” of Hangzhou following their first meeting in 1589.<sup>39</sup>

The social life of the elite at the time was marked by a continuous exchange of courtesy visits, reciprocal invitations to dinners and banquets, and trips taken to places of historic or scenic interest. During the period when Feng was in Hangzhou, Xu Cishu spent much time with him, joining him on boating excursions on the Eastern Lake, visiting the numerous sanctuaries scattered about the surrounding hills, and, on a few occasions, travelling to other cities of Jiangnan.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Towards the end of the sixteenth century a noticeable growth in the interest of Buddhism is present among the literati as well as among the common people, with an increase in support of charitable temples (Cf. Brook, 1993). Feng Mengzhen was a disciple of a monk named Zibai (*Muzhai Chuxue Ji*, 51, p. 1300), while Wu Zhijing is the author of a monograph on the temples of Hangzhou (Cf. *infra*, note 75).

<sup>39</sup> “Seventh day [1<sup>st</sup> month, *Jichou* year: 21-02-1589] ...fairly serene. I went on an excursion with a few people to Mount Wu; two of my sons came with me. Jiang Zigan (Cf. *infra*, note 59) loves to discuss geomancy; he said that there are many beautiful places on Mount Fenghuang and invited me to go and see. Xu Ranming came with us, limping. Xu is a famous scholar of Wulin.” (KXTJ, 49, 1v).

<sup>40</sup> We find numerous references to this in the epistles and in the diary of Feng: “2nd day [2nd month, *Jichou* year (17-03-1589)] ... I went with Jiang Zigan, Xu Ranming and [Xu] Lingci on a trip to the taoist monastery Zhensheng ...” (KXTJ, 49, p. 4v); “8th day [2, *Jichou*: 23-03-1589]. Serene, lightly misted. Ranming and his companions met me at the lake. Once again, it was I who presided over the meeting ...” (*Ibid.*, 49, p. 5r); “19th day [2, *Jichou*: 03-04-1589]. I set off for central Yue (Zhejiang). Xu Ranming and Jiang Zigan came with me...” (*Ibid.*, 49, p. 5v); “3rd day [3, *Jichou*: 17-04-1589]. I invited Wang Jiru, Shen Changru and Sun Ziyi to go on a trip with me on the lake. Jiang [Zigan] and Xu [Ranming] also accompanied us ...” (*Ibid.*, 49, p. 8r-v); “10th day [12, *Gengyin*: 05-01-1591]. Peaceful. The moon was beautiful. The two Zhou’s and Xu Ranming came to meet [Chen] Gongheng. We moved by boat until Huqiu (to the north of Suzhou)...” (*Ibid.*, 50, p. 21v); “27th day [3, *Xinmao*: 20-04-1591] ... I had a drink on the lake with [Yu] Zhonghan, [Tu] Changqing (Tu Long), Wang Hauiting, and Cai Xihan. We joined up with Yang Hanqing, Chen Jixiang, Huang Baizhong, Qian Shuda, Xu Maowu, and Xu Ranming: in all we were eleven people...” (*Ibid.*, 51, p. 5v); “19th day [2nd intercalary month, *Renyin*: 11-04-1602]. Rain. I went down to the lake to go around with some singers. I invited Hu Zhongxiu and Xu Ranming to come and accompany Tu Changqing. Today Changqing went to pray to the immortals by the hermitage at the south of the lake. I went together with Hu and Xu to visit him near Liu’s studio ... I chatted pleasantly with Hu and Xu and I enjoyed myself very much.” (*Ibid.*, 59, p. 6r); “24th day [2 intercalare, *Renyin*: 16-04-1602]. It rained all day long. I invited Yao Shudu and Xu Ranming to come and keep me company...” (*Ibid.*, 56, p. 6v).

Throughout his life, Xu Cishu was constantly running into financial difficulties, partly due to his extravagant tastes. To stay afloat, he had to carry out irregular jobs that required him to travel once or twice a year to distant provinces. According to his own statements in the CS, he visited Hebei, Shandong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Hunan, Guizhou, Yunnan, and Guangdong.<sup>41</sup> We know that he was in Shandong for a period of time to serving as a companion or tutor under the patronage of a high-ranking figure.<sup>42</sup> In his friendship with Feng Mengzhen, one can imagine that there existed some form of support from the latter.<sup>43</sup> It is also possible that Xu Cishu engaged in some sort of commercial activity, though there is no evidence of this in the sources. The revenues that Xu Cishu gained from his employment were quickly and regularly exhausted within a period of a few months. During the last of his trips, he accidentally fell into a body of water, almost drowning. Upon returning to Hangzhou, he decided never to leave again. Xu Cishu died at home on October 7, 1604.

Xu Cishu's house was located in south-east of Hangzhou, close to the city walls, a few hundred meters south of where the city's train station is located

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“... At midday I met Hu, the Assistant of Transportation. Shall we go entertain ourselves at the lake tomorrow morning?” (“Reply to Ranming”, *Ibid.*, 35, p. 9r).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. CS, p. 9r.

<sup>42</sup> “We remained distant, one in the south, the other in the north, after we said farewell at the end of the autumn in Lingci's studio. I received your news and it was a big comfort to me. In two months I had to journey twice to Zuili (Jiaxing) and once to Wu (Suzhou). When I returned to Hangzhou it was already the end of the year. Good customs has decayed and I cannot lift them back with my weak forces. The only ones who I trust in are you and [Yue] Zijin (Cf. *infra*, note 59), both on distant trips. Alas, no one is left to look after the altars of the West Lake except this old bald man. Given that you have found a virtuous patron, it wouldn't do you any harm to stop in Qi-Lu (Shandong) and work as a companion; remember not to behave in an thoughtless manner. I have composed a few poems that I am sending to you to make you smile two thousand *li* away. If the postal system is available, I hope that you will not forget to send me your news.” (“Communication to Ranming”, KXTJ, 36, pp. 1r-v)

<sup>43</sup> Regarding this point, there are several interesting parts of the KXTJ: “7th day [9th month, *Wuxu* year: 06-10-1598] ... From today I met with Ranming to eat in the eastern studio ...” (KXTJ, 56, p. 11r); “One cannot complain when the boat full of grain does not arrive [?: perhaps referring to a salary], but this misery with regards to a friend is a great displeasure and shame. To meet the governor I need to be there in person, but it will be difficult to accomplish with this intense heat. Tomorrow I must go once more to Fancun [to the southwest of Hangzhou] and I plan to stop for a few days in the hills. I will attend to your affairs before the middle of the month.” (“Communication to Ranming”, *ibid.*, 41, p. 5r)

today.<sup>44</sup> According to the title of one of his collections, we can suppose that he named his studio *Dangzhi zhai* 蕩櫛齋 (Studio of the Comb and Washbasin).

The end of the Ming dynasty was characterised by a great interest on the part of the Jiangnan elite in the collection of art work and antiques as well as in the consumption of luxury goods.<sup>45</sup> Xu Cishu's friendship with Feng Mengzhen, his acquaintance with Tu Long 屠隆 (1542-1605),<sup>46</sup> and most likely with Gao Lian<sup>47</sup> 高濂 – the latter two authors of two of the most significant works dedicated to the “things” proper of the elite lifestyle – places him in the milieu of the literati most involved in this kind of matters. Of Xu Cishu's non-literary interests, we know only of his passion for collecting oddly shaped rocks (*qishi* 奇石)<sup>48</sup> and of that for tea. As the

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<sup>44</sup> “19th day [3, *Jichou*: 03-05-1589] ... I stopped by to visit Ranming in his studio. After a chat, I took my leave. [Yue] Zijin and [Jiang] Zigan were there as well. A few steps from Ranming's studio is the Ciyun temple, close to [the city] wall and in front of a pool...” (KXTJ, 49, p. 10r). The complex of the Ciyun temple dates back to 955 and was rebuilt after a fire in 1541 (*Wulin Fanzhi*, 1, pp. 23r-v). It was in the vicinity of the Eastern Garden (Dong Huayuan) on the street of the lamb market (*Hangzhou Fu Zhi*, 43, p. 4v). Today no traces of it remain. In QTXZ we find reference to two alleys called Dong Huayuan and Ciyun Si that were the fourth and the sixth side streets respectively on the east side of the street that ran from the Houchao gate north, that is the street of the lamb market (QTXZ, *Jijiang*, p. 7v). Today the street is called Jiangcheng Road. The house of Xu Cishu would have been found between this street at the old city wall, an area that today is crossed by the train lines that go to the nearby station.

<sup>45</sup> Clunas gives a detailed analysis of the value given to questions of taste in the sphere of intellectuals in the late Ming, highlighting the importance of the literature dedicated to this subject. Cf. Clunas 1991, pp. 141-73; 1996, pp. 80-91.

<sup>46</sup> DMB, pp. 1324-1327; MRSY, pp. 640-641. Tu Long (*zi*: Changqing 長卿), poet and playwright, was a great friend of Feng Mengzhen and obtained the *jinshi* degree in the same session of 1577. His writings include the *Kaopan Yushi* (Desultory Remarks on Furnishings the Scholar Abode), a work composed of fifteen sections that discussed the pastimes and objects that the literati loved to surround themselves with. Cf. *supra*, note 40, diary of 20-04-1591 and 11-04-1602. Wu Zhihe, probably not having taken into consideration these two episodes, states that an acquaintance between Xu Cishu and Tu Long was only hypothetical (Wu Zhihe, 1985, p. 143).

<sup>47</sup> MRSY, p. 392. Gao Lian, resident of Hangzhou, was in contact with Feng Mengzhen and was author of *Zunsheng Bajian* (Eight Discourses on the Art of Living), regarding luxury objects, pastimes, and Taoist practices. For a biographical profile and a survey of the *Zunsheng Bajian* and the *Kaopan Yushi* of Tu Long, Cf. Clunas, 1991, pp. 9-39.

<sup>48</sup> On the hobby of collecting rocks among the literati, Cf. Mowry 1997, pp. 19-36; Hu 1998, pp. 21-40.

preferred drink among intellectuals at the time, tea was present in every moment of their day. A veritable science developed around the drink resulting in a notable exchange of information and practical advice on the preparation and tasting of tea.<sup>49</sup> Tea appears in many references to meetings between Xu Cishu and Feng Mengzhen.<sup>50</sup> Xu could boast of a deep and recognised experience in this field and, in the postscript of the CS, affirms that he always had – apart from his love for literary composition – a strong passion for tea, to the point of always bringing with him “the brush-rest and the tea stove”.<sup>51</sup> In contrast, it seems that he generally abstained from consuming alcoholic drinks.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. Wu Zhihe 1996, pp. 105-09; 1990, pp. 77-114.

<sup>50</sup> “4th day [3rd moon, *Jichou* year: 18-04-1589] ... Jiang [Zigan] and Xu [Ranming] came to invite me to go plucking tea at Xixi (to the south west of Hangzhou) the day after tomorrow. Ranming lent me the poems of Yang Sheng’an (Yang Shen, 1488-1559) to fill in two missing pages in an old book that I have to give back to Shen Taigong. The new moon is beautiful.” (KXTJ, 49, p. 8v); “3rd Day [3, *Genyin*: 03-05-1590]. Rainy and cloudy in the morning, clear in the evening. Xu Ranming returned from Shandong and came with Zhang Zhongchu to see me. We sat and chatted and we tried Longjing tea prepared with water from the Hui spring (near Wuxi, Jiangsu)...” (*Ibid.*, 50, p. 9v); “10th day [3, *Xinmao*: 04-04-1591]. Cloudy with rain. Xu Ranming and Zhang Zhongchu came by. Zhongchu gave me a packet of Longjing tea that we tried with water from the Hui spring ...” (*Ibid.*, 51, p. 5r); “29th day [4, *Yiwei*: 06-06-1595]. Clear. I was free from work. I tried some first flush Jie tea (from Luojie, Changxing, Zhejiang) and really enjoyed it. There was Xu Ranming sharing it with me ...” (*Ibid.*, 53, p. 23r); “3rd day [7, *Yiwei*: 08-08-1595] Clear and hot; in the afternoon there was some thunder. Xu Ranming came by and we drank many pots of tea ...” (*Ibid.*, 53, p. 25r). “One time when I was jokingly discussing tea with Feng Kaizhi (Mengzhen), I defined the first cup as ‘delicate and lovely thirteen year-old’, the second as ‘the beautiful Biyu at the age of the broken melon’, while the third and those following were like a ‘overgrown shady green foliage’. Kaizhi was earnestly in agreement with me about this.” (CS, p. 13r. The three citations within the CS come respectively from the poems: *Zengbie* by Du Mu, in *Quan Tangshi*, 8, 7, 524, p. 1328; *Biyu Ge* by the Prince of Runan, in *Yuefu Shi Ji*, 45, p. 14r; *Tan Hua* by Du Mu, in *Quan Tangshi*, 8, 7, 524, p. 1330). Cf. also the reference to tasting spring water in the epitaph (*infra*, note 78).

<sup>51</sup> “I live in my studio at leisure and I cultivate the same great passion as Hong Jian (Cf. *infra*, note 96). Thus, as the Venerable Sir of the Mulberry and the Ramie, wherever I go I bring the brush-rest and tea stove with me. Among my friends who share the same interest, there are those who have encouraged me to write a treatise to bring to life my unique style and to donate it to the enthusiasts. For these reasons, I wanted to address the topic point by point ...” Cf. CS, p. 19r.

<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, we find some references to the consumption of alcohol: “When you drink wine, once you have served a number of cups, it would be appropriate to pause for a while. After that, one can offer some fruit and pastries, serving also a strong [tea] infusion” (CS, p. 14v-15r); Cf. also *supra*, note 40; *infra*, note 53.

## Works

Xu Cishu was certainly a prolific writer and his works include both prose and poetry. Like his father, he was well-versed in the poetic styles of *shi* and *ci*.<sup>53</sup> We know that he left behind two collections of writings under the titles *Xiaopin Shi Ji* 小品室集 (Collection of the Hall of Treatises) and *Dangzhi Zhai Ji* 簞櫛齋集 (Collection from the Studio of the Comb and Washbasin). In his preface to the CS, Xu Shiqi reports that in 1607 Huang Ruheng 黃汝亨 (1558-1626)<sup>54</sup> was preparing to publish these two collections, yet at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Li E tells us that they have already been lost.

The treatise on tea is the only one of his works that is preserved today. The text contains about 4,500 characters and consists of one *juan*, subdivided into 36 paragraphs (each with its own title) with a postscript by the author.<sup>55</sup> In this regard, the CS presents the most accurate subdivision among all the treatises on tea from the Ming dynasty. Xu Cishu addresses practically all aspects of the production and consumption of tea in a systematic way, and is the first to discuss some of the important innovations in tea-drinking that had developed in the course of the dynasty. Unlike what we find in other coeval treatises, that are often merely extensive collections of quotations from other sources, the contents of the CS seem to be based predominantly on the personal experiences that the author – born and raised in one of the most famous tea growing areas – gained in the course of his life and through his

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<sup>53</sup> Regarding this aspect, it is interesting to note the contents of a few of Feng's letters: "I was about to send a servant to go get your composition, but without warning you were kind enough to send it to me. While I read the poem, its luminosity radiated to the corners of the room. I hosted [a gathering] along the river. I invited the censor Shi to come drink wine tomorrow morning. I would like it if you would come as well" ("Missive for Xu Ranming", KXTJ, 34, 2v). "Yesterday two double orchid buds bloomed. Today I read your composition and I felt the way one does before a great wizard..." ("Reply to Ranming", KXTJ, 35, 9r).

<sup>54</sup> Huang Ruheng (*zi*: Zhenfu 貞父; 1558-1620), native of Hangzhou. He became *jinshi* in 1598 and served as advisor to the Administrative Commission of Jiangxi (Cf. MRSY, p. 651). He edited the publication of the KXTJ in 1616.

<sup>55</sup> In Wan Guoding's catalogue it is reported that it contains 4,700 characters (Wan, 1958, n. 58). Yao's preface is comprised of a total of 252 characters, while that of Xu Shiqi contains 343. The index of sections contains 86. The annotated catalogue of *Siku Quanshu* (from here on SKQS) incorrectly states that the text is divided into 39 paragraphs. Cf. *Siku Quanshu Zongmu Tiyao*, 116, pp. 21v-22r.

interaction with friends and experts. Among these people, we can first identify his father, whose *hao* Mingshan (Tea mountain) let us suppose that Cishu inherited his passion for tea from him, and then Feng Mengzhen and several people who were a part of his entourage: Yao Bodao, who in his preface to the CS claims to have passed to Xu Cishu all his knowledge of tea; Tu Long, author of *Chajian* 茶箋,<sup>56</sup> Xu Gui 徐桂,<sup>57</sup> mentioned in the KXTJ as a great connoisseur of tea; and, in all likelihood, also Tian Yiheng 田藝蘅, author of *Zhuquan Xiaopin* 煮泉小品 and an acquaintance of Feng Mengzhen.<sup>58</sup> Feng himself was also an esteemed connoisseur of the drink.<sup>59</sup> In his CS, Xu Cishu wanted to put into written form all his knowledge of the

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<sup>56</sup> The text is one of the sections of *Kaopan Yushi* (Cf. *supra*, note 46). It was subsequently published within the CSQJ under the title *Chashuo*. This edition differs from the *Chajian* in the absence of a few paragraphs and the insertion of one from another section of the *Kaopan Yushi*. Cf. Wan 1958, n. 51; Clunas 1991, pp. 29-30.

<sup>57</sup> Xu Gui (*zi*: Maowu 茂吳), native of Changzhou (Jiangsu) and resident of Yuhang (district to the east of Hangzhou); he obtained the *jinshi* degree in 1577, in the same session as Feng Mengzhen and Tu Long. We was described by Feng as one of the few qualified to appreciate the genuineness of Longjing tea and an expert in methods of conservation (Cf. KXTJ, 46, pp. 21r-22r). Biography in *Jingzhi Ju Shihua*, 15, pp. 21r-v; *Mingshi Jishi*, 12. Wu Zhihe maintains that the friendship between Xu Cishu and Xu Gui, as that with Tu Long, was likely but not demonstrable (Wu Zhihe 1985, p. 143). We find, nevertheless, the following reference in a letter from Feng Mengzhen to Yao Bodao and Yao Shaoxian: “I had just had a dream about the Gorge of the Shining Moon when I received the things you sent me: everything arrived, from the vase to the two baskets. There was, besides, your letter full of feelings for which I am extremely grateful. Yesterday I met Xu Maoru and Xu Ranming. I saw the poem that the archivist Luo wrote on a fan. He has all the vigour of the early Tang poets ...” (“Reply to Yao Bodao and Shudu”, KXTJ, 41, pp. 10v-11r): based on a reference in his diary, it is possible that the letter was written on the day 11-4-1590 (*Ibid.*, 50, pp. 7v-8r).

<sup>58</sup> DMB, p. 1287-88; MRSY, p. 108. Tian Yiheng (*zi*: Ziyi 子藝), native of Hangzhou. The DMB reports the dates 1524-1574?, yet in Feng’s diary we find references to meetings with Tian in 1590 (KXTJ, 50, pp. 7r-v). Tian’s text, dated 1554, is entirely dedicated to water used for the preparation of tea (Cf. Wan 1958, n. 43).

<sup>59</sup> “There was a time when the Chancellor Feng Kaizhi and the Reviewer Xu Maowu knew all the secrets of the preparation of tea. They would often meet up at the West Lake with two or three prominent scholars to drink tea” (*Zhuanqing Ji, shang*, p. 92r). Two other friends of Xu Cishu’s who were part of Feng’s entourage are named (unfortunately reporting only their *zi*) in the KXTJ as tea experts: Yue Zijin 樂子晉 and Jiang Zigan 薑子幹 (Cf. KXTJ, 48, p. 22r; 49, p. 8v. Cf. also *supra*, note 39, 40, 42, 44, 50). Despite the fact that there is no proof of an acquaintance with Xu Cishu and Feng Mengzhen, it should be noted that Chen Shi 陳師, author of the *Chakao* (1593), was also active in Hangzhou at this time: Cf. Wan 1958, n. 53; MRSY, p. 589.

subject. The resulting text was completed in 1597, when Cishu showed it to his friend Xu Shiqi, a year after their holiday in Longjing.

The first edition, which has been lost, was edited by Xu Shiqi in 1607. A few years later, the text was republished in CSQJ and then later within other *collectanea*.<sup>60</sup> After more than a century, Li E bestowed upon the CS one of the highest compliments, stating that “it arrives to seize the essence of tea and is complementary to Lu Yu’s *Chajing*.”<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, the CS did not manage to escape the strong discrimination that many Ming period writings faced in the following dynasty. The compilers of *Siku Quanshu Zongmu Tiyao*, while recognising the CS to be extremely accurate in its treatment of the methods of harvesting, conserving, and preparing tea, maintained that upon close examination there were numerous inaccuracies and that the author made an error in the identification of an ancient spring.<sup>62</sup> Today, the text is considered one of the most important and representative texts on tea of the Ming period.

The dates of Xu’s death and of the composition of the CS have been subjects of debate following arguments put forward by Nakamura Takashi and Nunome Chofu. In a brief introduction to his Japanese translation of the CS within the *Chūgoku no Chasho* of 1976, Nakamura cites the two prefaces to the treatise as the only sources available on the life of the author, and based solely on his own interpretation of a passage in Xu Shiqi’s preface, sets the

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<sup>60</sup> The oldest editions available are that in the CSQJ (1613) with the title *Chashu*, and that in the BYTMJ (1620) with the title *Xu Ranming Xiansheng Chashu*. The version in the CSQJ is without the preface by Xu Shiqi, but is more reliable with regards to the text. The later editions are found within the following *congshu* (Cf. Wan 1958, n. 58): *Jujia Bibei*, *Xinshang Bian*, *Guang Baichuan Xuehai*, *Xu Shuofu* (only the first ten paragraphs), *Gujin Tushu Jicheng* (incomplete), *Shuobu Congshu*, *Congshu Jicheng*. For a comparison of the different editions of the text Cf. Ruan 1999, pp. 233-45.

<sup>61</sup> *Dongcheng Zaji*, pp. 20v-21r. Regarding Lu Yu Cf. *infra* note 96.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *Siku Quanshu Zongmu Tiyao*, 116, pp. 21v-22r. Xu Cishu is accused of confusing the well found on top of Mount Jinshan (in the city of Zhenjiang, Jiangsu) with the ancient spring of Zhongling. Actually, the author of CS expresses his correct perplexity about the identification of the well with the famous ancient spring, believing it to have disappeared as a result of changes in the terrain. Furthermore, we must remember the incorrectness of the compilers about the number of chapters of CS (Cf. *supra*, note 55). On the Zhongling spring (Nanling) Cf. Yao 1957, pp. 30-31; Ceresa 1993<sup>a</sup>, pp. 45-53.

composition of the CS around 1602.<sup>63</sup> Wu Zhihe – in an article dedicated to the CS printed for the first time in 1980 – wonders how “an able Japanese researcher” in *Chūgoku no Chasho* could cite the two prefaces to the treatise as the only sources on the biography of Xu Cishu, without even mentioning his epitaph.<sup>64</sup>

In his introductory paper to the CSQJ of 1987, Nunome Chofu agrees with the dating of the CS proposed by Nakamura. At the beginning of his paper he states the dates of Xu Cishu’s birth and death as indicated in the MRSY and the fact that they were obtained from Feng Mengzhen’s epitaph (which indicates a date of death of 1605). However, on the basis of his reading of Xu Shiqi’s preface, he places the death of Xu Cishu to around 1606, or a year after the death of Feng Mengzhen, the author of his epitaph.<sup>65</sup> A few years later, Nunome reaffirmed his position in a speech dedicated to the CS and its author that he presented at the International Symposium on Tea Culture held in Hangzhou in 1990.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Contrary to all the Chinese studies, Nakamura Takashi translates the expression “*Si ci jing nian*” (嗣此經年) – regarding the trip to Longjing – as “several years later” (それから數年して). Based on this interpretation, he places the composition of the CS around the 30<sup>th</sup> year of the Wanli reign (1602). Cf. Nunome and Nakamura 1976, pp. 328, 332.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Wu Zhihe 1985, p. 411.

<sup>65</sup> Nunome Chofu interprets Xu Shiqi’s phrase “*Yue shinian er Ranming xiuwen dixia*” (越十年而然明修文地下) as “ten years passed then Ranming departed to continue his studies in the afterlife”, counting ten years from the trip to Longjing in 1596 and attributing a strict temporal sequence value to the particle *er*. (Cf. Nunome 1987, vol. 1, p. 50). Nevertheless, from the preface of Xu Shiqi, it seems more logical to count the ten years from 1597, the year that he saw the CS, to 1607, when Xu Cishu appeared to him in a dream. With this meaning, the phrase could be translated as “ten years passed and [in the meantime] Ranming departed to continue his studies in the afterlife”. Wang He, in a paper dedicated entirely to the topic, points out that the Japanese study does not take into consideration the epitaph in which the precise date of death is recorded and does not even note the fact that the author of the epitaph died in 1605 (Cf. Wang 1999, p. 825).

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Nunome 1990, p. 175.



### Tomb inscription for Xu Cishu Ranming

From the time I took my current consort<sup>67</sup> in the period between the reigns of Longqing and Wanli,<sup>68</sup> I settled down with her family outside of Wulin.<sup>69</sup> [Her] father, Wang Zhangting,<sup>70</sup> worked under the principality of Chu,<sup>71</sup> and gained the admiration of the local lord for his knowledge of literature and history. He later retired to dedicate himself to his studies for his own enjoyment. He was in contact with many illustrious people. Having asked him, during a period of repose, which of the literati and officials of Wulin were qualified to study and dedicate themselves to ancient writings, he said: “There were two gentlemen named Xu. One was the honorable Regional Earl<sup>72</sup> Mingshan (Xu Yingyuan) and the other was the honorable Reviewer<sup>73</sup> Shiwu (Xu Yingheng). They are no longer among us today, but their collections of writings remain. Pingyu, the son of the Reviewer, is a friend of mine; furthermore, I know that one of the younger sons of Mingshan is crippled but is able in letters.”

At the time, Pingyu was in the habit of visiting often the Shen,<sup>74</sup> and it was in that way that I met him a few times: he overflowed with a knowledge almost unfathomable, but wrote few things. Shortly after, he passed away.

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<sup>67</sup> *Ruren* 孺人. Title conferred upon mothers and wives of officials of the seventh level (Hucker, 1985, n. 3070).

<sup>68</sup> Longqing (1567-1572), Wanli (1573-1619). Feng Mengzhen joined his wife's family following the death of his own parents. Cf. epitaph in *Muzhai Chuxue Ji*, 51, p. 1299.

<sup>69</sup> The other name of the city of Hangzhou.

<sup>70</sup> 王樟亭. Presumably his wife's father. No other information is available about him.

<sup>71</sup> The principality was founded in 1381 for Zhu Zhen 朱楨 (1364-1424), the sixth son of the founder of the dynasty, in the city of Wuchang, present day Wuhan (Hubei). The prince to whom the text refers is most probably Zhu Yingxian 朱英翊 (assumed the title in 1551 and died in 1571) or his successor Zhu Huakui 朱華奎 (died in 1643) (Cf. *Mingshi*, 101, pp. 2607-08; *Ibid.*, 106, pp. 3570-72).

<sup>72</sup> *Fangbo* 方伯. During the Ming was an unofficial reference to Provincial Administration Commissioner (Hucker 1985, n. 1911).

<sup>73</sup> *Bibu* 比部. Reference to personnel in the Bureaus of the Ministry of Justice (Hucker 1985, n. 4582).

<sup>74</sup> It is not possible to establish to whom this refers.

Only much later did I manage to make Ranming's acquaintance, and it was due to him that I met all the famous scholars of Wulin, such as Huang Zhenfu, Wu Bolin,<sup>75</sup> and Zhang Zhongchu.<sup>76</sup>

I entered into civil service over thirty years ago. Half way through that period of time, I retired. Eight years out of ten, I lived in Wulin and I passed six or seven of them happily in the company of Ranming.<sup>77</sup> It was almost two or three years that I spent with him, passing entire days tasting spring water<sup>78</sup> and chatting on the "boat of the Five Lakes"<sup>79</sup>

Ranming was not shrewd in the management of his wealth; he loved to entertain guests and he often had a full house. He couldn't hold his drink and as soon as he touched a drop his face turned purple and he would have to lie down. Despite this, he was always bursting with an unstoppable enthusiasm and he always stayed up till dawn, and when all the other drunk guests had already collapsed in exhaustion, he was still lively and full of vigour.

When he managed to get his hands on some money, he spent it immediately. Because of the frequent economic difficulties that his family faced, he was forced to travel to distant regions, such as Min, Chu, Yan, and Qi,<sup>80</sup> taking one or two trips per year. He usually returned with tens and hundreds of gold ingots that he would newly exhaust in the space of a few months, finding himself once again poor, but content. The last time he made a

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<sup>75</sup> Wu Zhijing 吳之鯨 (*zi*: Bolin 伯霖). Native of Hangzhou. Active in the period of the Wanli reign, author of *Wulin Fanzhi*, monograph dedicated to the Buddhist temples and sanctuaries of his native city. Cf. Preface of *Wulin Fanzhi*, pp. 1r-2v.

<sup>76</sup> 張仲初. It is not possible to establish to whom this refers.

<sup>77</sup> It would be possible to calculate the exact time if not for the lack of attention to figures on the part of the author: the thirty years of which he speaks – from 1577 when Feng graduated and entered into the academy in Hanlin, to the end of 1604 when the obituary note was written – are in reality twenty-seven.

<sup>78</sup> Spring water is an indispensable element in the preparation of the drink, and the terms "tasting water" and "preparing tea" are often found together (Cf. KXTJ, 50, p. 9v; 55, p. 8r). The expression within the epitaph can be considered a metonymy used as a reference to the consumption of tea.

<sup>79</sup> The term "five lakes" (*wuhu* 五湖) indicated the lake of Tai and/or the other principal lakes in the Jiangnan area. Probably it was the name of the boat in which Feng used to go on his excursions.

<sup>80</sup> Respectively indicating the provinces of Fujian, Hubei, Hebei, and Shandong.

trip up north under the orders of some high-ranking person. Passing by Zuili,<sup>81</sup> my hometown, he fell into some water; when he had been rescued, he returned and from that time he never left again. He expired in his own home on the fifteenth day of the ninth moon of the *jiachen* year in the reign of Wanli (October 7, 1604), at the age of only fifty-five years.<sup>82</sup>

His literary production was very rich: his *shi* poems are excellent and his prose compositions and *ci* poems are even more excellent. The genuineness of his nature and the breadth of his interests were not limited to only literary compositions.

His proper name was Ciyu,<sup>83</sup> while his *zi* was Ranming. He had a great passion for Zhuang Zhou, to the point that he adopted the nickname Nanhua.<sup>84</sup> He was crazy about stones like Mi [Fu]<sup>85</sup> and, though finding himself in extreme poverty, he had a collection of tens of strangely shaped rocks that he was unwilling to part with, even for one hundred ingots of gold. It is easy to understand the kind of person that he was.

The ancestors of the Xu's descended from Siyue.<sup>86</sup> Six generations before Ranming, they moved [to Hangzhou], leaving Dong'an, in the Yan region.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> To the south west of the city of Jiaxing (Zhejiang).

<sup>82</sup> In the text: 56 *sui*. From this we can derive Xu Cishu's year of birth: 1549.

<sup>83</sup> In his proper name, the character *yu* 紆 is found in place of *shu* 舒.

<sup>84</sup> The taoist thinker Zhuang Zi. Cf. *supra*, note 37.

<sup>85</sup> Mi Fu (1051-1107), one of the most important calligraphers and painters of the Song period, great lover of rocks. For his biography, Cf. Lothar Ledderose in Franke, 1976, pp. 116-127.

<sup>86</sup> Siyue 四嶽 (Four Summits) indicated the minister in charge of the four principle mountains of the empire, situated at cardinal points, in the period of the sovereigns Yao and Shun, or the four officials of any single mountain (*Shujing*. I, 11; II, I, 8 in Legge, Vol. III, pp. 24-25, 35-37). According to the *Tongzhi* (26, p. 451), the last name of Xu is derived from the fief conferred at the beginning of the Zhou dynasty to a baron family descended from Siyue, that was part of the Jiang clan and descended from the emperor Yandi (Shennong). Cf. also *Zuozhuan*, I, ix, 3 in Legge, Vol. IV, pp. 30-34. The first capital of Xu was located to the east of current day Xuchang (Henan). The *Wanxing Tongpu* reports the place of origin of the Xu clan as Gaoyang, a name that, among different places, belonged to an old district to the south west of present day Qixian county (Henan). Cf. *Wanxing Tongpu*, 76, p. 1r.

<sup>87</sup> The district of Dong'an in the Ming era corresponded to the southern part of the current day prefect of Longfang (Hebei), to the south-east of Beijing.

Ranming had three brothers. His mother was the consort<sup>88</sup> Bao, who he lost when he was three years old.<sup>89</sup> Mistress<sup>90</sup> Zhang took her place. Ranming was, by nature, a dutiful son and a friendly person. From when he was little, he received Mistress Zhang's instructions and served her in every one of her requests. The stepmother had two other sons, but loved Ranming more than her own first-born. Ranming also served his older brother very conscientiously: he consulted him about every question and stayed near him all day long without ever showing indolence. He was very affectionate towards his younger brothers, so that people could not imagine that they were born of two different mothers.

With the death of Ranming, the glory of the Xu family has practically disappeared. There remains only Lingci, Administrative Aide<sup>91</sup> in Yanzhou.<sup>92</sup> Lingci, with whom I am in good relations, is the second-born of the honorable Shiwu, the younger brother of Pingyu. For an illustrious family it is a difficult thing to have worthy descendants. After the death of Ranming, I not only mourn a good friend, but I commiserate above all with the Xu family.

Ranming took a wife, née Ping, who died thirty years before him and gave him a son, Zhaonan, a student in the district.<sup>93</sup>

The epigraph recites:

Two are the difficult enterprises carried out by the Xu family: to give birth to a Regional Earl and a Reviewer. Their descendants are all virtuous, like the feathers of the phoenix and the quills of the kingfisher.<sup>94</sup> How virtuous Ranming was! Pure in his intentions and noble in his actions. Poor and careless of his goods, he often had a house full of guests. He loved to

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<sup>88</sup> 宜人 *Yiren*: Lady of Suitability (Hucker 1985, n. 2961). Title conferred in the Ming period upon the wives of rank 5 officials.

<sup>89</sup> 4 *sui* in the text.

<sup>90</sup> 夫人 *Furen*. Generic title used to indicate a consort (Hucker 1985, n. 2066).

<sup>91</sup> Hucker 1985, n. 4623.

<sup>92</sup> To the west of Qufu, (Shandong). In the Ming period it was the centre of the namesake prefecture that contained the southern part of the province.

<sup>93</sup> The wife would have died around 1574, when Xu Cishu was only 25.

<sup>94</sup> *Fengmao, cuiyu* 鳳毛翠羽. The first expression indicates the worthy son of a high official, the second something extremely rare.

travel in his later years, for enjoyment and delight. He suffered much in his life, but his fame is known by everyone. I composed this epitaph in verses: might paper and ink be my incense for him!<sup>95</sup>

### Preface to Ranming's Treatise on Tea

In the classification of teas, Lu Yu<sup>96</sup> placed that product from my hometown Guzhu<sup>97</sup> first, and in particular esteemed above any other that of the Gorge of the Shining Moon.<sup>98</sup> I have a small area of cultivation in the gorge from which each year I would collect tea that I personally select and judge. I do this ever since I was a child and now that I have white hair, I have acquired a deep understanding of the subject.

The honourable Xu Ranming of Wulin was one of my dearest friends and he also had a great passion for tea. Every year, when the tea season arrived, he would inevitably stop by my house to go and draw water from the Jinsha and Yudou springs,<sup>99</sup> after which we tasted them with extreme care to

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<sup>95</sup> That is, the tribute usually offered to the deceased.

<sup>96</sup> Lu Yu 陸羽 (*zi*: Hongjian 鴻漸, *hao*: Sangzhu Weng 桑苧翁; 733-804), scholar and poet. Lu Yu is the author of *Chajing* (Canon on Tea; 760 ca), the first work entirely dedicated to tea that addressed all aspects of the drink, from the productions and the instruments, to the preparation and consumption; it also contained a collection of citations on the drink preceding the Tang period. Later, this text became the model to reference for all the papers written on the topic and the figure of Lu Yu was raised to the status of the "God of Tea" (Cf. Ceresa 1991, pp. 9-15).

<sup>97</sup> Mountain to the north of the district of Changxing, prefect of Huzhou (Zhejiang). In the list of the areas of production contained in the *Chajing*, Lu Yu considered the tea of Huzhou the best among the provinces of Zhexi, affirming that "the product in the valley of Mount Guzhu in the district of Changcheng (Changxiang) is equal to that of Xiazhou and Guangzhou", which in turn were considered the best of the respective provinces (Cf. *Chajing*, 3, p. 25v). Furthermore, it should be noted that Lu Yu is attributed with the authorship of a work entitled *Guzhu Shan Ji* (Memories of Mount Guzhu), of which remain only a few fragments (Cf. Ceresa, 1993<sup>b</sup>, p. 203). From 770 in Guzhu the first cultivation was created for the tea to send in tribute to the court (Cf. Xie 1993, p. 132).

<sup>98</sup> Mingyue Xia. A small gorge to the north west of Mount Guzhu. In *Tianzhong Ji* by Chen Yaowen (1569) it is reported: "The Gorge of the Shining Moon is on the side of Guzhu. Between the steep cliffs of two mountains that face each other, runs a large creek with rocks tumbling through it. In this place grows tea of excellent quality." (*Tianzhong Ji*, 44; p. 134).

<sup>99</sup> The former is found at the base of Mount Guzhu, the present-day location of the latter is unknown.

examine and evaluate the quality. I told him all of the secrets that I have perfected through the practice and experiments compiled in the course of my life that I kept to myself. Consequently, Ranming has a perfect understanding of the principles of tea. Once he returned home, he composed his *Treatise on Tea*, which consisted of a single *juan*. I never knew about it.

Ranming had been gone for three years, and every time I held a cup of tea in my hands I would have the same feeling that Ya [had for] Qi,<sup>100</sup> when in the spring of the year *dingwei* (1607) Xu Caifu came to see me, bringing with him Ranming's *Treatise on Tea* to show to me and to tell me about a dream he had. In life, Ranming was quite a prolific writer, but he wanted entrust his friend with this refined subject only. Could it not be for the fact that his soul is still attached to it that he wants his treatise connected to the *Canon of Tea* in order to avoid oblivion?<sup>101</sup> In the past, the people of Gong<sup>102</sup> made statues of Hongjian (Lu Yu) in ceramic and all types that did business in tea offered sacrifices to the statues with aspersions. Similarly, I wanted to offer a description of Ranming before the text, so that whoever reads the book may also have a portrait of its exceptional author.

Written in the Gorge of the Shining Moon, by the friend Yao Shaoxian of Wuxing,<sup>103</sup> in the spring of the year *dingwei* in the Wanli reign.

### Introductory Note to the Treatise on Tea

My fellow townsman Xu Ranming has dominated the world of letters for a long time. In the year *bingshan* (1596), I went with him to visit

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<sup>100</sup> Reference to the story of friendship between the *qin* player (a lute with seven strings) named Bo Ya 伯牙 and Zhong Ziqi 钟子期. Zhong Ziqi understood perfectly how to interpret every mood of the soul that Bo Ya expressed through his music. When Ziqi died, Bo Ya cut the strings on his instrument and never played again, claiming that there was no one left in the world who was able to appreciate his music. (Cf. *Lüshi Chunqiu*, 14, 2; p. 102). The understanding between the two became a model for friendship in China.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. *supra*, note 96.

<sup>102</sup> In *Tangguo Shibu* of the Tang era it is written: "Many sculptors in the Gong district make sculptures of clay called Lu Hongjian; if you acquires about ten utensils for tea, you can have a [statue of] Hongjian. When the tea business is not going well, the merchants sprinkle tea on the statue." Cf. *Tangguo Shibu*, 2, 3v. After 1991, the district of Gong (Henan) assumed the name of the city of Gongyi.

<sup>103</sup> The other name of the prefect of Huzhou.

Longhong<sup>104</sup> where we resided for ten days in the temple dormitory. We chatted cheerfully about old times while we indulged in drinking tea and tasting spring water, and the monks helped us, procuring tea picked in the spring. At times, the hiss of the water boiling on the bamboo stove seemed to echo the wind whispering through the pines on the deserted mountain: it was all we needed to be happy.

Ranming said, sighing: “If Ruan Sizong<sup>105</sup> wanted to become an infantry commandant<sup>106</sup> because in that corps’ pantry were kept three hundred *hu* of wine,<sup>107</sup> so should I shave my head and become a monk of Longhong.”

A year later,<sup>108</sup> Ranming let me see the *Treatise on Tea* that he had written. I only had to read it once to feel that my mouth was filled with a fragrance that made me think I had returned to Longhong to drink tea and taste water. I said to Ranming: “The *Canon on Tea* of Hongjian has been without equal since ancient times. This treatise<sup>109</sup> may be considered a joyous companion to Hongjian; as far as the literary style, it can be placed between the Han and Wei dynasties,<sup>110</sup> to which Hongjian would show respect.”<sup>111</sup>

Ranming replied: “I just wanted to note my extravagant and grand passion, desiring rather to be a worthy subject<sup>112</sup> of Hongjian.”

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<sup>104</sup> Longhong or Longjing, located in the hills of Hangzhou on Mount Fenghuang, a few kilometres west of the West Lake, where a famous fresh water spring flows. Since the epoch of the Five Dynasties there was located a Buddhist Monastery, that today has been transformed into a tea house. The area is renowned for the production of Longjing Tea.

<sup>105</sup> Ruan Ji 阮籍 (*zi*: Sizong 嗣宗; 210-263), poet and scholar, one of the seven sages of the Bamboo Forest. The episode about the enlistment in the infantry is contained in Ruan Ji’s biography in the Dynastic Histories of the Jin (*Jinshu*, 49).

<sup>106</sup> Xiaowei 校尉. Hucker 1985, n. 2456.

<sup>107</sup> In the Jin epoch, one *hu* 斛 corresponded to ca. 20 l. The quantity of wine indicated corresponds to over 60 hl.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. *supra*, note 63.

<sup>109</sup> In the text, *liu* 流: Wang He interprets it as [*Cha*] *shu* 疏. Cf. Wang 1999, p. 825.

<sup>110</sup> During the Han (206 a.C.-220 d.C.) and Wei (220-265 d.C.) Dynasties the principal genres of prose writing took on a definite form.

<sup>111</sup> Literally “to face North,” the position of a subject with respect to the sovereign or of the pupil to the master.

<sup>112</sup> In the text the *character jiang* 匠 is amended with *chen* 臣.

Ten years passed and [in the meantime] Ranming departed to continue his studies in the afterlife.<sup>113</sup> I was saddened by the thought that his writings could be lost, and I could not succeed in dismissing the feeling that he and his lute had both disappeared.<sup>114</sup>

One night I dreamed of Ranming who said to me: “I would like someone to waste some wood to publish the *Treatise on Tea*, and I have come to ask you to do it.” I woke with a start and thought back on the days passed at Longhong drinking tea and tasting water. Those moments had disappeared forever, and impressed in my memory was the image of his tomb;<sup>115</sup> my tears inundated the bed and pillow.

The literary production of Ranming was very rich and the *Treatise on Tea* is no more than a single slice of meat taken from nine cauldrons.<sup>116</sup> Why, then, did he want to appear to me in a dream just for this? Could it not be that what he loved in life his soul is still concerned with, that, considering that I shared his tastes, he wanted to come and entrust this to me from the reign of the nine capitals?<sup>117</sup> For this reason I wanted to publish the book and thank Ranming. His works include *Collection from the Hall of the Treatises* and the *Collection from the Studio of the Comb and Washbasin*, that his friend Huang Zhenfu, together with others, is preparing for publication.

Written by his fellow townsman Xu Shiqi, Caifu, in the summer of the year *dingwei*.

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<sup>113</sup> Cf. *supra*, note 65.

<sup>114</sup> *Ren qin ju wang* 人琴俱亡. The expression is found in an episode regarding Wang Weizhi 王微之 (?-388), the son of Wang Xizhi, the notable calligrapher of the Jin epoch. After the death of his brother Xianzhi (zi: Zijing), who loved to play the *qin*, Weizhi took his brother's instrument, by now out of tune, and went to play it on his tomb. He gave up immediately and said, sighing: “Alas! Zijing, you have both left, you and your *qin*”. (Cf. *Jinshu*, 80).

<sup>115</sup> In the text, *Shanyang* 山陽, the southern side of the hill, where tombs were usually located.

<sup>116</sup> *Jiu ding yi luan* 九鼎一鑊. The expression indicates a small sample, a small part of Xu Cishu's literary production.

<sup>117</sup> *Jiujing* 九京. The terms “nine capitals” or “nine springs” are employed to indicate the realm of the dead.



## Conclusion

Through an analysis of the biographic sources of Xu Cishu, it is possible to construct an image of his life, filling in an omission common to all the major biographic indexes of the Ming epoch and to the studies on the history of tea. Furthermore, information regarding other minor figures active in Hangzhou at the end of the sixteenth century can be brought to light. Identifying the circle of friends and scholars with whom Xu Cishu was in contact (among whom a few experts on tea stand out, such as Feng Mengzhen, Tu Long and Xu Gui), we find important information on the underground culture of the CS and on its genesis. An understanding the origins of the CS, helps us to comprehend and appreciate its contents, as well as place it among the writings of the period.

In particular, Feng Mengzhen's diary illustrates the omnipresence of tea in the daily life of scholars at the time and the weight of the exchange of information on it. As acutely pointed out by Craig Clunas, the consumption of luxury goods and engagement in refined pastimes assumed a key position in the socio-economic dynamics that emerged in the late Ming period. Even tea and the specific way it was consumed became distinctive elements of a certain class. Furthermore, at the end of the sixteenth century, in contrast to what occurred in the preceding and following periods, we find the literati of Jingnan interested not only in experimentation in devices and techniques for the consumption of tea, but also directly involved in all the phases of its collection and production. In light of the extreme importance attributed to tea in Xu Cishu's time, it is not strange to learn that the CS was the first and only of his works to be published.

This largely biographical study makes evident the importance of a reevaluation of the enormous body of texts dedicated to tea in all its aspects, for their value as sources on daily life and material culture in the Ming period. Until now, all the treatises on this drink, as well as books written on other material goods, have been considered almost a subproduct of official literature, merely the fruits of literati pastimes. In this attitude, we can perceive the strong discrimination that many late Ming writings endured in the course of the compilation of the SKQS during the following dynasty, and that, in many ways, has shaped the general approach to the study of Chinese literary heritage.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- BYTMJ: *Baoyan Tang Miji*  
CS: *Chashu*  
CSQJ: *Chashu Quanji*  
DMB: Goodrich and Fang. *Dictionary of Ming Biography*  
ECCP: Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*  
KXTJ: *Kuaixue Tang Ji*  
MDZJCK: Zhou Junfu, *Mingdai Zhuanji Congkan*  
MRSY: Chang Bide, *Mingren Zhuanji Ziliao Suoyin*  
QTXZ: *Qiantang Xian Zhi*  
SKQS: *Siku Quanshu*  
WLZGCB: *Wulin Zhanggu Congbian*

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