

Chou Tun-I Gazing Out Over Lotus, g203  
Liu Chun  
c. 1500  
#98.217



*Introduction*

In this study I will attempt to compare and contrast the academic style with the literati style of painting in China. Two paintings will be discussed: this one and *Scholar in Landscape* by Liu Yuan-ch'i. In addition, as an appendix, I've included a summary of the dynasties and a short discussion of the three great philosophies of China.

*Gallery Label*

Liu Chun was a court painter in the early Ming "Academy" during the reign of the Hung-

chih emperor (1488-1505). Best known as a Taoist figure painter, he followed the style of Yen Hui (14th century), a figural specialist of the early Yuan period. Landscapes by Liu Chun are relatively rare but the true subject of this large riverside scene is the famous Sung philosopher Chou Tun-i (1017-1073), who is shown staring out the open window of this waterside retreat across a bed of lotus, his concentration broken by the melancholy flute playing of a solitary fisherman.

Much "academic" and **Che school** painting of the early Ming drew inspiration from the earlier **Ma-Hsia** landscape tradition of the Southern Song period (1127-1279). The dramatic foreground rocks, broad brushstrokes, and calligraphic landscape elements shown here recall the earlier style. The large scale of the work suggests that it is a *ta-chung-t'ang* (great central hall) painting reserved for one of the large public rooms of a palace or aristocratic household. Working for the court would have brought the artist into contact with wealthy patrons who required these larger paintings.

Medium: Painting- hanging scroll/ Ink and colors on paper

Creation place: Asia, China

Style: Ming dynasty

Inscriptions: Stamps; Inscriptions; Tag artist's seals, in red, and inscriptions, in black, on tree root below building and at upper left corner; lender's tag, on hanging cord

Physical Description: fisherman riding on a boat and playing a flute at lower right corner; three people inside a building just below center at left edge; mountains in background

### *Che School*

Founded by Tai Chin (1388 – 1462), the Che School included professional painters of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries in the province of Chekiang. These painters were praised in their time, but lost favor in the Ming Dynasty. For years they have been neglected in favor of the scholar painters (literati) of the 'Southern' school. More recently they are again gaining interest.

### *Ma-Hsia landscape tradition*

The Ma-Hsia tradition was created by a group of landscape artists who followed the style of two great painters of the Southern Song academy of the late 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, Ma Yuan and Hsia Gui. Their landscapes emphasized a feeling of limitless space, a vast atmospheric void out of which a few elements, such as mountain peaks and twisted trees, emerge with subdued drama.

### *Chou Tun-i*

Chou Tun-i was a Chinese Neo-Confucian philosopher (1017 – 1073) and cosmologist born in present-day Yongzhou during the Song Dynasty. He conceptualized the Neo-Confucian cosmology of the day, explaining the relationship between human conduct and universal forces. He emphasized that humans can master their *qi* ("vital life energy") in order to be in accord with nature. A literati, he held various high level posts within the government.



Chun Tun-i

*Landscape Paintings*

Called shanshui (pronounced shahn-shooay), the characters mean mountain and water. When juxtaposed the characters of this word are understood to mean, “landscape.” In Chinese paintings prior to the eighth century, natural elements such as trees, hills, and rocks were relatively small in scale and arranged to create a stage-like setting for narrative scenes. By the tenth century, however, landscapes had become the dominant pictorial subject, imbued with complex philosophical ideas, including the Confucian concepts of natural order.

*Academic Style*

This painting is in the academic style (also sometimes called court or professional style). Throughout Chinese history the imperial court established artistic taste and trends. In the Song Dynasty an ‘imperial painting academy’ was established which formalized the conventions of art and provided status to artists. The painters of the academic style were not highly educated, high-level government workers like the literati. They were painters only, with a career creating artistic works for the court and the Chinese upper class.

Academic painting tended to be more conservative, more decorative, and had an emphasis on technical skill than the literati style. They are, according to Bob Jacobson,

brighter and more colorful. There make use of more fine lines. They are generally easier to understand.

### *Literati Style*

This style of painting can be contrasted with that of the literati. The literati were government officials who were also scholars, painters, calligraphers, and musicians. Exams for civil service begun in the Tang Dynasty (or even before) and became very strong in the Song Dynasty. As the exams were stringent, the literati were highly accomplished and intelligent government workers. These scholar-gentlemen fully emerged as an elite class in China during the Song dynasty (960 – 1279). Their rigorous classical education prepared them for careers in government service, and their official positions often enabled them to accumulate land and wealth. In the Yuan Dynasty government employment became disagreeable and hard to obtain. Literati's migrated south.

An emphasis on nature formed the foundation of the artistic preferences of the literati. In keeping with Confucian ethics, a proper gentleman should abhor ostentation and espouse a lifestyle based on a close affinity with nature and the qualities of simplicity and elegance. The literati aesthetic also embodied an appreciation of the past, often regarding it as an ideal golden age.

The literati studied the writings of Confucius which stressed family relationships and service to state. They often viewed the hierarchy and order of the natural world as metaphor of a well-regulated government.

Literati painters withdrew from court life and immersed themselves in nature. They would go on outings into the mountains on trips lasting, possibly, 30 days. Their paintings were based strongly on Daoism (see below) where nature is the teacher. They painted for themselves and their family and friends. Their paintings were not often sold, and therefore were not tainted by money. Personal expression was more important than professional skill. Their paintings emphasized expressive power and were more abstract (a rock is not expressive, the brush strokes that add up to a rock are expressive). The result was a feeling more like calligraphy. Landscapes were done not to depict nature realistically, but were used to convey personal meaning. The human figures are often small, dwarfed by nature. The colors were more subtle, and were often only black and white in ink. The brushwork is more unassuming, more free.

Both academic and literati paintings share a basis on nature. They are full of trees, water, vertical scenes, mountains, little people, and scholars contemplating nature. Both look back to honor earlier master painters.

### *Literati painting:*



Scholar in Landscape by Liu Yuan-ch'i, 1601  
Accession number: 2002.48.3  
on view in G203  
(pronounced lee-yo yoo-ahn-chee)

Gallery label

Liu Yuan-ch'i was a pupil of Ch'ien Ku (1508-78) who, in turn, was a direct disciple of Wen Cheng-ming (1420-1559), one of the four great masters of the Wu School. Not surprisingly, this painting accords well with sixteenth-century Suchou literati values and ultimately the late style of Wen Cheng-ming.

This large scroll, intended for a main hall (*ta chung-t'ang*), is one of Liu's earliest and most ambitious paintings. The majority of his output was on a small, intimate scale, and this monumental scroll, nearly eleven feet high, appears to have been his masterwork. A lone scholar is shown crossing a small bridge in the bottom foreground. He gazes up past a rustic retreat toward a pavilion situated high on a rocky promontory in front of a cascading waterfall. In spite of the densely patterned surface, the composition is clearly

articulated and the brushwork generally relaxed and easy. The basic theme, flattened and somewhat mannered trees, pictorial structure, and dotted textures are all reminiscent of the ink landscapes produced by Wen Cheng-ming during the last decades of his career.

Medium: painting-hanging scroll/ Ink on paper

Creation place: Asia, China

Style: Ming dynasty

Literati painters were not professional, but were self-taught. They studied the great master painters of the past for inspiration and emulated techniques and brush strokes. The theme, composition and dot-textured brushwork of this painting are reminiscent of Wen Cheng-ming, a great master of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Like the art of calligraphy, the brushes used by the literati painters were soft and flexible. Great skill was required to vary the thickness of line, darkness of tone, and variety of stroke by the pressure applied to brush on the paper or silk. This painting is considered by many to be Yuan-ch's's masterpiece.

In the Qing dynasty, Literati painting was established as the dominant tradition and became orthodox.

*Questions:*

You can start with Chou Tun-I Gazing Out Over Lotus and then compare it to Scholar in a Landscape.

As you can see, these are very tall paintings, nearly 11 feet high. Take a moment to look at them up close as well as at a distance. What's going on in these paintings? What do you see that makes you say that?

Both paintings feature a scholar in a landscape. What adjectives come to mind when describing these landscapes? How would you describe the relationship between the scholars and their natural surroundings? What are the scholars looking at? What do you think the scholars are thinking? What do you see that makes you say that?

Where do you retreat when you need a moment of silence?

Who else can you find in the paintings? What are they doing?

How would you describe the brushwork, the way the artist applied the ink? Compare the way the artist applied the ink in the Chou Tun-I painting and the Scholar painting. How are they similar. How do they differ? What do you see that makes you say that?

Which picture is simpler and easier to understand? WDYSTMYST?

In both pictures a scholar is immersed in nature, in one contemplating an idealistic setting, in the other embarking on a journey through a mountainous landscape. Each represents a shared ideal of the beauty of nature and humans place within it. The concept of withdrawal into the beauty of nature was a major theme for poets and painters during

the Ming dynasty. The order and structure within the natural world provided a place of solace for humans to retreat (like our Scholar's Studio).

Landscape paintings were the next best thing to being there. As a viewer you can imagine yourself in the little cabin or embarking on a journey up the mountain path across the bridge to the waterfall, to rest within the humble thatched hut in order to contemplate life.

### *Dynasties*

(Neolithic cultures	6000 – 2000 BCE)	
Xia	c. 2000 – 1650 BCE	(Bronze age
Shang	c. 1650 – 1050	“
Zhou	c. 1050 – 256	“ )
Qin	221 – 207 BCE	China unified for 1 <sup>st</sup> time
Han	202 BCE – 220 CE	
three kingdoms		
southern		
northern		
Sui	581 – 618	China reunited.
Tang	618 – 906	
five dynasties		
Song	960 – 1279	
Yuan (Mongols)	1260 – 1368	
Ming	1368 – 1644	
Qing (Manchus)	1644 – 1912	
Republic	1912 – 1949	
People's Republic	1949 –	

### *The Dynasties Song*

(sung to the tune of “Frere Jacques” can help students remember the major Chinese dynasties in chronological order.

Shang, Zhou, Qin, Han	(pronounced ‘Joe, Chin’)
Shang, Zhou, Qin, Han	
Sui, Tang, Song	(‘sway’)
Sui, Tang, Song	
Yuan, Ming, Qing, Republic	(‘ching’)
Yuan, Ming, Qing, Republic	
Mao, Zedong	(‘Za tong’ – rhymes with day)
Mao, Zedong	

### **The Three Great Philosophies of China**

(adopted from the Pomona College website:

## **Daoism**

Daoism begins with the ancient philosopher Lao Tzu who was said to have been born in China around 604 BCE. Most of what we know about Lao Tzu comes to us in the form of stories of which some are unbelievable while others are probably true. One story states that he was a keeper of records in western China and lived a simple life. At the end of his life he was upset with his people's lack of interest in developing the natural goodness that he was teaching and left for a life of meditation in what is now Tibet. At Hanako Gate a guard tried to convince him to return to China but failed. However, the guard did convince Lao Tzu to write his philosophy. Lao Tzu spent three days writing a 5000-character book, which is now known as the Tao De Ching or The Way to Power. This work is still regarded as the most important text in Daoism.

In Daoism, the most important is that of the Dao. We can understand the Dao in three ways. First, Dao is the highest reality - it is so large and complicated it cannot be understood. Secondly, Dao can also be described as the way of the universe. It is the way the universe and the laws of nature act. Finally Dao is the way of human life. It is this aspect of Dao that has the greatest impact for the Chinese culture.

Later, Daoism divided into three different schools of which two are important for our understanding of this philosophy. These two types are philosophical and religious Daoism. The major difference between these two schools is the idea of the Dao itself. In Philosophic Daoism the Dao is something to be controlled and spent wisely. This type of Daoism called School Daoism in China seeks wisdom for it's own sake rather than to be expended on useless conflicts. It emphasizes the concept of wu wei which means inaction or pure effectiveness.

On the other hand in religious Daoism the Dao is to be increased. In religious Daoism the idea of ch'i is important. It literally means breath but it also refers to energy. To receive more ch'i is to remove things that block it. This can be done by working in three ways: matter, movement and minds. From matter the idea of nutrition and medicinal herbs become important. The exercise t'ai chi and acupuncture relate to the concept of movement. In the area of mind, Daoist meditation developed.

Over time Daoism became institutionalized into a religion. (Around the 2nd century C.E. Lao Tzu became a "god.") It became strong in China in the Han Dynasty.

To Lao Tzu harmony can be found by living within the natural state of things.

## **Confucianism**

Perhaps the most important philosopher in the Chinese culture is Confucius. Confucius was born in 551 BCE when China was going through political turmoil. As a young man, still in his twenties, he became a teacher with several students. However, he still wished



to hold public office. At the age of fifty, he began a thirteen-year journey going from province to province offering his service to the various rulers. He had no offers. At the end of his life he was finally offered a position in his home province of Shantung, but by that time he was too old. He spent the remaining years of his life teaching and editing the great Chinese books. He died at the age of 73 in the year of 479 BCE. Although he never reached his political goals, he is today considered to be one of the world's greatest teachers.

Confucius lived in a time in Chinese history known for its political problems and governmental cruelty. He tried to solve this problem of this government instability by stating that harmony could be found in the ancient ways of the founders of the Chou Dynasty. Confucius called this time the Age of Grand Harmony. He believed that the key to harmony was education. The family, temples, schools, government all were tools by which moral ideals were passed on to the individual. He reinforced certain Chinese ethics such as (1) social and political concerns, (2) importance of family, (3) reverence for the elders and (4) the value of education.

Confucianism became strong in China in the Han Dynasty. It established relationships among people.

Confucius thought that harmony came from proper relationships. If everyone would maintain their proper roles within these relationships then the entire society would be at peace. These relationships are: (1) husband and wife (2) father and son (3) older brother to younger brother, (4) friend to friend and (5) subject to ruler.

## **Buddhism**

Of the three philosophies discussed in the following lessons, the only one is not inherently Chinese is Buddhism. Buddhism began in India around 560 BCE with the teaching of Siddhartha Gautama who upon his enlightenment was called the "the Buddha." which means the "awakened one." His teaching traveled into China along the famous silk route around 200 C.E. in the Han Dynasty. Over the next several hundred years Buddhism developed into a major religious philosophy in China with as many as eight different schools of Buddhism of which Ch'an (Zen meditation) and Pure Land (chanting a Buddha's name) still exist today.

The basic tenets of Buddhism are that life is impermanent, illusory, and filled with suffering, conditions caused by desire and ignorance. The cessation of suffering (nirvana) is achieved when all desires and emotional attachments are extinguished. The basic belief of Buddhism is outlined in the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. The first noble truth is the admission that life is suffering. (Note the term suffering has a different connotation in the language of the Buddha. It means out of kilter or not quite right.) The second noble truth is that the cause of suffering is desire, greed ignorance and attachment. The Buddha gives a way to end suffering in the third noble truth which is to end desire, ignorance and attachment. The fourth noble truth tells how to end desire. This model is laid out in eight steps called the Eightfold Path. These guidelines are right understanding,

right views, right speech, right effort, right livelihood, right behavior, right concentration and right meditation.

*Sources:*