

## Thatched Huts Among Ridges in Winter



Object Title	Thatched Huts Among Ridges in Winter
Creation Place	China
Artist	Lan Ying
Date	1649
Medium	Ink and colors on silk
Classification	Paintings - Hanging Scroll
Dimensions	72 1/16" x 26 13/16"
Accession #	2001.5.1
Gallery	G203

### Questions and Activities:

1. This is a very typical Chinese landscape painting. Take a moment to look at it closely. Let's explore it together. What's going on in this painting? What do you see that makes you say that?
2. Of what does this painting remind you? What do you see that makes you say that?
3. Brushwork is the essential characteristic of Chinese painting. Ink and brushwork provide the foundation of Chinese pictures, even when color is also used. Connoisseurs of Chinese art first notice the character of the line when they view a painting. In the quality of the brushwork the artist captures the spirit resonance, the *raison d'être* of a painting. In fact, Lan Ying was a favorite of aristocratic patrons who admired his romantic scenes rendered with expressive brushstrokes. How would you

describe the brushwork in this painting? What do you see that makes you say that?

4. In keeping with the cultural, religious, and philosophical basis in Confucianism and Taoism, the Chinese artist sought to express his vision of what is essential through landscape. The Taoists saw in Nature the ultimate mystery and harmony of existence. For the Confucians, Nature, as experienced in the mountain wilderness, exhibited the perfect order of the universe, after which man should pattern his social existence. How do you think the artist has expressed harmony and order in this painting? What do you see that makes you say that?
5. What questions does this painting raise for you?

### **Key Points:**

#### **Historical and social context:**

This painting was created at the very beginning of the Ch'ing Dynasty (1644 - 1912 CE). The weakening of the Ming dynasty in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century paved the way for the Manchu takeover of China in the mid-seventeenth. As the Ch'ing dynasty, the Manchus ruled China, large parts of Central Asia, and other neighboring regions until the late nineteenth century. China was one of the wealthier and more populous nations in the world during this period, largely due to efficient production and trade in tea and luxury goods such as silk and porcelain.

The preceding dynasty was the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 CE). The Ming was vibrant during its first half but racked with internal discord during its second. Scores of workers constructed the renowned Forbidden City, an imperial palace of staggering proportions and opulence. Ming leaders revived a sense of cultural identity and respect for traditional artifacts and craftsmanship.

In the sixteenth century, the development of massive manufacturing industries, such as those for porcelains and textiles, spurred great prosperity and the rise of a more educated populace, particularly in southern China. New regional centers arose in response to the private patronage of arts by wealthy officials and merchants in cities such as Nanjing and Suzhou. The widespread printing of books and the development of new types of painting and less formal designs in the decorative arts reflected these economic and cultural changes.

An interesting development during the Ming Dynasty was the commercialization of art. As a result of social changes and a process of urbanization, artists began to rebel against state dogmatism and moral hypocrisy. Painters indulged in a world of sensuality and pleasure which rejected moral pretense and displayed a need to satisfy the real needs of a growing middle class. Eroticism, vivid colors, individuality and commercialism combined to give Ming painting its diverse character and wide range of styles. This also led to the appearance of many female artists which presented the painting scene with an additional perspective and distinct characteristic. This world of pleasure Chinese artists chose to indulge in was reminiscent of the late 19th century Ukiyo-e or "Art of the Floating World" in Japan. Both were inspired by the same kind of social changes and symbolize the popularization of art and its emancipation from state sponsorship and exclusivity.

Another influence on Ming painting was the growing interaction between east and west. Traders, Jesuit missionaries, and artists were instrumental in introducing western techniques and concepts of painting into China. These foreign influences symbolize the beginning of a long process which stretches all the way to present times, in which Chinese painting gradually changed from a strictly local tradition to a more internationalized form of art.

Note that the Che school with which Lan Ying is associated looked to the Southern Sung Dynasty (1127 -1279 CE) artists for their inspiration and style. Southern Sung society was characterized by the pursuit of a highly aestheticized way of life, and paintings of the period often focus on evanescent pleasures and the transience of beauty. Images evoke poetic ideas that appeal to the senses or capture the fleeting qualities of a moment in time. One particularly important source of inspiration for Southern Sung artists

was the natural beauty of Hangzhou and its environs, especially West Lake, a famed scenic spot ringed with lush mountains and dotted with palaces, private gardens, and Buddhist temples.

**Art history context:**

Chinese painting is one of the oldest continuous artistic traditions in the world. The earliest paintings were not representational but ornamental; they consisted of patterns or designs rather than pictures. Early pottery was painted with spirals, zigzags, dots, or animals. It was only during the Warring States Period (475-221 BCE) that artists began to represent the world around them.

Traditional painting involves the same techniques as calligraphy and is done with a brush dipped in black or colored ink. As with calligraphy, the most popular materials for paintings are paper and silk. Skilled artisans then mount the paintings to a backing with very thin paste. Silk is the more difficult medium, but it is also more luxurious. Silk tends to darken with age, which explains why so many early Chinese paintings seem brown. Literati painters championed paper as the appropriate medium, as they admired its simplicity and its ability to absorb ink. The finished work can be mounted on scrolls, such as hanging scrolls or handscrolls. Traditional painting can also be done on album sheets, walls, lacquerware, and folding screens.

Artists from the Han (202 BCE) to the Tang (618–906 CE) dynasties mainly painted the human figure. Much of what we know of early Chinese figure painting comes from burial sites, where paintings were preserved on silk banners, lacquered objects, and tomb walls. Many early tomb paintings were meant to protect the dead or help their souls get to paradise. Others illustrated the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius or showed scenes of daily life.

Many critics consider landscape to be the highest form of Chinese painting. The time from the Five Dynasties period to the Northern Song period (907–1127) is known as the "Great age of Chinese landscape". In the north, artists such as Jing Hao, Fan Kuan, and Guo Xi painted pictures of towering mountains, using strong black lines, ink wash, and sharp, dotted brushstrokes to suggest rough stone. In the south, Dong Yuan, Juran, and other artists painted the rolling hills and rivers of their countryside in peaceful scenes done with softer, rubbed brushwork. These two kinds of scenes and techniques became the classical styles of Chinese landscape painting.

During the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), painters joined the arts of painting, poetry, and calligraphy by inscribing poems on their paintings. These three arts worked together to express the artist's feelings more completely than one art could do alone.

Beginning in the 13th century, the tradition of painting simple subjects—a branch, a few flowers, or one or two horses—developed. Narrative painting, with a wider color range and a much busier composition than Sung paintings, was immensely popular during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). In addition, some painters of the Ming Dynasty continued the tradition of the Sung and Yuan scholar-painters.

During the early Ch'ing Dynasty (1644–1911), painters known as Individualists rebelled against many of the traditional rules of painting and found ways to express themselves more directly through free brushwork.

This painting was produced in the very early days of the Ch'ing Dynasty. Lan Ying varied somewhat from most professional painters during the Ming Dynasty, combining his technical proficiency with an art historical knowledge of past painting styles, exploring various styles and techniques to develop his own. Thus, this painting bridges the traditional painting of the Ming Dynasty with the individualist painting of the Ch'ing Dynasty.

**The object:**

This object is a large painting on a silk scroll of a monumental mountain landscape. The foreground is a valley with two buildings, one with two people and the other with one person. The buildings are surrounded with mountains and frost-covered trees. A rocky mountain peak towers over the valley.

This 1649 depiction of a wintry landscape represents the distinctive style of Lan Ying's middle and late period. The composition refers generally to the monumental landscape tradition of Northern Sung (960-1127); the larger forms are strongly silhouetted and the surface is one of light and dark contrasts. Lan's inscription indicates he did this painting in the manner of Wang Wei (699-759), a T'ang dynasty master known for incorporating sharply outlined mountains and bare trees into his winter landscapes. Wang is also associated with the beginnings of the ink landscape tradition.

Large seasonal paintings such as this were often hung above altar tables in the reception halls of the aristocracy.

Two outstanding additional resources for understanding and decoding Chinese paintings are: <http://www.asianart.org/pdf/education/Brushstrokes-vocabulary.pdf> and <http://www.asianart.org/pdf/education/Brushstrokes-packet.pdf>.

**The artist:**

Lan Ying (1588-after 1660) ranks among the top two or three professional landscape painters of the late Ming era. He spent his early years in Zhejiang province in the area of Hangzhou. He showed great artistic talent as a young boy and was determined "to become famous through painting." He was trained and worked as a painter in the conservative tradition of the Che (Zhe) School, a school of mainly professional artists who perpetuated the style of the Southern Sung (1127-1279) Imperial Painting Academy after the fall of the Sung in 1279. By the time he was in his twenties he seemed to have moved north into the Songjiang (Sung-chiang) region of Jiangsu province where his name appears in association with those of the prominent collectors, critics, and painters of the then current scholar-amateur (literati) tradition (dominated by the ideas and style of Dong Qichang). Here the gifted young artist was able to meet and paint with his peers and to study old paintings. While a technical mastery was realized early on, he varied somewhat from most professional painters in combining his technical proficiency with an art historical knowledge of past painting styles, exploring various styles and techniques to develop his own.

Note that MIA has several works by this artist, including the scroll *Angling in the Shade Amid Summer Trees*.

**The Che (Zhe) School:**

Three distinct schools of painting emerged during the Ming Dynasty: the Che echoed the formal approach of the Sung; the Wu consisted of, and appealed to, the intelligentsia; and the Eccentric fostered spontaneity and freedom of expression

The Che School was a school of painters, part of the Southern School, led by Dai Jin. The political influence of Ming royalty on art displeased Dai Jin and his close painter friends. The name derives from the first character of the name of the province in which the school flourished (Zhejiang) and in which the Southern Sung capital, Hangzhou, had been located.

The Che painters did not formulate a new distinctive style, preferring instead to further the style of the Imperial Painting Academy of the Southern Sung (1127-1279), specializing in decorative and large paintings. The school were identified by the formal, academic and conservative outlook. There were a great many Southern Sung paintings left in Zhejiang at that time, so the painters had firsthand models to copy. From the Southern Sung the Che school borrowed diagonal compositions, delicately graded ink washes, twisted pines, distant buildings, and the "ax-cut" brushstroke. They added to this a greater complexity in composition, more anecdotal details, a looser organization and free flow of space, and a scattering of elements in contrast to the carefully constructed Southern Sung works.

Dai Jin was a talented and reputed painter. He did not follow the conventional norms of painting, generally pursued by the official imperial court painters (which were predominantly the Southern Sung styles). Dai did not as such create any new style of painting, but he drew inspiration from both the Northern Sung and the Southern Sung styles of painting. He adapted a more dynamic, elaborate, and versatile approach. Dai Jin specialized in beautiful landscapes and human figures. His subjects often revolved around mythology (with gods and ghosts) and history. He used a rather bold color palette with free brush strokes. His elegant creations had a unique narrative quality, which was rare to find.

Dai Jin's unrestrained approach was a major influence to all the Che School painters. The Che School gave birth to a whole generation of untraditional painters that furthered the Southern Sung styles (also called the Ma-Xia) of painting and carried it to new heights. The themes of paintings were mostly ornamental varying from flowers, to plants, to birds and landscapes. Like Dai Jin, most of the Che School painters used bright colors in their works. Although the Che School painters were not official court painters, still they did receive some support from the royal administration.

**Resources:**

- Asian Art Museum Education Resources: <http://www.asianart.org/educatorresources.htm>
- Metropolitan Timeline of Art History: <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/>
- Minneapolis Institute of Arts On-Line Resources The Art of Asia: <http://www.artsmia.org/art%2Dof%2Dasia/>
- Minneapolis Institute of Arts Chinese Painting Formats: <http://www.artconnected.org/resource/93720/chinese-painting-formats>
- Princeton University Art Museum: <http://etcweb.princeton.edu/asianart/china.jsp>
- Wikipedia Chinese Painting: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese\\_painting](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_painting)

**Submitted By:** Linda Krueger