

# Fantastic Mountains: Where Man Meets Nature in Chinese Landscape Painting

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Liu Yang

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*You ask why I dwell in the green mountain,  
I smile but do not answer, my heart is serene.  
Peach blossoms and flowing waters go without a trace.  
It is another heaven and earth beyond the mortal world.*

For centuries, this poem, entitled *Dialogue in the Mountain*, written by the great Tang poet Li Bai (701-762), has had a special appeal for Chinese, not only for their vivid unfolding of a medieval poet's peaceful and unfettered mind, but also for their profound touch at the very heart of the Chinese perception of mountains. As a bridge between the human and transcendental realms, the mountains in China have provided an enduring source of inspiration for poets, scholars and artists. Indeed, the exploration of man's relationship with mountains, as the physical manifestation of the mysterious power and the regenerative forces of the universe, is the grand and eternally inspiring theme of the Chinese landscape tradition. There are few more potent and distinctive images of the Chinese aesthetic than the great tradition of Chinese landscape painting that takes mountains as its predominant subject.

Above all, the works in *Fantastic Mountains*, a touring exhibition of Chinese landscape painting of the Ming and Qing dynasties, organised by the Art Gallery of New South Wales, have been selected around the theme of mountains. After a successful showing in the Art Gallery of New South Wales (12 March to 9 May 2004) the exhibition travelled to the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore (20 May to 18 July 2004) and the Honolulu Academy of Arts (4 August to 3 October 2004) On loan from the esteemed collection of the Shanghai Museum, the works in the show span some 500 years of Chinese history, from the early 14th century to 19th century. During this time landscape painting flourished and new themes and brush techniques emerged. Yet mountains endured as the most popular and revered of landscape imagery - a symbol of the grandeur and immortality of nature, a celebration of man's awe in the power and beauty of the natural world, a home of the immortals, and a sanctuary for humans seeking refuge from the mundane world of politics and society.

Begun from a very early time, mountains have been perceived in China as numinous realms. Of particular importance are the Five Sacred Mountains: Mount Tai (Taishan) in the east, Mount Heng (Hengshan) in the south, Mount Hua (Huashan) in the west, Mount Heng (Hengshan) in the north, Mount Song (Songshan) in the centre. Located in each of the five cardinal directions, these mountains have defined and protected China's physical and sacred realms. The worship of these mountains was one of the major elements of the Chinese state religion.<sup>1</sup>

Rising from the ground to the sky, each of the Five Sacred

Mountains is seen as an axis mundi connecting earth and heaven. Their height and massive physical structures have long been admired and portrayed by artists and poets.<sup>2</sup> In the Great northern Mount Heng by an anonymous Ming painter (Fig. 1), a dramatic and multi-layered mountainscape of powerfully solid forms dominates the picture, while the addition of tiny houses, trees and figures gives the mountain a sense of scale. Twisted and tortuous rocks enclose the foreground creating a secluded grotto-like hideaway within the mountain ranges. Inside the enclosure, the pinkish architecture built on the cliffside appears to be Xuankongsi ("suspended temples"), the famous temple compound which mixes the two religions of Daoism and Buddhism. Although the basic composition of a tall mountainscape constructed around a central vertical axis echoes earlier prototypes of the monumental landscape created by painters of the Song dynasty, the mountains here are close up, blocking most of the sky and cutting off the horizon or other distant views. The setting is winter; snow is still visible on the treetops. While the topographic features seem to emphasise the sacred mountain's inaccessibility, tiny pilgrims and other climbers zigzagging up the paths animate the spiritual realm.

Interestingly, a strange pictogram painted in red pigment is seen above the summit of the mountain. As is often emphasised in literature of the early period, the mountains are full of various spirits and dangers that one may encounter when entering them. "When a superior master enters a mountain, he carries the Esoteric Signs of the Three Sovereigns and the Chart of the True Forms of the Five Sacred Mountains with him", wrote Ge Hong (283-343), the eminent Daoist theorist of the Eastern Jin dynasty.<sup>3</sup> It is such a talisman, a Daoist diagrammatic symbol or "true form" (*zhenxing*) of Mount Heng that is depicted in this painting, signifying its sacredness. Interestingly, the detailed rendering of the mountain and the pictogram form a powerful contrast: while the mountain itself exhibits Hengshan's physical grandeur in vivid form, the pictogram, or talisman, in abstract form suggests the hidden structure of the sacred mountain. During Ge Hong's times such pictograms of certain mountains were used as talismans and carried into mountains by Daoist practitioners, they later came to assume the primary function of aiding mystic orientation, allowing the adept to visit the sacred mountains in meditation.<sup>4</sup> The painting may indeed share such a function, and may have played significant roles in religious activities.<sup>5</sup>

The populace focus of divine worship, however, was not restricted to the five great mountains: "All mountains, whether large or small, have gods and spirits. If the mountain be large, then the divinity is a greater one; if the mountain be small, then the divinity is a lesser one",<sup>6</sup> noted Ge Hong. Characteristics such as grandeur and splendour are seen in numerous images of the mountains. In *Two*

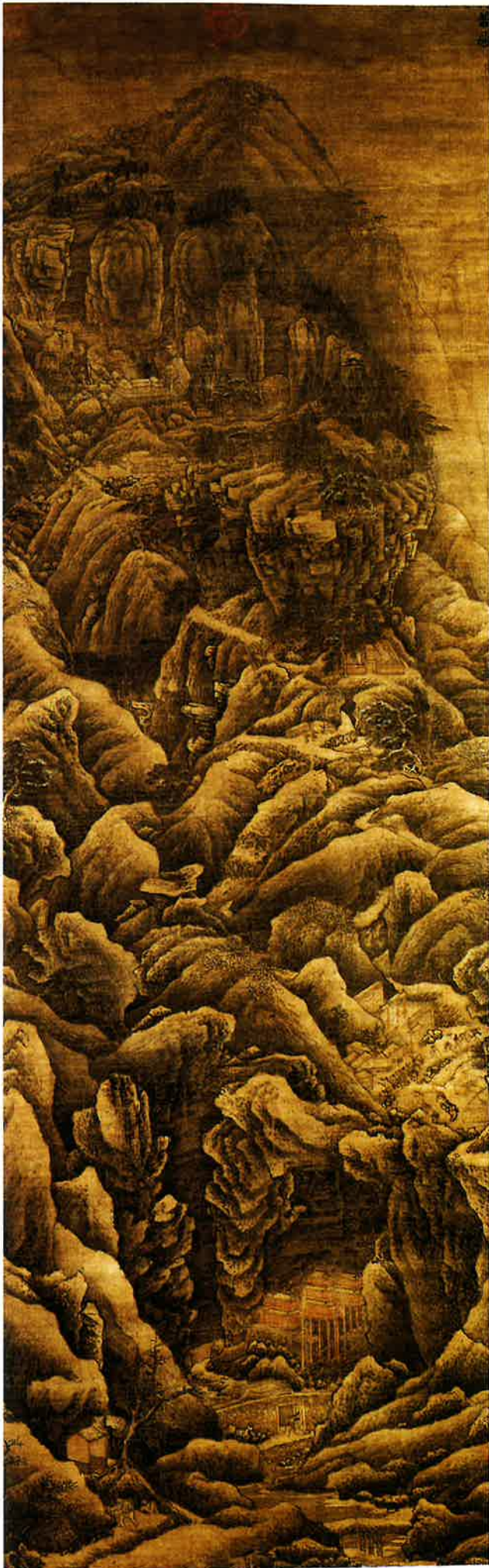


Fig. 1 (left). Anonymous, Ming dynasty, *The Great Northern Mount Heng*, hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, 210.7 x 65.4 cm.

Fig. 2 (above). Huang Ding (1650-1730), *Two Ravines in Mount Emei*, dated 1714; hanging scroll, ink on paper, 284 x 130 cm.

*Ravines in Mount Emei* painted by Huang Ding (1650-1730) in 1714, the painter follows the early monumental landscape tradition of the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127) to capture the grandeur of mountainscape and the transcendental feelings it inspires (Fig. 2). The name Emeishan stems from its two main peaks, Da'e (the big E) and Er'e (the second E) that face each other like a pair of women's



Fig. 3. Wu Bin (active ca. 1573-1620), *Landscape along the Shanyin Road*, dated 1608; hanging scroll, ink and colour on paper, 31.8 x 862.2 cm.

eyebrows. The name implies the mountains' fame lies in their charm and beauty: "Emei is the most charming mountain under heaven" would be a conventional comment. The charisma of Emei comes also from its divine power and transcendental associations. "Of the numerous immortal mountains in the Shu [Sichuan], Emei afar is hard to be matched". So the Tang poet Li Bai tells us in *Ascending Emeishan*.<sup>7</sup> Although the Buddhists arrived on the mountain much later than the Daoists, by around the late Ming some 1,700 monks resided in the numerous temples in the mountains. Buddhist activities gradually overshadowed the early glory of the mountains as a Daoist site, and the Emei eventually became one of China's four most renowned Buddhist holy mountains, designated as the home of Puxian or Samantabhadra.<sup>8</sup>

During the time of Huang Ding, the Buddhist presence in the mountains must have been prominent: a cluster of temples and pagodas are seen in the painting on the very peak. The pilgrims could reach there through a winding but climbable path that begins at the lower left corner behind several far-reaching pines and hostels. The path slopes gently across two ravines and then zigzags up. As viewers follow the path upwards, they are caught and amazed by the detailed descriptions of topography, vegetation and human habitation. Although entitled "two ravines", the painting is essentially a portrayal of the two main peaks Da'e and Er'e, with emphasis

on the former. Although awesome and sublime, Huang's Emei is accessible and inhabitable, and is rendered quite faithfully to its topographic features. This may have resulted from his travels: in comparing him to the renowned Qing painter Wang Hui (1632-1717), Ding's contemporaries noted that while Wang Hui had seen all the famous paintings of the past and present and therefore used sophisticated methods whenever he laid ink on paper, Ding had seen all the sceneries in the country and exhibited liveliness in whatever he painted.<sup>9</sup>

The numinous nature of the sacred mountains has in part shaped Chinese landscape painting, an art far less concerned with verisimilitude than the expression of harmony with the dynamics and forces of nature. This art thus often bears scant resemblance to what the eye may see, but it does express with credibility man's imaginative responses to the majesty of nature. In many examples, the close conceptual link between mountains and sacred power had endowed spiritual auras on the pictorial images and driven representations of landscape deeper into a fantastic realm. The highly stylised rendering of the mountains and idealised manipulation of topographic features reject any attempt to consider those paintings as records of the real experience in the life of painters or as descriptions of places encountered. In these works it seems that the painters wanted to convey to viewers images of strangeness and



Fig. 3b.



diversity, not of what they saw, but of what they imagined.

Such quality of mountain-imagery is best seen in *Landscape along the Shanyin Road*, a dramatic handscroll painted by Wu Bin (active ca. 1573-1620) in 1608 (Fig. 3).<sup>10</sup> According to a title written by the artist himself and a colophon inscribed by Emperor Qianlong of the Qing dynasty (r. 1736-95), the painting portrays the scenes along the road of Shanyin at present-day Shaoxing in Zhejiang province. The mountain range in Shanyin in the lower Yangzi delta has long been admired for its stunning scenery. Its fame was promoted by the literati, who made it a popular subject in literature and art. Gu Kaizhi (345-406), a great painter of the Jin dynasty, for instance, recalled the breathtaking scenery seen at Shanyin: "A thousand peaks rival in height, ten thousand rivulets compete in flowing forth. Herbs and trees grow over them, hiding them from view like clouds that rise and obscure the rosy sky at dawn". One of his contemporaries Wang Xianzhi (344-386) also made the following comment: "Travelling along the Shanyin road, one came upon a rapid succession of mountains and streams which set each other off marvellously and was too much a feast to one's eyes".<sup>11</sup> Such poetic comments were so influential that the expression *shanyin daoshang*, or "along the Shanyin road", thereafter became synonymous with spectacular landscape. Due to the area's fantastic topography and, more significantly, its association with two legendary sage kings,

Huangdi (Yellow Emperor) and Yu,<sup>12</sup> Daoist theorists designated the mountain range as the tenth *xiao dongtian* or lesser grotto-heaven (see discussions below).

The mysterious air surround the area and the excitement both Gu and Wang felt as one scenic marvel after another appeared before them are amazingly recreated by Wu Bin in this composition. It begins at the right with a normal view of the riverbank and houses nesting amid a dense grove of trees. Immediately after this short passage, towering peaks rise unexpectedly from the level ground. Following this, a rapid succession of peaks and rocks, enfolding each other in all kinds of postures, propel the viewer's eye relentlessly forward until the end of the scroll. Masses of sheer rock rise into bizarre organic shapes, balancing only on oddly narrow bases; mysterious constructions of clefts and caverns evoke immortal realms; clouds and mists float freely or swiftly drift by. Tiny trees and houses in quite realistic form set the scale of the mountains and also serve as a foil for the highly distorted mountain shapes. Ambiguous surface definitions unsettle the eye, created using a variety of *chun*, or texture, patterns such as hemp-fibre, rain-dot, axe-cut, lotus-leaf vein and ox-hair strokes. A light wash of indigo and brown further adds to the range of effects. With such structure and brushwork, the mountain range of Shanyin has been translated into a compelling and powerful version of the land. The surging, twisting



Fig. 3c.



Fig. 3d.



Fig. 3e.



Fig. 3f.



Fig. 3g.



Fig. 3h.

rocks and hills seem to suggest the vital animation of the sacred mountain. We can sense the experiences of the artist, which may well have been inspired as much by feelings of transcendence as by the visual and aesthetic legacies of early literati artists such as Gu and Wang.<sup>13</sup>

It is interesting to note that when Chinese painters articulate the pictorial components within a highly personal landscape painting, as exemplified by Wu Bin's handscroll, they always show the viewer a perceptual duality: the mountains are seen as greatly distorted fantastic forms, while those elements in close relationship to the mundane world, including human figures, animals, architecture, boats, bridges and even rice fields, are all rendered in a meticulous manner that maintains a great truthfulness to reality. The mountain imagery is thus uniquely different from other worldly phenomena, signifying the notion of mountains as a sacred realm where humans can communicate with transcendental beings or seek refuge.

Colours could also be used as a means to reveal an artist's vision of the mountains as a transcendent realm. This is particularly true with a style known as *qinglü*, or "blue-and-green" which had for centuries been assigned to this type of landscape painting. The style developed during the Six Dynasties period (222-479) to become the prime mode for landscape painting, and enjoyed its heyday during the Tang dynasty and remained vital thereafter. As the style evolved, its symbolism became conventionalised. In early examples from the late Song and early Yuan periods, the increased association of the blue-and-green style with otherworldly fairylands or Daoist paradise was paralleled by a shift from representation to geometric stylisation.<sup>14</sup> Since then, it has remained the characteristic style for fantasy imagery. A good example of this type of mountain imagery is seen in *Landscape in Green and Blue*, a hanging scroll painted by a late Qing painter Liu Yanchong (1807 - 47) (Fig. 4). Here, three far-reaching pines in the foreground introduce this decorative and fancy composition. Through an opening between the branches, one catches sight of a waterside retreat, with a scholar reading at a table within and a crane relaxing in front. Further back a series of hard-edged peaks thrust into sky, their configuration showing a strong emphasis on geometric form. The surfaces are flat, with only minimum texturing or modelling strokes. Near the right corner of the first set of peaks, one catches a glimpse of a gentleman strolling with his stick. Behind, a group of palace-like buildings nestle in grove of trees.

Clouds and mists are transformed into fanciful, archaic swirling forms. Introduced between the mid and far ground, they create a sense of recession, compensating for the lack of depth caused by the flat treatment of the mountain. Such linear formed clouds have a noticeable presence in landscape paintings suggesting a wonderland-like setting and the realms of the immortals. The use of strong colour - predominantly green but with accents of yellow, suggesting warm sunshine - adds to the excitement of the picture. Distant peaks are simply drawn in light blue in quick, decisive brushstrokes. A certain decorative beauty is obvious here, yet this is not the aim. The colour creates a dream-like atmosphere where realistic reading is denied in favour of the evoking of an imaginary world. Liu Yanchong has brought this tradition of decorative and geometric fantasy to its extreme. His verse inscription dwells on his vision of the mountains as a pure and transcendent contrast to reality, and on the artist's private yearning to visit immortal realms and encounter "feathered" men (immortal beings). It reads,

Since [I was] young, I have loved mountains and water,  
Even before embarking on the journey, my mind has already moved forth.  
I may regret staying at home,



Fig. 4. Liu Yanchong (1807 - 47), *Landscape in Green and Blue*, hanging scroll, ink and colour on paper, 135.3 x 51 cm.

But will never regret embarking on a journey.  
In high spirit, I paint mountain peaks and terrains,  
Here, modesty plays no part.  
How can this mountain be named?  
It shines elegantly in the south-east.  
White clouds glide down the gully,  
The water from the fall comes splashing upon the trees  
If you chance upon a feathered man on road,  
Ask him of the whereabouts of the recluse Shang Chang.<sup>15</sup>  
I am unsure in the Southern Sea,  
If there is a mountain such as this.  
You have travelled half the earth under the heaven,  
Your aspiration and will permeate the nine regions of the world  
On Mount Cangwu you embrace the autumn colour,  
On Mount Lu your high inspiration tunes with ancients.



Fig. 5. Xie Shichen (1487- after 1567), *Clearing after Snow on the Mount Wudang*, dated 1541; hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, 198.9 x 98.9 cm.

*Your pure conversation delighted my spirit,  
Your witty remarks sharpen my eyes.*

*My admiration for you is not just because of your love for the mountains,  
But also for your ability to comfort a traveller with your song.*

With such a vision in both the imagery and accompanying poem, the painting goes beyond eremitic imagery to become an evocation of the otherworldly or immortal.<sup>16</sup>

The early worship of great mountains as the embodiment of mysterious power of Han and pre-Han period was later woven into Chinese Buddhism and, particularly, the religious Daoism. The ideal of a religious life far from the bustle and impurities of daily life encouraged Daoists and Buddhists to build temples and other holy buildings in mountain settings, turning these sites into pilgrim centres. The unique relationship between religion and geography, particularly mountains, that is, between the people and their con-

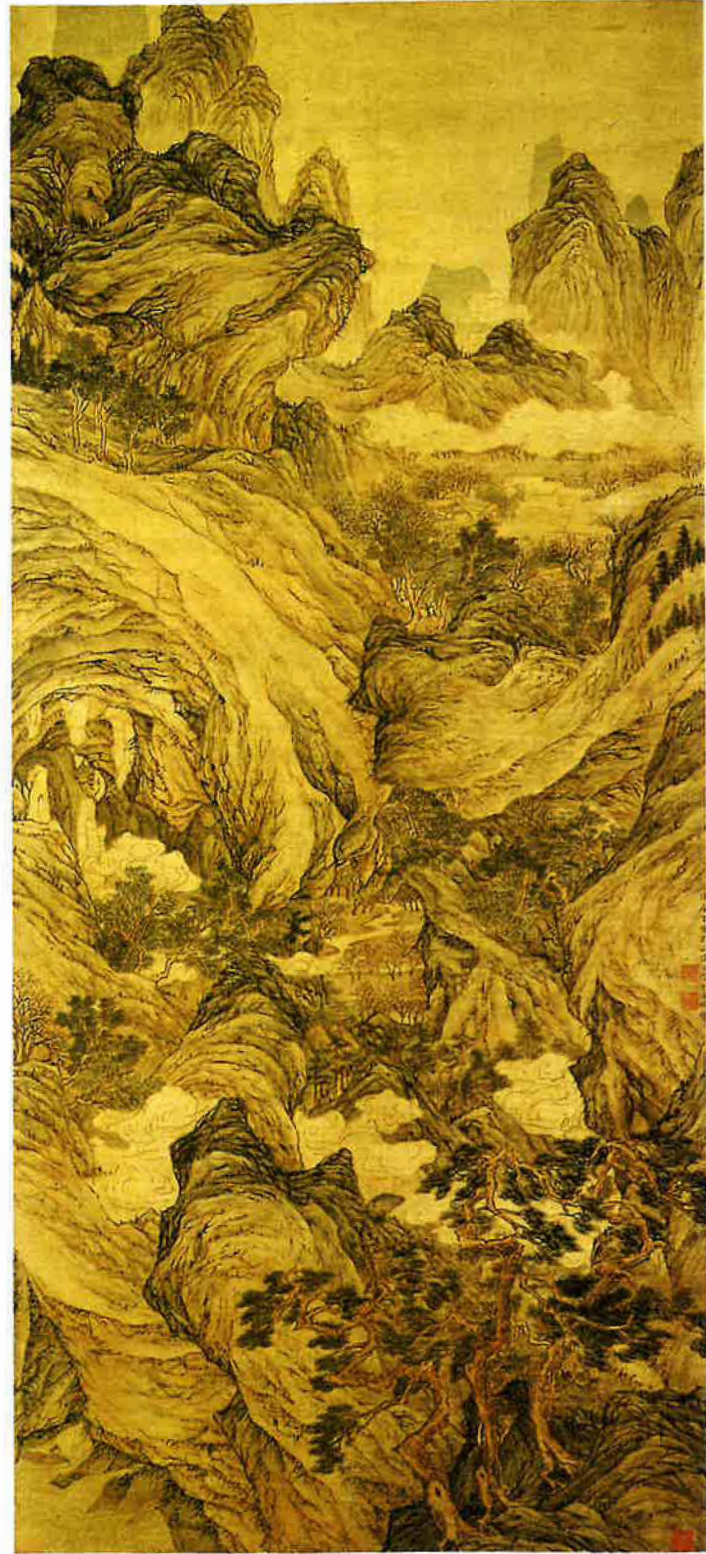


Fig. 6. Lu Zhi (1496-1576), *Peach Blossom Spring*, dated 1567, hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, 141.7 x 62.6 cm.

crete expressions of belief in architecture and natural surroundings,<sup>17</sup> has greatly enriched Chinese landscape painting and the depiction of architecture (temples in particular), as seen in many above discussed compositions, became one of its most ubiquitous and fascinating elements.

It is a unique cultural phenomenon that the sacredness of many of China's great mountains is shared by different religions.<sup>18</sup> The Wudanshan, situated in northwest Hubei province, however, is one of a few purely Daoist mountains. The mountain is venerated as the terrestrial home of the Daoist god Zhenwu (Perfected Warrior). The range extends some 400 kilometres and its tallest peak stretches approximately 1612 metres above sea level. Begin-

ning with Ying Xi (ca. 5th century BCE), the Daoist who requested Laozi to write the classic text *Daodejing* (*Classic of Virtue*) in the late Zhou dynasty, a great number of eminent Daoists have lived in seclusion in the mountains for the purpose of religious cultivation. The building of Daoist temples in considerable scale began during the Zhen'guan reign of Tang dynasty (627-649), when a local governor promoted and sponsored the Daoist activities there. During the Yongle reign of the Ming dynasty (1403-24), under imperial order, 33 groups of temples were built within ten years, covering a total area of some 1,600, 000 square metres. Designed and constructed to be in harmony with the mountainscape, the buildings appear as parts of the natural world.

The glory of Mount Wudang as the Daoist sacred mountain during the Ming period is vividly illustrated in a hanging scroll *Clearing after Snow on Mount Wudang*, painted by Xie Shichen (1487-after 1567) in 1541 (Fig. 5). The composition begins at the bottom with a rapid mountain stream at the foot of a dramatic mountainscape of powerful writhing forms. Climbers, more likely Daoist pilgrims, are seen making their way toward the temples in the mountain hollows near the summit. Above them, threatening overhanging bluffs emerge as solid and multi-edged masses. The brushlines of the rocky edges avoid a smooth continuity, instead fluctuating constantly in breadth and shifting from wet, suffused patches to the dry and scratchy. Xie's characteristic heavy dotting of the vegetation is seen throughout. The predominantly diagonal compositional structure creates a sense of instability and movement. The artist has created an impressionistic view of the mountain that reflects its sacred nature rather than records its actual topography. Zixiaogong (Purple Empyrean Palace), the elaborate temple complex, located on the mid-mountain, however, is deliberately accurate in manner, forming a marked contrast to the mountainscape.<sup>19</sup>

Within the context of Daoism many great mountains were not only considered especially suited to meditation and to the preparation of drugs of immortality, but also taken as the sacred realms where immortals and divine creatures resided. The realm of the immortals was considered reachable by human beings, but only through designated caves, called *dongtian* or grotto-heavens. These *dongtian*, lying within and beneath the great sacred mountains, represent a world beyond the mortal realm with its own space and time, a heaven or paradise where immortal beings reside.<sup>20</sup> Within the Daoist classification of sacred geography, as systemised by two Tang dynasty Daoist theorists Sima Chengzhen (647-735) and Du Guangting (850-933), there are ten greater and 36 lesser *dongtian*. In addition, there are also 76 *fudi* (blessed lands), an assortment of other auspicious mountains. In some cases a mountain is at once a *dongtian* and a *fudi*, for example Mount Gouqui in Jiangsu province.

The theme of *dongtian* or grotto-heaven has a special appeal for artists and viewers when it is merged with the imagery of *Peach Blossom Spring*.<sup>21</sup> The famous allegory by Tao Qian (365-427) tells the story of a fisherman who stumbles upon a spring lined with peach blossom and issuing from a small opening in a mountain valley. He ventures through to discover a paradise where all people live in harmony with the natural world. The story became a potent symbol for those seeking refuge from the turmoils of this world, and is the popular theme in landscape painting during the Ming and Qing period, as exemplified by Lu Zhi's (1496-1576) *Peach Blossom Spring*, painted in 1567 (Fig. 6). Here Lu gives the theme powerful expression by using an unusual compositional type with turbulent tension. The lower left-hand corner, where the fisherman is seen mooring his boat, signifies the opening-out part of the hidden land. The peach trees, usually seen along the stream that leads the fisherman on to the beyond, are omitted, removed to within the hidden valley itself. Instead three eloquent pine trees, conventional

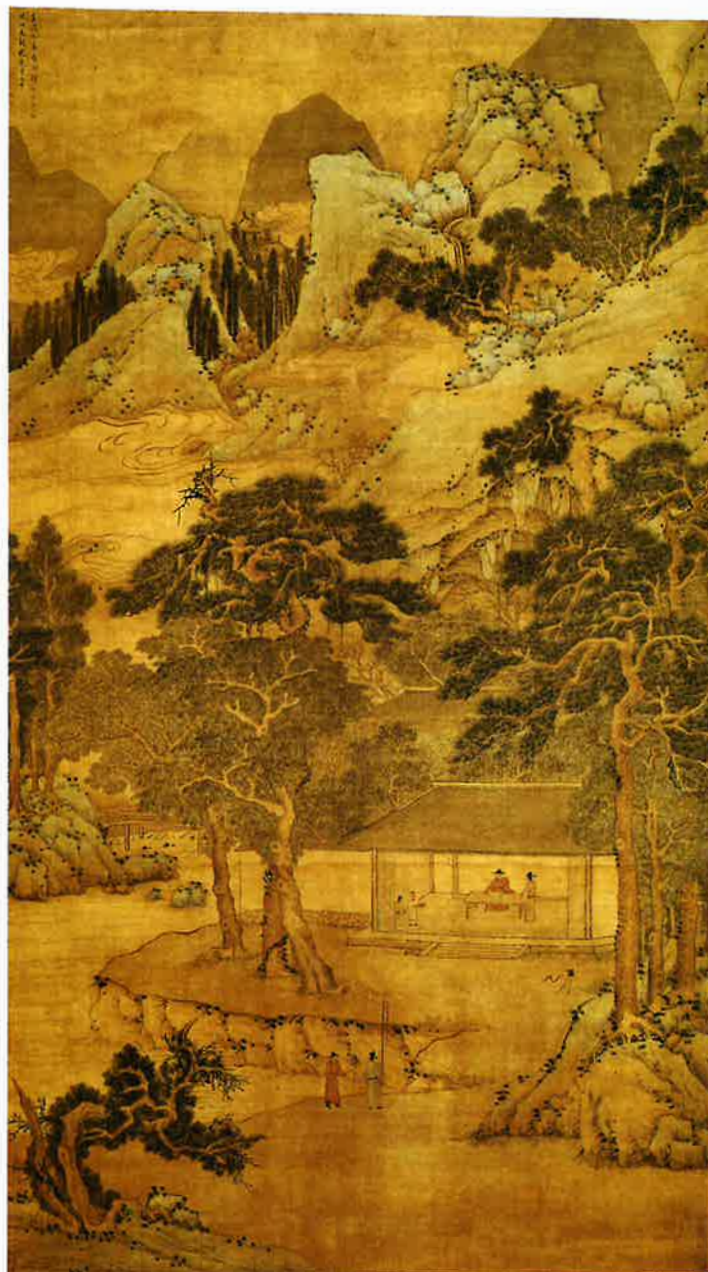


Fig. 7. Lu Shidao (1517-1580), *Lofty Trees in Green Grove*, dated 1562; hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, 174.8 x 98.2 cm.

symbols of longevity, stand by the cave-mouth to herald a hidden land. Superimposed tortuous terrains and grottoes dramatically block the hidden land from the outside, and the whole composition is dominated by overhanging, twisted mountain-rocks. Only in the middle and backgrounds do the mountain walls part and the mists disperse, revealing faintly the hidden dwellings. In the far distance, the mountains close up again and block most of the sky, suggesting a paradise where no human tracks have penetrated. The stable and steely rendition of texture and detail seen in many other Wu school masters are replaced here by a swifter, more linear manner which transforms the mass into movement. Instead of the peaceful and idyllic landscapes used in conventional "Peach Blossom Spring" images, this composition expresses a state of security and peace through instability and turbulence. The landscape conveys a message that stresses an inaccessible and untouchable immortal-like realm.

The utopia described in Tao Qian's allegory where all people live in peace and harmony, free from politics, is a Confucian idea that reflects a past golden age. Yet the image of a hidden world in the mountains closely resembles the Daoist grotto-heavens: both are paradises beyond the mortal realm and can be reached through



designated caves,<sup>22</sup> The affinity between the two imageries greatly enhanced their influence, and made them ubiquitous motifs in landscape painting. In Lu Shida's (1517-1580) *Lofty Trees in Green Grove* (Fig. 7), a multi-roomed retreat nestles harmoniously within a peaceful grove near the bank of a stream flowing gently from a grotto behind the houses. An official in his red imperial robe and black cap is seen seated at a table, reading a document. He is attended by a subordinate official and two servants. The picture seems to represent an official in his mountain villa but still confined by his duties to the city. The lofty trees and mountains are visual metaphors for spiritual ascents, which are universal, not specific to



Fig. 8. Chen Hongshou (1598-1652), *Playing Chess by the Pine Stream*, hanging scroll, ink and colour on paper, 210.4 x 95.8 cm.

any one religion. However, the grotto hung with stalactites that appears behind the retreat evokes a sense of the transcendental. It first alludes to the "Peach Blossom Spring" imagery: the cave where the stream issues from strongly suggests the entrance to a secret enclave, a paradise. This further invokes the Daoist concept of the hidden paradises of the immortals, the *dongtian* or grotto-heavens. The cleft in the picture serves as a symbol of the entry into such a transcendental realm and would channel the viewer's thoughts toward Daoist mysteries of immortality. The crane appears in the front of the villa, introducing a subtle hint of something transcendental. The picture was painted on the occasion of a certain Mr Fengjun's 70th birthday, as a celebration of his longevity. The composition alludes to the scholar-official's subtle yearnings for spiritual rather than actual, or physical, reclusion and immortality.<sup>23</sup>

Steeped in centuries of accumulated religion, history, literature and folklore, China's mountains are seen as divine realms, endowed with myriad sacred associations. Sometimes the cultural or religious associations grow to surround a mountain would become more important and better known than the physical aspect of the site. Such is the case in Chen Hongshou's (1598-1652) *Playing Chess by the Pine Stream* (Fig. 8). The picture depicts a mountain setting, where three old men seated at a stone table are playing a chess game, while two others look on. The scene evokes a transcendental realm - since the centuries before the common era, chess has been seen as a preferred diversion of the immortals. From such prototypes a pattern in literature called *xianjing guanqi* or "watch chess-playing in an immortal realm" developed during the Jin dynasty (265-420), when the Daoist *dongtian* or grotto-heaven theory was systemised. One of the stories relates that a man named Wang Zhi went into Mount Xin'an (or better known as Mount Lanke or Mount of Decomposed Axe-handle) in Quzhou, Zhejiang province, to cut wood. There he sees several old men (or little boys in some versions) playing chess. Attracted by the scene, he stops and watches. When he remembers his duty and is about to leave, even before one game has finished, he notices that the handle of his axe has decomposed. On coming out the mountains he is shocked to find that several generations have passed. Chen Hongshou's distinguished style in rendering landscape hints at the otherworldly. In this painting his favoured archaism contributes to the unreality of the scene: the trees are treated schematically and the mountains are shaped like separate cone-shaped clods of earth. Superimposed one upon another, they recall the schematised versions of mountains dating back to the early landscape representations of the 4th century.<sup>24</sup>

The idea of retreating from society into a life of reclusion in the mountains has a long-standing history in China. The practice thrived in ancient China, in part because it found support in the philosophies of Confucianism, Daoism and later Buddhism.<sup>25</sup> The motivation for reclusion could be spiritual or ethical. For the Daoist adherents, the mountains offered the opportunity to encounter immortal beings and therefore a path to transcendence. To those profound scholar-adherents, a peaceful and unfettered life in simple circumstances in a mountain wildness was equally important to the physiological cultivation. Such might be the case of Chen Tuan (? - 989), a renowned Daoist of the early Song dynasty who lived most of his life in Huashan, the Western Sacred Mountain, and died there. Pictures relate to his life was seen in an album, *Scenes of Mount Hua*, painted by Wang Lü (ca. 1332 - ?) in 1383 and now divided between the collections of the Palace Museum in Beijing and the Shanghai Museum. The album is the result of a mountain pilgrimage. It is like a pictorial travel diary, with a sequence of leaves presenting stages in the journey and places seen by the painter along the way. On the first leaf in Shanghai Museum (Fig. 9), two Daoist

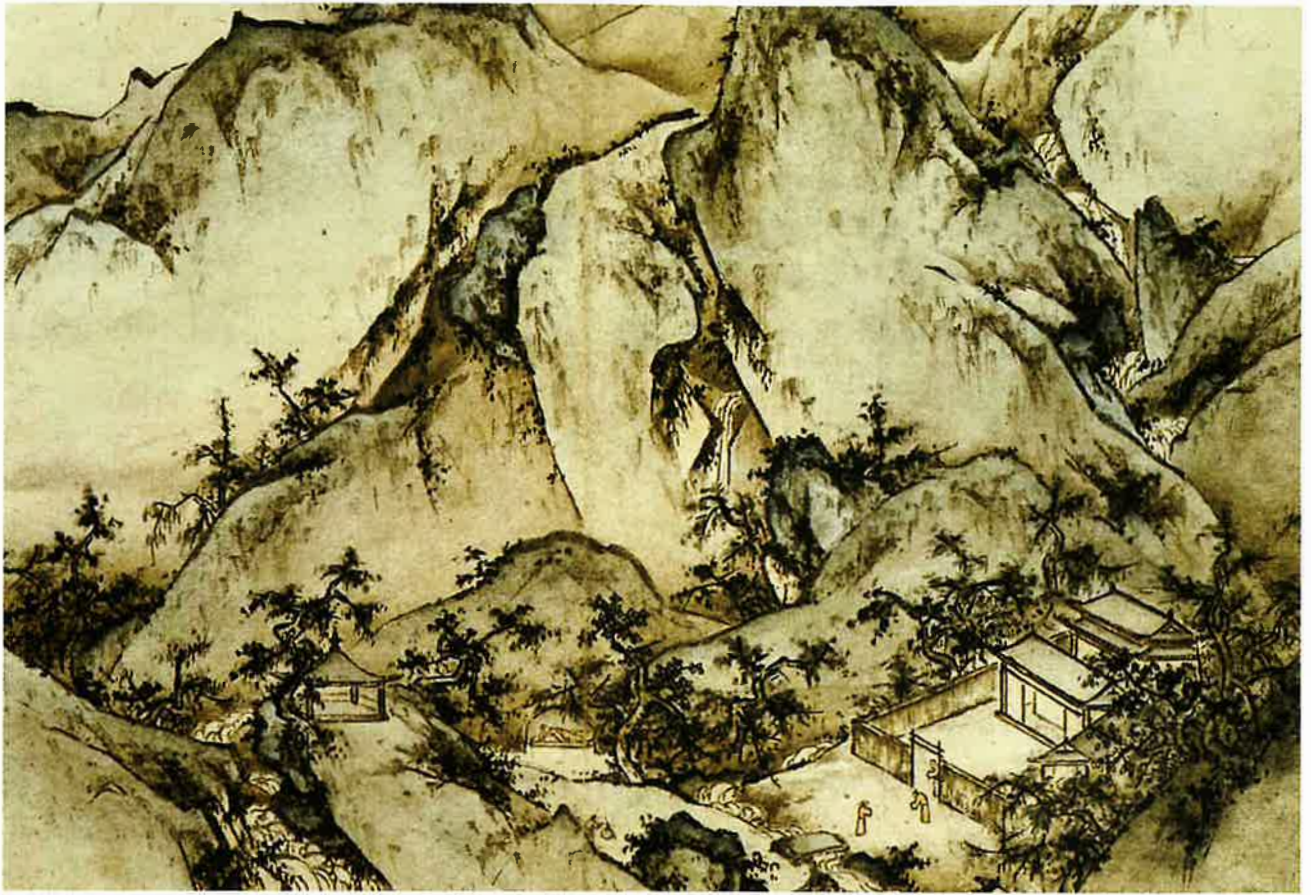


Fig. 9. Wang Lü (ca. 1332 - ?), leaf 1 from *Scenes of Mount Hua*, dated 1383, ink and colour on paper, 34.7 x 50.5 cm.



Fig. 10. Wang Lü (ca. 1332 - ?), leaf 7 from *Scenes of Mount Hua*, dated 1383, ink and colour on paper, 34.7 x 50.5 cm.

practitioners greet Wang Lü by the gate of a Daoist monastery at the mountain foot. In between the gate and a kiosk, on a higher slope, is a shallow cave with a sculpture of a figure reclining on a low bed. The figure is Chen Tuan, renowned for his ability to sleep or rather, meditate. A precipice depicted on leaves 7 and 8 (another side of the cliff) was the place where Chen went to hide to avoid an imperial

summons to government service (Figs. 10, 11). In the inscribed poem, Wang Lü hints at the story of the famous pre-historical recluse Chao Fu, who refused to let his thirsty water-buffalo drink from the stream where Xu You, defiled by a summons to court, had washed his ears.<sup>26</sup>

From such prototype there developed in literature and art a



Fig. 11. Wang Lü (ca. 1332 - ?), leaf 8 from *Scenes of Mount Hua*, dated 1383, ink and colour on paper, 34.7 x 50.5 cm.

theme of what known as *yinju bizhao* or “Going to seclusion to avoid being summoned”. For some intellectuals, the politics of court and the burdens of society or perhaps fame proved unbearable. Retreats built in mountain or streamside settings promised a peaceful and unfettered life in simple circumstances where they could indulge in scholarship and the practice of art. To these characters mountains were heavens to flee to avoid summons from the rulers. One other painting depicting such theme is *Thatched Cottage by the Hexi Lake*, painted by Zhao Yuan (? - 1376) (Fig. 12). This painting depicts the secluded dwelling of Gu Dehui (or Gu A’ying, alias Zhongying) and was painted for presentation to him by the artist himself. The place in this painting was chosen simply because of its special personal significance to both the recipient and the artist. Gu, a native of Kunshan near Suzhou, was a well-known collector and connoisseur. During the late period of Zhizheng reign (1341-68) of the Yuan dynasty, he turned himself into a recluse and lived in seclusion in a thatched cottage at Hexi Lake in Jiaying, Zhejiang province, in order to escape Duke Wu (Wuwang) Zhang Shicheng’s call to serve in his government. His repeated defiance of the summons was perhaps politically motivated, differing from the philosophical aloofness of other recluses.<sup>27</sup> The composition is essentially a portrait of a thatched cottage and several large trees silhouetted against an expanse of water. Across the water is a spit of land with leafy trees where, according to Gu’s inscription, his monk friend lived in a temple. The style responds to the special demands of the particular category of painting and echoes an established pattern. Simple, quiet and graceful, the composition suggests the lifestyle and moral integrity of a lofty gentleman. Much of the picture surface is empty space, suggesting airy heights. The secluded dwelling conveys the idea of seclusion while the two boats signify access to

the outside world.<sup>28</sup> Such compositional methods immediately evoke a sense of the otherworldly that is realised and reinforced by the poems inscribed on the painting by the recipient, which reads,

*Set in the midst of Lake Hexi, the thatched hut nestles within  
A ten-acre stretch of trees and bamboo groves.  
Nature shapes the character of the landscape through ordered colour and  
structured terrain.*

*The reverberating sound of water begets a tidal song.*

*No government tax collectors are here to be seen*

*Instead, only poets, poems and wine.*

*One can come and go freely with boat and oars.*

*Contemplation of the painting brings a deeper perception of beauty.*

*I love the vastness of Lake Hexi. Without a boat and oars, access [to this place] will be denied. Indeed, what a remarkable place this is for seclusion. Thus, I built this retreat to reside in. Shan Chang [Zhao yuan] painted this scroll for me, which captures the real features of the landscape. In response to the painting, I am inscribing these sentiments. Amid the lake, there lies an islet, [there monk] Chengxinbai lives in the Chaoyin Temple...*

Interestingly, a later collector, the Qianlong emperor of the Qing dynasty (r. 1736-95), also wrote a poem on the top of painting to express his understanding of it. Interestingly, he feels that the composition is immersed in thoughts of eremitism and the otherworldly and shares the same feeling of enjoying living in seclusion.<sup>29</sup>

Withdrawing could be politically motivated. A good example of this type of disengagement is seen in Lan Ying’s (1585-1664) *Deep Mountains after Huang Gongwang* (Fig. 13). Lan Ying painted this



Fig. 12. Zhao Yuan (? - 1376), *Thatched Cottage by the Hexi Lake*, hanging scroll, ink and colour on paper, 84.4 x 41.2 cm.

landscape in 1644 right at the time when the Ming dynasty collapsed and fell under Manchu control. As he wrote in his inscription, the painting was the result of an unbearable pain: "In the fourth moon of the year *jashen* [1644], while I was hosting Qinglai at the Xiyun Pavilion, we suddenly heard of the national calamity. Our deep grief led to a mutual commitment to withdraw deep into the mountains. Drowning in sorrow, I painted the *Deep Mountains* after the 'old man Yifeng' [Huang Gongwang (1269-1354)], and therefore allayed a bit of sorrow..." In Lan Ying's case, mountains serve as the literati's refuge from dynastic disorders. Lan's intention to withdraw to a life of seclusion at a mountain was a clear protest against the invasion of the Manchu. Facing national disaster, a preoccupation with the idea of retreat and withdrawal was something that a literati artist like Lan Ying would naturally foster. In this

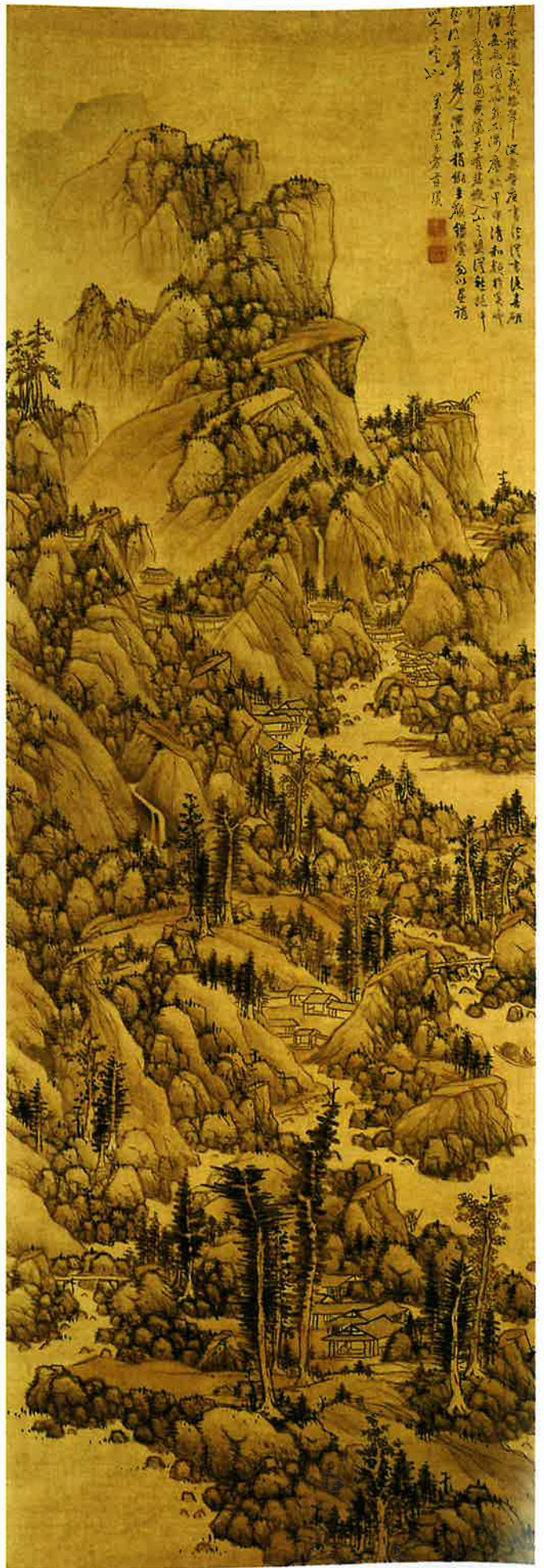


Fig. 13. Lan Ying (1585-1664), *Deep Mountains after Huang Gongwang*, dated 1644, hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, 196.6 x 63.7 cm.



Fig. 14. Zhu Da (1626-1705), *Autumnal Mountains*, dated 1694, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 182.8 x 49.3 cm.



Fig. 15. Shitao (1642-1718), *Pine Trees on Green Cliffs*, hanging scroll, ink and colour on paper, 198 x 89.6 cm.

picture, an atmospheric perspective with conviction and effect was used. Tiny buildings and figures set the scale, while the surmounting peaks fade into mists. The mountain seems to be an accumulation of rocks and boulders, which creates an imposing mountain spine. The piling of clusters of rounded boulders, plateaus and rows of trees is formal in character. The barren and broken land seems to express the heartbreaking reality of a country that has fallen under invaders' control. Yet at the base of the composition tall and sinuous trees grow on the sloping banks suggesting a hint of hope. Lan Ying inscribed the painting after Huang Gongwang, one of the greatest

painters of the Yuan dynasty. Several features recall Huang's style. For instance, Lan Ying represented landscape masses as composites of interacting parts - a feature also seen in Huang's work (such as famous *Stone Cliff at the Pond of Heaven*). However, it is possible that Lan Ying referred to Huang more as a mark of reference, hinting at Huang's withdrawal from the shadow of Mongol public life to dwell in his later years on Mount Fuchun in Zhejiang province.

Such is what Mote termed the "compulsory eremitism", the retirement out of loyalty to a fallen dynasty.<sup>30</sup> The Confucian concept of eremitism demanded that one takes refuge in seclusion to escape from a society ruled by foreign invaders. This form of reclusion is perhaps best demonstrated by the group of early Ming loyalist artists known as *yimin* (literally "left-over men"), who refused to transfer their political allegiance to the new Qing dynasty following the Manchu invasion in 1644. Some became Buddhist or Daoist monks, often through overt displays of eccentricity (like Zhu Da, 1626-1705). Others withdrew into lifelong retirement, living in seclusion or eking out a living by teaching (such as Gong Xian, 1618-89). Among these political renegades were the era's most individual and independent schools of artistic thought and imagination.

Zhu Da was born into a side branch of the Ming royal family in Jiangxi province. The collapse of the dynasty left him with deep scars and shaped his life thereafter. For a time he became, or pretended to be, mad and mute. His behaviour, along with his 12 years living as a Buddhist monk, were the reactions of a hopeless loyalist trying to survive the purges of the foreign Manchu conquerors. Zhu's sorrow and pain is also reflected in his brushwork. Birds and fish are often depicted with squarish upturned eyes and expressions of dissatisfaction and mockery. His landscapes are more subtle in expressing his sentiments but are not free from the terrible historical stresses of the period.

The hanging scroll *Autumnal Mountains*, dated 1694, is inscribed with his last assumed name, Bada Shanren (taken partially from the name of a Buddhist sutra he favoured), which he used exclusively in the last year of his life between ca. 1685-1705 (Fig. 14). It was written in a peculiar way to resemble the characters for "cry" and "laugh", and thus to express the contradictions of his mind. The mountains are monumental in scale, seen in *gaoyuan*, or "high-distance", perspective. His characteristic feature of a sparse picture plane with flattening silhouettes of rocks without much modelling is not evident here. One feels convincing effects of space, height and volume. Yet this kind of compositional arrangement should not deceive the viewer into thinking that this is just another traditional landscape. All the details (such as the modelling or texturing of the rock and mountain crevices) are spontaneous in manner, based on the calligraphic principle. The piling of clusters of rounded boulders was simply achieved with sketching circles, rapidly and spontaneously rendered in light ink wash. Darker dots accent the tone and unite the composition. The contours of distant rolling mountains are completed with a few quick, decisive dry lines. The "craziest" aspect of Zhu's brushwork is seen in those far-reaching trees in the foreground. They are rendered as deliberately primitive and awkward forms, sparsely located in strange postures, isolated from one another. They disturb the spatial order and make the picture a somewhat lonely and solitary one, a reflection of his private world. The painting as a whole gives the impression that the conflict between wild, spontaneous expression and the need to impose some overall sense of order is neutralised by principles of calligraphic expression.

Critics have paid more attention to Zhu Da's more expressionistic and gestural works. In his biography of Zhu Da, the Qing dynasty critic Zhang Geng quoted a contemporary's remarks by

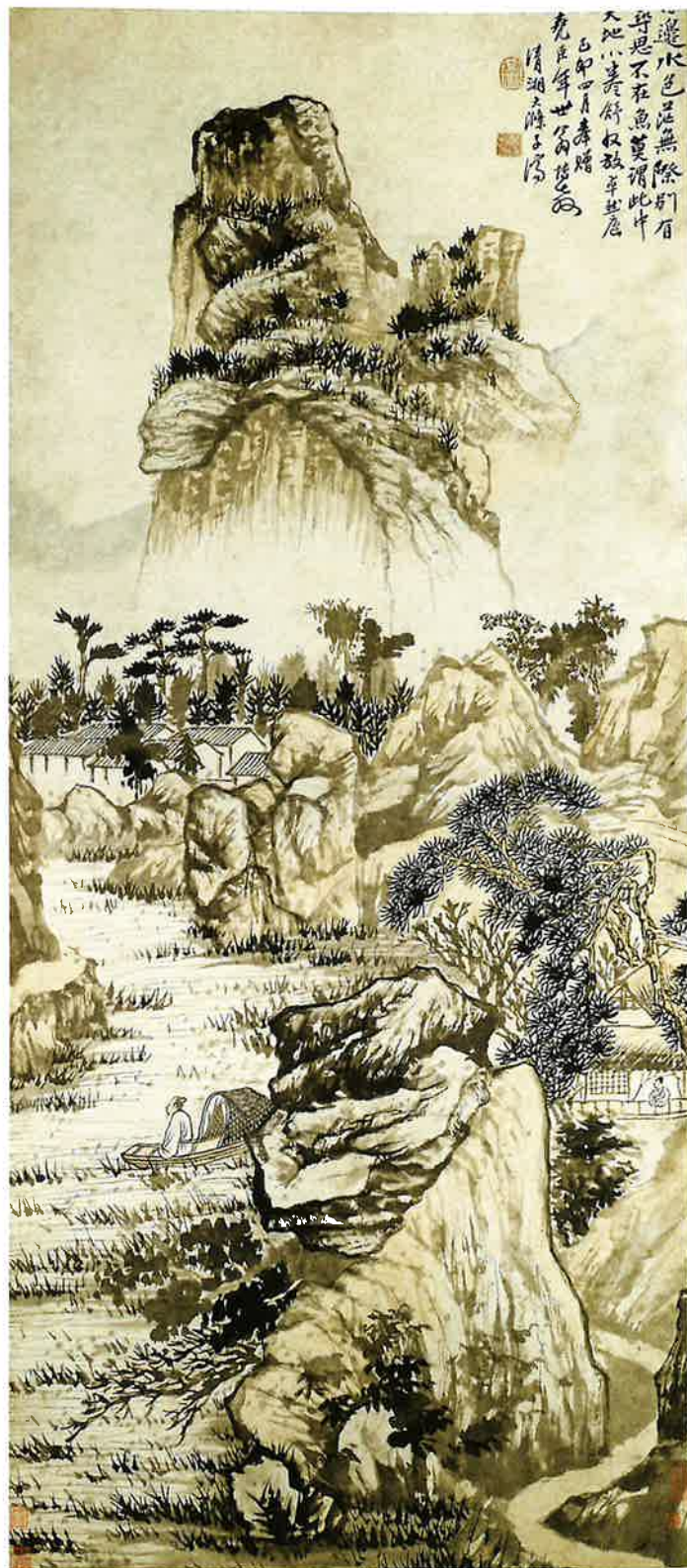


Fig. 16. Shitao (1641-1718), *The Unique Studio*, dated 1699, hanging scroll, ink and colour on paper, 127.8 x 55.1 cm.

saying, "Bada Shanren is well known for his simple and summary brushwork but few people know that he also painted in a very fine and detailed manner; such works of his are the best he ever did, but they are rare and difficult to find".<sup>31</sup> This composition may represent this "rare" category. The "fine and detailed manner" is in perfect balance between *mo* (ink-play) and *bi* (calligraphic structure of composition). Within a single unity of field, Zhu Da has reconciled two conflicting elements of design - chaotic force and the desire for order.

Like Zhu Da, Shitao was also a kinsman of the Ming emperor. He was only an infant when the Manchus took over his



Fig. 17. Guan Si (active 1625), *Fisherman's Flute in a Stream*, dated 1625, hanging scroll, ink and colour on paper, 153.5 x 53.4 cm.

country. His father declared a new regime in Guangxi province when the Ming imperial rule ended in Nanjing, but was captured and killed soon after by another kinsman of the Ming royal family who claimed to be legitimate successor of the Ming. Shitao entered the Buddhist priesthood at a very young age, more as a means of survival than from spiritual conviction. Like in Zhua Da's painting, the effect of dynastical change on Shitao is reflected in his painting style, as demonstrated in *Pine Trees on Green Cliffs* (Fig. 15). The choice of subject matter is not quite new: one sees a riverbank view opened with two huge boulders in the foreground, set by a flowing stream. Upon the rock, an old man in a white robe relaxes under a large pine with twisted branches and a dragon-scale-like trunk. Beyond, wondrous and tortuous rocks, cliffs and peaks of hard-edged forms arise on the left, with a waterfall crashing down inside a grotto. On the opposite side houses nestle among a bamboo grove. On the further shore, the river recedes into the background and the distant mountain range in "boneless" washes of ink and pink pigment rolls gently into the realm of mists. However, the strong sentiment of the artist (as well as his highly individual side of style) is evident in his depiction of the rocks and peaks. Their contours were chiefly configured with desiccated, twisted lines and dry, crumbly texturing, and then accented by light green and pink wash and dark spots of ink. The unconventional forms seem to be twisting, squirming and contorting, as if in pain, struggle or embarrassment. The dominant colours are warm pink and cool blue. As they merge, they produce a third, ochre tone. Like other 17th-century individualist artists, Shitao uses colour as an expressive rather than descriptive element.

In comparison with Zhu Da, Shitao was less scarred by the fall of the Ming, and when the opportunity arose willingly adopted Confucian ideals and became active in the service of the Qing. Only after running into trouble did he flee the capital to find sanctuary in the city Yangzhou in Jiangsu province. He settled in a house named Daditang (Hall of Great Cleansing) built by the Small Qinhuai River in 1695 and remained there for the rest of his life. The composition in Fig. 16 depicts his late years in Yangzhou. Dominating the foreground is a waterweed-covered river on the left and a series of rocks in bizarre configurations on the right. A winding path emerging from the lower edge of the picture leads the eye to a house where a figure looks out, his gaze fixed on a quiet boat on the river. A man, apparently Shitao himself, sits in the prow, immersed in deep meditation. In the background, a grotesque peak arises abruptly, thrusting towards the sky. The rocks are shaped and configured carelessly in bold brushstrokes and finished with dilute-wash shading in a spontaneous manner. The looser, wet and bold brushwork and freer manner replace the earlier dryer and careful texturing or modelling. Trees in the background are rendered as deliberately primitive and awkward forms, creating an expressionistic feel. In the context of Shitao's life and spiritual journey, many of his landscapes maintain his dilemma about withdrawal and engagement, the dissolution and regaining of the self, and the fragmentation and refocus of the gaze. Shitao's poem speaks of a self-satisfied and carefree state. It was at this time, free of all other concerns, that he could live truly like a Buddhist or Daoist recluse, or simply a retired gentleman of leisure, pursuing only personal and artistic self-cultivation.<sup>32</sup>

The poem Shitao inscribed on his painting is interesting: "An infinite expanse of water opens a void, Into which I delve but not for the fish ..." These lines hint at an important theme of Chinese landscape painting, the so called *yuyin*, sometimes translated into English as "fisherman-recluse", or rather "reclusion in a fishing boat". Such compositions are quite different to those which depict the lives of fishermen - a subject popular in the early and middle Ming, particularly among the Zhe school artists.<sup>33</sup> In these compositions,

the fishermen are generally shown at work, as carefree people who, when their work is done, can spend their time at leisure and enjoying nature. The theme of *yuyin*, however, concerns eremitism rather than fishing. Those seen on boats are not fishermen but scholar-recluses who are escaping an official career, fame and other social burdens. The Chinese literati regarded fishing, reading, ploughing and wood-chopping as the Four Pleasures. Such sentiments embodied the ideal of a carefree life in harmony with nature, far from the mundane world, and recalled early literary traditions where the character of a recluse was often a person of great wisdom in humble guise.

Among numerous compositions depicting the *yuyin* theme, a hanging scroll painted by Guan Si (active 1625), an artist of the Wu school in 1625, is an interesting one (Fig. 17). The structure of this painting combines the axial plan typical of the 11th and 12th centuries with the Wu school compositional scheme of "river and shore". In the foreground is an open stream upon which a small boat drifts. A man in a red robe sits in the prow, playing a flute. In the midground, dense trees fringe a rolling terrace, while in the background a grandiose mountain, constructed around a central vertical axis, echoes early landscapes of the Northern Song period (960-1127). The mountain seals off the vista, enclosing the fisherman-recluse in a discrete and magical scene. The rocks and mountains have been brushed using bold lines and then touched with *cun* texture strokes and dark vegetation dots, and finished with a wash of indigo. The alternating black and green dots and the figure's red robe brighten the whole composition. Although the painting was given a title by the collector as *Fisherman's Flute in a Stream* (Fig. 17), the picture in fact portrays the *yuyin* or "reclusion in a fishing boat" theme. The imagined sounds of the flute, murmuring stream, distant waterfall and rustling autumn leaves combine to evoke a carefree and otherworldly mood. In addition, the colour of the figure's robe is also pregnant: while red was the colour of a ranking official's costume during the Ming, it was also one of the primary colours of the Daoist priests' robe.<sup>34</sup> The image therefore leads a viewer's imagination to flit between different hints.

The ethos of reclusion so influenced the Chinese intellectual class that it left an imprint on almost every facet of artistic endeavour. In landscape painting, the theme of reclusion was expressed through a diversity of imagery, sometimes unprecedented and original but often based on well-known prototypes and patterns. Among others, "retreat in solitude" is the most represented imagery.

The imagery of retreat in solitude includes personal studios, country estates or anonymous insubstantial huts. The secluded dwellings are either built by a river or high on a mountain amid a grove of trees. In the former, the composition is compartmentalised, with the dwelling in a secluded area to suggest the idea of reclusion. Several boats, however, often signify the possibility of venturing out, if one desired, into the wider world.<sup>35</sup> In the latter, the atmospheric effects created around the retreat often draw the theme beyond the peaceful solitude of the secular recluse to evoke feelings of otherworldliness. In *Fantastic Peaks among Autumnal Cloud*, Gong Xian (1618-1689) sets his secluded dwelling far back in the middle distance, behind a series of obstacles of trees, hills and mists, and raises it aloft. The atmospheric effects create a feeling of a solitary dwelling far from worldly concerns. While Chinese painters of all periods touched upon the idea of eremitism now and again, in Gong Xian's painting it is a persistent theme. A native of Kunshan in Jiangsu province, Gong belonged to the group of scholars known as *yimin*, or "left-over men", who maintained loyalty to the Ming dynasty after its fall. Unwilling to serve as a government official, he earned his living by selling his paintings and teaching. For Gong Xian, living in seclusion was a political choice for men of integrity.



Fig. 18. Qiu Ying (early 16th century), *Thatched Study among Wutong Trees and Bamboo*, hanging scroll, ink and colour on paper, 148 x 57.2 cm.



Mirroring his physical life, he also dedicated his painting to eremitic landscape imagery that was accompanied by individualistic poems. In this painting, his inscribed poem reinforces the theme:

*I behold fantastic peaks and clouds in exotic shape,  
Under the azure-glazed sky of early autumn.  
The burning ambergris awaits the arrival of the three-legged blue bird,  
Which delivers from afar solicitous regards of Queen Mother of the West.*

In popular belief, Xi Wangmu, or Queen Mother of the West, was the major deity of the Western Paradise, the magic mountain Kunlun, where fairies and hybrid creatures abound and hares prepare the drug of immortality. She possessed the magic power of conferring the means to attain longevity upon others. Among her many fairy subordinates was a three-legged blue bird messenger. Through this imaginary experience of the supramundane encountering, Gong Xian had therefore accomplished his task of raising his dwelling above the turbulence of the world.<sup>36</sup>

"Shutting the door and writing books, one forgets the passing of time. Planted pines all turn into the old dragon scale". Poems such as this by Wang Wei (701-761) are stimulating to Chinese artists. "Reading in a secluded dwelling" is therefore another popular variation of the reclusion theme in landscape painting. Here scholars are depicted engaged in scholarly activities in a mountain retreat, riverside villa, garden cottage or other secluded dwelling. Mountains were seen as a perfect setting for engaging in the scholarly pursuit of reading, where scholar, nature and poetry (or history) form an intimate communication. Some pictures also evoke a Chinese tradition where eminent scholar-recluses not only cultivate their own scholarship but also use their retreat as a place for teaching others.

In Qiu Ying's (early 16th century) *Thatched Study among Wutong Trees and Bamboo*, an open pavilion with a roof half tiled and half thatched is depicted against a mountain range (Fig. 18). Inside, a gentleman sits in a deck chair, captured glancing up from his book to momentarily enjoy the scenery. The rolling mountains with a waterfall, the elegant bamboo grove, vigorous far-reaching *wutong* (Chinese parasol tree) and quiet pool surrounding the pavilion indicate that this is a scene of serenity and seclusion conducive to study and meditation. Furthermore, some elements are also symbolic: bamboo has *jie* (nodes) which is a homophone of *qijie* (moral integrity); it bends but never breaks, its void interior suggests a modest, open-mind; the *wutong*, according to tradition, is the only place where a phoenix would choose to perch. With such allusions, the private, insular life implied in retreat painting is somehow purified. During the Ming dynasty, it was common for painters living in the Suzhou area to paint their own retreats or those of their friends.<sup>37</sup> Typically these paintings depicted either social gatherings in landscape surroundings, where people met to express their sensual pleasure in nature and the arts, or lone figures in a retreat setting enjoying a cultured life in solitude, as in this scroll by Qiu Ying.

One other popular pattern is the so-called "visiting a recluse" genre. This theme has its origins in literature and has developed many variations in landscape painting. In some, the visit is successful and the visitor finds the recluse at home. Other, more poignant variations include "looking for the recluse and not finding him" and "turning back when the urge has abated".<sup>38</sup> Such paintings emphasise the purity of the recluse's dwelling, often with emblems that allude to well-known recluses. Thus, even if the visitors (including



Fig. 19. Xiao Yuncong (1596-1673), *Autumnal Mountains*, hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, 171.2 x 52.1 cm.

the viewers) do not find the recluse, they are not disappointed as simply observing evidence of his recent habitation is enough to fulfil their goal. In *Autumnal Mountains*, Xiao Yuncong (1596-1673) catches the moment when the visitors have just arrived at their destination (Fig. 19). Several houses nestle in a secure dell at the foot of a towering mountain. The red leaves of large trees and chrysanthemums blossoming by a fence give an autumnal atmosphere. In the foreground, a small boat is about to enter the open space. Two gentlemen sit in its prow. Only in the areas where the human figures and autumnal leaves occur are there hints of colour, otherwise the composition is monochrome. At first glance, the painting seems to depict the *yuyin* or "reclusion in a fishing boat" theme. The painter's inscription, however, suggests a different reading:

*The permeating autumnal colour in boundless plains burns the trees,  
Flowering by the fence, blossoms withstand the frost.  
Striking the paddle, a small boat calmly drifts,  
We are here to visit the recluse in his mulberry-surrounded dwelling.*

To those familiar with the theme, the scene opens to many possibilities: is the recluse at home, would the visitors return back like Wang Huizhi because their urge has abated, or would they change their minds at the last minute and decide not to intrude on the recluse's solitude? Whatever the result, the scene as seen by both visitors and viewers is in harmony with the inscribed poem, which contains conventional emblems of the recluse, especially those associated with the renowned recluse Tao Qian, such as the chrysanthemum and the secluded world of the garden.<sup>39</sup>

Among the many variations of the reclusion theme in Ming and Qing landscape traditions, "gazing at a waterfall" was one of the most popular and enduring. A good example is seen in *Mountains in Blue and Green*, a hanging scroll painted by Zhang Hong (1580-1668) in 1642 in celebration of a certain Mr Jintai's birthday (Fig. 20). It depicts a mountain range with a gentleman sitting by a cliff side, gazing at a waterfall that cascades down from a mountain peak. The dramatic scenery expresses the dream of an ideal realm of transcendental beings that goes beyond what is conventionally conveyed by this theme. The colour of the haze further fuses the elements of the picture into a fantastic unity.<sup>40</sup>

The significance of the genre is not only seen in the endurance of its subject matter but also in its multiplicity of representation. Images of scholars contemplating by flowing water, gazing into a spring, or even watching the waves surge, all relate to the theme. The persistence of such imagery is easily explained its underlying philosophy: in Confucian teaching, water has been used as a metaphor of virtue or of a higher state of mind. This is reflected in one of the most well-known Confucian dictums, "The wise man finds joy on the water, the benevolent man finds joy in the mountains". Here an analogy is drawn between the natural qualities of mountain and water and the moral qualities of the perfect gentlemen such as endurance, stability, sharpness of mind and flexibility to adapt in the best way to a changing environment. In Daoism, water was the closest parallel to the *dao*, the core of the natural world. Water's capability to overcome stubborn obstacles, smooth rough surfaces and round sharp edges of hard materials using only very soft power embodies one of the core notions of Daoism - the power of weakness



Fig. 20. Zhang Hong (1580-1668), *Mountains in Blue and Green*, dated 1642, hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, 130 x 63 cm.

(or *yin* element). In both Confucianism and Daoism, the observation of flowing water offers a model for an enlightened person to approach life's imperfections: gazing into a waterfall is to gaze into one's own mind, or the *dao* or essence of the phenomena.

The image of the landscape in Chinese art was indeed hardly ever an end in itself. There are numerous paintings depicting mountains composed during the Ming and Qing period that directly or indirectly refer to the transcendental ideas. Many of them



Fig. 21. Tang Yin (1470-1523), *Spring Outing in Mount Nüji*, hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, 122 x 65 cm.

path, approaching a rustic bridge which leads to a cottage by the lakeside. The picture is weighted to the right, where rocky ridges thrust upwards, while a splendid group of buildings overlooks a wide expanse of water. The whole composition is structured to form a continuous "S" curve, from the background hills to twisted mountain ridge in the midground to the foreground rocks and bridge. Although the painting represents the realm of mundane experience, there are oblique spiritual references. In the Daoist classification of sacred mountains, each of the five greatest mountains (one in each of the cardinal directions north, south, east, west and centre) has several "lesser" mountains as subordinates connected by a system of underground grottoes. Mount Nüji, located in Henan province, is among the five lesser mountains associated with the great mountain of the west, Mount Hua. Tang Yin's understanding of the mountains' sacred association is evident in a poem he has inscribed on the painting:

*The early spring snow is melting on Mount Nüji,  
Along the path the immortals' apricots burgeon forth.  
[I] have longed for this day to go sightseeing [with you],  
Carrying a zither and wine, [I] am crossing the rustic bridge.*

The poem was modified from the Tang dynasty poet Yang Shi's piece *Gazing at the Summit of Mount Nüji*,<sup>41</sup> cited in Guo Xi's (ca. 1010-90) *Linquan gaozhi* (*Lofty aims in Forests and Streams*) in a group of poems that Guo thought was suitable for painting. Noticeably, the apricot trees are named in the poem as *xianxing*, or "immortals' apricots". The transcendental feeling is also hinted at in the cliffside buildings, which, although they are not temples, have a palatial appearance that suggests an abode of the immortals. The otherworldly theme of the composition may be viewed in association with the artist's life. Tang Yin is a typical example of the Chinese intellectual who turned to escapism after failing to succeed in an official career. Born into a rich family in Suzhou, Tang had a good education and his future seemed bright with great expectation. However, his dream of an official career was ruined by a bribery scandal caused by a close friend while taking the *jinsbi* civil service examination in Beijing in 1499. He returned home and instead made his living as a painter. During his later years he turned both to Daoism and Buddhism, although never seriously indulged in religious activities.

Paintings such as Tang Yin's *Spring Outing in Mount Nüji* reflect the ordinary scholar-artists' attitude toward the mountains who treated the sacred realm as a counterimage to world reality or as a spiritual home. These paintings thus played important roles in enriching the intellectuals' lives by offering a space of spiritual roaming, a source of imagination and an ideal of life-style.

*Liu Yang is Curator of Chinese Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.*

are so subtle in their reference to the idea of transcendental realms that their overtones are often not readily apparent unless one examines the relationships between the paintings, the artists' own and the later viewers' inscriptions on them. Such is the case in Tang Yin's (1470-1523) *Spring Outing in Mount Nüji* (Fig. 20). On first impression, this painting belongs to the so-called "topographical" genre of landscape as it depicts a known geographic location. A group of large boulders and venerable pine trees dominate the foreground. A man carrying a staff with his servant walks along a

## NOTES

1. For discussions of the Five Sacred Mountains, see Liu Yang, *Fantastic Mountains: Chinese Landscape Painting from the Shanghai Museum*, Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2004, pp. 31 - 39, 190, and pl. 67. See also Terry Kleeman, "Mountain Deities in China: The Domestication of the Mountain God and the Subjugation of the Margins", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 114, no. 2, 1994, pp. 226 - 38.
2. Cf. Paul W. Kroll, "Verses from on High: The Ascent of T'ai Shan", *T'oung Pao*, vol. Lxix, 4-5, 1983, pp. 223 - 260.
3. In Ge Hong, *Baopuzi* (He who embraces simplicity), ed. and annot. by Wang Ming, Beijing: Zhonghua Press, 1980, *juan* 17, p. 274.
4. See K. M. Schipper, "Gogaku, shinkeizu, no shinkō", *Dōkyō kenkyū* 2, 1967, pp. 114 - 62. For "true forms" of the five sacred mountains, cf. Kiyohiko Munakata, *Sacred mountains in Chinese Art*, Urbana-Champaign, Krannert Art Museum, 1991, p. 113.
5. For discussions of this painting, see also Liu Yang, 2004, pl. 40, p. 127.
6. Ge Hong, *Baopuzi*, *juan* 17.
7. In *Quan Tangshi* (Complete poems of the Tang), edited by Peng Dingqiu (1645-1719) and others under imperial auspices, completed in 1706, Beijing: Zhonghua Press, 1960, *juan* 180.
8. For a historical study of Emei's association with Daoism, cf. Shi Mingfei, "Li Po's Ascent of Mount O-mei: A Taoist Vision of the Mythology of a Sacred Mountain", *Taoist Resources*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1993, pp. 31 - 45.
9. Qin Zuyong (1825 - 84), *Tongyiu lunhua* (Comments on painting in the shade of Wutong trees). For discussions of this painting, see also Liu Yang, 2004, pp. 31 - 39, 190, and pl. 67.
10. For Wu Bin's life and works, see James Cahill, *The Compelling Image: Nature and Style in Seventeenth Century Chinese Painting*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1979, pp. 70 - 105, and *Fantastics and Eccentrics in Chinese Painting*, New York: The Asia Society, Inc., 1967, pp. 28 - 36.
11. Both were recorded in Liu Yiqing (420-79), *Shishuo xinyu* (A new account of tales of the world).
12. The legends have that it was in Shanyin that Yu obtained the *Shujing* or *Classic of Water*, a sacred text of Huangdi or Yellow Emperor from a grotto. Following Huangdi's method Yu tamed the Yellow River of floods. See Zheng Shanfu (Ming), *Yuxueji* (Record of Yu Grotto). Latter, during his inspection trip to the east, Yu died in Shanyin and was buried there, see *Mozi*, *juan* 6: 25.
13. For discussions of this painting, see also Liu Yang, 2004, pl. 31, p. 110.
14. See Richard Vinograd, "Some Landscape Related to the Blue-and Green Manner from the Early Yuan Period", *Artibus Asiae*, XLI, 2/3, 1979, pp. 101-31.
15. Shang Chang was a famous Eastern Han recluse. After arranging a marriage for his son, he said to his family: "now I am no longer of concern to you. Just assume that I am dead". Then he went into mountains. See Fan Ye (398-445), *Houhanshu* (History of the later Han dynasty), Beijing: Zhonghua Press, 1965, *juan* 83.
16. For discussions of this painting, see also Liu Yang, 2004, pl. 79, p. 220.
17. For a discussion of Chinese religious geography, see Thomas Hahn, "The Standard Taoist Mountain and Related Features of Religious Geography", *Cahiers d'Extreme-Asie*, 4, 1988, pp. 145 - 156.
18. A good study of such situation on the southern sacred mountain Hengshan, see James Robson, "The Polymorphous Space of the Southern Marchmount (Nanyue): An Introduction to Nayue's Religious History and Preliminary Notes on Buddhist-Daoist Interaction", *Cahiers d'Extreme-Asie*, 8, 1995, pp. 221 - 264.
19. For discussions of this painting, see Liu Yang, 2004, pl. 18, p. 82, and Stephen Little et al., *Taoism and the arts of China*, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, 2000, p. 301.
20. For studies of *dongtian*, see Franciscus Verellen, "The beyond within: grotto heavens (*dongtian*) in Taoist ritual and cosmology", *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient*, 8, 1995, pp. 265 - 290; Liu Yang, 2004, pp. 31 - 39.
21. For a study of representations of *dongtian* in Chinese landscape painting, see Liu Yang, "The 'Grotto-heavens' in Chinese Painting", paper presented at *Fantastic Mountains in Chinese Painting and Culture*, organised by the Art Gallery of New South Wales, 12 - 13 March 2004, Sydney.
22. Cf. Stephen Bokenkamp, "The peach flower font and the grotto passage", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 106, 1986, pp. 65 - 77; Susan E. Nelson, "On Through to the Beyond: The Peach Blossom Spring as Paradise", *Archives of Asian Art*, XXXIX, 1986, pp. 23 - 44.
23. Cf. Liu Yang, 2004, pl. 23, p. 90.
24. Cf. Liu Yang, 2004, pl. 37, p. 122.
25. For studies of the eremitic tradition in China, see Frederick W. Mote, "Confucian Eremitism in the Yuan Period", in Arthur F. Wright, ed., *The Confucian Persuasion*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960, pp. 202 - 40; Bauer Wolfgang, "The Hidden Hero: Creation and Distegration of the Idea of Eremitism", in Donald J. Muro, ed., *Individualism and Holism: Studies in Confucian and Taoist Values*, The University of Michigan, Centre for Chinese Studies, 1985, pp. 157 - 197; Aat Vervoorn, *Men of the Cliffs and Caves: The Development of the Chinese Eremitic Tradition to the End of the Han Dynasty*, Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1990, and Alan J. Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement: The Practice and Portrayal of Reclusion in Early Medieval China*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000.
26. For studies of this set in Shanghai Museum, and for Wang's complete album, see Liu Yang, 2004, pl. 1, pp. 3, pp. 45 - 51; Kathlyn Maureen Liscomb, *Learning from Mount Hua: A Chinese Physician's Illustrated Travel Record and Painting Theory*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1993.
27. For the life of Gu Dehui, see Zhang Tingyu et al., *Mingshi* (History of the Ming dynasty), Beijing: Zhonghua Press, 1974, *juan* 285, p. 7325.
28. Such painting structure was popular during the Ming and earlier. James Cahill has discussed a few examples, see Cahill, *Three alternative history of Chinese painting*, The University of Kansas, 1988, p. 41.
29. Cf. Liu Yang, 2004, pl. 2, p. 52.
30. Cf. Frederick Mote, 1960.
31. Zhang Geng, *Guochao bua zhenglu* (A record of paintings in the Qing dynasty), quoted in Siren, 1978, vol. 2, p. 122.
32. Cf. Liu Yang, 2004, pls. 65 - 66, pp. 87 - 88.
33. Cahill, 1988, pp. 58 - 61.
34. See Stephen Little et al., 2000, pp. 195 - 98.
35. Cf. Cahill, 1988, p. 41.
36. Cf. Liu Yang, 2004, pl. 51, p. 150.
37. Ellen Johnston Laing distinguished two common compositional arrangements that were used widely in garden depictions by Tang Yin, Wen Zhenming and other 16th-century Suzhou artists. See "From Sages to Revellers: 17th-Century Transformations in Chinese Painting Subjects", *Oriental Art*, XLI, 1, Spring, 1995, pp. 26 - 27. For discussions of this painting, cf. Liu Yang, 2004, pl. 16, p. 78.
38. Here the underlying story, as recorded in Liu Yiqing's *Shishuo xinyu*, relates how the renowned scholar Wang Huizhi (son of Wang Xizhi, 303-361) was overcome on a snowy night by an urgent desire to visit his friend Dai Kui (?-395), a gifted artist. He journeys on his boat through a blinding snowstorm. Once he arrives, however, he discovers that his urge has gone and he returns home without knocking on Dai's door.
39. For Tao Qian's life, see Alan J. Berkowitz, 2000, pp. 215 - 226. Cf. Liu Yang, 2004, pl. 44, p. 135.
40. Cf. Liu Yang, 2004, pl. 32, p. 114.
41. In *Quan Tangshi*, *juan* 332. For a variant translation of the poem and a discussion of the painting, see Wen Fong et al., *Images of the mind*, Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton 1984, p. 152. Cf. also Liu Yang, 2004, pl. 14, p. 75.