

ARTIBUS ASIAE



The Donkey Rider as Icon: Li Cheng and Early Chinese Landscape Painting

Author(s): Peter C. Sturman

Source: *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 55, No. 1/2 (1995), pp. 43-97

Published by: [Artibus Asiae Publishers](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3249762>

Accessed: 05/08/2011 12:40

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Artibus Asiae Publishers is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Artibus Asiae*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

PETER C. STURMAN

THE DONKEY RIDER AS ICON:
LI CHENG AND EARLY CHINESE LANDSCAPE PAINTING*

“The country is broken, mountains and rivers remain.”¹ With these famous words that lament the catastrophe of the An Lushan Rebellion, the poet Du Fu (712–70) reflected upon a fundamental principle in China: dynasties may come and go, but landscape is eternal. It is a principle affirmed with remarkable power in the paintings that emerged from the rubble of Du Fu’s dynasty some two hundred years later. I speak of the magnificent scrolls of the tenth and eleventh centuries belonging to the relatively tightly circumscribed tradition from Jing Hao (active ca. 875–925) to Guo Xi (ca. 1000–90) known today as monumental landscape painting. The landscape is presented as timeless. We lose ourselves in the believability of its images, accept them as less the product of human minds and hands than as the record of a greater truth. Jing Hao’s and Guo Xi’s own writings on landscape painting largely perpetuate the illusion that what is seen is first and foremost nature’s reality.² We are encouraged to appreciate the subtle transformations of season and geography, but not necessarily the human intentions that underlie the choice of one motif over another and its placement in the composition.³

* Preliminary research for this study was first outlined for the Chinese Poetry Group of Southern California in Los Angeles, September, 1991. Subsequent forms of the study were presented at the February, 1992 meeting of the College Art Association in Chicago and for the conference “Mountains and the Cultures of Landscape in China,” which took place in Santa Barbara, California, January, 1993 sponsored by the University of California at Santa Barbara, the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for Scholarly Exchange, and the Metropolitan Center for Far Eastern Art Studies. Those papers were respectively titled “The Donkey Rider as Cultural Icon: A Study in Chinese Iconography” and “Li Cheng and the Literati Discourse on Reality in Northern Song Landscape Painting.”

¹ Du Fu, “Chun wang” (Spring gazing), *Du shi xiangzhu*, edited by Qiu Zhaoao (Beijing, 1979 reprint ed.), 320–21. The poem is presumed to have been written in the third lunar month, 757.

² Jing Hao’s text, *Bifa ji*, is well-presented in Kiyohiko Munakata’s monograph study *Jing Hao’s “Pi-fa-chi”: A Note on the Art of the Brush*, *Artibus Asiae Supplementum XXXI* (Ascona, 1974). Guo Xi’s *Linchuan gaozhi* (Lofty Aspirations Among Forests and Streams) is published in Yu Kun’s (Yu Jianhua) *Zhongguo hualun leibian* (Taipei, 1977 reprint ed.), 631–50. An old but serviceable translation of Guo Xi’s text is Shio Sakanishi’s *Lin ch’uan kao chih: An Essay on Landscape Painting* (London, 1959). Portions of both are included in Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (Cambridge, 1985), Chapter 4. See also Fu Songnian and Chen Shaofeng, “Du Linchuan gaozhi hua ji zhaji” (Notes on reading *Linchuan gaozhi* and the “Record on Painting”), *Meishu yanjiu* no. 3 (1979), 66–71, and Suzuki Kei, “Linchuan gaozhi hua ji yu Guo Xi” (*Linchuan gaozhi*, the “Record on Painting” and Guo Xi), translated into Chinese by Wang Weiming, *Meishu yanjiu* no. 4 (1982), 70–76 [originally published in Japanese in *Bijutsu shi* no. 109 (1980)]. Guo Xi’s text and painting are the subject of a Ph.D. dissertation by Stanley Murashige, “‘Early Spring’ and the ‘Linchuan gaozhi’: Painting as Ritual Performance,” University of Chicago, 1991.

³ Among the few studies that specifically address the subject of meaning in tenth- and eleventh-century landscape painting are Richard Barnhart, *Wintry Forests and Old Trees, Some Landscape Themes in Chinese Painting* (New York, 1972); Sofukawa Hiroshi, “Kaku Ki to Soshun zu” (Guo Xi and “Early Spring”), *Tōyōshi kenkyū* XXXV, no. 4 (1977), 62–86; and Richard Barnhart, “Figures in Landscape,” *Archives of Asian Art* XLII (1989), 62–70. To date, the majority of studies of the monumental landscape painting tradition have been primarily concerned with issues of dating, structural analysis, technique, style and lineages. These studies, too, however, commonly touch upon broader questions of meaning and intention. Among the more notable are Wen Fong, *Summer Mountains* (New York, 1975); Sofukawa Hiroshi, “Godai Hoku Sō shoki sansuiga no ichi kosatsu” (A Study of the landscape painting of the Five Dynasties and early Northern Song periods), *Tōhō gakuhō* 419 (1977), 113–214; Ogawa Hiromitsu, “Tō Sō sansuiga shi ni okeru imajineeshon – hatsuboku kara Soshun zu Shōshō gakuyu zukan made” (Imagination in Tang and Song landscape painting – from the splashed ink style to “Early Spring” and “Dream Journey Along the Xiao-Xiang”), *Kokka* #1034 (1980), 5–17, #1035 (1980), 35–45, and #1036 (1980), 25–36; Suzuki Kei, *Chūgoku kaigashi*, first volume (Tōkyō, 1981), especially 188–291.

This attractive quality of timelessness belies the fact that the formation of landscape painting during the Five Dynasties Period and early Northern Song, like any other movement in art, is subject to historical analysis, and the subtleties of the process of its development are recoverable. It is towards this goal that iconographical studies hold some promise, for isolating the associations of a prominent motif and analyzing its function over time potentially provide a small window of visibility on the formation of the genre. The motif of choice here is one that at first may appear unworthy of serious study. The donkey rider seems but an insignificant and humorous player in the greater drama of mountains and rivers that surround him. Ubiquitous in these early paintings, one comes to think of him as a natural outgrowth of the landscape, as timeless as the hills he traverses. Yet the donkey rider's presence will be shown to be inextricably linked to the very emergence of landscape as a dominant subject in the tenth century and, as such, an important key to revealing the values that spurred the development of this magnificent art.

The subject proves far more complex than one might first presume, with multiple lines of potential inquiry leading from what begins as a simple process of identification. A number of these will be followed in this essay, though none with the exhaustive detail each ultimately deserves. The primary goal, rather, is to sketch some of the vistas that open through a study of the donkey rider. Not least among these is the historical process itself by which an icon takes form, expands and splinters into various themes, sub-themes and personalities. As will be demonstrated, there was a powerful tendency in China to root the values assigned to an icon with historical figures. In the case of the donkey rider numerous individuals are involved, including some of the most hallowed names of Chinese poetry and painting. None, however, plays as pivotal a role as the Five Dynasties Period landscape painter Li Cheng (919–67), who in many respects becomes the true subject of this study. The essay is loosely structured around three important attributions to Li Cheng: *Travelers in a Wintry Forest* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art), *A Solitary Temple amid Clearing Peaks* (The Nelson-Atkins Museum), and *Reading the Stele by Pitted Rocks* (The Ōsaka Municipal Museum).

I. *Travelers in a Wintry Forest: Ut Pictura Poesis*

We begin with *Travelers in a Wintry Forest* (figs. 1, 2), a large and impressive painting on silk upon whose mounting above one finds the lofty proclamation, “The number one Li Cheng painting in the world,” written by its former owner, the twentieth-century painter and collector Chang Dai-chien (Zhang Daqian [Zhang Yuan], 1899–1983). This is a painting that has attracted relatively little attention since it was purchased in 1973.⁴ A possible reason for this may be a persistent uneasiness concerning the painting's date. Unsigned, and with few seals, the style and technique of the painting are about the only things by which a date can be assigned, and analysis of these has resulted in wildly differing conclusions, ranging from the tenth to the twentieth centuries (see Appendix for a discussion of the painting's date). Ironically, if it had been known how the painting, or at least the

⁴ The painting was shown in the exhibition “Wintry Forests, Old Trees: Some Landscape Themes in Chinese Painting,” organized by Richard Barnhart at China Institute in America, October 26, 1972 – January 28, 1973. It is reproduced with Professor Barnhart's observations in the catalogue to the exhibition, pp. 28–29. The painting is also published in Wang Shijie, ed., *A Garland of Chinese Painting* (Hong Kong, 1967), vol. 1, pl. 11, and Nakata Yūjirō, ed., *Tō Gen, Kyōnen* (Dong Yuan and Juran), *Bunjinga suiben* series (Tōkyō, 1977), vol. 2, pl. 17. Most recently, the painting has been discussed and sumptuously published by Wen Fong, *Beyond Representation* (New York, 1992), 77–79, pl. 9, 9a–b. I would like to express my appreciation to Maxwell Hearn of the Metropolitan Museum, who shared with me the Museum's files on the painting and a seminar paper that he wrote in February, 1978 while a graduate student at Princeton titled, “‘Travellers in a Wintry Forest’: A Problem in Identification”.

composition, had been attributed in its early history, that extraordinary variance would have to be increased even more, for early sources reveal that the painter responsible for the image was none other than the famous poet and statesman Wang Wei (701–61) of the Tang dynasty.

Chang Dai-chien's undated inscription on the mounting underneath the painting helps to explain this coupling of the famous names of Wang Wei and Li Cheng, and in the process cites two more: Mi Fu (1052–1107/08), the Northern Song calligrapher and connoisseur whose comments on painting prove to have been instrumental in Chang Dai-chien's attribution of *Travelers in a Wintry Forest* to Li Cheng, and the Tang dynasty poet Meng Haoran (A.D. 689–740). Chang quotes two passages from Mi Fu's *Hua shi* (Painting History), the first of which begins, "In the four-scroll composition by Li Cheng in Master Baoyue's collection one sees a scholar riding a horse on the road and a servant following behind. Pure and refined, it is like Wang Wei's painting of Meng Haoran."⁵ Chang Dai-chien's inscription continues by remarking what an extraordinary coincidence it was that the painting Mi Fu commented upon had been owned by an eleventh-century Buddhist master from Sichuan Province residing in Suzhou, just as Chang, himself, was a native of Sichuan who had been residing in Suzhou when he acquired this painting.⁶

According to Meng Haoran's official biography in the rewritten history of the Tang dynasty, Ouyang Xiu's (A.D. 1007–72) and Song Qi's (998–1061) *Xin Tang shu*, when Wang Wei passed through Yingzhou (Jingshan, Hubei Province) sometime after Meng's death in 740, he painted his friend's likeness on a pavilion at the prefect's official residence.⁷ Ouyang Xiu's information probably came from Pi Rixiu's (ca. 834–83) record of the pavilion, dated A.D. 863.⁸ It should be noted from the outset that Pi Rixiu's record was written over one hundred years after the fact, and as his choice of language suggests ("People say..."), the association of Wang Wei with this painting is not necessarily documented in hard fact. It was, however, widely accepted in Pi Rixiu's time, as proven by its appearance about a generation earlier in Zhu Jingxuan's *Tang chao minghua lu* of circa 845, where it is written that Wang Wei painted the poet Meng Haoran chanting a poem on a horse.⁹

One generation after Mi Fu, the twelfth-century scholar Ge Lifang (d. 1164) recorded another painting supposedly by Wang Wei that he had seen at the home of Sun Runfu of Piling (Jiangsu Province). This silk scroll, described as old and in tattered condition, came complete with inscriptions by Wang, himself, the famous tea cognoscente Lu Yu (d. 804), and Zhang Ji (933–96), an official of the Southern Tang kingdom and early Song dynasty.¹⁰ The painting, according to Lu Yu's inscription, was titled *Lord Meng of Xiangyang Chanting a Poem Atop a Horse*. Ge Lifang questioned the painting's authenticity, calling it the copy of a "vulgar" craftsman, and he mentions how the

⁵ Mi Fu, *Hua shi*, in Yu Anlan, comp., *Huapin congshu* (Shanghai, 1982; hereafter *HPCS*), 205.

⁶ Chang Dai-chien seems to have been identifying Master Baoyue as the Buddhist monk Weijian (surnamed Su, 1012–95). However, I have seen no evidence to suggest that Weijian ever left his native Sichuan to live in Suzhou. There were a number of monks in the latter half of the eleventh century who adopted the cognomen Baoyue, including Xiuguang (1008–68), a native of Hangzhou. To date, none is identifiable with the Master Baoyue of Suzhou whom Mi Fu mentions in his *Hua shi*.

⁷ Ouyang Xiu, *Xin Tang shu* (Beijing, 1975 reprint ed.), *juan* 203, 5579–80. Hans H. Frankel, *Biographies of Meng Hao-jan, Chinese Dynastic Histories Translations* No. 1 (Berkeley, 1952), 6. See also Paul W. Kroll, *Meng Hao-jan* (Boston, 1980), 146. As subsequent citations will show, I am particularly indebted to Professor Kroll's study.

⁸ Pi Rixiu's record of the Meng Pavilion (as it was later called), "Yingzhou Meng ting ji," is found in *Quan Tang wen* (Taipei, 1961 reprint ed.), *juan* 797, 3b–5a. Yingzhou is about one hundred miles southeast of Xiangyang, where Meng Haoran lived.

⁹ Zhu Jingxuan, *Tang chao minghua lu*, *Meishu congshu* ed. (Jiangsu, 1986 reprint ed.), 7a. Alexander Soper, "T'ang Ch'ao Ming Hua Lu: Celebrated Painters of the T'ang Dynasty by Chu Ching-hsuan of T'ang," *Artibus Asiae*, XXI, 3/4 (1958), 218.

¹⁰ Ge Lifang, *Yunyu yangqiu* (Shanghai, 1979 reprint ed.), *juan* 14, 1b–2b. Zhang Ji's official biography is found in *Song shi*, *juan* 267, 9208–15.

inscriptions all appeared to have been from a single hand. Nevertheless, Wang Wei's purported inscription and Zhang Ji's careful description provide significant information for our understanding of the Metropolitan Museum's *Travelers in a Wintry Forest* (Lu Yu's inscription is less relevant, dwelling on his presentation of the painting to someone with the sobriquet Zhongyuan). Wang Wei's inscription is as follows:

In the past, I, Wei, heard Lord Meng chant the following: "Towards evening, my horse hastens with quickened steps / The city is desolate and human habitations few."¹¹ He also recited, "Sails hoisted, many thousands of miles / But no famous mountains have I encountered. / I moor my boat by Xunyang's outer walls / And for the first time see Brazier Peak."¹² Because I so admire the beauty of this man's spirit, upon returning home I have painted his image on a piece of silk.¹³

Zhang Ji's inscription, dated A.D. 983, describes Meng Haoran as tall and lanky, dressed in a scholar's plain robe, with boots, hat and a layered kerchief. Riding a small horse, he is followed by a young servant, hair still tied in tufts, who carries Meng's booksack and zither on his back. "Meng's air and bearing are expansive and independent, quivering as if with life," Zhang writes.¹⁴ His inscription ends with a curious story concerning Meng's relationship with Wang Wei:

Lord Meng's poetry was highly acclaimed at the end of the Kaiyuan and beginning of the Tianbao reigns [ca. 740–45]. During a journey he took to Chang'an, Wang Wei admired him and sang his praises. Some say that the Assistant Director of the Right [Wang Wei], seeing that Meng was superior to himself, was unable to recommend him to the emperor. Because of this Meng Haoran ended his life without encountering imperial recognition. Thus, in Xiangyang's parting poem for Wang Wei he writes, "Will those who 'control the roads' grant me anything? / What is rarest in this world are 'connoisseurs of tone,'"¹⁵ referring to this situation. Recently when in Jincheng I saw a copy of this painting. The following couplet was written on it: "The water ebbs, and Fish-weir Isle is left in shallows; Sky turns cold, and the Marsh of Dream lies deep"¹⁶ . . .

Ge Lifang's record cements the traditional association of Meng Haoran's portrait with Wang Wei. It is repeated in Huizong's Northern Song catalogue of paintings in the imperial collection, *Xuanhe huapu* of ca. 1120, and in an inscription written by Du Fan (1182–1245) of the Southern Song.¹⁷ A portrait of Meng Haoran by Wang Wei is recorded as having passed through the collections of Zhao Youzuo, Zhao Xinzhi, Zhou Mi (1232–98), Qiao Kuicheng and Guo Tianxi at the end of the

¹¹ From Meng Haoran's poem "Xi ci Caiyang guan" (Stopping for the Night at an Inn at Caiyang). Meng Haoran, *Meng Haoran shiji* (Shanghai, 1982 reprint ed.), *juan* 2, 5a–b.

¹² From Meng Haoran's poem "Wan bo Xunyang wang Lushan" (Night Mooring at Xunyang, Gazing at Mount Lu). *Meng Haoran shiji*, *juan* 1, 3a.

¹³ Ge Lifang, *Yunyu yangqiu*, *juan* 14, 1b.

¹⁴ My translation of Zhang's description mostly follows that of Paul W. Kroll, *Meng Hao-jan*, 146.

¹⁵ The poem to which Zhang Ji refers is "Liu bie Wang shiyu" (Parting from Attendant Censor Wang), *Meng Haoran shiji*, *juan* 2, 11a. As published in this edition, the first of these two lines in Meng's poem differs by one character: "Who of those that 'control the roads' will grant me anything?" Translation by Paul W. Kroll, *Meng Hao-jan*, 82–83. "Control the roads" refers to those who hold political power.

¹⁶ From Meng Haoran's poem "Yu zhuzi deng Xianshan" (On Climbing Xian Mountain in Company with Several Friends), *Meng Haoran shiji*, *juan* 1, 4a. Translation by Paul W. Kroll, *Meng Hao-jan*, p. 35. Ge Lifang, *Yunyu yangqiu*, *juan* 14, 2a.

¹⁷ *Xuanhe huapu*, *Huashi congshu* ed. (Shanghai, 1982; hereafter HSCS), *juan* 10, 104. Du Fan, *Qingxian ji*, *Siku quanshu* ed. (Shanghai, 1987 reprint ed.; hereafter SKQS), *juan* 17, 5a. Du Fan's inscription is also recorded in Wang Yuanqi, ed., *Peiwenzhai shuhua pu* (Taipei, 1982 reprint ed.), *juan* 81, 26a–b.

thirteenth century.¹⁸ With the exceptions of a couple of fourteenth century poems and the brief repetition of some of these early notices in such later catalogues as Zhang Chou's *Qinghe shubua fang* (preface dated 1616) and Wang Keyu's *Shanhuwang hualu* (preface dated 1643),¹⁹ afterwards, curiously, there is no mention of Wang Wei's painting. In similar fashion, there is no record of this painting, *Travelers in a Wintry Forest*, that Chang Dai-chien found in Suzhou earlier in this century, at least not in the customary places. For all intents and purposes the composition attributed to Wang Wei disappeared from sight sometime in the fourteenth century, and when Chang Dai-chien found this old hanging scroll, aware or not of the historical connection to Wang Wei, he attributed it to Li Cheng on the basis of Mi Fu's *Hua shi*. Possibly *Travelers in a Wintry Forest* was the same painting that Zhou Mi records circulating in the south during the latter half of the thirteenth century; we cannot be certain. What is certain is that had Chang Dai-chien followed historical precedent, he would have attributed *Travelers in a Wintry Forest* to Wang Wei. Nevertheless, for reasons that will become clear later, Chang Dai-chien was not necessarily mistaken in his choice of Li Cheng's equally famous name.

Another important question of identification concerns not the painter but the subject. To this point we have simply assumed that the donkey rider is the famous Tang dynasty poet Meng Haoran, but the issue deserves much greater scrutiny, for as a perusal of the early literature reveals, Meng Haoran was hardly the only one to straddle the donkey's spiny back. The Northern Song poet Mei Yaochen (1002–60), for example, wrote a poem for a painting attributed to Wang Wei that his friend Hu Gongshu (unidentified) had engraved into rock. The donkey rider in this case was Ruan Ji (210–63), one of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove.²⁰ As revealed in poems by Huang Tingjian (1045–1105) and Chen Shidao (1052–1101) and a description by Dong You (active early twelfth century), the famous Tang dynasty poet Du Fu, a younger contemporary of Meng Haoran, was also known and sometimes depicted as a donkey rider in the eleventh century.²¹ Other Tang dynasty poets described atop their donkeys were Jia Dao (779–849) and Li He (790–816).²² The early Song poet Pan Lang (d. A.D. 1009) portrayed himself in the poem “Passing Mount Hua” as admiring the landscape while riding a donkey backwards, and was so depicted in a painting by Xu Daoning.²³ According to Huang

¹⁸ Zhou Mi, *Yunyan guoyan lu*, HPCS, 345. Citing another version of Zhou Mi's text, the late Ming dynasty scholar Zhang Chou mentions that the painting had been in the collection of Zhao Yuqin, a member of the Song royal family active in the mid-thirteenth century. Zhang Chou, *Qinghe shubua fang* (Taipei, 1975 reprint ed.), *juan* 1, 14b.

¹⁹ Mou Xian, “Wang Wei hua Meng Haoran qili tu” (Wang Wei's painting of Meng Haoran riding a donkey), *Lingyang ji*, SKQS, *juan* 3, 3a–b. Liang Yan, “Ti Wang Wei suohua Meng Haoran xiang” (Inscribed upon Wang Wei's portrait of Meng Haoran), *Shimen ji*, SKQS, *juan* 2, 10b–11a. For Zhang Chou's record see the previous note. Wang Keyu, *Shanhu wang* (Chengdu, 1985 reprint ed.), second volume, *juan* 23, 1322.

²⁰ Mei Yaochen, “Yong Wang Youcheng suohua Ruan bubing zui tu” (“Singing of Wang Wei's Painting of Infantry Commandant Ruan Drunk”), *Mei Yaochen ji biannian xiaozhu* (Shanghai, 1980), *juan* 6, 95.

²¹ Huang Tingjian, “Lao Du Wanhuaxi tu yin” (A Song of the Portrait of Old Du at Flower-washing Stream), *Shangu ji*, *waiji*, SKQS, *juan* 4, 23b–24a. Chen Shidao, “Xi Kuan jun ershou” (Two Verses Playfully Written for Mr. Kuan) and “He Raojie yong Zhou Fang hua Li Bo zhen” (Rhyming Raojie's Poem on Zhou Fang's portrait of Li Bo), *Houshan shi zhu*, SKQS, *juan* 9, 12b–13a, and *juan* 12, 4b–6b. For a translation and discussion of Huang Tingjian's poem, see Ronald Egan, “Poems on Paintings: Su Shih and Huang Ting-chien,” *The Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 43 (December, 1983), 447–48. Dong You, *Guangchuan huaba*, HPCS, 273.

²² Jia Dao's association stems primarily through a well-known “poetry-chat” (*shihua*) told of his meeting with Han Yu. Ji Yougong, *Tang shi jishi* (Shanghai, 1965 reprint ed.), *juan* 40, 613. Li He is described riding a donkey in Li Shangyin's (813–58) capsule biography “Li Changji xiao zhuan,” included in Chen Zhiguo, ed., *Li He yanjiu ziliao* (Beijing, 1983), 4–5. In his official biography Li's steed is changed to a young colt. Ouyang Xiu, *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 203, 5787–88. A poem by Xu Fu (1075–1141) for a painting of Li He mounted on a horse accompanied by a servant, “Li He wangui tu” (Li He Returning at Nightfall) is recorded in Li E, *Song shi jishi* (Shanghai, 1983 reprint ed.), *juan* 33, 835. Both the associations for Jia Dao and Li He are discussed in more detail below.

²³ Pan Lang, “Guo Huashan,” *Xiaoyao ji*, SKQS, *juan* 1, 12b. Guo Ruoxu, *Tuhua jianwen zhi*, HSCS, *juan* 4, 53.

Tingjian and Lu Dian (active late eleventh – early twelfth centuries), Li Gonglin (ca. 1048–1106) painted his older contemporary Wang Anshi (1021–86) riding a donkey on Mount Zhong, in the environs of Nanjing.²⁴ The Northern Song poets Lin Bu (A.D. 967–1028) and Su Shi (A.D. 1037–1101) were commonly portrayed atop donkeys in later paintings, as were such legendary figures as Zhong Kui the Demon Queller, the Daoist magician Zhang Guolao, Buddhist monks and a host of others.

A closer look into donkey-riding iconography, however, will show that many of these potential claimants to the rider in *Travelers in a Wintry Forest* can be dismissed. Ruan Ji, for example, is described in Mei Yaochen's poem as being so drunk that his hat is radically tilted, as is Ruan Ji, supported by a figure to his side. The painting of Du Fu described by Huang Tingjian and Chen Shidao seems to have borrowed liberally from Ruan Ji's wine-sodden tradition. He is returning home to his thatched hut at Flower-washing Stream outside Chengdu (Sichuan Province), quite drunk and supported by one of his sons. I know of no painting of Ruan Ji on his donkey, but the image of the drunken donkey rider is well-represented by an anonymous fan in the Shanghai Museum that should be identified as Du Fu at Flower-washing Stream (fig. 3). True to the lines from Huang Tingjian's poem – "Zongwen remains at home, Zongwu supports him, At sunset the old donkey carries his drunken form"²⁵ – we find Old Du crossing a stream laden with floating petals from the blossoming trees, supported by Zongwu while his other son Zongwen (one guesses) goes about his domestic chores accompanied by the family pet on the other side. There are some added elements not found in Huang Tingjian's poem: the servant carrying a lantern behind, for example, and the banner signifying, in all likelihood, a rustic wineshop. But these, it can be argued, simply enhance some of the essentials of the narrative, such as the lateness of day and Du Fu's inebriation. The iconography of Du Fu as drunken donkey rider clearly departs from what is shown in *Travelers in a Wintry Forest*.

Pan Lang would have been shown facing backwards. Wang Anshi, according to Lu Dian's description, ambled through the forests of Mount Zhong accompanied by three attendants: one carrying a set of the Classics, one holding Wang's highly acclaimed lexicon, *Zishuo*, and one following with a portable urinal (*muhuzi*). Li Gonglin, moreover, included in his portrait the scholar Yang Ji and the monk Xiufa (1027–90). Li He, as we shall see, would be a credible candidate, but having died at the young age of twenty-six, it is difficult to imagine him being portrayed with a face full of whiskers. Lin Bu would undoubtedly have been shown appreciating his floral spouse, the blossoming prunus.²⁶ *Travelers in a Wintry Forest* possesses its own specific iconography, of which the wintry chill so beautifully represented by the tangled pines and blasted trees is foremost in establishing its distinct image. What proves to be an immensely useful description of a painting seen in the early twelfth century by Dong You confirms that this particular version of the donkey rider who trots through the frozen landscape indeed can be none other than Meng Haoran traversing the hills at Xiangyang. It begins:

²⁴ Huang Tingjian, "Shu Wang Jinggong qilü tu" (Written after the painting "Wang Jinggong Riding a Donkey"), *Shangu ji*, SKQS, juan 27, 8a. Lu Dian, "Shu Wang Jinggong you Zhongshan tu hou" (Written after the painting "Wang Jinggong Roaming at Mount Zhong"), *Taoshan ji*, SKQS, juan 11, 7b–8a.

²⁵ Translation by Ronald Egan, *op. cit.*, 448.

²⁶ For information concerning Lin Bu and his passion for plum blossoms see Maggie Bickford, *Bones of Jade, Soul of Ice: The Flowering Plum in Chinese Art* (New Haven, 1985), 22–26. Lin Bu was so indelibly associated with the blossoming plum that it is nearly inconceivable that he would be shown in a painting without them.

Master Meng was an extraordinary man of the world, and it thus is appropriate that he did not accord with his times. He huddles amidst his thick coarse clothes while carrying a bamboo basket on his back. His sleeves fall down as he straddles the donkey. He braves the wind and snow traversing the mountain slope. . . .²⁷

Combining Ge Lifang's and Dong You's descriptions, we note the following points in common with *Travelers in a Wintry Forest*. Meng Haoran wears the plain white robe of a scholar. He is booted and hatted, with the layered kerchief wrapped about his head to protect from the winter's chill, and the sleeves of his coarse clothing hang down as he huddles from the cold. We append here two lines from a verse written by Su Shi to the portrait painter He Chong: "And have you not seen Meng Haoran riding a donkey in the snow? Brows knit, chanting a poem, his shoulders hunched like mountains."²⁸ Those hunched shoulders are well-rendered by the thick brush lines descending from the hat of our donkey rider. Ge Lifang describes one young servant following Meng Haoran, bearing his booksack and zither. This young lad, with hair still in tufts, appears to have been moved to the front (though the painting is a little too worn here to confirm that what he carries on his back is indeed a booksack and *qin*). Dong You mentions a basket, *lingsheng*, on Meng Haoran's back. Perhaps this is what the second attendant secretly rifles through as he trails behind. *Lingsheng* commonly refers to a fishing tackle box, though as we shall see presently, the contents of this container are rather different. In summary, while it is clear that the paintings Ge Lifang and Dong You saw and described differed in certain details from *Travelers in a Wintry Forest*, there can be little question that the donkey rider is the Tang poet Meng Haoran.

Although we have provided a specific identity for the donkey rider in *Travelers in a Wintry Forest*, in many respects it is just as important to consider him less an individual than a collective persona, for Meng Haoran's association with the donkey was essentially historical invention. This becomes evident when one looks for the key text that connects Meng Haoran to what one would presume to be his trusted donkey. Contrary to expectations, in Meng Haoran's entire extant *oeuvre* of more than two hundred poems there is not a single mention of a donkey. Nor is he connected to a donkey in any of the various stories told of him in *shihua* (poetry-chat) miscellanies. In fact, the first time Meng Haoran is placed on a donkey is not for one hundred fifty years after he lived, in a poem written by Tang Yanqian circa A.D. 880.²⁹ To understand why, in the minds of later poets and painters, Meng Haoran eventually became a donkey rider, one must uncover the associations donkey and rider engender. The source, it would appear, is Meng Haoran's predecessor Ruan Ji, whose portrayal on a donkey in the eleventh century, we have seen, was also associated with Wang Wei. There were earlier donkey riders, no doubt, but the fundamentals of the iconography seem to begin with this extraordinary eccentric. A portion of Mei Yaochen's poem describing this painting will serve to introduce them.

Wang Wei's brush attained the Marvelous,
Ruan Ji pondered the Abstruse and Empty.
Only he (Wang) paints him arriving at Dongping,
Hat askew, drunk, and riding a donkey.
With stubborn strength (the donkey) refuses to advance,

²⁷ Dong You, *Guangchuan huaba*, 253.

²⁸ Su Shi, "Si xiezhen He Chong xiucai" (Presented to the Portrait Painter and Cultivated Talent He Chong), *Su Shi shiji* (Beijing, 1982 reprint ed.), *juan* 12, 587.

²⁹ "Yi Meng Haoran" (Remembering Meng Haoran), *Quan Tang shi* (Beijing, 1960), *juan* 671, 7668.

Head bowed, his ears push forward.
 One person pulls and looks back,
 An official supports from the side.
 Grasping the saddle, (Ruan) lifts both feet,
 Closing his eyes, he forgets about the road's end. . .³⁰

A number of notable Ruan Ji anecdotes are alluded to in Mei Yaochen's verse. Spontaneous and transcendent, Ruan was never one to talk about worldly affairs, preferring, instead, to discuss the "abstruse and remote."³¹ Disinterested in public office, he only agreed to take the position of Grand Warden at the commandery at Dongping (Shandong Province) because years earlier he had enjoyed the scenery there as a young man. Ruan mounted a donkey and rode to his new post where he demolished the walls of the administrative offices in order to gain a better view of the landscape. After ten days he remounted his donkey and left.³² A notorious drinker, Ruan Ji's only other request for office was as Commandant of Infantry, tempted by the several hundred vats of wine stored in the commissary.³³ Lastly, Ruan was fond of riding alone without any thought of destination, following little-known routes to the point where the carriage tracks would end. For some reason this would cause him to weep bitterly as he returned home.³⁴

We note the following points about Ruan Ji. He was absolutely disinterested in official service, acquiescing only when the post in question permitted him to pursue other interests. The first of these is landscape, whose precedence over paper-shuffling is wonderfully expressed by Ruan's sense of architectural design. The second is wine, described by Wang Chen (d. A.D. 392) as that which Ruan Ji needed to irrigate the rough and rugged terrain in his breast.³⁵ Attracted to matters of philosophical profundity, Ruan Ji was never interested in passing judgments on others.³⁶ He was a poet and self-acclaimed social non-conformist, famed for his rhetorical query, "Were the rites established for people like me?"³⁷ Lastly, and no doubt in consequence of most of the above, Ruan Ji was poor.³⁸ The donkey that he rides was probably in equal measure a symbol of Ruan's poverty and eccentricity.

When Du Fu described himself as one who had ridden the donkey for thirteen years, "following the dust of well-fed horses," he did not necessarily mean to compare himself with Ruan Ji, but rather to emphasize his poverty and singular lack of success in pursuing an official career.³⁹ Du Fu, in fact, differed significantly from Ruan Ji as a Confucian who maintained a life-long ambition to serve the

³⁰ See note no. 20.

³¹ Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian*, edited by Xu Zhen'e (Hong Kong, 1987 reprint ed.), 10 (I.15). Richard Mather, *Shih-shuo Hsin-yu: A New Account of Tales of the World* (Minneapolis, 1976), 9.

³² From Zhang Yin's *Wenshi zhuan* of the fourth century. Cited from Liu Yiqing, *op. cit.*, 392 (XXIII.5). Mather, 373.

³³ Liu Yiqing, *op. cit.*, 392 (XXIII.5); Mather, 373. Another anecdote commenting on Ruan Ji's fondness of wine describes him having to be supported while he writes an official communiqué, which he does perfectly, without error. Liu Yiqing, 135 (IV.67); Mather, 127.

³⁴ From Sun Sheng's *Wei shi chunqiu*, cited from Liu Yiqing, *op. cit.*, 355 (XVIII.1); Mather, 331–32.

³⁵ Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu*, 409–10 (XXIII.51); Mather, 390–91.

³⁶ Fang Xuanling, ed. *Jin shu* (Beijing, 1977 reprint ed.), *juan* 49, 1361.

³⁷ Liu Yiqing, *op. cit.*, 393 (XXIII.7); Mather, 374.

³⁸ Along with his nephew Ruan Xian (234–305), Ruan Ji was one of the Ruans who lived on the south side of the street. All of the other Ruans lived on the north (with the southern, hence sunny, exposure). According to an anecdote told in *Shishuo xinyu*, the northern Ruans were all wealthy, while the southern Ruans were poor. Liu Yiqing, *op. cit.*, 393 (XXIII.10); Mather, 375.

³⁹ Du Fu, "Fengsi Wei zuocheng zhang ershier yun" (Presented to Left Aide Wei Qi, Twenty-two Rhymes), *Du shi xiangzhu*, *juan* 1, 73–80. Some versions of the poem say thirty years. A commentary to this poem dates it to ca. A.D. 747, around the time of his second failure in the imperial examinations. Du Fu did not succeed in achieving any kind of official recognition until 755, when he was finally offered a low-ranking post attached to the crown prince's palace.

empire. Huang Tingjian makes a point of emphasizing that the besotted Confucian loyalist arriving at Flower-washing Stream still grieves for his country, “knitting his drunken eyebrows.”⁴⁰ Nevertheless, for at least some later admirers of the “poet-sage,” Du Fu begins to look suspiciously like the earlier eccentric. Here, for example, is the beginning of Dong You’s description of the painting he saw of Du Fu on his donkey: “Du Zimei was one who lost himself in wine, following his nature, arriving where he may. Not bound by the rules of the rites, he looked lightly at heaven and earth, staring down princes and nobles in defiance.”⁴¹ Du Fu’s admitted taste for wine, lackluster official career, extensive sojourns and masterful poetry were all factors that allowed his image to begin blending with that of Ruan Ji.⁴²

The process by which Meng Haoran takes his place on a donkey in later paintings is related but intriguingly different. Known as the recluse of Lumen (Deer Gate Mountain), Meng Haoran never served in high office, nor does it appear he aspired to. He failed in his one attempt at the *jinsshi* examinations, taken at the late age of forty when he traveled to the capital Chang’an from his home in Xiangyang (Hubei Province). According to an anecdote concerning this trip recorded in his official biography, when asked about his poetry during an impromptu meeting with Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712–56) Meng Haoran recited a poem that included the line, “Because I lack talent, the illustrious ruler has rejected me.” Xuanzong was offended and upbraided Meng Haoran with the remark, “You have not sought office, and We have never rejected you.” Meng Haoran was ordered to return home.⁴³ Meng Haoran’s lack of genuine interest in a public career is supported by another incident, also recorded in his official biography, in which arrangements to be brought to the capital and provided with an introduction to the court are undermined by Meng’s unwillingness to interrupt his cups during a get-together with friends. The veracity of at least the first story has been questioned,⁴⁴ but we are less concerned with the true facts of Meng Haoran’s life than its perception in the eyes of those who followed, particularly of the late Tang, Five Dynasties Period and Northern Song. For such later admirers, Meng Haoran represented the pure scholar, “steadfast and righteous” (citing from the same biography), whose distaste for the material comforts of public office was proportionately matched by the cultural antithesis: exultation in the glories of landscape. It was Meng Haoran’s ability as a poet of landscape that marked his reputation in later times, to the degree that Su Shi, looking at a landscape painting by Guo Xi (ca. 1000–90) some three hundred years later could joke that the “soundless” poem within should be sent to Meng of Xiangyang for delectation.⁴⁵ Poet and lover of wine and landscape with little, if any, interest in an official career, Meng Haoran’s image well-accorded with that of Ruan Ji. All that was missing, apparently, was a donkey, so one was bequeathed him posthumously.

⁴⁰ This is how Du Fu is described in Huang Tingjian’s poem. See note no. 21.

⁴¹ Dong You, *Guangchuan huaba*, 273.

⁴² Over time, as revealed in later paintings, the specificity of each donkey-rider tends to dissolve. Thus, Du Fu becomes a contrary rider à la Pan Lang in the minds of some later artists. Dong You’s description already reveals the beginning of the process by which the collective persona supercedes individual specificity.

⁴³ Ouyang Xiu, *Xin Tang shu*, *juan* 203, 5778. Frankel, *Biographies*, 4–5. The translation here is that of Professor Frankel. Kroll, *Meng Hao-jan*, especially pp. 13–22. See also Paul W. Kroll, “Wang Shih-yuan’s Preface to the Poems of Meng Hao-jan,” *Monumenta Serica* 34 (1979–80), 349–69.

⁴⁴ Frankel, note no. 19, 13–14; Kroll, *Meng Hao-jan*, 15. The second story is also found in Wang Shiyuan’s preface to Meng’s collected poems, which is dated to within a decade of Meng’s death.

⁴⁵ Su Shi, “Guo Xi qiushan pingyuan er shou” (Two Poems on Guo Xi’s “Autumn Mountains, Level Distance”), *Su Shi shiji*, *juan* 29, 1540.

Like Ruan Ji and Du Fu, Meng Haoran represents a specific subset within the collective persona of the donkey rider, defined by that for which he was best-known. In his case it was poetry and landscape rather than wine that distinguished his donkey riding. This brings us to the true subject of *Travelers in a Wintry Forest*, and the painting's true interest. As Zhu Jingxuan's title for the Wang Wei painting recorded in *Tang chao minghua lu*, Lu Yu's title for the painting seen by Ge Lifang, and the poetic lines of Su Shi cited above reveal, Meng Haoran chants a poem while riding his donkey. This explains the content of the purported Wang Wei inscription, with its citation of a couple of choice Meng Haoran lines, as well as the fact that yet another snippet of a Meng Haoran verse was written on the second painting seen by Zhang Ji. It also explains Dong You's description of the painting *Meng Haoran Riding a Donkey*, which, as we will see presently, focuses entirely on the nature of Meng Haoran's poetry.

Within *Travelers in a Wintry Grove*, itself, there is an intriguing indication that the subject is Meng Haoran composing a poem. The key lies with the mischievous servant holding an oblong case trailing behind the donkey rider (fig. 4). The case proves to be an enduring feature in Meng Haoran's specific iconography. It appears again in a Southern Song rendition of the same theme stylistically datable to the early thirteenth century and the school of Li Song (fig. 5), and it perhaps is what Dong You describes on the back of Meng Haoran as a *lingsheng* basket in the painting that he saw. The function of the container is revealed by the composing habits of two other famous poets: Li He of the late Tang and Mei Yaochen of the Northern Song. In his official biography we are told that Li He wrote poetry at great speed, flushed with inspiration. Every day at dawn he would leave the house riding a colt followed by a servant-lad with an antique tapestry bag on his back. When the Muse struck, Li He would write the verses down and drop them in the bag, waiting until he returned home later at night to finish them.⁴⁶ In the mid-eleventh century, a scholar named Sun Sheng discovered that Mei Yaochen used the same method. Flabbergasted at the rate of speed Mei Yaochen composed poems, he decided to spy on him:

I found that whether lying in bed or eating, traveling about to see the sights, he would never for a moment stop chanting lines and ruminating. At times he would abruptly withdraw from a party, grab a brush, and jot something down on a little piece of paper. This he would put in a bamboo container. As we were traveling in the same boat, I was able to examine the container secretly. It turned out to contain poetic phrases, half a couplet or even a single character. He had put in whatever he felt might be useful in some future poem...⁴⁷

A highly magnified look at what the servant-lad pulls from the container he holds in *Travelers in a Wintry Forest* shows it to be a slip of paper with writing on it (fig. 6). What is written has so far resisted efforts at deciphering, but there can be little doubt that what these three (?) characters are meant to signify is nothing less than the poetic lines composed by Meng Haoran as he rides through the frigid forest. The container is a key indicator of the painting's true subject: that profound moment when poet encounters the drama of nature and is moved to song.

One can only guess of the content of Meng Haoran's poem – three different verses are already suggested in Ge Lifang's inscription – but what proves to be of much more significance is the nature

⁴⁶ Ouyang Xiu, *Xin Tang shu*, juan 203, 5778. Translated in J.D. Frodsham, *Goddesses, Ghosts, and Demons: The Collected Poems of Li He* (San Francisco, 1983), xv.

⁴⁷ Sun Sheng, *Sun gong tanpu*, in *Baibu congshu jicheng*, (Taipei, 1964–70), xia, 6b–7a. Translation by Jonathan Chaves, *The Poetry of Mei Yao-chen* (New York, 1976), 48–49.

of the poem rather than the specific lines being uttered by the donkey-rider. What kind of poem is composed from this practice of filing away in a bag or container the bits and pieces that come as one rides through the wintry landscape of Xiangyang? Li He, we are told, never wrote poems on a given topic and never forced, as other did, his verses to conform to a specific theme.⁴⁸ Sun Sheng continues his investigation into Mei Yaochen's poetic practice by noting that one of the couplets he saw in the bamboo container read, "In writing poetry, no matter whether past or present, It is only achieving the 'even and bland' that is difficult." At first it seems difficult to reconcile the mystical and bizarre poetry of Li He with Mei Yaochen's call for the "even and bland" (*pingdan*), but a close reading of Mei Yaochen's critical writings on *pingdan* reveals that first and foremost its emergence depends on naturalness and spontaneity, precisely what Mei Yaochen's friend Ouyang Xiu emphasizes of Li He's writing by contrasting it with the conventional poetic practice of writing to set topics and themes. Jonathan Chaves writes, "Mei Yaochen may thus have used the term *pingdan* as a sobriquet for realistic poetry, poetry which took its main inspiration from the experience of the real world, rather than from a corpus of conventional images and allusions."⁴⁹ This perfectly accords with the kind of poetry Dong You articulates in his description of Meng Haoran riding his donkey. The remainder of his long inscription reads as follows:

. . . Meng Haoran] braves the wind and snow traversing the mountain slope. Following the road at Xiangyang, the lines of poetry that come to him by their own accord naturally carry the icy frost and sleeting snow, thus causing those who recite them to shiver with cold, their teeth chattering. This is not the kind of chanting that can be derived from the mood of white snow appreciated from [the comfort of] a deep and privileged chamber. Poets always presume that if the poems of extraordinary men who do not meet their due are not the utmost of purity and bitterness, direct and abrupt in their expression, then the emotions behind their resentment and longing are not deep. If one's words do not carry the highs and lows of resentment and longing then they float aimlessly without flavor and are incapable of exciting others' imaginations. It is essential that one's lines and phrases be full of purity and imbibe deeply of the refined airs of rivers and mountains to leave behind the realm of man, and it takes the brace of wine and chill of frost to highlight poverty and resentment, pain and longing. Do away with those inner chambers, and then one's breast can be aloof and proud. [If not all of these things] how could extraordinary verses emerge? Zheng Qi (d. A.D. 899) said, "Poetry thoughts are atop a donkey amidst the wind and snow on Ba Bridge. How could one possibly come up with anything here?"⁵⁰ Perhaps Qi was compelled to make this comment upon seeing the painting of Master Meng. Otherwise, how would he know such a thing?⁵¹

Real poetry must be based on real emotions, real experience, real landscape. Dong You establishes the central contrast between Meng Haoran's frost-riven poem, spontaneously impelled by the sleeting snow at Xiangyang, and the kind of superficial verse extolling the beauties of a snowy landscape written from the material comfort of a warm chamber. At the heart of the contrast is the more fundamental paradigm of privilege versus poverty, officialdom versus reclusion, the capital versus the provinces and landscape. This antipodal structure is highlighted by Dong You's citation of

⁴⁸ Ouyang Xiu, *Xin Tang shu*, juan 203, 5788.

⁴⁹ Jonathan Chaves, *Mei Yao-ch'en and the Development of Early Sung Poetry*, 133 (with transliteration changed).

⁵⁰ This *shihua* is found in Sun Guangxian (d. A.D. 968), *Beimeng suoyan*, in Shang Jun, ed., *Baibai* (Taipei, 1965 reprint ed.), juan 7, 2 a-b. See also You Mou, *Quan Tang shihua*, in Mao Jin, ed., *Jindai bishu* (Taipei, 1966 reprint ed.), juan 5, 24b-25a. It is discussed in more detail presently.

⁵¹ Dong You, *Guangchuan huaba*, 253.

Zheng Qi's famous remark, which emerged in answer to the question, "Has the Minister recently come up with any new poems?" Zheng's rueful response reflects recognition of the fact that one must be on the "outside" to write a good poem. Ba Bridge was the major bridge about five miles east of the Tang capital Chang'an, and its significance in the cultural milieu of the time was as a place of parting. Ba Bridge essentially marked the border separating the capital, with its associations of culture and wealth, from the hinterlands, exile, a minor post, or the reclusive life of one like Meng Haoran.

The subject of *Travelers in a Wintry Forest* is not simply the making of a poem, but the making of a certain kind of poem, and its representation depends not on such facile signifiers as the oblong case with writing or even the chilled and focused look on Meng Haoran's face but on the scene around the donkey rider that inspires his verse. Whoever it was who painted this large hanging scroll possessed remarkable powers of description. It is not simply the realism of the landscape that impresses. We witness, as Meng Haoran witnesses, an inexorable process of order, and we are humbled by its presence. Twisted bamboo, pitted rocks, trunks blasted and knotted... these things reveal the unrelenting passage of time, and the fragility of those who pass in the frozen stillness of a winter's day. One need only juxtapose this painting with the seemingly light, almost frivolous, version of the same subject in the Southern Song fan (fig. 5) to understand that it is not technical skill that provides *Travelers in a Wintry Forest* with its majesty. Rather it is a true empathy, if not first-hand experience, of precisely that which Dong You describes: the depth of poverty and longing of extraordinary people who imbibe deeply of the refined airs of rivers and mountains to leave behind the realm of man.

II. *A Solitary Temple amid Clearing Peaks*: The Structure of Landscape

Dong You's inscription for the painting he saw of Meng Haoran riding a donkey bespeaks a familiar cultural paradigm: the opposition of reclusion and landscape to the world of officialdom. Familiar as it is, however, the subtleties and variations of its manifestation in painting have yet to be fully explored. An illustration of this is provided by *Winter Landscape*, painted by the mid-fourteenth century Ma Yuan follower Sun Junze (fig. 7). With Dong You's inscription in mind, *Winter Landscape* suddenly welcomes a new interpretation. In the foreground we find the warm comfort of a palatial chamber, and a scholar seated within who perhaps seeks a clever verse from the cut sprig of plum blossoms on his table. His gaze leads us out to a distant donkey rider crossing a bridge, heading towards the unknown through a chasm in the rocky cliffs. Foreground and background are meant to contrast, just as the wild prunus growing from the sheer distant cliff is probably intended to contrast with the fetishized *ikebana* so carefully arranged on the scholar's table. "Do away with those inner chambers, and then one's breast can be aloof and proud," writes Dong You, implying that a better poem will result. Sun Junze's painting elaborates on this idea, utilizing Ma Yuan-style plum trees and their important place of appreciation in Southern Song culture to emphasize, in a manner his Hangzhou patrons of the fourteenth century could well understand, the poetry in the painting.

The structural model that Sun Junze's painting is founded upon long precedes the immediate descriptive source of his images in the late twelfth-century painter Ma Yuan. In fact, it is present with the emergence of landscape as a major genre of painting in the tenth century. Our focus now shifts slightly, away from the humble equestrian to the landscape he traverses and the manner in

which the artist's composition of that landscape echoes and expands upon the semantic values lodged in the donkey rider. A recent article by Richard Barnhart has shown that an integral relationship can exist between figure and landscape in these early paintings.⁵² More than simply inhabitants of the landscape, strategically placed figures, Barnhart argues, potentially function as the "eye" of the painting – a kind of personality-window through which the painter creates, and through which we view, landscapes of a particular subjective experience.

Barnhart's argument is in part built upon Mi Fu's brief comment regarding that same Li Cheng painting in Master Baoyue's collection of the scholar riding a horse that resembled Wang Wei's painting of Meng Haoran. "Li Cheng's figures never went beyond this," Mi Fu's comment continues, suggesting that the scholar on a horse (or donkey) represents the "eye" of Li Cheng's paintings, particularly in contrast to the figures painted by some of his followers: "In other paintings [attributed to Li] the figures are ugly and strange – gamblers and rustics that look like actors. These are all paintings from when Xu Daoning worked exclusively in Li Cheng's style."⁵³ But Barnhart's interest here is less in Li Cheng than Xu Daoning, victim of Mi Fu's condescension, and though he briefly discusses in his article an important attribution to Li Cheng, *A Solitary Temple amid Clearing Peaks* (figs. 8, 9), the connection between Mi Fu's comment and the donkey rider who enters this landscape at the lower left is never made, despite the fact that this is probably one of the finest illustrations to confirm Barnhart's thesis.

Increasingly this essay focuses on Li Cheng and the influential role he plays in disseminating the popularity of the donkey rider motif in later landscape paintings. In order to place Li Cheng's use of the motif in proper perspective, however, it is important to sketch some of the developments during the critical period between the eighth and tenth centuries. We begin with the observation that Li Cheng was not alone in utilizing the donkey rider as a signifying element in tenth-century landscape painting. He is prominently displayed not once but three times in Zhao Gan's well-known painting *Along the River at First Snow* (fig. 10). He appears first on a donkey-like horse accompanied by his now familiar servant in a small copse of trees on a path by the wintry river, wearing on his face (like his mount below) the howl of the chilling wind. Moving from right to left, we cross a small bridge and soon encounter two more riders, this time on donkeys, engaged in animated conversation as their small group battles the wind marching upstream. A possible clue to the meaning of the double donkey riders motif is found in a famous *shihua* anecdote told of Jia Dao and Han Yu (A.D. 768–824):

Jia Dao was on his way to the capital to take the examinations, riding a donkey and reciting poems. He thought of the line, "The monk pushes the gate under the moon," but then wanted to change "pushes" [*tui*] to "knocks" [*qiao*].⁵⁴ [Debating,] he gesticulated with his hand, making the motions of pushing and knocking. He had not yet decided when without realizing he rode his donkey into the retinue of the Metropolitan Governor Han Yu. He discussed the matter with Han Yu, who responded that "knock" is good. Thereupon the two rode forward, discussing poetry for a long time.⁵⁵

⁵² Richard Barnhart, "Figures in Landscape," *Archives of Asian Art* XLII (1989), 62–70.

⁵³ See note no. 5.

⁵⁴ From Jia Dao's poem "Ti Li Ni youju" (Inscribed for the Hidden Residence of Li Ni), *Changjiang ji*, SKQS, *juan* 4, 2a–b. The line in question is the second half of a famous Jia Dao couplet: "Birds roost in the pond's trees / The monk knocks at the gate under the moon."

⁵⁵ Ji Yougong, *Tang shi jishi*, *juan* 40, 613.

One of the important points of the anecdote, as elaborated upon in other versions, is the fact that Han Yu and Jia Dao could ignore the considerable differences in their social status and trot along as equals discussing poetry. Consequently, if one were to illustrate the story in a literal manner, Han Yu, in accordance with his exalted position, would be portrayed on a more stately mount accompanied by ranks of attendants. That, of course, is not what is seen in Zhao Gan's painting, but it remains possible that the painter borrowed the idea of a donkey-riding conversation from this celebrated poetry-chat, even raising the arm of one rider to make the motions of knocking and pushing, in order to emphasize the poetry in the painting.

Poetic qualities, in any case, are precisely what traditional commentators have read from this composition. Chao Buzhi (1053–1110), for example, wrote a long preface dated 1086 for a painting titled *Catching Fish*, whose composition, according to Chao's detailed description, corresponded exactly to Zhao Gan's *Along the River at First Snow*.⁵⁶ As John Hay has shown, Chao ends his inscription in poetic reverie about the landscape of Jiangnan.⁵⁷ Huizong's imperial catalogue *Xuanhe huapu* praises the compelling character of Zhao Gan's painting of Jiangnan's scenery: "Though one may be amidst the wind and dust of the capital, one look and it's as if you are right there on the river. It makes you want to gather up your robes and stroll along, inquiring of boats along the riverbank."⁵⁸ One might question the wisdom of jumping into this particular painting, from which one faintly hears the chattering of teeth, but its compelling chill certainly emphasizes the fact that we are far, far away from the dust of the marketplace (as another critique of Zhao's painting put it),⁵⁹ precisely where "real" poems are written. If there is an "eye" to Zhao Gan's painting it resides in this trio of riders, whose focus is established by the wide-eyed stares of the fishing lads across the river.

Given the frequency with which his name has already appeared, it should not surprise us that the painting *Catching Fish* for which Chao Buzhi wrote his long, descriptive preface was said by some at the time to be a draft by Wang Wei. In fact, there appear to have been a number of versions of this composition extant in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, most of which were associated with Wang Wei's name.⁶⁰ The possibility remains that Wang Wei had something to do with the original composition of *Along the River at First Snow*, but it seems more likely that we are witnessing here an example of what Mi Fu described as the pervasive contemporary practice of misattributing various Five Dynasties Period paintings to the famous Tang poet/painter. Such paintings included those produced in Shu (Sichuan) depicting scenes of mule trains transporting goods through the mountain passes and snowscapes (like Zhao Gan's) from Jiangnan.⁶¹ It has always been assumed that the reason for these misattributions was the perception of some vaguely poetic quality inherent in these tenth-

⁵⁶ Chao Buzhi, "Buyu tu xu," *Jile ji*, SKQS, *juan* 34, 18a–19b.

⁵⁷ John Hay, "'Along the River during Winter's First Snow': A Tenth Century Handscroll and Early Chinese Narrative," *The Burlington Magazine* (May, 1972), 294–303.

⁵⁸ *Xuanhe huapu*, *juan* 11, 125. A painting of this title is included among the nine paintings by Zhao Gan in the Northern Song imperial collection.

⁵⁹ Xia Wenyan's *Tubui baojian* of 1365: "[Zhao Gan] paints landscapes and forests, all of which are the scenery of Jiangnan. Often he adds buildings and towers, boats, fishing villages, flowers and bamboo, scattering these things about to capture the flavor of the scene. One finds not a speck of dust of the capital's marketplace." (My italics). HSCS ed., *juan* 3, 49.

⁶⁰ In 1057 Wen Tong wrote a record for a painting of the same title. The composition of this particular painting, judging from his description, differed from *Along the River at First Snow* in its details, but in general it sounds quite similar. Wen Tong, "Buyu tu ji," *Danyuan ji*, *juan* 22, 11b–12b. There were two paintings of this same title in Huizong's collection, along with a number of other paintings whose titles related to fishing, travelling and snowy rivers, might suggest something similar. *Xuanhe huapu*, *juan* 10, 103–04. During the Southern Song there were at least four *Catching Fish* paintings attributed to Wang Wei in the imperial collection. Chen Kui, *Nan Song guange xulu*, in *Wulin zhanggu congbian* (Taipei, 1967 reprint ed.), vol. 5, *juan* 3, 11a.

⁶¹ Mi Fu, *Hua shi*, 189.

century landscapes. The donkey riders in Zhao Gan's painting suggest that those poetic qualities may well have been intended from the beginning.

Students familiar with the writings of Su Shi have long known the important role poetry plays in conferring respectability to painting as a gentleman's art in literati painting theory of the late eleventh century. They are familiar, as well, with Wang Wei's central position in this concept of *ut pictura poesis*.⁶² What we find now is serious, credible evidence suggesting that this was not, as has been presumed, a late eleventh-century construct, and that Wang Wei may have had more to do with the idea of merging poetry with painting than simply as figurehead for the later theorists whose primary interest was in assembling legitimizing lineages. The key document is Zhu Jingxuan's *Tang chao minghua lu* of ca. A.D. 845, which provides the earliest evidence that Wang Wei painted Meng Haoran chanting a poem on his mount.⁶³ This alone does not confirm the role Wang Wei's later admirers would have him play, as Zhu Jingxuan was writing almost eighty years after Wang Wei's death, well enough removed to cast doubt on the earlier poet's personal efforts to forge a marriage of the sister arts as crystallized in the image of Meng on his horse or donkey. What becomes certain, however, is that these developments for which Wang Wei was traditionally credited were in place by the middle of the ninth century. Moreover, they were integrally related to landscape painting's emergence as a mature genre.

Prompting these developments, undoubtedly, were historical and socio-political factors related to the far-reaching changes taking place in Tang society after the middle of the eighth century. These were of too complex a nature to be scrutinized here, but in the broadest possible terms they must be associated with the gradual collapse of the dynasty, the fracturing of political authority, and growing uncertainty concerning the role of the educated élite, or scholar-officials, who serviced the state bureaucracy.⁶⁴ The path to a successful career as an official was difficult enough in the best of times; as the old structures of order came down one became increasingly conscious of one's relative success or failure, and how these alternatives were manifest in cultural paradigms (thus, Zheng Qi's remark on his paucity of inspired poetry). As the Tang dynasty falters the donkey rider archetype gains currency as a self-image, mirroring, perhaps, a growing sense of isolation and class-consciousness among scholars. The Jia Daos of the world (who, incidentally, was described as "a lean monk lying in ice" and failed in his numerous attempts at the capital examinations) do not necessarily become more numerous, but their plight becomes more sharply defined. Among Zheng Qi's contemporaries we find such poets employing the donkey rider as Tang Yanqian (873 *jinsbi*), Sun Ding (active ca. 893), Li Dong (active ca. 893) and Lu Yanrang (900 *jinsbi*).⁶⁵ Sun Ding and Li Dong both failed in the exams. Little is known of Sun; Li Dong was an impoverished poet. Prior to his discovery by the Attendant

⁶² Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Shu Shih (1037–1101) to Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555–1636)* (Cambridge, 1971), especially 22–43.

⁶³ See note no. 9.

⁶⁴ See Peter K. Bol, *"This Culture of Ours": Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China* (Stanford, 1992), especially Chapter Two: "The Transformation of the Shih," 32–75.

⁶⁵ Tang Yanqian, "Yi Meng Haoran" (Remembering Meng Haoran), *Quan Tang shi* (hereafter *QTS*), *juan* 671, 7668; Sun Ding, "Xiadi zuizhong ji Chu" (Sent to Chu after failing in the exams and getting drunk), *QTS*, *juan* 715, 8220; Li Dong, "Fu de song Jia Dao zhe Changjiang" (Written upon receiving 'Saying Farewell to Jia Dao on his banishment to Changjiang'), "Xiadi song Zhang Wu gui jin Jiangnan" (After failing in the exams, sent to Zhang Wu upon returning to Jiangnan), "Bi lü" (Dead donkey), "Yiyousui zi Shu sui ji chen shi buji" (Written in the *yiyousui* year after leaving Sichuan to take the exams but failing), "Guo Jia Langxian jiu di" (Passing the old grounds of Jia Dao), *QTS*, *juan* 721, 8272–73, 8274, *juan* 723, 8297, 8299, 8304; Lu Yanrang, "Ji you" (Sent to a friend), "Xue" (Snow), *QTS*, *juan* 715, 8214. Of the last two citations, which are couplets from Lu Yanrang's poems, "Xue" is of interest for being mentioned by Guo Xi as one of his favorite verses for illustration. *Linchuan gaozhi*, 641.

Censor Wu Rong (d. ca. 903), Lu Yanrang was a poor wandering scholar. The multi-talented Tang Yanqian was relatively successful, but he too first experienced more than ten years of failure with the exams, and his official career was far from tranquil in the last spasms of the Tang dynasty.⁶⁶

Also of note is a propensity among some of these poets not only to present themselves in what was by now the well-established persona of the donkey rider, but also to root that persona's historicity in role models of the past. Li Dong's extraordinary adoration of Jia Dao presents the most extreme case of this (he fastened to his hat a small cast bronze replica of the earlier poet and repeated Jia Dao's name a thousand times a day as that of the Buddha).⁶⁷ When he appears in Li Dong's poems, Jia Dao is often pictured on his donkey, just as when Li Dong puts himself on a donkey he is like Jia Dao reciting poems. In similar fashion, Tang Yanqian puts Meng Haoran on a donkey, perhaps for the first time, in his poem "Remembering Meng Haoran." By the end of the Tang dynasty, a process is well-established whereby persona, role-model and self become mutually reinforcing. Consider the final lines of a poem by Li Dong, written while thinking of Jia Dao: "Year after year someone passes with high grades, But he does not surpass the donkey rider who enters the painting screen."⁶⁸ Li Dong's personal failure in the exams and officialdom is consoled with the hope that his poetry, born from the same kind of suffering that he imagines for the painted donkey rider Jia Dao, will earn him a similar piece of immortality.

Though based upon the small number of extant poems of a handful of poets, this tiny glimpse into the circumstances attending the end of the Tang dynasty serves to build a context for understanding Li Cheng's use of the donkey-rider image a generation or two later. Thanks largely to the detailed research of Wai-kam Ho,⁶⁹ we now recognize that the basic facts of Li Cheng's life in the middle of the tenth century well accord with the general pattern of others who described themselves atop the donkey. Li Cheng was a distant descendant of the ruling house of the Tang dynasty, which fell thirteen years before his birth in 919, and thus a disenfranchised subject during the chaos of the Five Dynasties Period. His father and grandfather were both renowned Confucian scholars and holders of significant official posts. Li Ding, the grandfather, had served as Chancellor of the Directorate of Education; his son, Li Yu, served as a Judge on the Qingzhou circuit in Shandong Province, the region where Li Cheng was born. Li Cheng flirted with an official career but apparently was never able to establish himself.⁷⁰

Huizong's *Xuanhe huapu* embellishes this sketch with a vivid image of how Li Cheng was perceived by the early twelfth century. Like his father and grandfather, Li Cheng's reputation was as a learned Confucian scholar. Despite his great ambitions and talent, however, he never met with imperial favor and consequently drowned himself in poetry, which he also excelled at, and alcohol. He painted, we are told, as an outlet for his emotions, with no interest in selling his paintings. Thereupon follows the celebrated story of Li Cheng's encounter with a grandee named Sun who sought to engage Li's talents as a painter only to meet with the haughty rebuff:

⁶⁶ Information on these poets is conveniently presented in Tan Jiading, ed., *Zhongguo wenxuejia da cidian* (Taipei, 1985), 488, 500, 506.

⁶⁷ Li Dong would transcribe Jia Dao's poetry for those who appreciated it and exhort them to burn incense, treating it the same as a Buddhist *sūtra*.

⁶⁸ Li Dong, "Guo Jia Langxian jiudi," *QTS*, *juan* 723, 8304.

⁶⁹ Wai-kam Ho, "Li Ch'eng and the Mainstream of Northern Sung Landscape Painting," *Proceedings of the International Symposium on Chinese Painting* (Taipei, 1970), 251–83.

⁷⁰ Mi Fu states that Li Cheng passed the *jinshi* examination and served as Aide to the Court of Imperial Entertainments. *Hua shi*, 191. This, however, cannot be corroborated, and it is likely, as Wai-kam Ho asserts, that Mi Fu is mistaken.

“From antiquity, the four classes of people have never intermixed. At root I am a Confucian scholar, and though I allow my heart to wander through matters of art, it is simply to accord with my feelings and nothing more. Could I allow someone to bind and deliver me to reside in some guesthouse in the imperial district, where, licking brushes and fixing pigments, I would thus be counted with the lowly sorts described in painting histories?”⁷¹

Xuanhe huapu also records that Li Cheng went to the capital in search of a position with the Ministry of Rites but fails to state whether or not he succeeded. His late years, we are informed, were spent wandering lakes and rivers. He died in Huaiyang (northern Jiangsu Province) in 967.

Certainly the *Xuanhe huapu* account of Li Cheng is much enhanced to emphasize his scholarly background and distinction from the artisan class of professional painters, reminding us that one's efforts to understand who Li Cheng was will always be colored by what one suspects to be the eagerness of traditional historiographers to cast him as one of their own. Similarly, one's efforts to understand his art will always be frustrated by the fact that there seems little chance for any of his genuine paintings to have survived into later times. Nevertheless, we can be certain of two things: Li Cheng was affiliated with the *shi* class of scholar-officials, to which the basic facts of his family background attest, and Li Cheng was immensely influential as a landscape painter – the “master to a hundred generations,” as he was commonly called.⁷² These two factors, I believe, account for the popularity of the donkey-rider motif in Chinese landscape painting. Li Cheng adopts it as a self-image, following a practice already well-established by others like himself, and his many followers and forgers insure its longevity by perpetuating the imagery of his paintings, a process that can be followed from the eleventh century through the Zhe school painters of the Ming, and beyond that to painters in Korea and Japan.

A brief survey of some early paintings confirms the association of the donkey-rider persona with Li Cheng. *A Solitary Temple amid Clearing Peaks* (figs. 8, 9) has already been introduced. In another important Li Cheng attribution, *Verdant Forests, Distant Peaks*, one finds the donkey rider fording a stream midway through the handscroll composition (fig. 11).⁷³ In similar fashion, Yan Wengui's *Towers and Pavilions by Mountains and Rivers* reveals two donkey riders and servants crossing a bridge near the end of the scroll (figs. 12, 13). A hanging scroll attributed to Yan Wengui, *Towers and Pavilions by Mountains and Streams*, presents a single donkey rider crossing a bridge at the bottom of the composition (fig. 14). Although traditional sources do not specify Li Cheng's influence on Yan Wengui's landscape painting, Yan's period of activity (*ca.* 1000) accords perfectly with the first wave of Li Cheng's spreading popularity, from Li Cheng's native Shandong (Zhai Yuanshen) to the mountains of Shaanxi (Fan Kuan) to the capital Kaifeng, where Yan was active.⁷⁴ The narrow,

⁷¹ *Xuanhe huapu*, juan 11, 114. Wai-kam Ho also translates this passage, *op. cit.*, 270–71. He hypothesizes that the man named Sun, who in other sources is called Sun Sihao, was Sun Cihao, a wealthy wine shop proprietor with connections to the imperial family. Ho also believes that Sun Sihao's real name was Sun Shoubin, a captain of the guards. *Op. cit.*, 271–75.

⁷² To the best of my knowledge, this moniker first appears in Wang Pizhi's late eleventh-century miscellany, *Minshui yantan lu* (Beijing, 1981 reprint ed.), juan 7, 90–91.

⁷³ This painting, in the Liaoning Provincial Museum, Shenyang, is well reproduced in Yang Renkai, ed., *Li Cheng Maolin yuanxiu tu* (Shanghai, 1989). An inscription dated 1219 by someone surnamed Xiang informs us that the painting was owned by his great-grandmother, who was the granddaughter of Lu Yijian (979–1044) and the daughter of Lu Gongpi (998–1073). She, consequently, would have lived in the middle of the eleventh century. The style of the painting is consistent with a late tenth or early eleventh century date.

⁷⁴ Liu Daochun's *Shengchao minghua ping* appears confused about Yan Wengui's origins: he is described as both a native of Wuxing (Zhejiang Province) and Shanggu (Shanxi Province) who came to the capital (Kaifeng) during Song Taizong's reign (976–97). In any case, Yan is listed as a pupil of Hao Hui, an unknown master of Hedong (Yongji, Shanxi Province). Liu Daochun, *Shengchao minghua ping*, HPCS, 129, 132. Zhai Yuanshen was one of the three notable followers of Li Cheng; he is said to have captured Li

delicately chiseled peaks billowing like distant clouds and temperate use of ink seen in these two paintings are characteristics shared with *A Solitary Temple amid Clearing Peaks* and associated with Li Cheng through textual descriptions.⁷⁵

There are mounted equestrians in *Travelers at the Mountain Pass* (fig. 15) and *Xiao Yi Steals the Lanting Pavilion Preface* (fig. 16). These two paintings are interesting because they are usually associated with artists generally considered outside of Li Cheng's sphere of influence: Li's predecessor Guan Tong (active ca. 925–50) for *Travelers* and Juran (active ca. 960–80), the monk-painter from Jiangnan, for *Xiao Yi*. A closer look, however, suggests a connection with the “master to a hundred ages.” *Travelers at the Mountain Pass* may owe some lingering stylistic debt to Guan Tong's tradition of painting the hard, unforgiving mountains of north central China,⁷⁶ but it distinctly reveals Li Cheng's influence in the mannered description of a billowing cloud-like mountain and trees with “crab-claw” branches (features commonly associated with the Li Cheng tradition). Although undoubtedly an early painting, *Travelers at the Mountain Pass* must postdate Guan Tong. It was probably painted by a minor master of the early Northern Song who was keen to adopt and accentuate various features of landscape painting popular in his day, many of which, like the donkey rider, were derived from Li Cheng. As for *Xiao Yi Steals the Lanting Preface*, it is documented that Juran was influenced by Li Cheng after following the last ruler of the Southern Tang, Li Yu, to the Song capital at Kaifeng where he received important commissions.⁷⁷ I have argued elsewhere that the composition of this landscape already suggests Li Cheng's influence.⁷⁸ The rider on the bridge can be considered corroborating evidence supporting the hypothesis that this painting reflects Juran's relatively late, capital style.

The donkey rider appears on a bridge at the end of Xu Daoning's (ca. 970–ca. 1052) *Song of the Fishermen* of the mid-eleventh century (fig. 17). He is seen again traversing a rickety bridge towards the end of *Solitary Temple by Autumn Mountains* (fig. 18), a painting also attributed to Xu Daoning but more recently associated with his younger contemporary Song Di by Richard Barnhart.⁷⁹ Both Xu

Cheng's “airs” (*feng*), in contrast to Xu Daoning, who captured his “energy” (*qi*), and Li Zongcheng (whose name literally means “Li, Worshipper of Cheng”), who captured Li Cheng's “form” (*xing*). Zhai was a native of Shandong active in the late tenth – early eleventh centuries. Liu Daochun, 134. Fan Kuan, a native of Shaanxi Province and Zhai Yuanshen's well-known contemporary, admits to having first modeled himself after Li Cheng. Liu Daochun, 132. Li Cheng's lasting influence at the capital Kaifeng, where he was already popular in his own day according to his biography in *Xuanhe huapu*, is confirmed by Su Qi's (987–1035) observation that the landscape decorating the Hanlin Academy by the late tenth-century monk-painter Juran imitated the style of Li Cheng. Discussed in the text below. See note no. 77.

⁷⁵ Perhaps the most concise description of Li Cheng's landscapes is that of Mi Fu: “Li Cheng used light ink in such a way that it seems as if one is in the mist of a dream. His rocks are like moving clouds. It is all extremely ingenious but lacks reality.” *Hua shi*, 215.

⁷⁶ A succinct description of Guan Tong's landscape painting is provided by Mi Fu: “Guan Tong paints rough mountains. He excels at capturing the force and manner of ‘the pass and river.’ His peaks and ranges have little refinement.” *Hua shi*, 215. “Pass and river” can either refer to the specific region around the Hangu Pass and Yellow River in western Henan, or simply the rough traveling terrain of mountains and rivers. The two conjure similar images.

⁷⁷ This information comes from Su Qi's (987–1035) description of the Juran painting hanging prominently in the Hanlin Academy: “His brush traces are wild and untrammelled. He imitates the work of Li Cheng yet is able to establish the marvels of his own personal style.” Su Qi, “Cixu Hanlin zhi,” in Hong Zun, ed., *Hanyuan chunshu, SKQS, juan 9*, 5a. This information was first brought to attention by Wai-kam Ho in his catalogue entry for Juran's *Buddhist Retreat by Streams and Mountains* (Cleveland Museum of Art). *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting* (Cleveland, 1980), 18–19.

⁷⁸ Peter C. Sturman, “Mi Youren and the Inherited Literati Tradition: Dimensions of Ink-play,” Ph.D. dissertation (Yale University, 1989), 234–37.

⁷⁹ Richard Barnhart, “Shining Rivers: Eight Views of the Hsiao and Hsiang in Sung Painting,” *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Chinese Art History, 1991* (Taipei, National Palace Museum, 1991), 45–95, especially 60–70.



Fig. 1. Li Cheng, attributed to, *Travelers in a Wintry Forest*. Northern Song period, ca. A.D. 975–1000. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 161.6 x 100 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Fletcher Fund and Bequest of Dorothy Graham Bennett, 1972.



Fig. 2. Detail of figure 1.



Fig. 3. Anonymous, *Returning Drunk to a Flowered Cove*. Southern Song period, ca. A.D. 1200.
Fan, ink and colors on silk, 23.8 x 25.3 cm.
The Shanghai Museum, The People's Republic of China. After *Liang Song minghua ce* (Beijing, 1963).



Fig. 4. Detail of figure 1.



Fig. 6. Detail of figure 1.



Fig. 5. Anonymous, *Riding a Donkey Through a Wintry Grove*. Southern Song period, ca. A.D. 1200. Fan, ink and colors on silk, 26.9 x 29.9 cm. The Shanghai Museum, The People's Republic of China. After *Liang Song minghua ce* (Beijing, 1963).



Fig. 7. Sun Junze, *Winter Landscape*. Yuan dynasty, fourteenth century.
Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 125.8 x 56.4 cm. Tōkyō National Museum.



Fig. 8. Li Cheng, attributed to, *A Solitary Temple amid Clearing Peaks*. Northern Song period, *ca.* A.D. 1000. Hanging scroll, ink and light colors on silk, 111.8 x 56 cm. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri (purchase: Nelson Trust) 47-71.



Fig. 10. Zhao Gan, *Along the River at First Snow*. Five Dynasties Period, ca. A.D. 950. Detail of a handscroll, ink and colors on silk, 25.9 x 376.5 cm. The National Palace Museum, Taiwan, Republic of China.



Fig. 9. Detail of figure 8.



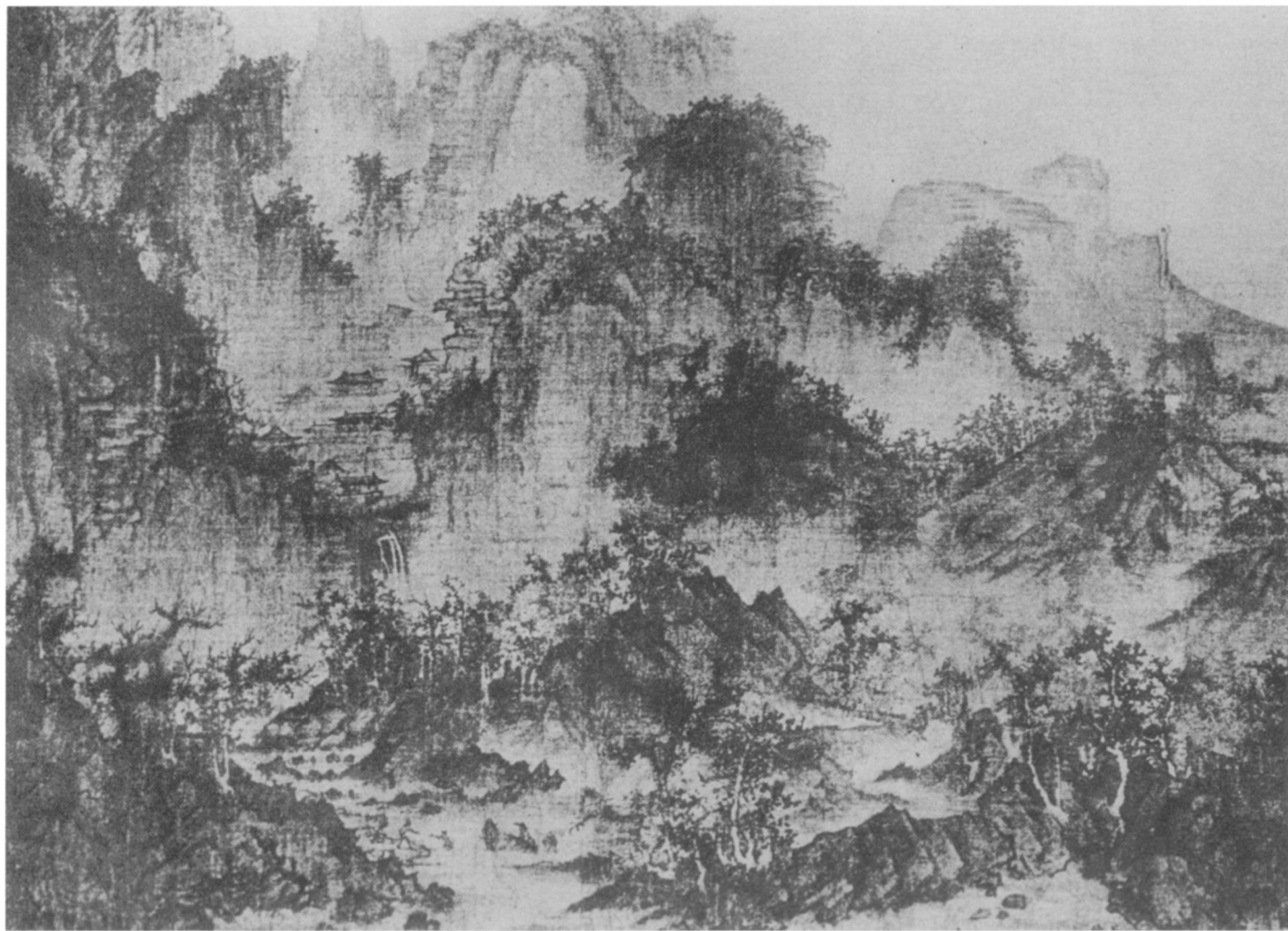


Fig. 11. Li Cheng, attributed to, *Verdant Forests, Distant Peaks*. Northern Song period, *ca.* A.D. 1000–25. Detail of a handscroll, ink on silk, 45.9 x 141.8 cm. The Liaoning Provincial Museum, Shenyang, Liaoning, The People's Republic of China. After *Li Cheng Maolin yuanxiu tu* (Shanghai, 1989).

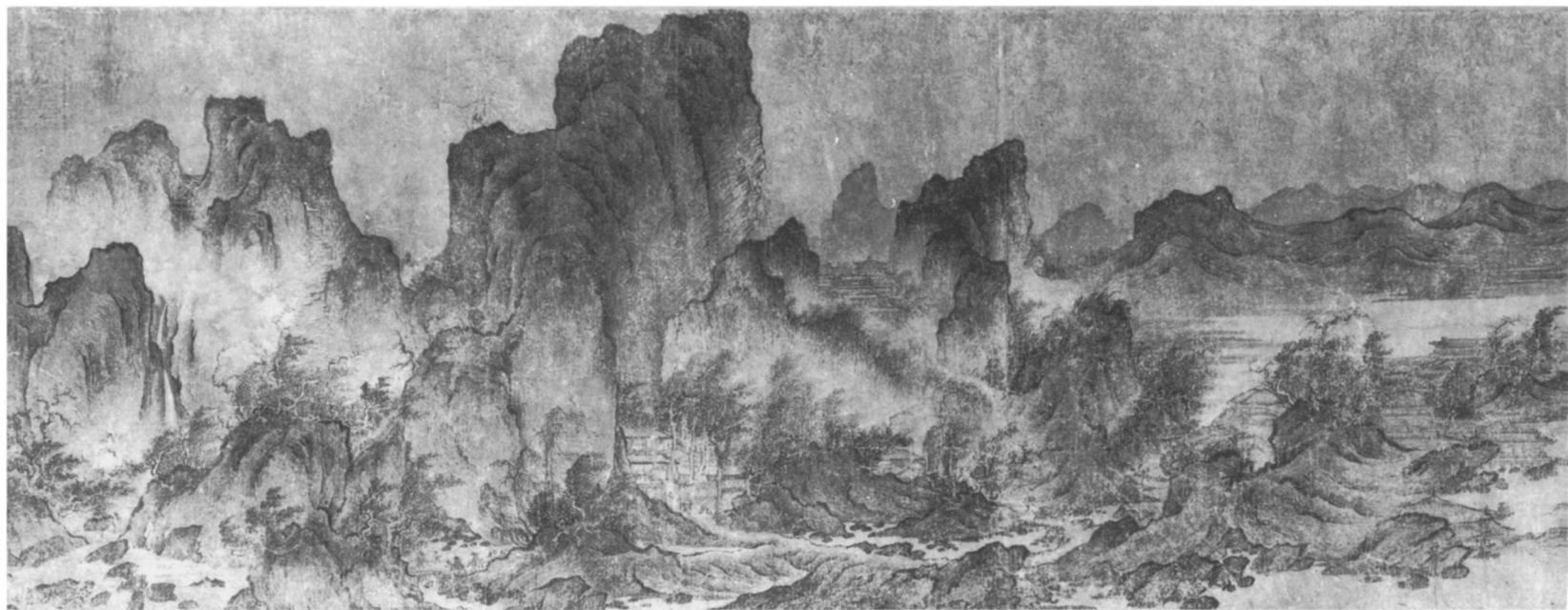


Fig. 12. Yan Wengui, *Towers and Pavilions by Mountains and Rivers*. Northern Song period, *ca.* A.D. 1000. Handscroll, ink and light colors on paper, 31.3 x 160.5 cm. Ōsaka Municipal Museum.



Fig. 13. Detail of figure 12.



Fig. 14. Yan Wengui, attributed to, *Towers and Pavilions by Mountains and Streams*. Northern Song period, ca. A.D. 1000. Hanging scroll, ink on silk, 103.9 x 47.7 cm. The National Palace Museum, Taiwan, Republic of China.





Fig. 15. Guan Tong, attributed to, *Travelers at the Mountain Pass*. Northern Song period, ca. A.D. 1000–1025. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 144.4 x 56.8 cm. The National Palace Museum, Taiwan, Republic of



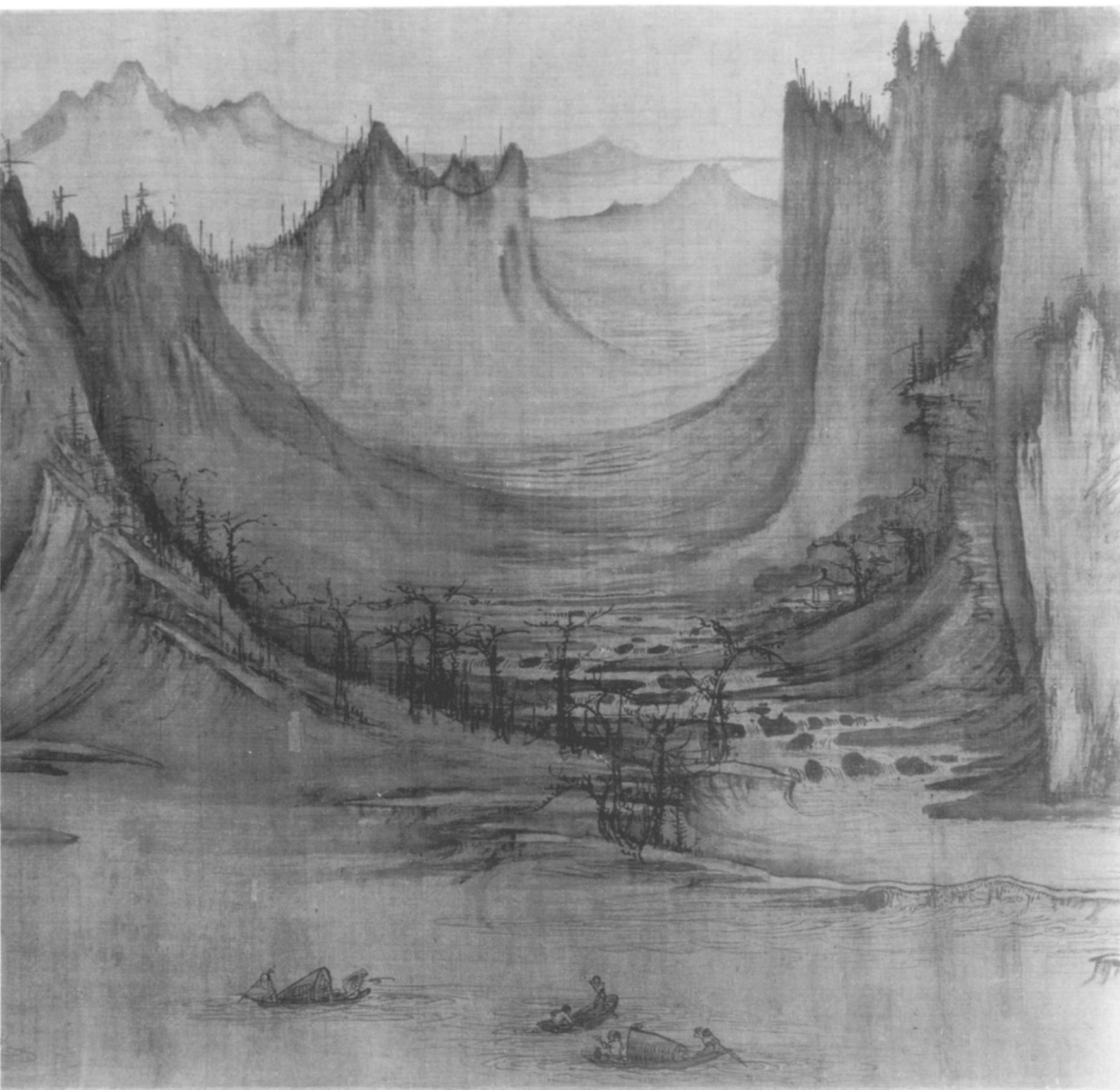
Fig. 16. Juran, attributed to, *Xiao Yi Steals the Lanting Preface*. Northern Song period, ca. A.D. 975–1000. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 144.1 x 59.6 cm. The National Palace Museum, Taiwan, Republic of China.



Fig. 17. Xu Daoning, attributed to, *Song of the Fishermen*. Northern Song period, *ca.* A.D. 1050. Detail of a handscroll, ink and light colors on silk, 48.9 x 209.6 cm. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri (purchase: Nelson Trust) 33-1559.



Fig. 18. Xu Daoning, attributed to, *Solitary Temple by Autumn Mountains*. Northern Song period, *ca.* A.D. 1050. Handscroll, ink on silk, 38.3 x 147.5 cm. Fujii Yurinkan, Kyōto.



許道寧秋山蕭寺
康熙甲寅秋日
畫村重裝

Fig. 19. Qu Ding, attributed to, *Summer Mountains*. Northern Song period, ca. A.D. 1025–50. Handscroll, ink and light colors on silk, 45.3 x 115.2 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Dillon Fund, 1973.



Fig. 20. Detail of figure 19.

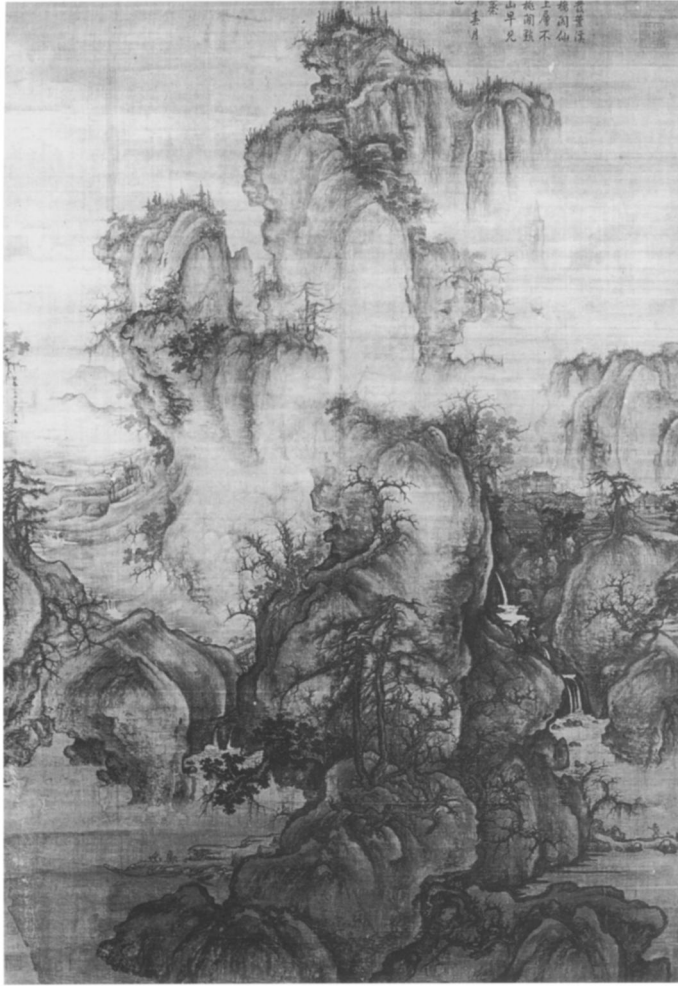


Fig. 21. Guo Xi, *Early Spring*. Northern Song period, dated A.D. 1072. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 158.3 x 108.1 cm. The National Palace Museum, Taiwan, Republic of China.



Fig. 22. Detail of figure 21.

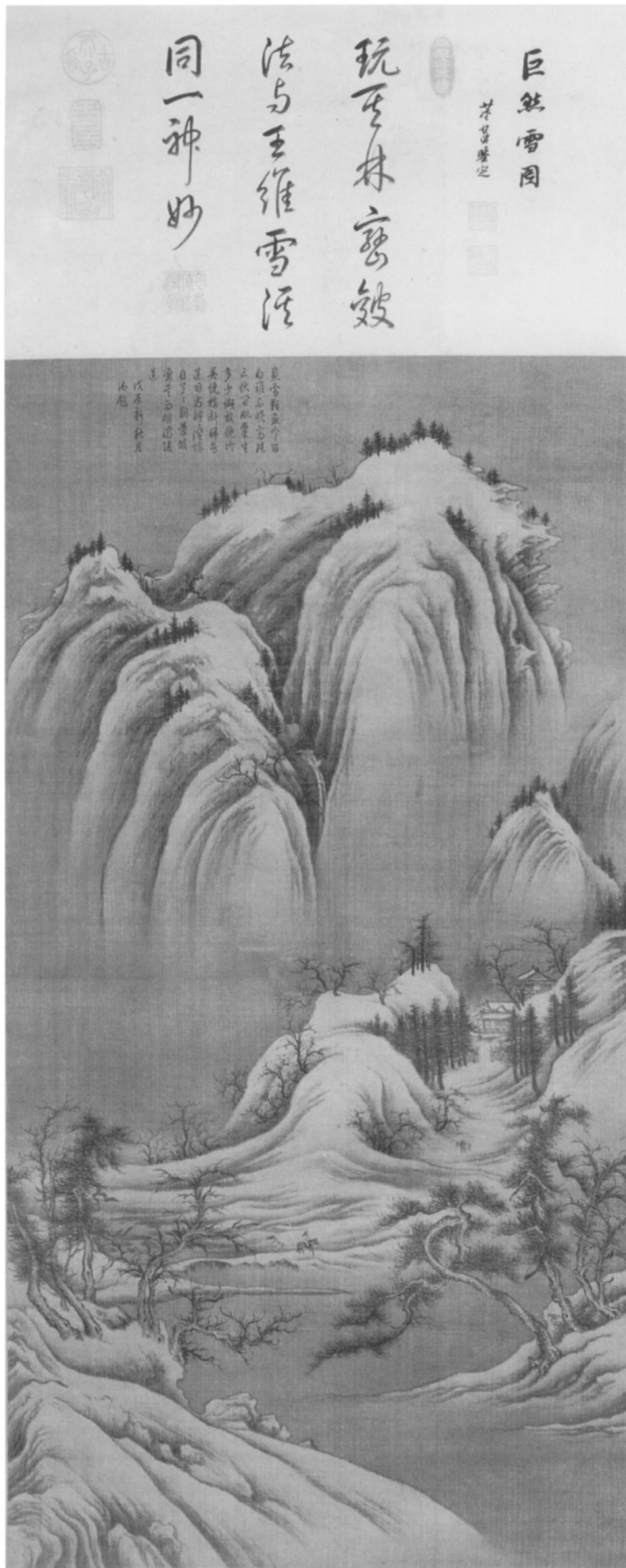


Fig. 23. Feng Qin, attributed to, *Snowscape* (old attribution to Juran). Northern Song period, ca. A.D. 1120. Hanging scroll, ink on silk, 103.6 x 52.5 cm. The National Palace Museum, Taiwan, Republic of China.

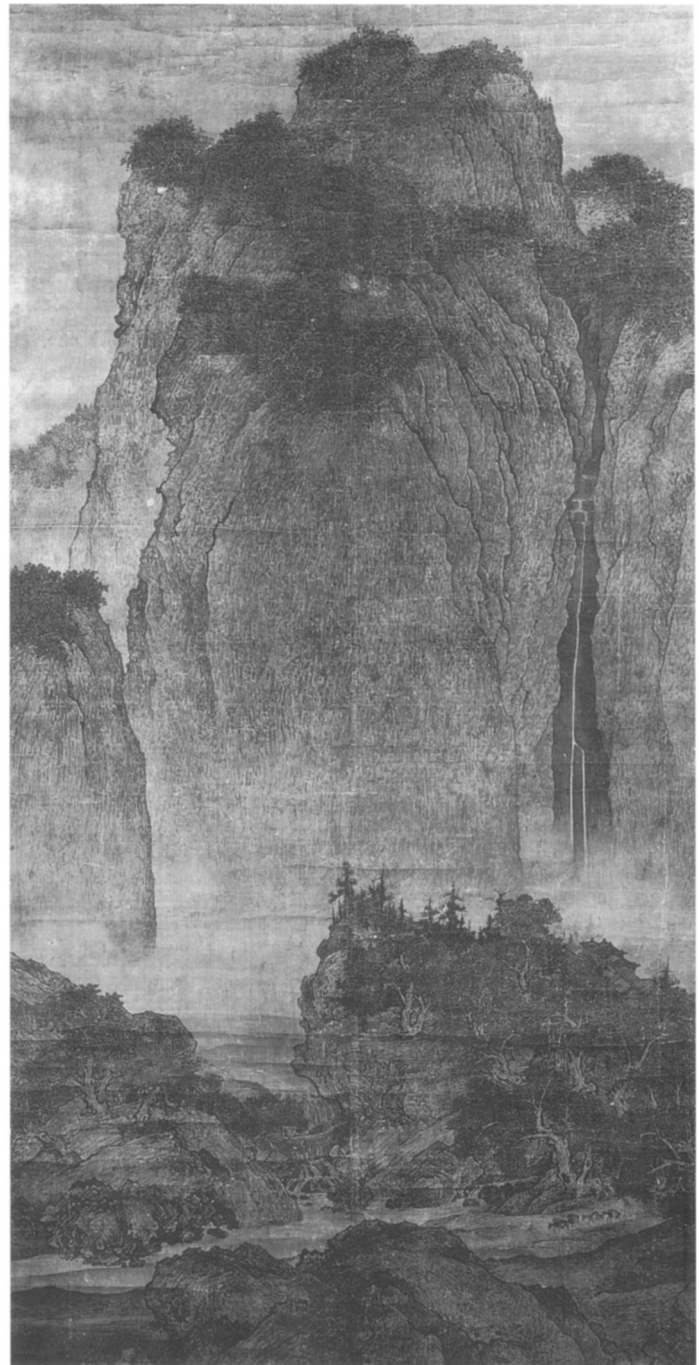


Fig. 24. Fan Kuan, *Travelers among Mountains and Streams*. Northern Song period, ca. A.D. 1000–25. Hanging scroll, ink on silk, 206.3 x 103.3 cm. The National Palace Museum, Taiwan, Republic of China.

Fig. 25. Li Cheng, attributed to, *Tall Pines, Level Distance*. Northern Song period, eleventh century. Hanging scroll, ink on silk, 126.1 x 205.6 cm. Chōkaidō Bunko, Yokaichi.





Fig. 26. Li Cheng, Wang Xiao attributed to, *Reading the Stele by Pitted Rocks*. Hanging scroll, ink and light colors on silk. Yuan dynasty, fourteenth century (?). Ōsaka Municipal Museum.



Fig. 27. Guo Xi, attributed to, *Regarding the Stele*. Hanging scroll, ink on silk. Ming dynasty, fifteenth century (?). The National Palace Museum, Taiwan, Republic of China.

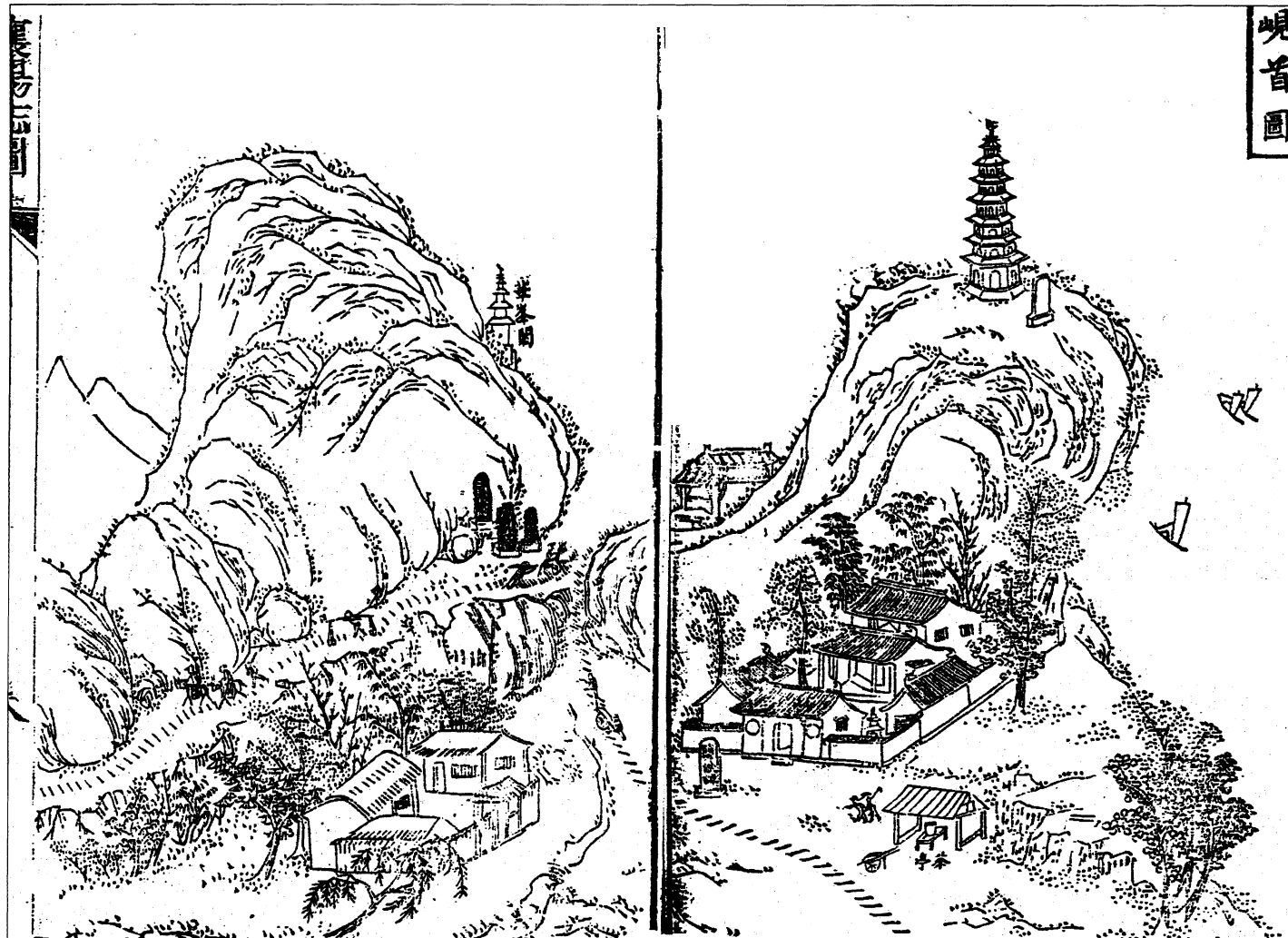


Fig. 28. Mount Xian, from *Xiangyang xianzhi*, 1874 edition.

Daoning and Song Di were notable followers of Li Cheng.⁸⁰ The donkey rider appears on a bridge in *Summer Mountains* (figs. 19, 20), a painting attributed to the Yan Wengui follower Qu Ding (active ca. 1030–60). He appears yet again on a bridge heading towards the temple complex of Guo Xi's *Early Spring*, dated 1072 (figs. 21, 22), and just past a bridge in *Snowscape*, once attributed to Juran but more recently ascribed to the late Northern Song painter Feng Qin (fig. 23).⁸¹ Each of these paintings exhibits stylistic features associated to some degree with Li Cheng. After the late Northern Song, the donkey rider becomes a well-settled inhabitant of the oft-explored landscape essay in the Li/Guo style.

Knowledge of the associations engendered by the donkey rider allows some tentative observations about the structure of these landscape paintings. A key element is the bridge, which the donkey rider is almost always shown approaching, crossing or just leaving. On the surface these bridges appear to be nothing more than the simple man-made conveniences that undoubtedly were a very real feature of the Chinese landscape. Yet the regularity with which they appear under hoof suggests a symbolic, perhaps metaphorical, function. That function, I would suggest, is tied to the associations of Ba Bridge, symbolic site, as Zheng Qi remarked, for the composing of worthy poems. That is not to say that what is painted in these landscapes is Ba Bridge – the real Ba Bridge spans a considerable distance and is well removed from anything resembling these mountain vistas. But the connotations of removal, separation, exile, failure, and of course poetry that this famous Chang'an landmark represented come to mind when one sees, as Zheng Qi did, a donkey rider crossing one. The intended association, I believe, is with the Meng Haorans and Jia Daos of the world, departing from the capital and returning to their wilderness landscapes after failing in the examinations or in their attempts to secure significant patronage.

The metaphorical passage from the insider's world of comfort and civilization to the outsider's world of landscape and reclusion is articulated by the full compositions of these paintings. It is clearest in the handscrolls, and of these the best illustration is the earliest: Yan Wengui's *Towers and Pavilions by Mountains and Rivers* (figs. 12, 13). As one moves from right to left we pass through tightly packed fishing villages, past pavilions, hostels and temples. Leaving behind these vestiges of human activity is our small party of donkey riders on the bridge, heading towards the spectacular passage of distant peaks and tumbling waterfalls at the painting's end. *Verdant Forests, Distant Peaks*, attributed to Li Cheng (fig. 11), and *Summer Mountains*, attributed to Qu Ding (figs. 19, 20), also suggest the horizontal movement from human world to wilderness, though not as neatly as this particular handscroll by Yan Wengui.

Yan Wengui's *Storied Pavilions by Streams and Mountains* presents a similar paradigmatic structure, only now organized vertically for the hanging scroll format (fig. 14). The donkey rider follows a path upwards, past what appear to be riverside dwellings to temple structures nestled higher and higher in the mountains. The higher he ascends, the more remote and spiritual the landscape. The bridge, in this case, would seem simply to signify entrance to the journey, its role as a divider between categories of human experience now assumed into the vertical, and by consequence, hierarchical structure. The same basic format, with slight variations, is seen in the Li Cheng and Guan Tong attributions *A Solitary Temple amid Clearing Peaks* and *Travelers at the Mountain Pass* (figs. 8, 15).

⁸⁰ Xu Daoning is recorded as having said, "In my heart, I recognize that Li Cheng is my master." Cited from Huang Tingjian's poem of 1087, "Da Wang Daoji sicheng guan Xu Daoning shanshui tu" (In answer to Court Aide Wang Daoji, looking at Xu Daoning's landscape painting), *Shanggu ji, waiji, SKQS, juan 3*, 1a–2a. Li Cheng's influence on Song Di is noted by Mi Fu in *Hua shi*, 199.

⁸¹ Richard Barnhart, "The 'Snowscape' Attributed to Chü-jan," *Archives of Asian Art* XXIV (1970–71), 6–22.

Neither has quite the grandiose pretensions of the Yan Wengui hanging scroll, but both suggest physical and spiritual ascension from the mundane world of human society – represented by the quaint mountain village scenes – to the temples above. The format is still present in Guo Xi's *Early Spring* (fig. 21), though one barely recognizes it, much diluted and overwhelmed by the grand image of a landscape captured in the drama of seasonal transformation.

What I have brought attention to in these various early landscape paintings can perhaps best be described as a template for landscape experience. Upon it the artists add and subtract, constructing visions of landscape particular to their individual interpretations. We note, for example, how Guo Xi half hides his donkey rider behind a large boulder (fig. 22), demonstrating for our delectation one of the most prominent principles stated in his text on painting *Linchuan gaozhi*, that what is suggested can be more effective than what is described.⁸² And we note in this same vignette how the two porters in front of the donkey rider stand aside to allow passage on the narrow bridge – a prime presentation of the paramount importance Guo Xi placed in the logic of the landscape, and perhaps of the Confucian virtue of yielding, which would certainly be appropriate in a landscape painted by a professional painter working in the service of the emperor.⁸³

If logic and rationality characterize Guo Xi's landscape for the court in the 1070s, then perhaps, as Richard Barnhart has suggested, a self-mocking humor tints Xu Daoning's landscape for the marketplace of a generation earlier (fig. 17). Rather than fishing villages to symbolize the world of human activity, Xu Daoning added a busy foreground scene that includes a merchant beating an understandably reluctant steed into a ferry boat and fishermen noisily casting their lines. Although fishermen normally symbolize the peaceful life of the Daoist recluse, Barnhart suggests that in this painting Xu Daoning parodies their traditional role into a metaphor for the busy marketplace where Xu cast his own line for the fat fish of customers to whom he peddled medicine (with landscapes as his bait).⁸⁴ The donkey rider makes an aloof departure for the peace of distant hills. Yan Wengui's paintings, with their stacked peaks and stark vistas, suggest an artist's fascination with the overpowering majesty of nature (figs. 12, 14). The specific meanings Juran may have intended in his painting remain elusive (fig. 16), though in all likelihood they are unrelated to the painting's present title, which seems to be a later and somewhat arbitrary invention.⁸⁵

Such are a few casual observations of how some of Li Cheng's followers pursued diverging paths determined by any number of factors after first learning the prototype(s) established by the tenth-

⁸² "A man on the mountain gives a clue to a path; a pavilion on the mountain gives a clue to an excellent view..." "If one wishes to paint a high mountain, one should not paint every part, or it will not seem high. If one wishes to paint a stream stretching afar, one should not paint its entire course, or it will not seem long." Guo Xi, *Linchuan gaozhi*, 635, 639. Translation by Sakanishi Shio, *An Essay on Landscape Painting*, 36–37, 47.

⁸³ Such logic and meanings are well discussed in Sofukawa Hiroshi, "Kaku Ki to Soshun zu" (Guo Xi and "Early Spring"), *Tōyōshi kenkyū* XXXV/4 (1977), 61–86.

⁸⁴ Barnhart, "Figures in Landscape," 63–64. Liu Daochun's entry on Xu Daoning mentions that he began by selling medicine at the main gate by the palace of Kaifeng. To those who bought his goods he would always present a painting of trees and rocks. Liu Daochun, *Shengchao minghua ping*, *juan* 2, 133.

⁸⁵ The title *Xiao Yi Steals the Lanting Preface* does not appear in association with Juran in any early source of which I am aware. It first emerges in the seventeenth century with Zhang Chou's *Qinghe shuhua fang* of 1616, *juan* *wu*, 44a. The title appears often in early texts, but almost always in association with figure painters, which Juran was not. The best-known extant example of the *Xiao Yi* composition is the Five Dynasties Period work erroneously attributed to Yan Liben in the National Palace Museum, Taipei. *Gugong minghua sanbai zhong* (Taizhong, 1959), pl. 2. See the article by Han Chuang (John Hay), "Hsiao I Gets the Lan-t'ing Manuscript by a Confidence Trick," *National Palace Museum Bulletin*, (in two parts) vol. V, no. 3 (July-August, 1970), 1–13, and no. 6 (January–February, 1971), 1–17. For another version in the Freer Gallery of Art see Thomas Lawton, *Chinese Figure Painting* (Washington, D.C., 1973), cat. #12.

century master. But what of Li Cheng, himself? Can anything more be learned of his paintings with the knowledge gained from donkey riding lore? One author takes note of the central position given the temple in *A Solitary Temple amid Clearing Peaks*, terminus of any human movement through the landscape, and suggests a connection with the Buddhist faith.⁸⁶ It is difficult to proceed further with this interpretation since the painting is almost certainly from the hand of someone other than Li Cheng and there is little in the historical materials to confirm the nature and strength of Li Cheng's religious beliefs.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, another feature of this painting tangential to the temple's placement is both significant and firmly associated with Li Cheng: the expression of distance that extends from the temple in a sublime vista of towering peaks and waterfalls dropping into mists of pure emptiness. Distance is so fundamental and obvious an element of all landscape painting that it is easy to overlook the subtleties of its expression. As discussion of the third Li Cheng attribution will show, however, gazing into the distance is an act of cultural as well as physical perception, and one performed most notably by those who rode the donkey.

III. *Reading the Stele by Pitted Rocks*: History as Distance

Zhai Yuanshen, a native of Yingqiu [Shandong Province], acquired a reputation as a musician and excellent player of drums. He modeled his paintings after the landscapes of his fellow countryman Li Cheng, delighting in painting scenes of peaks and ranges. One day while performing with his drums at the governor's banquet, he chanced to see distant clouds rising precipitously upward, just like mountain peaks stacked one upon the other. Yuanshen craned his neck and stood on tiptoes gazing towards them. Without realizing it, he climbed on top of his drums and the beat was consequently lost. When the governor inquired, Zhai spoke directly, explaining everything. The next day the governor ordered Yuanshen to paint, and sure enough, his mountain peaks possessed an abrupt and awesome force. People found it extraordinary.⁸⁸

Although Zhai Yuanshen's paintings are no longer known, *Towers and Pavilions by Mountains and Streams* by Zhai's contemporary Yan Wengui serves as a good illustration of this inspired trick of using the billowing forms of towering clouds as models for majestic mountains (fig. 14). But was the source for this trope truly in the summer cumuli of Shandong, or was it in the landscape paintings of Zhai Yuanshen's teacher Li Cheng, who painted rocks like moving clouds, according to Mi Fu?⁸⁹ And presuming that the connection to Li Cheng is more significant, was the earlier painter's motive the same? To overwhelm the viewer with mountains of towering forces? Anecdotes sometimes provide significant pieces of information that are overshadowed by the more curious elements of a story. In this case it is not so much what Zhai Yuanshen obtains for his landscape paintings, but the

⁸⁶ Barnhart, "Figures in Landscape," 66.

⁸⁷ Barnhart cites Osvald Sirén's reading of Dong You's critiques of Li Cheng's paintings to presume a connection between the artist and Chan Buddhist circles. Osvald Sirén, *Chinese Painting: Leading Masters and Principles* (New York, 1956), vol. 1, 200. While such a connection would have been perfectly commonplace in the tenth century, it seems to me that Dong You's language in these inscriptions is purely rhetorical and not based on any specific private knowledge of Li Cheng's life. For that matter, Dong You's mystical terminology would be equally welcoming of a Daoist interpretation. Without a pagoda visible, can we be certain the temple in this particular Li Cheng attribution is Buddhist? For the Dong You inscriptions see *Guangchuan huaba*, *juan* 4, 277, 280; *juan* 6, 306–07.

⁸⁸ Liu Daochun, *Shengchao minghua ping*, *juan* 2, 134. This same anecdote is found in *Xuanhe huapu*, *juan* 11, 121, where Zhai Yuanshen further explains that the towering clouds could serve as the perfect model for one's landscape painting. Another version of the anecdote is found in Wang Pizhi, *Minshui yantan lu*, *juan* 7, 91.

⁸⁹ See note no. 75.

manner in which he obtains it – by gazing into the distance with such singleminded intensity that he unwittingly climbs atop his drums to gain a better view. Zhai's actions bespeak the true attraction of Li Cheng's landscape paintings: vistas of such depth that the eye gazes on long after the paths and roadways come to an end, to mountains so distant that they cannot be distinguished from faraway clouds. This characteristic of Li Cheng's landscapes is confirmed by a famous comparison made between his paintings and those of his most noted follower, Fan Kuan.

Fan Kuan studied Li Cheng's style and was able to realize the marvels of Li's essence. Nevertheless, he still compared unfavorably with the master. Then Fan Kuan began to face the landscape directly in order to forge his ideas. He did not seek frivolous adornment but rather painted the mountains' true bones. In this manner he was able to establish his independence and earn equal stature with Li Cheng. In landscape painting of the Song dynasty only Fan Kuan and Li Cheng can be considered absolutely peerless. People today say that with Li Cheng's painting you can get very close and it still seems one thousand miles distant while with Fan Kuan's painting, even when seen from some distance, it appears as if within hand's reach.⁹⁰

A similar observation is attributed to the later Li Cheng follower Wang Shen (ca. 1048 – after 1104), who is cited as commenting that in contrast to Fan Kuan's landscapes, Li Cheng's give one the impression of looking out over an expanse of a thousand miles.⁹¹ One might compare the looming massif of Fan Kuan's masterpiece *Travelers among Mountains and Streams* (fig. 24) to the receding mountains and cascades of *A Solitary Temple amid Clearing Mists* (fig. 8) to substantiate Liu Daochun's and Wang Shen's observations. Another painting attributed to Li Cheng, *Tall Pines, Level Distance* (fig. 25), makes the comparison even more explicit. Although this tall hanging scroll reveals the touch of Guo Xi, or someone close to him, the level distance theme is one that had long been associated with the earlier master.⁹² The expression of distance is a key feature of the paintings of Li Cheng's followers, from Yan Wengui to Xu Daoning to Guo Xi and Wang Shen. Even without genuine works from his hand to confirm it, there can be little question that the expression of depth and distance was a fundamental characteristic of Li Cheng's landscape paintings.

Curiously, the painting that allows us to proceed a step further in understanding Li Cheng's interest in expressing distance in his art portrays little, if any, physical separation. *Reading the Stele by Pitted Rocks* is limited to a foreground scene of gnarled trees, rocks, two figures and a memorial tablet (fig. 26). What gazing takes place extends no farther than the massive stele standing on a majestic tortoise base and topped by a finely chiseled dragon crown. This is a painting that proves difficult to reconcile with the story it has long been presumed to describe. Resolution of this contradiction will provide a last important piece to Li Cheng's story.

The association of this theme with Li Cheng can be dated to the late Northern Song, when two paintings of this title attributed to the artist were in the imperial collection.⁹³ According to Zhou Mi

⁹⁰ Liu Daochun, *Shengchao minghua ping*, juan 2, 132.

⁹¹ Han Zhuo, *Shanshui chunquan ji*, in Yu Kun, *Zhongguo hualun leibian*, 676. Wang Shen purportedly ended his comparison of Li Cheng's and Fan Kuan's paintings with the comment that the one (Li Cheng) was surely like a scholar while the other could be likened to a warrior. See also Richard Barnhart, "Wang Shen and Late Northern Song Landscape Painting," *Kokuji kōryū bijutsushi kenkyūkai daiseikai shinpojiamu* (International Symposium on Art Historical Studies #2, Kyōto, 1983), 61–69.

⁹² Suzuki Kei discusses this at some length in *Chūgoku kaigashi*, first volume (Tōkyō, 1981), 200–10. Among the sources he cites is Wang Pizhi's *Minshui yantan lu*, juan 7, 91, which comments that the theme of wintry forests with a level distance view did not exist before Li Cheng. One finds among the one hundred fifty-nine Li Cheng attributions in *Xuanbe huapu*, juan 11, 115–17, such titles as *Level Distance* and *Level Distance, Pitted Rocks*.

⁹³ *Xuanbe huapu*, juan 11, 116.

(1232–98), who saw the remains of a painting with a similar title, the work was jointly done by Li, who painted the landscape elements, and another painter named Wang Chong, who painted the figures.⁹⁴ The painting that survives today is considered by most to be a later recension, probably of the fourteenth century. A half-hidden inscription identifies Li Cheng's partner in this case as Wang Xiao, a little-known specialist of bird-and-flower painting who may have been a contemporary.⁹⁵

For centuries the narrative of the painting has been presumed to concern the reading of the stele of the filial maiden Cao E (d. A.D. 108) by the Three Kingdoms Period generalissimo Cao Cao (150–220).⁹⁶ The source of the identification is a famous anecdote told in Liu Yiqing's *Shishuo xinyu* of Cao Cao's encounter with Cao E's memorial tablet while traveling by the Fen River in Kuaiji (Zhejiang Province) in the company of his sharp-witted assistant Yang Xiu. The tablet's text, which recorded the moving story of how the youthful Cao E had thrown herself into the river after seeking the body of her drowned father, was an inspired piece of writing by Handan Chun (fl. ca. A.D. 220). However, it was not so much Handan Chun's writing that attracted Cao Cao's and Yang Xiu's attention, but a seemingly nonsensical eight-character inscription attributed to Cai Yong (133–92) written on the back of the stone. Yang Xiu figured out immediately that the inscription was a synonymic anagram which translated into the phrase, "Utterly lovely, wonderful words," describing Handan Chun's composition. Cao Cao solved the puzzle as well, but two hours later and after having continued on their travel for some ten miles. This caused him to sigh, "My ability is ten miles slower than yours."⁹⁷

The problem with this identification of the painting's story is the extraordinary inappropriateness of portraying Cao Cao, one of the most feared and powerful men of the third century, as seated on the back of a donkey, the steed of failure. His attire, as well as his mount, are much more suited for the poor itinerant scholar than for the leader of a powerful state. Moreover, the second figure in the painting could not possibly be the brilliant aide-de-camp Yang Xiu. This is no more than a servant-lad attending to the menial tasks of his master. A second stele-reading painting, this one attributed to Guo Xi (fig. 27) titled *Regarding the Stele*, highlights the questionable nature of the association of *Reading the Stele by Pitted Rocks* with the *Shishuo xinyu* anecdote.⁹⁸ Unquestionably, this second composition was intended to be an illustration of the story of Cao Cao and Yang Xiu. The stately deportment of the two gentlemen engaged in animated conversation, the fierce-looking retainers, the two magnificent horses, the regal scepter in the hands of an assistant (as opposed to the gnarled staff held by the servant in the other composition) all point to the story of Cao Cao and Yang Xiu. *Reading the Stele by Pitted Rocks*, in contrast, must be something different.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Zhou Mi, *Yunyan guoyan lu*, 334. Zhou Mi writes that only one half of the painting survived; the scroll with the figures was gone. Nothing more is known of Wang Chong.

⁹⁵ Wang Xiao is sometimes said to be from Sishui (Shandong), sometimes from Sizhou (northeast Anhui). Liu Daochun, *Shengchao minghua ping*, juan 3, 143. *Xuanhe huapu*, juan 19, 235. I presume that some confusion ensued in the minds of later viewers of the *Reading the Stele* paintings: the otherwise unknown Wang Chong may have been associated with Wang Xiao, who at least could be situated in geographical proximity to Li Cheng. Li Cheng, as stated earlier, was a native of Shandong who is said to have spent his last years in Huaiyang, not far from Sizhou.

⁹⁶ Suzuki Kei, *Chūgoku kaigashi*, first tome, vol. one, 207–08, vol. two, notes no. 191–93. Professor Suzuki documents poems on the subject by Ke Jiusi (1312–65) (*Danqiusheng ji*, juan 2), and Du Jiong (1396–1474) (*Du Dongyuan ji*, juan 19), among others.

⁹⁷ Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian*, juan 2, 318–19 (XI.3); Mather, 293–94. The original stele inscription by Handan Chun is found in *Quan Sanguo wen*, in *Quan Shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* (Taipei, 1964 reprint ed.), juan 26, 4a–b.

⁹⁸ *Gugong shubua tulu* (Taipei, 1989), vol. 1, 237–38. I suspect that this little-known painting dates to the early Ming dynasty.

⁹⁹ Suzuki Kei, perhaps recognizing the inappropriateness of the Cao Cao identification of the donkey rider in *Reading the Stele by Pitted Rocks*, suggests instead the anagram's author, Cai Yong. Moreover, he questions the painting's description of a barren, wintry plain for Cao E's stele, located in the lush riverine landscape of Jiangnan. Professor Suzuki concludes with the astute hypothesis that *Reading the Stele by Pitted Rocks* is a painting whose roots may be in the Three Kingdoms Period story but whose content

Misidentification of the narrative portrayed in *Reading the Stele by Pitted Rocks* proves to be an early phenomenon, or so one may deduce from an observation that Mi Fu makes in his *Hua shi* of the late Northern Song. Listing the many types of paintings owned by wealthy aristocrats randomly attributed to Wang Wei, Mi Fu adds the title *Emperor Wu of Wei (Cao Cao) Reading the Stele*.¹⁰⁰ Why would this theme have been associated with Wang Wei? The answer, I believe, is in the likelihood of there being a donkey rider in that painting, just as one finds in *Reading the Stele by Pitted Rocks*. Donkey riding reminded one of Wang Wei's painting of Meng Haoran, and stele reading of Cao Cao and the Cao E stele. The overlapping of Wang Wei's name with Meng Haoran and Li Cheng emerges once more, and once more it is Meng Haoran who proves to be the pivotal figure.

There was, in fact, some reason to the misidentification, for Cao E's stele represented an important model that would reappear in Meng Haoran's environment in the eighth century, and by consequence again with Meng's admirer Li Cheng in the tenth century. The key, however, lies not with Cai Yong's character-puzzle, but rather with what is entirely overlooked in the *Shishuo xinyu* anecdote – Handan Chun's original stele text. So moving was Handan's recounting of the story of Cao E, it is said, that all who read it were reduced to tears. On Mount Xian at Xiangyang, Meng Haoran's landscape of reclusion, was another tear-wrenching stele. Styled, in Paul Kroll's translation, the Tablet of Falling Tears (*Duolei bei*), this memorial stone was dedicated to a man named Yang Hu (221–78), the military governor who administered Xiangyang some five hundred years before Meng Haoran lived in the area.¹⁰¹ Yang Hu performed nothing as dramatic as the filial maiden Cao E; he was simply a benevolent magistrate particularly fond of making outings to Mount Xian in the company of friends. But during those outings Yang Hu proved susceptible to philosophical musings on the ephemerality of man, and his thoughts, given presence in the stone on Mount Xian, proved as effectively moving to those who followed him at Xiangyang as Cao E's stele in Kuaiji. Here is Meng Haoran's well-known poem on the subject, borrowing Paul Kroll's translation:

ON CLIMBING XIAN MOUNTAIN IN COMPANY WITH SEVERAL FRIENDS
 Human affairs fade in turn, each generation;
 Their goings and comings forming the past and the present.
 But rivers and hills retain their supassing traces;
 And our group now again climbs and looks down.
 The water ebbs, and Fish-weir Isle is left in shallows;
 Sky turns cold, and the Marsh of Dream lies deep.
 Lord Yang's stone tablet stands here still;
 We have read it, and tears now wet our lapels.¹⁰²

Reading stelae is contemplation of the past, *diaogu*, reflection on the passage of history, the actions of great people of former times, and by consequence, reflection on one's own place in history. It was a

reflects the story's evolution into the more generic theme of the lofty scholar being emotionally touched by the ancient tablet. This hypothesis is mostly correct, though the theme, as I will attempt to show, proves to be more specific than Professor Suzuki presumes. Suzuki Kei, *op. cit.*, 209.

¹⁰⁰ Mi Fu, *Hua shi*, 189.

¹⁰¹ Paul W. Kroll, *Meng Hao-jan*, 34–37. This study conveniently and concisely presents much of the material concerning Mount Xian and Yang Hu that I am citing in my text. Yang Hu's biography is found in Fang Xuanling, *Jin shu* (Beijing, 1974), *juan* 34, 1013–25.

¹⁰² “Yu zhuzi deng Xianshan”, *Meng Haoran shiji*, *juan* 1, 4a. Translation by Paul W. Kroll, *Meng Hao-jan*, 35. One couplet from this poem was included in the inscription on the so-called Wang Wei painting of Meng Haoran riding a donkey seen by Zhang Ji that was cited earlier in this article.

pattern that repeated itself over and over again on Mount Xian, as those who passed through Xiangyang were drawn to Yang Hu's stele. Here, for example, is the poem of Li She, who passed through Xiangyang early in the ninth century:

PRESENTED TO SIKONG DI, PASSING THROUGH XIANGYANG

At Fangcheng and the Han River, a pond by old city walls;¹⁰³

High banks and gulleys remain; tis the world that moves on.

I stop my horse, alone seeking affairs of old;

Those I meet speak only of the stele on Mount Xian.¹⁰⁴

"High banks and deep gulleys" (*linggu*) refers to the passage of time, over the course of which hills and valleys change places, just as all things transform. The expression is derived from *Shi jing* (*Book of Odes*),¹⁰⁵ but the real reference in Li She's poem is to the military official Du Yu (222–84), who immediately followed Yang Hu's tenure at Xiangyang, serving there from 278 until his death six years later. Undoubtedly influenced by Yang Hu's meditations, and fearful that later generations would forget his name, Du Yu had two stelae inscribed with a record of his deeds. Just in case the old adage was true, one was hidden deep in a gulley below the mountains while the other was placed atop Mount Xian, thereby insuring that later generations would know his name.¹⁰⁶ Du Yu was a celebrated figure of his time, renowned for considerable military and civil achievements. How much more susceptible to this pattern of self-reflection would be failed scholars like Meng Haoran and Li She, who travel through a landscape of historical ruins and encounter mementos of others before them who meditated on the passage of time?

The pattern continues, only now, those who once meditated join those of the past to become objects of meditation. By the beginning of the tenth century Meng Haoran's fame has grown, his place on the donkey has become fixed, his association with Xiangyang and Deer Gate Mountain indelible. Just one generation before Li Cheng's time, the monk Qiji came through Xiangyang and now thought not only of Yang Hu, but Meng Haoran as well: "At Deer Gate Mountain is buried Master Meng; Mount Xian carries Lord Yang..."¹⁰⁷ The association of Meng Haoran on his donkey and Yang Hu's stele with the landscape of reclusion at Xiangyang remained so strong for so long that a thousand years later one still finds vestiges of their presence in the schematic woodblock illustration of Mount Xian from the 1874 edition of the *Xiangyang Gazetteer* (fig. 28): three stelae on a ridge, another on the peak, and three donkey riders followed by zither-toting attendants. There can be no doubt that Li Cheng's *Reading the Stele by Pitted Rocks* illustrates this long-standing tradition at Xiangyang.

The donkey rider travels to a landscape composed of historical distance. He travels, as Li She's poem announces, in search of the affairs of old. And when he encounters the stele, he gazes into the time-weathered stone and beyond to the models of the past. History moves one; stelae have the

¹⁰³ Fangcheng refers to the great wall erected by the state of Chu during the Spring and Autumn Period to protect its northern borders. *Huainan Honglie jijie* (Shanghai, 1924), *juan* 4, 1b–2a. The wall stretched from Fangchengxian to Dengxian, in southern Henan Province, just north of the Han River and Xiangyang. The underlying associations in Li She's poem is with the great battles that took place in this region between warring hegemonies during the Eastern Zhou.

¹⁰⁴ Guo Xiangyang shang yu Sikong Di," *QTS*, *juan* 477, 5432. Note also Li She's poem "Song Wei Jianneng dong you" (Sent to Wei Jianneng on my Eastern Travel), *ibid.*, 5432, in which he describes himself as a failed public servant leaving Chang'an, riding his "haggard horse" through the eastern pass.

¹⁰⁵ "Shiyue zhi jiao" in "Xiao ya." James Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (Taipei, reprint ed., 1983), vol. IV, 322.

¹⁰⁶ Fang Xuanling, *Jin shu*, *juan* 34, 1031.

¹⁰⁷ "Guo Lumen zuo" (Written upon passing Lumen), *QTS*, *juan* 839, 9466–67.

ability to elicit tears. One contemplates the past and thinks of oneself in the present. One considers how others in years to come may continue the cycle by contemplating *his* place in history. Yang Hu began the pattern and Li Cheng painted it. The vital connection is apparent in the following passage from Yang Hu's biography in *Jin shu*:

[Yang] Hu delighted in landscape. Each time the scenery was fine he insisted on traveling to Mount Xian, where he would set the wine, chat and sing poems, never becoming fatigued. On one such occasion Yang Hu gave a forlorn sigh. Turning to his retainer, the Gentleman of the Inner Court Zou Zhan, and others, he said the following words: "As long as the cosmos has existed, so has this mountain. And many have been the worthy and superior gentlemen of the past who have, like you and me, ascended here to gaze into the distance. That all of them should have been extinguished without rumor wounds one with grief! But a hundred years henceforth, if my carnal- and cloud-souls are possessed of consciousness, they both will climb up here still." [Zou] Zhan responded, "My lord's virtue crowns the four seas, his Way will continue the wisdom of the past. Your reputation, your regard – these things will surely exist together with this mountain, passed down to later generations. But as for myself and the others, well, then it will be just as you, Sir, have described."¹⁰⁸

To judge from Meng Haoran's poems, climbing Mount Xian to gaze into the distance is to partake in a ritual of society.¹⁰⁹ Contemplating it, however, is to partake in a ritual of history, for gazing proves to be an act of measuring not the physical separation from here to there, but the chronological distance that separates kindred spirits across time. Gazing is a reflection of the hope that one's own name will carry far. *Wang*, "to gaze," also means "repute," "regard," and is so used in Zou Zhan's response to Yang Hu's lament. The expression of distance is a self-conscious affirmation of the point from which that distant scene unfurls, for though it may be mist-shrouded alps and faraway stands of trees that are depicted, the true subject is the act of gazing itself. By consequence, the expression of distance is also affirmation of the person who occupies that point in space and time.

Li Cheng made an art of gazing into the distance. *Twin Pines, Level Distance* (fig. 25), a scene that would seem to echo the experience of viewing out across the landscape from Mount Xian if not for the forward-moving stream, is a literal illustration. There is no donkey rider here, but his mortal presence may be noted indirectly through the poignant contrast offered by the evergreens, symbols of longevity. *Reading the Stele by Pitted Rocks* illustrates through metaphor, the contemplated distance so vast here that tears fall. The expression of distance and the function of the gaze that characterizes *A Solitary Temple amid Clearing Mists* should be interpreted similarly. The donkey-rider who approaches the small village will travel only as far as the temple. From there he will look into the distance and partake in this ritual of history, exactly as he does on Mount Xian, whether confronting a far-off scene or a stone monument. Yang Hu and Meng Haoran both emphasize the permanence of landscape to contrast with the "goings and comings" of man. This painting crystallizes the contrast in this image of distant peaks and tumbling cascades, suggesting in their unworldliness the ephemerality of those who look.

¹⁰⁸ Fang Xuanling, *Jin shu*, *juan* 34, 1020. My translation is largely based on that of Paul W. Kroll, *Meng Hao-jan*, 34.

¹⁰⁹ Meng Haoran commonly said his formal farewells to guests on Mount Xian. As he wrote in his poem "Xianshan song Zhu da Qufei yu Badong" (At Mount Xian, seeing off Zhu the elder, Qufei, on his travels to Badong), "At farewell partings one always climbs on high and looks down." Paul W. Kroll, *Meng Hao-jan*, 36.

IV. Entering the Iconography

Claiming in his lifetime to have seen only two genuine Li Cheng paintings and some three hundred fakes, Mi Fu pronounced his famous “No Li” theory (*wu Li lun*).¹¹⁰ The distinction between genuine and pretender, at least in Mi Fu’s mind, was considerable, and it led to one of the fullest, most literal descriptions of any of the paintings mentioned in Mi Fu’s famous history of painting. The scroll was one of the few that the discerning connoisseur accepted, a small painting titled *Pine and Rocks* from the collection of Sheng Wensu. Mi Fu’s description is valuable not only for providing a sense of what it was that defined Li Cheng’s genuine work, but also for revealing what it was a late eleventh century scholar like Mi Fu may have valued in the earlier painter’s art.

The trunk of the pine is so upright it could function as a great beam. The branches and leaves provide a cool sensation of shade. He did not use circles of ink to describe the knots in the wood, but rather applied a large dot of ink, and then to unite it went over it a number of times with lighter shades of inkwash. This way it looks as if a product of nature. Facing it is a textured rock, full-bodied and glistening, that rises abruptly. It reaches to the brushstrokes descriptive of the slope. The foot of the rock is on a level with another rock in the water. Light ink was used to describe where the water reaches. In this manner the rocks form a single group that leads [from the slope above] directly into the water. It is not at all like the imitative efforts of the common and vulgar, who directly apply their slanted brushes to make paintings where there is no ground below or force to the water – they simply seem to be flying in the air. Such paintings have made misguided critics assume that Li Cheng directly applied the brush “without any feet” [without any firm basis of conception]. Such people have not seen his genuine works. Liu Jing thought that genuine paintings by Li Cheng were numerous, so I showed him this *Pine and Rocks*. After a long period of time he finally said, “This must be Master Cheng.”¹¹¹

According to Mi Fu, *Pine and Rocks* was the very image of geomorphic reality. The rocks were not randomly placed but carefully composed, following the artist’s observation of the truthful record left by nature’s passage over time. To accord with this goal of capturing the landscape’s true appearance the artist adopts extraordinarily naturalistic techniques. The pine is painted in such a manner that the brushstrokes and washes melt into a dense substance of many layers. The tree organically develops from within, stratum upon stratum, with twisted knots that reflect nature’s course through time. In contrast, Mi Fu derides the mannered paintings of Li Cheng’s followers, whose pine trees lack Li Cheng’s “stable conception,” quickly done and, elsewhere he writes, in imitation of the *unreal* forms of serpents and dragons.¹¹² Mi Fu goes on to suggest what underlies the difference:

Li Cheng was a recipient of the *jinsbi* degree and served as an Aide to the Court of Imperial Entertainments. His son Li You served as Grand Master of Remonstrance. His grandson Li You served as Edict Attendant to the Court of Imperial Entertainments... This makes these [followers’ works] the paintings of common artisans – stuff created for food and clothing.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Mi Fu, *Hua shi*, 191, 195. The two paintings are the set of four hanging scrolls in the collection of the Suzhou monk Baoyue and *Pine and Rocks*, described in the text below. Mi Fu elsewhere mentions a large fan by Li Cheng in his own collection, which he describes as “the world’s best,” leaving open the possibility that he actually knew of three genuine Li Chengs. *Hua shi*, 194.

¹¹¹ Mi Fu, *Hua shi*, 194.

¹¹² After describing the “sturdy and upright” pines in the set of Li Cheng paintings in Baoyue’s collection, Mi Fu informs us that they were not at all like the “strange serpent-demon forms” found in the paintings of Li Cheng’s vulgar followers. Mi Fu, *Hua shi*, 191.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 191.

The fact that Mi Fu was probably mistaken in his bestowal of the *jinsbi* degree and an official position to Li Cheng merely highlights the fact that essentially Li Cheng, like Wang Wei, was regarded by the late Northern Song literati as one of their own. And so he has been regarded through the later history of Chinese art, earning, ultimately, confirmation of a scholarly nature by inclusion in that most hallowed club, Dong Qichang's southern school. Appropriately enough, accompanying the dismantling of Dong Qichang's artifice in the second half of this century, the validity of the link between Li Cheng and what emerges in later times as the literati tradition of painting has been questioned. Li Cheng's absorption into the literati tradition is now understood by many to be a part of the same broad effort to legitimize scholar-amateur painting that utilized the prestigious name of Wang Wei, first in the eleventh century and then again by Dong Qichang five hundred years later. What this study demonstrates, however, is that far beyond one's expectations, viable links existed between the community of disenfranchised literati to which Li Cheng belonged and Su Shi's circle of inventive artists and theorists active in the late eleventh century. This is not to assume Mi Fu's condescending value judgments and deprecate the work of "common artisans," as he calls them, for this remains blatantly artificial and self-serving; nor is it to resurrect Dong Qichang's northern and southern schools. But what must be recognized is that some of the basic tenets of the literati theory of painting were well in place before Su Shi and company articulated them with such influential force. Consider the following verse by Su Shi, which all agree serves as one of the foundation blocks for literati painting theory:

Those who discuss painting in terms of formal likeness
Look at painting with the understanding of a child.
Those who compose poetry that must be *this* poem
Certainly are not ones who understand poetry.
Poetry and painting at root have one rule:
Natural skill and fresh originality.¹¹⁴

The third line of Su Shi's poem alludes to precisely the kind of poetry Zheng Qi felt himself mired in while serving in the comfort of the capital: poetry on set themes, following set conventions, with more or less predictable results – poetry, in other words, less indicative of personal growth and expression than the niceties of social communication. In contrast is the poetry of the donkey rider. Ouyang Xiu, we are reminded, described the youthful Li He composing on his steed as "never writing poems on a given topic, forcing his verses, as others do, to conform to the theme."¹¹⁵ Meng Haoran's poetry of reclusion written atop his donkey at Xiangyang would have been considered equally spontaneous. That is the implication of what is described in *Travelers in a Wintry Forest*, and we thus discover Su Shi defining true painting in accordance with what a painter like Li Cheng was describing pictorially over one hundred years earlier. When Su Shi discounts verisimilitude as the sole criterion by which quality is judged in painting, he echoes Ouyang Xiu's remark of a generation earlier that while things of superficial perception are easy to see, such as birds' and animals' rates of

¹¹⁴ Su Shi, "Shu Yanling Wang zhubu suohua zhezhi ershou" (Written after a painting of a cut branch by Assistant Magistrate Wang of Yanling, two poems), *Su Shi shiji*, *juan* 29, 1525–26. This is the first half of the first of Su Shi's two poems. It is introduced and discussed by Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting*, 26–27. It is also commented on by Kiyohiko Munakata in his review of Bush's book. "Some Methodological Considerations, A Review of Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting*," *Artibus Asiae* XXXVIII/4 (1976), 311–12.

¹¹⁵ See note no. 22.

speed, “relaxed harmony and solemn tranquility, feelings of far-reaching mood, are hard to shape.”¹¹⁶ *Travelers in a Wintry Forest* may employ highly naturalistic techniques (in accordance with what Mi Fu praises in Li Cheng’s *Pine Tree and Rocks*), but the very fact that its true subject is something unseen – the inspiration that moves Meng Haoran to song, or in other words, feelings of far-reaching mood – suggests that this painting accords with what Su Shi’s verse describes. How much more so a painting like *Reading the Stele by Pitted Rocks*, and by implication of its meanings, the literally far-reaching *Twin Pines*, *Level Distance* and *Solitary Temple amid Clearing Peaks*?

Most intriguing, perhaps, is the pattern of historical consciousness that is revealed through the study of the donkey rider’s iconography. We discover a code of values intrinsic to the scholar class of the late Tang, Five Dynasties Period and Northern Song, and one that serves as a vital tool of self-definition. As such it is self-consciously perpetuated again and again. The donkey rider trots on, so to speak, from Ruan Ji to Meng Haoran to Li Cheng’s generation and beyond. The iconography expands to accommodate new riders, but it is the constancy of the image that was significant to those who adopted it, for it is the constancy of the values the donkey rider represents that affirms this community of minds over hundreds of years. The most constant of those values is the fear of one’s place in history being lost and forgotten: Yang Hu’s lament. And yet, curiously, by simply voicing this concern, one combats it, as proven by the fact that what Yang Hu has always been known for is the lament itself. The lament becomes a communal chant over time, and it becomes embodied in an image that promises a small measure of eternity. Thus Li Dong writes, “Year after year someone passes with high grades, But he does not surpass the donkey rider who enters the painting screen.”¹¹⁷ To borrow a phrase used by Ivan Morris in an entirely different context, the donkey rider represents the nobility of failure, and that nobility is not forgotten by those who stood to gain the most from it.

The trans-temporal community of scholars, of course, is not entirely represented by the donkey rider; he simply provides one of its more useful icons. Li Cheng, for that matter, never seems to have been pictured atop old “long ears,” though it would appear he thought of himself as a donkey rider through his consistent use of the motif in his paintings and the alliance that is strongly implied with that paragon of donkey riding, Meng Haoran. Li Cheng’s measure of fame is earned through slightly different means – not as the chanter of poems, but as the painter of the landscape that elicits those poems. In this regard one finds an entirely appropriate homage paid by Su Shi in a verse written for an anonymous painting he saw in the collection of his friend Wang Shen:

WRITTEN FOR A MOUNTAIN PAINTING WITH COLORS
IN THE COLLECTION OF WANG JINQING, ONE OF TWO
Off in the misty distance, Yingqiu, immortal of water and ink,
Floating in the void, appearing and fading, between form and nothing.
Since then the world has changed, all gallant spirit is finished;
Who now sees the colored mountains of the Generals Li?¹¹⁸

The Generals Li are the eighth-century painters Li Sixun and Li Zhaodao, famous for their polychromatic paintings of landscape and recalled here because of the use of colors in this painting owned by Wang Shen. Su Shi is moved by the age of the painting, by its quality and perhaps by its

¹¹⁶ Ouyang Xiu, “Jian hua” (Evaluating painting), in “Shi bi” 1, *Wenzhong ji*, SKQS, *juan* 130, 2b–3a. Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting*, 69.

¹¹⁷ See note no. 68.

¹¹⁸ Su Shi, “Wang Jinqing suo cang zhuse shan ershou,” *Su Shi shiji*, *juan* 30, 1613–14.

anonymity, and he thus echoes in the third line a theme that he elaborates in greater detail elsewhere: the splendor of the Tang, and the pinnacles of achievement reached by Du Fu, Han Yu, Yan Zhenqing and Wu Daozi in the arts, respectively, of poetry, prose writing, calligraphy and painting. With these figures, he writes, all manner of human endeavor found culmination.¹¹⁹ That sentiment is repeated here – “all gallant spirit is finished” – but the list now includes landscape, and in addition to the Generals Li we find Yingqiu, or Li Cheng as he was occasionally called because of his identification with this area of Shandong. Su Shi creates another level of identification by seeing in the landscape’s distant mountains Li Cheng’s very person, recognizing in those floating peaks the earlier master’s influence. Whether or not Su Shi was aware of the meanings of distance in Li Cheng’s paintings, or recognized in this painting’s expression of faraway mountains floating in the void some possible connection with Yang Hu’s lament, he provides a fitting compliment for Li Cheng. He allows the painter to take his place in the course of history by setting him as the object of distant meditation: one of Yang Hu’s “worthy and superior gentlemen of the past” by which others, like Su Shi, now humbly measure their own mortality and the passage of time. Su Shi’s willingness to see Li Cheng, immortal of water and ink, in the cloud-like mountains of the painting owned by Wang Shen reminds us that within the culture’s images and icons reside the human efforts that created and perpetuated them.

¹¹⁹ Su Shi, “Shu Wu Daozi hua hou” (Written after a painting by Wu Daozi), *Su Shi wenji*, *juan* 70, 2210–11.

Appendix:
Dating Travelers in a Wintry Forest and A Solitary Temple amid Clearing Peaks

Issues of dating and attribution mostly have been avoided in this study for fear of drawing attention away from broader concerns that transcend the limitations of any single painting. The arguments presented are founded on a body of paintings, inscriptions, poems and other records which collectively should overshadow the controversy that still attends the study of early Chinese paintings. On the other hand, obviously, the arguments would carry less conviction if based on objects of questionable authenticity, or if the paintings used belonged to an entirely unrelated historical context. For the most part, the paintings illustrated here are accepted by a majority of Chinese painting scholars as representative works of the tenth and eleventh centuries. Li Cheng attributions, however, present particular problems and tend to enjoy less of a consensus. For this reason I have appended a few brief comments that may assist in justifying some of my choices.

Reading the Stele by Pitted Rocks and *Twin Pines, Level Distance* are relatively uncontroversial paintings because their general themes have been associated with Li Cheng since the eleventh century. The two are later paintings, and the former, most seem to agree, may date from as late as the fourteenth century, but both preserve stylistic and thematic characteristics of Li Cheng's painting described in early literature. *Travelers in a Wintry Forest* and *A Solitary Temple amid Clearing Peaks* have proven more divisive. This article establishes the theme of *Travelers* as one of considerable date and one also employed by Li Cheng. The date of the painting, however, remains a contentious issue. Part of the problem is an absence of hard documentation. There is a curiously small number of collectors seals (all in the lower left corner of the painting), and none of these has been identified.¹²⁰ A possible explanation is offered by Richard Barnhart's suggestion that the painting has been trimmed on all sides.¹²¹ The possibility of *Travelers in a Wintry Forest* being a modern forgery has been raised recently,¹²² but most seem willing to place the painting sometime between Li Cheng and the fourteenth century. That, however, remains a considerable period of time (four hundred years), and the issue of dating thus deserves more scrutiny.

Arguments for the later end of this period, as summarized by Barnhart, center on the landscape elements' general resemblance to paintings of the Li/Guo tradition by such artists as Li Kan (1245–1320), Luo Zhiquan and Cao Zhibo (1272–1355), and the figures' combination of rough, abbreviated outlines in the clothing with finely detailed, fleshy faces, which has suggested to some the style of Yan Hui (active ca. 1275–1325).¹²³ Nothing of the fourteenth century, however, presents the complexity of detail seen in this painting, and as Barnhart rightfully points out, the figure style may be associated with the *zhanbi* "tremulous brush" technique of such tenth-century masters as Zhou Wenju (active ca. 950–75). Mi Fu describes Zhou Wenju's female figures as possessing faces indistinguishable from those of the Tang painter Zhou Fang, whose brush, in turn, is described as "refined, lush, even and of intricate detail."¹²⁴ The figures in *Travelers in a Wintry Forest*, with their extraordinarily fine faces and *zhanbi* clothing, perfectly accord with what is known of Zhou Wenju's

¹²⁰ One has tentatively been read as belonging to a Mr. Zheng.

¹²¹ *Wintry Forests, Old Trees: Some Landscape Themes in Chinese Painting*, 28.

¹²² James Cahill, "Chang Ta-ch'ien's Forgeries of Old-Master Paintings." Paper presented at the symposium "Chang Dai-chien and His Art," Sackler Gallery, Washington, D.C., November 22, 1991.

¹²³ See note no. 121.

¹²⁴ *Hua shi*, 205.

style of painting. An excellent and early Zhou Wenju attribution in the National Palace Museum, *Minghuang Playing Chess*, substantiates the connection.¹²⁵ An equally compelling comparison can be made between the figures of *Travelers in a Wintry Forest* and the set of sixteen arhat paintings in the Seiryōji Temple which are identified as being the set brought to Japan from China by the monk Chonen in 987.¹²⁶ Wen Fong associates *Travelers in a Wintry Forest* with Li Cheng but dates it to the early twelfth century.¹²⁷ There seems to me, however, little to prevent the acceptance of an earlier date except our own natural skepticism, which bristles at the notion of a painting close in time to Li Cheng surviving with such little notice to the twentieth century. The compelling imagery of *Travelers in a Wintry Forest* should be argument enough.

Disagreement surrounding *A Solitary Temple amid Clearing Peaks* is of a slightly different nature. All seem to agree that the painting is early (it possesses a late Northern Song government seal),¹²⁸ but not all agree precisely how early nor its proximity to the style of Li Cheng. Presumably, the title of the painting was adopted from the record in Huizong's *Xuanhe huapu* of two scrolls of the same name.¹²⁹ To the best of my knowledge, however, no other documentation exists that can tie *A Solitary Temple amid Clearing Peaks* to Huizong's collection and thus to an early attribution to Li Cheng. Suzuki Kei, suggesting some distance from Li Cheng, places it after Guo Xi.¹³⁰ In contrast, Laurence Sickman and Marc Wilson consider *A Solitary Temple amid Clearing Peaks* to antedate Fan Kuan's masterpiece, *Travelers among Mountains and Streams*, which was probably painted in the first decades of the eleventh century.¹³¹ Wai-kam Ho and Dawn Ho Delbanco have gone so far as to suggest the possibility that the painting was done by Zhai Yuanshen, one of the close, early followers of Li Cheng active *ca.* 1000.¹³² Directly in between these two camps is Wen Fong, who places the painting between Fan Kuan and Guo Xi, *circa* 1050.¹³³

Ultimately, how one dates *A Solitary Temple amid Clearing Peaks* depends on one's understanding of the development of landscape painting over the course of the Northern Song period, and this understanding can be based on any number of considerations, from the stylistic to the historical. We look for the context in which the painting fits most comfortably, and with what other paintings. In this writer's opinion, the theme of the painting, which can be described as a clearly composed journey through a hierarchically constructed landscape, is most notable in paintings prior to Xu Daoning's generation, many of which have been illustrated here. Stylistically, the careful, detailed approach to

¹²⁵ Reproduced in National Palace Museum, *Gugong minghua sanbai zhong* (Taizhong, 1959), pl. 51. See also Li Lin-ts'an's article, "Minghuang weiqi tu" (*Minghuang Playing Chess*), *Gugong jikan* (special issue #1, in honor of the seventieth birthday of Mr. Jiang Fuzong, 1969), 219–31. *Minghuang Playing Chess* possesses the collector's seal of Song Gaozong (r. 1127–62). According to Cheng Jufu's (1249–1318) inscription, there originally was an inscription by Song Gaozong as well that accompanied the painting.

¹²⁶ Illustrated in Yonezawa Yoshiho and Nakata Yūjirō, eds., *Genshoku Nihon no bijutsu*, vol. 29 (*Shorai bijutsu*) (Tōkyō, 1971), pl. 77–78. See the short article by Yonezawa Yoshiho, "Juroku rakanzu," *Kokka* 754 (1954), 14–22.

¹²⁷ Professor Fong's analysis is based upon an involved structural model for the chronological development of the depiction of space in Chinese landscape painting. Wen Fong, *Beyond Representation*, 79, 116–17, note 27.

¹²⁸ *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting* (Cleveland, 1980), 13–15. For the argument dating the seal *Shangshubeng yin* ("seal of the Council of State") to *ca.* 1083–1126 see Wai-kam Ho's catalogue entry to Juran's *Buddhist Retreat by Stream and Mountain* in *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting*, 15–19.

¹²⁹ *Xuanhe huapu*, *juan* 11, 116.

¹³⁰ Suzuki Kei, *Chūgoku kaigashi*, first tome, first volume, 222–23.

¹³¹ *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting*, 13–15.

¹³² "Tung Ch'i-ch'ang's Transcendence of History and Art," in Wai-kam Ho, ed., *The Century of Tung Ch'i-ch'ang* (Kansas City, 1992), 26.

¹³³ Wen Fong, *Images of the Mind* (Princeton, 1984), 43–44.

describing landscape in *A Solitary Temple amid Clearing Peaks* finds parallels in the paintings of Yan Wengui and Fan Kuan. It is closest, however, to the landscape elements in another important early painting: *Waterwheel at the Sluice Gate* in the Shanghai Museum, which carries the interpolated signature of Wei Xian.¹³⁴ *Waterwheel*, according to Xu Bangda, dates to the Five Dynasties Period or early Northern Song and reflects the metropolitan style of Kaifeng. If Xu Bangda's assessment is correct, it supports a relatively early dating for *A Solitary Temple amid Clearing Peaks*, probably to the generation of Yan Wengui, Zhai Yuanshen, and Fan Kuan. As for its ties to Li Cheng, the arguments are included in the discussion above.

¹³⁴ Illustrated in *Yiyuan duoying* no. 2 (1978). Another signature, partly legible, was discovered during a recent remounting of the painting. See the notes by Zheng Wei, 18–19. See also Xu Bangda, *Zhongguo huihuashi tulu* (Shanghai, 1981), 93–94.

GLOSSARY

Baoyue 寶月
 Cai Yong 蔡邕
 Cao Cao 曹操
 Cao E 曹娥
 Cao Zhibo 曹知白
 Chao Buzhi 晁補之
 Chen Shidao 陳師道
diaogu 弔古
 Dong Qichang 董其昌
 Dong You 董迥
 Du Fan 杜範
 Du Fu 杜甫
 Du Yu 杜預
Duolei bei 墮淚碑
 Fan Kuan 范寬
 Feng Qin 馮覲
 Ge Lifang 葛立方
 Guan Tong 關同
 Guo Tianxi 郭天錫
 Guo Xi 郭熙
 Han Danchun 邯鄲淳
 Han Yu 韓愈
 He Chong 何充
 Hu Gongshu 胡公疏
 Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅
 Jia Dao 賈島
 Jing Hao 荆浩
 Juran 巨然
 Li Cheng 李成
 Li Ding 李鼎
 Li Dong 李洞
 Li Gonglin 李公麟
 Li He 李賀
 Li Kan 李衍
 Li She 李涉
 Li Song 李嵩
 Li Sixun 李思訓
 Li You 李祐
 Li You 李宥
 Li Yu 李煜
 Li Yu 李瑜
 Li Zhaodao 李昭道
 Lin Bu 林逋
linggu 陵谷
lingsheng 箒簞
 Liu Daochun 劉道醇
 Liu Jing 劉涇
 Liu Yiqing 劉義慶
 Lu Dian 陸佃
 Lu Yanrang 盧延讓

Lu Yu 陸羽
 Luo Zhichuan 羅稚川
 Ma Yuan 馬遠
 Mei Yaochen 梅堯臣
 Meng Haoran 孟浩然
 Mi Fu 米芾
muhuzi 木虎子
 Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修
 Pan Lang 潘閬
 Pi Rixiu 皮日休
pingdan 平淡
 Qiji 齊己
 Qiao Kuicheng 喬贊成
 Qu Ding 屈鼎
 Ruan Ji 阮籍
 Sheng Wensu 盛文肅
shi 士
 Song Di 宋迪
 Su Shi 蘇軾
 Sun Ding 孫定
 Sun Junze 孫君澤
 Sun Runfu 孫潤夫
 Sun Sheng 孫升
 Tang Yanqian 唐彥謙
wang 望
 Wang Anshi 王安石
 Wang Chong 王崇
 Wang Keyu 汪何玉
 Wang Shen 王詵
 Wang Wei 王維
 Wang Xiao 王曉
 Wei Xian 衛賢
 Wu Daozi 吳道子
wu Li lun 無李論
 Wu Rong 吳融
 Xu Daoning 許道寧
 Xuanzong 玄宗
 Yan Hui 顏輝
 Yan Wengui 燕文貴
 Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿
 Yang Hu 羊祜
 Yang Xiu 楊修
 Yingqiu 營丘
 Zhai Yuanshen 翟院深
zhanbi 戰筆
 Zhang Chou 張丑
 Zhang Daqian 張大千
 Zhang Guolao 張果老
 Zhang Ji 張洎
 Zhao Gan 趙干

Zhao Xinzhi 趙信之
Zhao Youzuo 趙由祚
Zheng Qi 鄭檠
Zhong Kui 鐘馗
Zhou Fang 周昉
Zhou Mi 周密

Zhou Wenju 周文矩
Zhu Jingxuan 朱景玄
Zongwen 宗文
Zongwu 宗武
Zou Zhan 鄒湛