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# **THE POLITICS AND POETICS OF WITHDRAWAL**

**Cultural Negotiations of Dynastic Change in Seventeenth-Century China**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores modalities of withdrawal by individuals from educated elites in seventeenth-century China when faced with the catastrophe of dynastic transition. Examining how withdrawal was enacted, manipulated, and negotiated through cultural productions, it attempts to show that this process led to new forms of withdrawal that went beyond the pre-established norms and models for the life of such “remnant subjects” in a new dynasty.

Drawing upon various literary and artistic sources, three case studies are examined: Qi Biaoja's 祁彪佳 (1602-1645) Garden of Mountain *Yu* and his midnight-suicide staged in it; Gong Xian's 龔賢 (1617-1689) dark-toned landscape and cultivation of his bamboo thicket garden; and Dong Yue's 董說 (1620-1686) obsession with dreaming and writing, and his boating life as a wandering monk during his later years. The case studies consider the correspondence between each figure's cultural practices and their individualized way of withdrawal by developing the concept of a “mediate landscape”.

In Qi Biaoja's aesthetic appreciation of his private garden, he seemed to have

projected his theatrical spectatorship as a drama critique onto his garden. He saw the garden elements, visitors, and sometimes even his alter ego, as spectacles or actors on the stage of garden, during which he could enjoy a capacity for simultaneous impassioned participation and dispassionate viewing. Upon the fall of Nanjing, Qi drowned himself in the garden lake in the middle of the night—his poetic self-killing is particular in terms of its theatrical characteristics, which can be observed not only in the dramatic gesture of his actual suicide but also in his actions prior to the act. In Qi Biaoja's case, the theatricalized garden is the mediate landscape that stages his political death, which I see as one modality of withdrawal, as well as the poetic farewells performed by the "theatrical self" of the garden owner.

Gong Xian's landscape paintings feature a heavy accumulation of ink and dense composition of elements, both of which actualise the substantiality of his landscape. Although dark and sombre, his thematic depiction of "a thousand peaks and myriad ravines" represents his ideal landscape, one opposed to the common expression of frustration and sorrow usually shared in the representation of landscape by Ming remnants, while the "solitary household" in it indicates an ideal of lived withdrawal. In this case, I regard the substantial landscape as the mediate landscape by which Gong's ideal of withdrawal is accomplished in both the paintings and reality: the solitary homes

in deep mountains depicted in his paintings echo his own gated and bamboo-thicket garden at the foot of the mountain.

Attracted by the changefulness of dreams, Dong Yue recorded his own dreams and constructed an imaginative Land of Dreams through systematic writing, which stabilised a therapeutic withdrawal from the harsh realities of the time. After dynastic change, with the assistance of Buddhist thinking, Dong came to realize how his previous cultural practices on dreams contradicted with the nature of dreams, which lies in the mutability of illusions. Understanding that only unobstructed movement and transformation could lead to his ideal withdrawal, in his late years Dong began a self-initiated exile on a boat. In this case, the transient world of dreams acts as the mediate landscape that leads eventually to Dong Yue's withdrawal on a rootless boat.

The conclusion summarizes the thesis from two perspectives: the poetics and politics of individual escape; and the way space and the body were imagined in the mediate landscape. Finally, it explores several significant issues arising from the case studies with a view to shedding new light on a number of binary relations – including the illusory and the real, obsession and self-cultivation, and the manifest and the hidden – that have informed discussion of the Ming-Qing transition.



## LAY SUMMARY

After the dynastic transition from Ming to Qing in mid-seventeenth century, there were individuals from educated elites who refused to accept the new reign, thus became the “remnant subjects”. To negotiate with the catastrophe of dynastic transition, they took use of their cultural practices to establish alternative worlds where they could be awarded with compensation for harsh realities. At the same time, inspired by the imagination of the alternative worlds, the remnants also found their own solutions to reconcile with the real world, therefore managed to find a mode of withdrawal from the dilemmas of the “inter-dynastic” situation.

Drawing upon various literary and artistic sources, three case studies are examined: Qi Biaoqia’s 祁彪佳 (1602-1645) Garden of Mountain Yu and his midnight-suicide in the garden; Gong Xian’s 龔賢 (1617-1689) dark-toned landscape paintings and cultivation of his bamboo thicket garden; and Dong Yue’s 董說 (1620-1686) aesthetic obsession with mutable dreams, and his boating life as a wandering monk during his later years. The case studies consider the correspondence between each figure’s cultural practices and their way of withdrawal.



In Qi Biao's aesthetic appreciation of his private garden, he projected his theatrical spectatorship as a drama critique onto his garden, making the garden a temporal stage. Sometimes his alter ego as the "Master" of the garden would appear as the actor on the stage. Upon the fall of Nanjing, Qi drowned himself in the garden lake in the middle of the night. His "theatrical self" emerged again and performed the pre-death actions and the dramatic gesture of suicide, which formed the poetics in suicide in terms of its theatrical characteristics.

Gong Xian's landscape paintings feature a heavy accumulation of ink and dense composition of elements, both of which actualise the substantiality of his landscape. His thematic depiction of "a thousand peaks and myriad ravines" represented his ideal of landscape and "solitary household" in it indicated his ideal of lived withdrawal, because it was offered an absolute level of protection and peace. In this sense, Gong took the substantial landscape as his alternative world – his bamboo-thicket garden at the mountain foot could be seen as a compromised version of the solitary household in the deep mountains.

Attracted by the changefulness of dreams, Dong Yue had various attempts to take dreams as an alternative world that enabled a withdrawal from the harsh

realities of the time. After the dynastic change, he got to profoundly understand the nature of dreams as mutable illusions and tended to take dreaming as a mode of self-therapy in real life. Inspired by the unobstructed transformation of dreams, Dong took a floating boat as his home and lived a drifting life in his late years.

The conclusion summarizes the thesis from two perspectives: the poetics and politics of individual withdrawal; and how such withdrawals were investigated as spatial practices in this thesis. Finally, it explores several significant binary relations arising from the case studies— including the illusory and the real, obsession and self-cultivation, and the manifest and the hidden, shedding new light on the culture of seventeenth-century China under the shadows of dynastic transition.



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# **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

## **The Literati's World During the Ming-Qing Transition**

- 1.1 Remnant subjects in the “interdynastic” period
- 1.2 Established patterns of withdrawal
- 1.3 Cultural production in the literati's world of 17th-century China
  - 1.3.1 Late-Ming literati aesthetics and sociability
  - 1.3.2 Continuity in early Qing and the landscape of loss
- 1.4 Research question: Cultural negotiations of dynastic change
- 1.5 Methodology and thesis structure

## 1.1 Remnant subjects in the “interdynastic” period

There are various perspectives from which to tell the dramatic tragedy of the dynastic succession from Ming to Manchu Qing.<sup>1</sup> The pride in prosperous economic development, flourishing cultural production, and advantageous social administration, were challenged by the constant and converging crises of internal ruptures in court, natural calamities, peasant rebellion and Manchu military forces.

The collapse of the dynasty came shortly after midnight on 25 April 1644 when the rebel leader, Li Zicheng 李自成 (1606 – 1645),<sup>2</sup> mounted a huge attack on Beijing with hundreds of thousands of troops. His armies entered Beijing without opposition, the city gates having been treacherously opened upon his arrival. The last Ming emperor, the Chongzhen Emperor, accompanied by a

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<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the Ming-Qing transition, see Frederic E. Wakeman. *The Great Enterprise: The Manchu Reconstruction of Imperial Order in Seventeenth-Century China* (University of California Press, 1985), vol.1, chap.1-8. Wakeman discusses the transition from the battles in the northern frontier to the resistance movement in Jiangnan region.

<sup>2</sup> After Li Zicheng overthrew the Ming dynasty in 1644, he ruled over northern China briefly as the emperor of the short-lived Shun regime, established in 1643, before his death a year later. See Frederic E. Wakeman. “The Shun Interregnum of 1644”, in Jonathan Spence, et al. eds. *From Ming to Ch'ing: Conquest, Region, and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century China* (Yale University Press, 1981)

loyal eunuch, hung himself from a tree in the imperial garden outside the Forbidden City. Ming loyalists fled to Nanjing, where they enthroned Zhu Yousong 朱由崧 (1607-1646) as the Hongguang Emperor, marking the start of the Southern Ming. The Nanjing regime lasted until 1645, when Qing forces captured the city. The following year, they executed the emperor. Later, a series of pretenders held court in various southern Chinese cities until 1662, when the entire Ming dynasty, as a political entity, came to an end.<sup>3</sup>

The reiterated distinction between “Chinese” and “barbarians” signalled the unwillingness of the educated elites to accept the legitimacy of the new dynasty, one that, in their view, had been established by a less developed civilization through outrageous conquest. Apart from the physical upheaval and devastation caused by the dynastic transition, for the educated elites the collapse of the dynasty was a crisis of culture and tradition that condemned them to an existence of haunted desperation.

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<sup>3</sup> It is in 1683 if including resistance in the Kingdom of Taiwan. See Lynn Struve’s illuminating discussion of this issue in the introduction to *The Southern Ming, 1644–1662* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), and her similarly entitled chapter in Frederick W. Mote & Denis Twitchett, eds., *The Cambridge History of China: Volume 7, The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, Part 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 641–725.

Xiang Shengmo's 項聖謨 (1597-1658) "Leaning on the Red (A Self-Portrait of Xiang Shengmo)" 依朱圖, dated to the fourth month of 1644<sup>4</sup>, dramatizes one man's immediate reaction to the fall of the Ming. The opening lines of the inscription explain: "Remnant waters, leftover mountains—colour still cinnabar red; Murky heavens, darkened earth—shadow of a trifling body 剩水殘山色尚朱, 天昏地黑影微軀".<sup>5</sup> Xiang Shengmo uses red to allude to the name of the Ming dynasty family, *zhu* (朱, lit. red), a declaration of affinity from the other side of the catastrophic loss. The mere trace of a lonely body in the red landscape indicates not only the sense of transience brought about by the dynastic change, but also the spatial separation between the man and the world he now inhabits. This man has become one of the "remnant subjects" (遺民 *yimin*)<sup>6</sup>, who refused to follow the change of dynasty, and lived in a state of alienation from the new reign.

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<sup>4</sup> In this thesis I applied the Chinese lunar calendar to keep correspondence with the original sources.

<sup>5</sup> I refer to the translation from Jonathan, Hay. "Posttraumatic Art: Painting by Remnant Subjects of the Ming." In Sturman and Tai eds., *Artful Recluse: Painting, Poetry, and Politics in Seventeenth-century China* (Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 2012): 79.

<sup>6</sup> Another widely used translation for *yimin* is "loyalists", which is more political. I chose the remnants to focus more on the result of dynastic transition and cultural negotiations, instead of their political standpoint and actions.

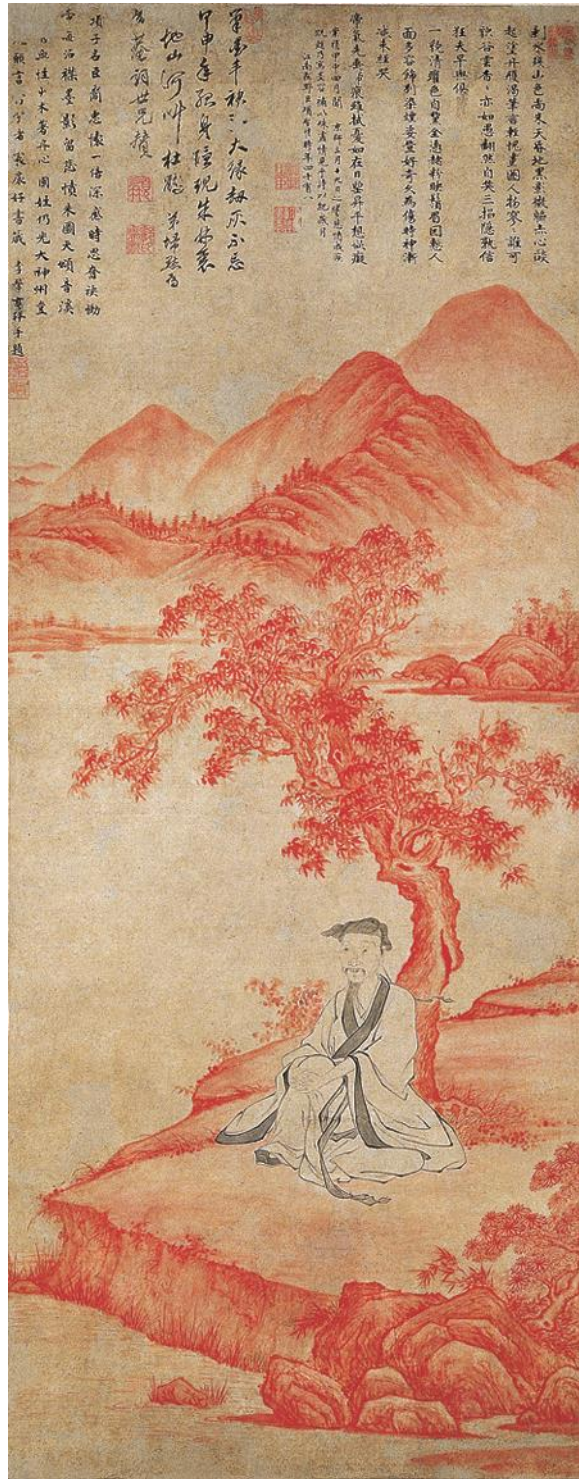


Figure 1-1. Xiang Shengmo, *Leaning on the Red (A self-Portrait of Xiang Shengmo)* 依朱圖. Hanging scroll, dated 1644, ink and colour on paper. Collection of Shitou Shuwu 石頭書屋.



Jonathan Hay notes that the Ming remnants “kept open the dynastic boundary, locating themselves outside the cyclical flow of dynastic time that was associated with the passage of the Mandate of Heaven to the new dynasty.”<sup>7</sup> In this sense, the notion of “remnant subject” is a temporal concept, with the late seventeenth century being the “interdynastic” time, as termed by Hay, when the Ming had ended but the Qing was denied. The full span of Chinese history offers countless examples of remnant subjects, allowing the seventeenth-century literati to establish the particularity of their socio-political identity. Ideally, to show their determination to refuse to serve two dynasties and, realistically, to protect themselves from political persecution, a sizeable number of remnants chose to withdraw from the new dynasty and become recluses. The choice of a remnant subject to live a reclusive life inherits a longstanding concept of reclusion in Chinese history, whose actualization

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<sup>7</sup> Jonathan, Hay. “The Diachronics of Early Qing Visual and Material Culture.” In Lynn, Struve eds., *The Qing Formation and the Early-Modern Period* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2004): 303-34. Hay uses the example that many Ming remnants “refused to employ the Qing calendar, preferring to employ the two-character cyclical dates from the endlessly recurring sixty-year cycle of years which traversed the millennia with a cosmic disregard for the succession of dynasties.”

begins to be traceable during the Han Dynasty (206BC-220).<sup>8</sup> The earliest of these practices demonstrate how political dissent acted as an important driving force, and how withdrawal into a landscape became a necessity. The recluses among the Ming remnants attempted to connect with the reclusive spirit of their ancestors, but their situation was spatially and emotionally different.

Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619-1692) was a Neo-Confucian philosopher recognized as one of the major thinkers to emerge in seventeenth-century China. Wang devoted himself to scholarship in the remote mountainous region of central Hunan<sup>9</sup> where spent the last seventeen years of his life in a “mud hut” 土室 in Stone Boat Mountain 石船山, from which he took his penname,

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<sup>8</sup> Writings on the subject of reclusion in traditional China are substantial. Berkowitz has written extensively on the subject and he also notes that the rationalization of reclusion could be traced back to pre-Han China; see Alan J. Berkowitz. *Patterns of disengagement: The practice and portrayal of reclusion in early medieval China* (Stanford University Press, 2000). Also see Aat, Vervoorn. *Men of the Cliffs and Caves: The Development of the Chinese Eremitic Traditions to the End of the Han Dynasty* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> Wang Fuzhi was only thirty-one when in 1650 his patriotic foray into the political arena of the court of the Ming pretender Yongli ended in temporary imprisonment as a result of factional strife. Thereafter, he had to content himself with propounding his ideas in a prodigious number of works, none of which were published during his lifetime owing largely to the fiercely anti-Manchu sentiments and politically subversive theories expressed in them. For the detailed biography of Wang, see Ian McMorran. Wang Fuzhi and the Neo-Confucian Tradition," in *The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism*, edited by William Theodore de Bary (New York: Degruyter, 1975).

the Boat Mountain. He named his mud-hut the “Dwelling of Contemplating the Life” 觀生居.<sup>10</sup> In his “Account of the Mount. Stone Boat” 船山記, Wang Fuzhi explained the constraints of finding a place for reclusion:

People of the past could be selective about where to travel and dwell. ...

After all the turmoil brought by the fall of heaven and earth, I cannot find a single inch of land for my sense of belonging. Thus, even though I want to choose, the choice is unavailable. 古之人，其遊也有選，其居也有選。.....

而踟天之傾，踏地之坼，扶寸之土不能信為吾有，則雖欲選之而不得。

Those who can look up at the sky with no regret, and look down at the ground with no sorrow, should have beautiful landscapes for their abodes. ...

For me, however, even if thorny bushes surrounded my lodging and thick frost covered the land, the place I live would still be beyond what I deserve.

Thus, even though I want to choose, how dare I? 仰而無憾者則俯而無愁，是宜得林巒之美蔭以旌之。..... 楸以叢棘，履以繁霜，猶溢吾分也，則雖欲選之而不忍。

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<sup>10</sup> According to Deng Xianhe 鄧顯鶴, the “Dwelling of Contemplating the Living” was the hut Wang Fuzhi lived in before he moved to the Stone Boat Mountain. Accounts on the remnants often contain contradictory details, which is partially due to the prevalence of personal documented history. See Deng, *Yuanxiang Qijiu Ji* 沅湘耆舊集, vol. 33 (Xinhua dengshi nantun caotang 新化鄧氏南邨草堂, 1843): 1b.

In the morning of springtime or the dusk of fall, I only wanted to seal my windows with mud and close myself in. Thus, even though I want to choose, what sense would this make? 春之晨，秋之夕，以戶牖為丸泥而自封也，則雖欲選之而又奚以為。<sup>11</sup>

With three parallel sentences starting with “even though I want to” 雖欲選之， Wang expresses a strong sense of helplessness in choosing his place of withdrawal. While for medieval recluses, getting away from the mundane world meant increased freedom, for Ming recluses, it almost meant immobilization. As the Manchu government took over more territory, and as it had been determined to incorporate former Ming literati into the Qing court, available living space for the Ming remnants became severely constricted and they were compelled to take compromising approaches on their own. As Wang wrote:

What the ancient people attained cannot be taken for granted today; what people desire cannot be speculated in every individual. Living in present day, why is it considered unattainable that I embrace my own affection as an individual? 古之所就，而不能概之於今；人之所欲，而不能信之於獨。居今日，抱獨之情，奚為而不可也？

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<sup>11</sup> See “Chuanshan ji” 船山記, in Wang Fuzhi, *Chuanshan quanshu* 船山全書, vol. 15: 128–29.

Wang pointed out that an individual's choice of where they live should not be dictated by ancient references or contemporary opinion, and connected an advocacy of "individualism" with living "in the present". Although Wang's articulation of restrictions is specifically about options of withdrawal, it could be extended to a broader context of posttraumatic living, regardless of the specific choices. In the post-1644 situation in China, one can identify how the Ming loyalists had a graduated series of individual responses to the fall of the dynasty that share in this character of symbolic withdrawal: suicide, feigned madness, the refusal to speak, renunciation of the world through becoming a monk, refusal to pursue a political career, a life in retirement, and so on.<sup>12</sup> The collective trauma shared by the group had to be practically overcome by individuals – especially when the entire Ming dynasty, as a political fact, came to an end in 1662 with the collapse of Southern Ming.

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<sup>12</sup> Stories of Ming remnants with such details are included in *Ming yimin lu huiji* 明遗民录汇集, Xie Zhengguang, and Fan Jinmin eds. (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1995). It is a contemporary compilation of seven historical accounts of Ming remnants written by early-Qing scholars. The full list of the seven accounts and their versions can be found in the introduction of this book. Most remnants' stories in the following discussion refer to the digital edition of this compilation, provided by National Library of China. (<http://www.nlc.cn>). For the most substantial secondary resource on Ming remnants, see Zhao Yuan. *Ming Qing zhi ji shidafu yanjiu* 明清之際士大夫研究 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999).

## 1.2 Conventional patterns of withdrawal

An unprecedented number of Ming intellectuals chose to “perish with the nation” 殉國,<sup>13</sup> and some others “performed” death as a political action—it became prevalent that remnants set up memorial objects in various forms for themselves in advance, in the form of an epitaph or testament, or a grave built for the living. They thus formed a landscape of death that reflected the separation of the aliveness of their body and the morbidity of their mind-heart. As recorded in his epitaph, Xu Fang 徐枋 (1622-1694) claimed that he lived a life where “the physical body survived while the will was dead,” 形存而志等於死.<sup>14</sup> In some cases, the literati who converted to Buddhism took their tonsure as a symbol of death in a social and political sense. As Fang Yizhi 方以智 exclaimed in his self-authored epitaph, written when he had the Buddhist tonsure, “do I finally die today? I have already died in the year of *jiashen* [1644],”

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<sup>13</sup> See He Guanbiao 何冠彪. *Sheng yu si: Mingji shidafud de jueze* 明季士大夫生與死 (Lianjing chuban gongsi, 1997), 161-93. He also discusses the choices of living and death of Ming officials in different circumstances based on his investigation of the official history records, in which the options are categorized as “perished with the nation” 殉難, “was killed” 誅戮, “was insulted by punishment” 刑辱, “luckily survived” 倖免, “yielded to the rebels” 從逆.

<sup>14</sup> Ye Xie 叶燮, “Epitaph of Xu Sizhai” 徐侯齋先生墓誌銘, in Chen Zuwu 陳祖武 ed., *Qingchu mingru nianpu* 清初名儒年譜, vol. 9 (Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 2006): 125.

汝以今日乃死耶？甲申死矣！<sup>15</sup>

Through the literary play of life and death, the boundary between them is blurred. Living people regarded themselves as dead, while graves intended for the dead were built for those were still alive. Gui Zhuang 歸莊 (1613-1673) built his hut in a graveyard and inscribed it with the couplet, “surrounded by houses of the dead, how lonely I was living with so many ghosts.” 四鄰接幽冥之宅，人何寥落鬼何多。<sup>16</sup> Qu Dajun 屈大均 (1630-1696) named his study room “the Dead Hut” 死庵 after he became a Buddhist monk, and claimed that, “a perfect man could live and die as he wishes.” 能生能死之至人。<sup>17</sup>

As for the remnants who chose to survive, they also produced a wide range of innovative spaces of withdrawal in which to endure their posttraumatic life. Wang Fuzhi’s reclusion in the Stone Boat Mountain, for example, was a combination of “moving into the mountain” and a “mud hut”. For Ming remnants, moving into the mountains was the most popular option, and also the easiest.

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<sup>15</sup> Fang Yizhi 方以智, “Self-authored epitaph”自祭文, in Ren Daobin 任道斌 ed., *Fangyizhi nianpu* 方以智年譜 (Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 1983): 173.

<sup>16</sup> Niu Xiu 鈕琇, *Gusheng xubian* 觚賸續編, vol. 2 (Linyetang 臨野堂, 1702): 21a.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted from Qu Dajun’s inscription for his hut “Inscription for the Dead Hut” 死庵銘, in Qu Dajun 屈大均, *Wengshan wen wai* 翁山文外 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995): vol. 12, 10.

It was premised on an assumption that, when going into the mountains, one goes out of the world, which had been one of the earliest models of reclusion. Chen Nanqi 陳南箕 fled into the mountains with his brother after the fall of the Ming and had not spoken a word to other people afterwards.<sup>18</sup> Living in the mountains was less convenient, but it led to greater mobility within their limited area. It also filtered access and sheltered the survivors' gatherings—there are many accounts of visits to fellow remnants in their mountain huts.

The “mud hut”, which became a recurring symbol of reclusive living in early Qing, originates from Yuan Hong's 袁閔 mud hut in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220).<sup>19</sup> It could be built anywhere – in a city residence as well as a rural farmhouse or mountain area. Compared with the flexibility of mountain living, remnants who chose to live in a mud hut usually professed even more stringent

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<sup>18</sup> “Chen Nanqi”, in Xie and Fan eds., *Ming yiminlu huiji*.

<sup>19</sup> The model of “mud hut” originates from Yuan Hong 袁閔 in the Eastern Han Dynasty, who was upset with the party disputes in court and thus decided to withdraw into deep forests. He then built a mud hut in the centre of the courtyard, which had no door and only a window for getting food, until his death. Every morning, Yuan greeted his mother to the east in the hut. When his mother missed him, she could look at him through the window and nobody else could even see him. When the Yellow Turban Rebellion invaded Yuan's county eighteen years later, people were fleeing, but Yuan kept reading the classics and did not move. For the complete biography of Yuan Hong, see Vol. 45 in “Book of the Later Han” 後漢書.



standards. The famous Confucian thinker, Li Yong 李顥 (1627-1705), called his abode “the Mud Hut” 土室 and himself “the Patient in the Mud-hut” 土室病夫. He considered meeting old friends as “breaking the rules and setting a bad example to no small harm,” 破戒壞例，為害不淺.<sup>20</sup>

The “cow cart”, developed by Fan Can 範粲 (202-285), a loyalist of Wei in Three Kingdoms period (220-280),<sup>21</sup> provided a model of a living that, being elevated off the ground, refused to touch the land of the new order. It was practiced by Ming remnants in various ways. Hu Zhengyan 胡正言 (ca. 1584-1674), a printmaker and publisher in Nanjing, lived alone in a little tower and did not touch the earth for thirty years.<sup>22</sup> Lu Shiyi 陸世儀 (1611-1672), a Neo-Confucianism philosopher, dug a pond which stretched over six thousand square metres in area, and built a pavilion in the centre where he lived with only books and no guests. The pavilion was named as “Gate of the Rafting

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<sup>20</sup> Li Yong 李顥, “Da Zhang Boqin” 答張伯欽, in *Erquji* 二曲集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shu, 1996): 161.

<sup>21</sup> Fan Can lived the last thirty-six years pretending to be mad and not speaking at all. He lived in a cow cart, in order not to touch the land of the Jin Dynasty. See Fang Xuanling 房玄齡, *Book of Jin* 晉書, vol. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Du Jun 杜浚, *Bianya tang wenji* 變雅堂文集 (Esheng sanfo ge tao zilin ju 鄂省三佛閣陶子麟局, 1894): vol. 5, 19.

Pavilion” 桴亭門.<sup>23</sup>

After the fall of the Ming dynasty, many remnants went into exile. In the beginning, some of them retreated to other places in search of opportunities to restore the dynasty; later, this became a widely accepted way for remnants to withdraw. Yan Ermei 閻爾梅 (1603-1679), the loyalist poet, drifted for eighteen years after two years in a Manchu prison. His poem recounts this wandering: “riding a donkey I had drifted three thousand *li*, across the four seas I had no home for twenty years.” 一驢亡命三千里，四海無家二十年。<sup>24</sup> Other remnants drifted on water. Lu Su 陸蘇 moved his family onto a boat and swore to never disembark. Lu had his rites of passage and marriage on the boat. Before his death, he told his family to bury him on an island in the sea, since he hoped to “never have my soul roaming on the mainland,” 毋使我遊魂中土也。<sup>25</sup>

Most space models of withdrawal are inspired by old traditions of reclusion.

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<sup>23</sup> Xu Zi 徐薰, *Xiao tian ji zhuan* 小腆纪传 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958): 574.

<sup>24</sup> “Yan Ermei”, in Xie and Fan eds., *Ming yimin lu huiji*. *Li* is known as the Chinese mile, which has varied considerably over time but was usually about one third of an English mile.

<sup>25</sup> “Lu Su”, *ibid.*

Varied as the modalities are, there exists a ubiquitous principle for their spatial practices – that is, to structurally escape from the Qing world and to reduce one's presence in it. The patterned options could be grouped into three archetypes: firstly, to die, either physically or symbolically; secondly, to withdraw by enclosing oneself; and thirdly, to detach oneself from a ground that one no longer has a place upon, perhaps through rootless drifting.

To conceptually understand these patterns, it helps to build up a substantial image of the Ming remnants' way of life and how they related spatially to the world. Passive resistance is given symbolic forms of space, exposing the gap between the exercise of Qing authority and the perceived legitimacy of their claim. It became a common course of action for the remnants to use their bodies and bodily gestures to enunciate political claims.<sup>26</sup> The spaces of withdrawal deep inside mountains, high above the ground, on the water, or being always on the move, indicate the remnants' determination to detach themselves from the Qing reign and especially from its land, the most significant representative of the Mandate of Heaven and of actual domination.

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<sup>26</sup> There are other non-spatial approaches of bodily resistance among remnants, such as not talking to others, and not accepting food from non-remnants, etc. Such details are included in Xie, and Fan eds., *Ming yimin lu huiji*.

The spatial patterns of withdrawal are the physical actualization of dissent and resistance, and thus, are highly performative and recognizable. They function as the foundation of further forms of withdrawal developed by the large remnants' group, and thus also represent a collective ideal of withdrawal.

## 1.3 Cultural production in the literati's world of 17th-century China

### 1.3.1 Late-Ming literati aesthetics and sociability

The broad social context for the enjoyment of cultural prosperity in the late-Ming period was complex. Firstly, a surplus of educated elites resulted in a particular social class of “unofficial literati”,<sup>27</sup> whose cultural practices were engaged in a complex network of literati, officials, merchants, and artisans, and were inevitably examined and challenged by others in a different social status.<sup>28</sup> Secondly, tremendous political and social insecurity accompanied the cultural and commercial affluence of the period, so that people's cultural enjoyments were occasionally also mixed with a mood of fear, anxiety and

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<sup>27</sup> For the identity crisis of the literati group in officialdom from the mid-sixteenth century and their endeavour in self-expression, see Martin W. Huang. “stylization and invention: the burden of self-expression in ‘The Scholars’”, in Roger T., Ames, Wimal Dissanayake, and Thomas P. Kasulis, eds. *Self as Person in Asian Theory and Practice* (SUNY Press, 1994): 89-112.

<sup>28</sup> Besides the political turmoil, in late Ming the uprising of merchants and artisans formed another two forces that participated in the competition of tastes with the literati group. Both of these have their inherent advantages in the commercial market of artworks, thus inevitably challenged and complicated the literati taste. For more information, see Brook, Timothy. *The confusions of pleasure: Commerce and culture in Ming China* (University of California Press, 1999):153-253.

desperation.

The late-Ming era witnessed the so-called “Unity of the Three Teachings” 三教合一 of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism.<sup>29</sup> Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529), the founder of “School of the Mind 心學”<sup>30</sup>, is often credited with nourishing a syncretic impulse within late-Ming Neo-Confucians. Wang and his disciples offered intellectual guidance on the interpretation of Daoist and Buddhist texts and integrated their ideas into their thinking. In this context, another Neo-Confucian master Li Zhi 李贄 (1527-1602) proposed his most important theoretical contribution, the “childlike mind” 童心. It argues that only a mind as spontaneous and sincere as that of a child could generate innate or genuine expression, which became foundational to the understanding of the expression of personal uniqueness and conceptual originality in the literary

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<sup>29</sup> Timothy, Brook. "Rethinking syncretism: The unity of the three teachings and their joint worship in late-imperial China." *Journal of Chinese Religions* 21, no. 1 (1993): 13-44.

<sup>30</sup> Contemporary studies on Wang Yangming and his “School of Mind”, or Yangmingism, is substantial. It is one of the major philosophical schools of Neo-Confucianism. For a comprehensive reading, see Julia, Ching. *To acquire wisdom: The way of Wang Yang-ming*. Columbia University Press (1976).

and visual arts.<sup>31</sup>

The celebration of personal uniqueness leads to what has been described as “the glorification of obsession”<sup>32</sup> and whimsical self-indulgence in various forms of cultural practices. It is highly commended among the literati. As Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568-1610) writes: “I have observed that in this world, all those whose words are insipid and whose appearance is detestable are men without obsessions,” 餘觀世上語言無味，面目可憎之人，皆無癖之人耳。<sup>33</sup> In relation to almost every obsession that was in some way shared, there accumulated a rich tradition of lore and a corpus of specialized manuals or

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<sup>31</sup> While the main body of Li Zhi's theory came from Confucian branch of thought, he had been strongly influenced by Chan and Daoism. His idea of naturalness and the child-like mind had apparent Chan and Daoist influence which could be exemplified in his writings. See Chapter 3 in Donglin. Zuo, *Li Zhi and Late Ming Literature thoughts* (Beijing: People Literature Press, 2010), and William Theodore, De Bary, ed. *Self and society in Ming thought*. Vol. 4 (Columbia University Press, 1970): 1-27; 145-225.

<sup>32</sup> On the concept of “obsession” in Chinese culture, and its intensification during the late Ming period, see Judith T. Zeitlin, “The Petrified Heart: Obsession in Chinese Literature, Art, and Medicine”, *Late Imperial China* (1991), 12(1): 1-26; and the chapter dealing with this topic in her subsequent book *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993). Also see Wai-yee Li, ‘The Collector, the Connoisseur, and Late-Ming Sensibility’, *T'oung Pao* (1995), 81(4-5): 269-302.

<sup>33</sup> Hongdao, Yuan 袁宏道, *Yuan Hongdao ji jianjiao* 袁宏道集箋校 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008): 846.

catalogues for connoisseurship. For example, Wen Zhengheng 文震亨(1585-1645) wrote the *Treatise on Superfluous things* 長物志, to catalogue “the small idle affairs and superfluous things” 小小閒長之物 in literati life;<sup>34</sup> Ji Cheng 計成(1582-1642) published *Crafts of Gardens* 園冶 in 1631, which is now considered as the first and definitive work on garden design in China;<sup>35</sup> and in 1624 Wang Jide 王冀德 (1542?-1623) published *Principles of Lyric Drama* 曲律, a monumental theoretical book of drama aesthetics.<sup>36</sup>

In late Ming, influenced by the prevalence of dramas and theatrical performances, an enhanced consciousness of staging permeated every

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<sup>34</sup> Wen Zhenheng's work is an encyclopaedic book about garden architecture, interior design, utensils, fashion, and leisurely entertainments. It is not the first of its kind. Since the sixteenth century, such “books on things”, as Clunas terms them, have been produced by several influential scholars, on the same theme and with similar frameworks. See the “introduction” in Craig, Clunas. *Superfluous Things, Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China* (University of Hawaii Press, 2004).

<sup>35</sup> For a translation and brief introduction to this book, see Alison Hardie (transl.), Ji Chen. *Craft of Gardens* (Yale University Press, 1988).

<sup>36</sup> For Wang Jide, his *Principles of Lyric Drama* 曲律 and drama “Nan wanghou” 南王后, see Chapter 4 in Sophie, Volpp. *Worldly Stage: Theatricality in Seventeenth-Century China* (Brill, 2020):132-60.



aspect of culture.<sup>37</sup> Such theatricality exposed the theatre of their social context, thereby emphasizing the illusory and ephemeral nature of all forms. Using the metaphor of theatre or theatricals, the literati group enjoyed their experiences of being inside and outside the enchantment that they themselves had created. This is part of characteristics in the late-Ming aesthetic sensibility, shaped by the deep reflection on unpleasant realities and the obsession with subjective expression, and celebrated subjectivity in its various manifestations; as perception, imagination, dreams, illusions, and memory.

The late-seventeenth century was the most generative period of dream-related writings and visual materials in Chinese history. This was reflected across a spectrum of cultural forms, ranging from the dream-driven dramas by various playwrights, to the novel *Supplement to Journey to the West* 西遊補 by Dong Yue in 1640, (in which Monkey King passes through continuous dreams prior to his enlightenment), or to the prose on paradisiacal realms built upon dreamy

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<sup>37</sup> Volpp has an impressive study on the new verbalization in the seventeenth century of notions like the transience of the world and the vanity of reputation, which had long informed the Chinese conception of theatricality. See Volpp, *Worldly stage*.

imagination by Huang Zhouxing 黃周星 (1611-1680).<sup>38</sup> An important space in Huang's the paradisiacal realm is called the "Make-Do Garden" 將就園—it is one of the enormous number of illusory gardens built on mere imagination in the late-Ming and early-Qing periods. In a recent study of illusions of gardens and gardens of illusions, Li Wai-yee has claimed that the illusory production of gardens was more than a self-indulgence, for it overlapped with "dreams, memories, or fantasies wherein a lost world could be reclaimed or an escape from an alienating reality invented in the post-conquest world."<sup>39</sup>

During the late-Ming period, the veritable mania for garden-building swept through centres of prosperity represented a new vogue, as observed by Craig Clunas in his work on late-Ming garden culture, a "triumph of aesthetics".<sup>40</sup> Gardens departed from a "fruitful garden" to a battlefield of rich associative aesthetics, which incorporated exotic plants, bizarre rocks, and other artificial

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<sup>38</sup> Lynn A. Struve. *The Dreaming Mind and the End of the Ming World*. (University of Hawaii Press, 2019).

<sup>39</sup> Wai-Yee, Li. "Gardens and Illusions from Late Ming to Early Qing." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* (2012): 295-336.

<sup>40</sup> Craig Clunas. *Fruitful sites: garden culture in Ming dynasty China* (Reaktion books, 2013): 80.

spectacles.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, a garden was regarded as an important representation of the owner's wealth, tastes, status, and social connections. It could host a large number of social activities, including theatrical performances, literary gatherings, and Buddhist sermons by famous masters.<sup>42</sup> Private gardens in late-Ming witnessed the maturation of a Chinese cultural market where renowned literati, officials and merchants gathered, and art works were appreciated and exchanged.

In 1640, Zheng Yuanxun 鄭元勳 (1604-1645) hosted one of late-imperial China's most celebrated social gatherings, a poetry contest occasioned by the flowering of a single unusual yellow peony in his "Garden of Reflections" 影園 in Yangzhou. In a time-honoured manner, the assembled literati sought to immortalise the moment, the garden, its master, and his guests with poems to

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<sup>41</sup> Clunas refers to the famous essay "Record of Visiting the Gardens of Jinling" 遊金陵諸園記 by Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526-1590), which included fifteen sites, to articulate the expansion of garden culture in late-Ming. See Craig Clunas. *Fruitful sites: garden culture in Ming dynasty China*. (Reaktion books, 2013): 64.

<sup>42</sup> Qi Biaoja's well-organized diary offers plentiful lively details of activities held in his garden. Even after he resigned, he had visitors almost every day and there was other communication through an exchange and circulation of letters, poems, paintings, etc. See Zhu Dongzhi, "Wanming shishen de renji suoying: Qi Biaoja riji zhong de shejiao huodong jiqi zhuanbian" 晚明士紳的人際縮影: 祁彪佳日記中的社交活動及其轉變, *Mingdai yanjiu* 明代研究 (2006), vol. 9: 63-100.

the yellow peony. These poems were then collected, commented upon, published and circulated after the gathering. Most of the literati were members of the Revival Society (復社, *Fushe*), an independent national organization constituted by members that represented an intersection of a political and a cultural elite.<sup>43</sup> The yellow peony poetry contest opens up a panorama of late-Ming art and culture and presents the context of sociability of its time.

### 1.3.2 Continuity in early Qing and the landscape of loss

The Manchu troops headed south after taking up Beijing, and invaded the Lower Yangzi region in the summer of 1645. This region had been a population centre for centuries and was the most developed area, both economically and in terms of regional administration, by the time of the late Ming. Literacy reached its highest level at this point and culture flourished at all levels of society. After the establishment of the Southern Ming in Nanjing, it became the centre of resistance until the summer of 1645, when it became the most damaged area, with three massacres from the fourth to the end of the sixth

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<sup>43</sup> For a general introduction to *Fushe*, see Frederic E. Wakeman. *The great enterprise: The Manchu reconstruction of imperial order in seventeenth-century China*. University of California Press (1985), vol. 1, 111-15.

month in Yangzhou, Jiading and Jiangyin.<sup>44</sup> Fragile literati gardens became victims of the turmoil, especially after their owners had died or escaped.<sup>45</sup> After Zheng Yuanxun died in 1644, his garden, destroyed during the Manchu conquest and eventually rebuilt, became emblematic of the cultural world and social network that had been lost. Individual intellectuals disappeared from – or erased themselves from – social networks that had been central to elite identity and cultivation during the Ming period. Instead, communication within the remnants was achieved through shared themes, metaphors, and the underlying feelings and political stance of their work.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> For a detailed introduction to the warfare in Lower Yangzi and urban disasters, especially renewed and ferocious resistance throughout the Lower Yangzi region caused by the decree of Manchu hairstyle, see Harry, Miller, and Harrison, Miller. *State versus Gentry in Early Qing Dynasty China, 1644-1699* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 23-5.

<sup>45</sup> “The Compilation of Viewing the World” 閱世編 by Ye Mengzhu 葉夢珠 offers numerous references on how famous gardens were destroyed during the transition. See Ye, *Yueshi bian* (Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981), vol. 10: 208-36.

<sup>46</sup> There is extensive contemporary scholarship on artistic creation under the theme of the Ming-Qing transition. In the last chapter, entitled “Remnant subjects: afterlives of Ming visual and material culture”, Clunas has an extensive investigation on the art of remnant subjects in visual and material culture. See also the last chapter in Craig Clunas. *Empire of great brightness: visual and material cultures of Ming China, 1368-1644* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007): 209-230. For literary representation, including poetry, prose and drama, see “Introduction” in Idema, Wilt L., Wai-yee Li, and Ellen Widmer, eds. *Trauma and Transcendence in Early Qing Literature* (Harvard University Asia Centre, 2006):1-70.

A small number of late-Ming gardens were preserved after they were turned into Buddhist monasteries by their owners, and these served to protect many remnants and loyalists. Converting to Buddhism also became a favoured choice among remnants as a means of escaping from problematic realities and their own mental obstructions.<sup>47</sup> Known as one of the “Four Monks 四僧”<sup>48</sup> who were painters born during the Ming Dynasty and converted to Buddhism after the transition, Shitao 石濤 (ca.1642-1707) became a Buddhist monk no later than 1651. He portrayed the complicated state of his inner world in his unique style that differed from the old traditional patterns of the orthodox literati painters. In his study of ruins in Chinese art, Wu Hung names Shitao as one of the earliest painters who represented such decayed structures.<sup>49</sup> It is in this

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<sup>47</sup> In the wake of the Manchu establishment of power, many humiliated Chinese intellectuals took refuge in temples where they could either conceal themselves or take the full tonsure of a Buddhist monk in order to avoid conforming with the haircutting edict.

<sup>48</sup> The Four Monks were Zhu Da 朱耷, Shitao 石濤, Hongren 弘仁, and Kuncan 髡殘. The Four Monks expressed their frustration, confusion and feeling of loss in their unique styles that differ from the old traditional patterns of the orthodox literati painters. Therefore, they are also known as the individualist masters.

<sup>49</sup> Wu Hung, *A story of ruins: Presence and absence in Chinese art and visual culture* (Reaktion Books, 2013). He points out that ruins, to the remnant subjects, embodied rich symbolism and evoked a strong emotional response. He also mentioned another excellent study of these people’s relationship

special historical context that the devastated landscape could be developed into a new theme of painting. In his study of “posttraumatic art”, Jonathan Hay discusses different ways in which the convictions and sentiments about dynastic subjecthood of literati artists affected their creative practice.<sup>50</sup> Personal expressions of the loss of their nation were indebted to the emergence of individualist painters,<sup>51</sup> who employed highly performative and improvisatory forms of self-expression. In this way, the presence of loss in paintings attained more complexity and extended beyond pictorial metaphors.

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with the stele by Bai Qianshen, which has identified the image of a “broken stele” as a poetic metaphor for the former dynasty, see Bai Qianshen, *Fu Shan’s World: Transformation of Chinese Calligraphy in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 172-84. Wu Hung also developed a specific study on the ruins depicted in Shitao’s paintings, see Wu Hung. “Shitao (1642-1707) and the Traditional Chinese Conception of Ruins.” *Proceedings of the British Academy*. Vol. 167 (2011).

<sup>50</sup> Jonathan, Hay. “Posttraumatic Art: Painting by Remnant Subjects of the Ming.” *Sturman and Tai, Artful Recluse* (2012): 77-93. For cases specifically in Nanjing, the capital of Southern Ming, see Yang Dunyao 楊敦堯. “The Early Qing Social Context and Development of Nanjing Topographical” 圖寫興亡：實景山水圖在清初金陵社會網絡中的意涵, *Taiwan yishu daxue shuhua yishu xuekan* 台灣藝術大學書畫藝術學刊, 2006 (1): 253-83.

<sup>51</sup> In contemporary studies of late-Ming and early-Qing paintings, this term is widely used. Hay thinks that the appellation of “strange gentlemen” or “originals” (奇士, *qishi*) could be an equivalent. It was applied to the artists “in their own time and place is evocative of a recognized claim to difference inseparable from the associated claim that their art in some sense embodied them personally.” See Jonathan, Hay. *Shitao: Painting and Modernity in Early Qing China* (New York: Cambridge, 2001): xv.



Figure 1-2 Shitao, Fourth leaf in *Huangshan Album* 黄山圖冊. Album of 21 leaves, ink or ink and colour on paper, 34.5×20.8cm. Palace Museum, Beijing. This leaf depicts a stone pagoda with decaying structure.



Laments about the loss of the nation generated literary themes in early-Qing poetry and prose, among which the most shared was the decay of the natural landscape. It is employed as an efficient way to indicate the downfall of Ming, along with the attendant depression of the people and the devastation of their homes. A line from Zhu Yizun's 朱彝尊 (1629-1709) poem depicts the change of landscape: "Places that used to be filled with jade wine cups and brocaded mats, now turned to be full of withered grass (on graves) and wild ashes." 玉杯錦席之地，皆化為宿草荒煙。<sup>52</sup> Some laments referred to a cosmological landscape, for example, Wan Shouqi 萬壽祺 (1603-1652) describes the aftermath of Ming's fall as "Earth broke apart, heaven crumbled, the sun and moon darkened." 地坼天崩日月昏。<sup>53</sup>

The late-Ming affection with illusoriness finds a new interest in the miscellaneous writing on dream-remembrances of the past. *Tao'an's Dream*

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<sup>52</sup> Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊, "Li Zhaocheng" 李肇亨, *Jingzhiju shihua* 靜志居詩話 (Beijing: renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1990): 605.

<sup>53</sup> Wan Shouqi 萬壽祺, "Jiashen ershou" 甲申二首; cited in Qian Zhonglian 錢仲聯. *Qingshi jishi* 清詩紀事, 1: 132. Wan Shouqi was captured and thrown in prison at the time of the Songjiang uprising. He went into exile after he luckily escaped from prison. When he returned to his hometown in Xuzhou the next year, he found that his family's compound and gardens had been largely ruined or taken over by conquerors.

*Recollections* 陶庵夢憶 and *West Lake Sought in Dreams* 西湖夢尋, by the renowned writer Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597–after 1684), recall his deep feelings towards the notoriously extravagant and sensual pursuits in late-Ming, thus conveying a sense of contrast between past glory and present misery.<sup>54</sup> Such private reminiscences participate in a collective nostalgia and serve to testify that the romantic ideals of late-Ming continued to survive into the Manchu dynasty.

Early-Qing cultural productions inherited the enormous, lively and chaotic legacy of late-Ming, which was premised on a subtle balance between the multidirectional external stresses and the complicated internal sensitivity that delicately responded to the former. Moreover, they created a period of extraordinary creativity and vitality in Chinese cultural history. This is, certainly in part, because the suspension of centralized control and the disorder of social status allowed a greater freedom of expression that tested the boundaries of political, moral, and formal constraints, and that traversed and questioned the lines that conventionally divided life and art, the illusory and the real.

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<sup>54</sup> For a study on Zhang Dai and his dream works, see Philip Alexander, Kafalas. *In limpid dream: Nostalgia and Zhang Dai's reminiscences of the Ming* (East Bridge, 2007).

## **1.4 Research question: cultural negotiations of dynastic change**

After the Ming dynasty collapsed, the literati group had two substantial markers of identity. On the one hand, they had been fostered in the highly developed literati culture and its sociability in late-Ming, while on the other, the dynastic change had compromised and constrained their forms of life, encouraging new modes of withdrawal. This provides the fundamental context for this thesis's primary hypothesis – namely, that Ming remnants continued their forms of cultural production into the early Qing period but manipulated them to construct an alternative realm for their posttraumatic living, thus exploring new forms of withdrawal. While the established norms of remnants' living covered up many complicated feelings about dynastic transition, personal cultural production opens a door to an intimate and highly differentiated poetics of individual escape. It is highly personal and therefore tends to resist interpretation in iconographic, stylistic, or thematic terms but is nonetheless fundamental to the literati's artistic creation.

Premised on culturally negotiated withdrawals, this thesis then chooses to further examine how the alternative realms created by cultural productions profoundly influenced the actual modalities of withdrawal. Therefore, the secondary hypothesis is that there exists a mediate landscape in each cultural

negotiation that mediates between the physical form and artistic form of withdrawal, thus managing to sustain the political demonstration of loyalty and the poetics of the literati's reclusive living at the same time. The point of the thesis is to uncover the mediate landscape and decode the essential mechanism of the cultural negotiation in each case.

It is obvious that in the cultural negotiations of withdrawal, there is a need to simultaneously juxtapose art with life, illusion with reality. Reality here cannot be understood as universal but rather stands for the intimate and immediate reality that an individual is faced with. This study takes withdrawal as, firstly, a spatial practice. The alternative realm for their posttraumatic living inter-relates their own existence with a profound reflection on the spatiality of withdrawal. Although space may not be the focal point of all the cultural productions examined in this thesis, it is subtly attended to and implicated throughout the works, and thus makes the mode of withdrawal also a concern of space. This focus on the embodiment of withdrawal through an examination of the body and space is one of the major contributions of this thesis to the existing scholarship on the socio-political situation of Ming remnants in the early-Qing period.

Since such cultural practices required the traversal between different realms,

it allows the literatus to explore the existence of his “self” from different aspects, and to experiment with how it can be concealed, isolated, withheld, and even fragmented in the process, although he was often deeply aware of the flaws and repressions that such attempts must have involved. Therefore, an investigation into the Ming remnants’ cultural negotiations of dynastic change gives us access to the multidimensionality of the way they consciously constructed a private realm for the proper withdrawal, lived in it and sometimes played with it.

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## 1.5 Methodology and thesis structure

Drawing upon various materials of literary and artistic sources of cultural practices, three individual case studies are examined in this thesis: Qi Biaoja's 祁彪佳 (1602-1645) Garden of Mountain Yu and his midnight-suicide staged in the garden; Gong Xian's 龔賢 (1617-1689) dark-toned landscape and his cultivation of the bamboo thicket garden; and Dong Yue's 董說 (1620-1686) obsession with dreaming and writing, and his subsequent boating life as a wandering monk in his late years. The case studies consider the correspondence between each figure's cultural practices and their individualized mode of withdrawal.

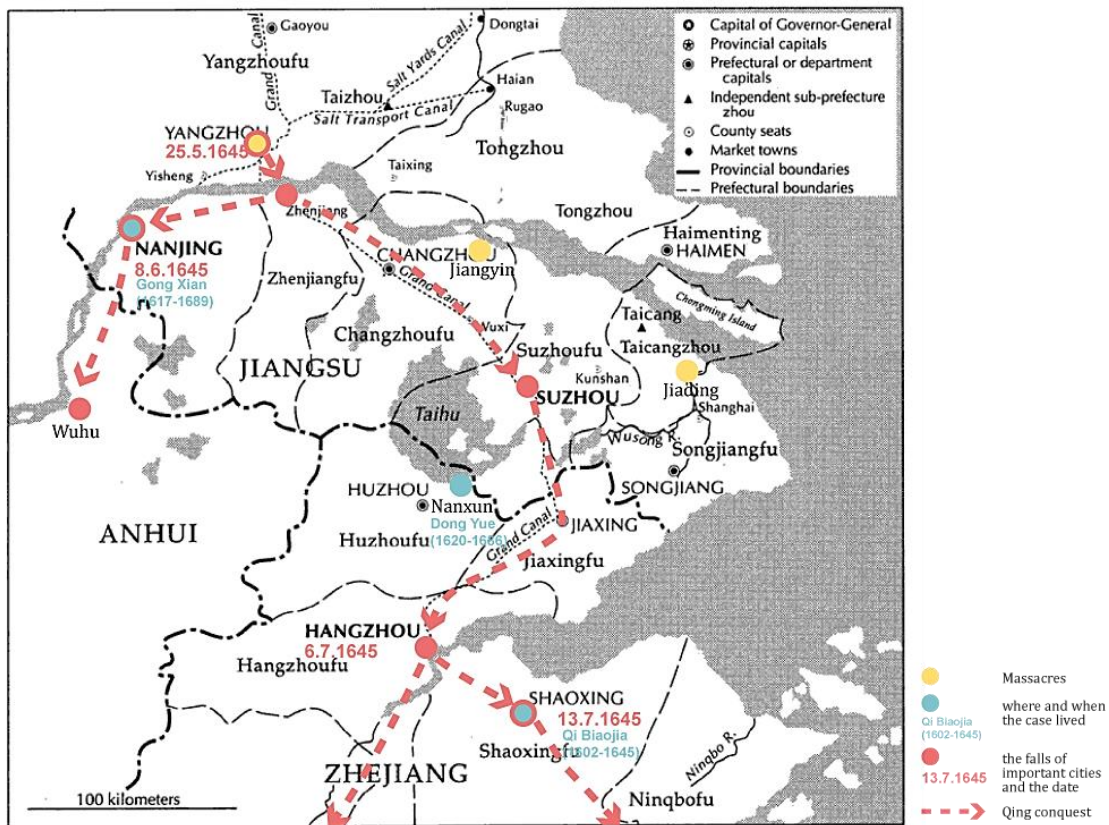


Figure 1-3 Qing conquest of Ming (Southern-Ming) territories in the Lower-Yangzi region (reworked on the Qing map of Lower-Yangzi Region by Cartographic Research and Spatial Analysis, Michigan State University)

Located in the Lower Yangzi region, and ranging from middle to late seventeenth-century, these three figures are representative Ming remnants,<sup>55</sup> who faced different posttraumatic situations and who were obsessed with different forms of cultural practices.

The three figures made different choices after the collapse of the Ming dynasty, which must be considered in relation to their personal histories. As an accomplished official-scholar, Qi Biaoja was confronted with a critical situation, which made his survival barely possible. Dong Yue and Gong Xian were still young scholars who had not yet substantially engaged with officialdom, but they both had their own crises regarding their official careers and the contemporary political environment. Regarding the modalities of withdrawal of the remnants, the three protagonists represent examples of three aforementioned archetypes: Qi Biaoja's retreat into his suburban garden and his final suicide in 1645; Gong Xian's exile for the first ten years after Ming's fall and his mountain hut retreat from 1664; and Dong Yue's mud hut retreat upon Ming's collapse and his boating life, starting from the 1670s.

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<sup>55</sup> A remnant subject usually refers to a survivor after the dynastic change. This thesis regards Qi Biaoja, who committed suicide in 1645, as a remnant in the sense that he was a remnant of Ming instead of Southern Ming, although he lived for just one year after the fall of Ming.



Regarding cultural practices, their works are especially noteworthy and significant when focusing on the continuity of artistic pursuits from the late-Ming period, for they reflect the aesthetic characteristics of seventeenth-century China. This thesis examines a wide range of sources in diverse fields: literary works, including prose, poetry, painting inscriptions and fiction; non-literary texts, including personal diaries, family manuals, painting manuals, private correspondence, gazetteers, and historical records (either official or private); and visual materials, including garden paintings and landscape paintings. As such, this interdisciplinary approach allows for an analytical framework based on a network of interrelations, including the artist's personal history, his artistic creation, literary practice, philosophical discourse, his political stance, and the historical context.

It must be noted that the three individual cases do not provide a seamless view of the cultural negotiations of withdrawal during the "interdynastic" period, but they do indicate a paradigm. The figures select their mode of withdrawal in relation to their profound and unique comprehension of their artistic creation – through which it is then cultivated and negotiated. My investigation of the cases intends to provide detailed and nuanced elaboration of this paradigm by focusing on the mediate landscape — the essential idea that bridges certain forms of cultural practices and withdrawal.

The first case study examines the prestigious scholar-official and drama critic Qi Biaoja, who returned to his hometown and built his private garden, Mountain *Yu* 寓山. Qi's aesthetic appreciation of his garden reflected his theatrical sensitivity, as seen in the literature on Mountain *Yu*. As the master, he not only personifies the sites in the garden and imagines the humanly interaction between them, but also demonstrates his theatrical view of the human agency interacting with the garden space. His alter ego – the “Master” also presents as a spectacle, whose interaction with the garden is viewed by the master himself. This theatrical self allows the garden owner to enjoy a capacity for simultaneously impassionate participation and dispassionate observation. Upon the collapse of Ming, Qi drowned himself in the garden lake—his poetic suicide in the context of a harsh and unendurable reality is particular in terms of its theatrical characteristics. Its theatricality lies in Qi's spectatorial relation to a “theatrical self” in his pre-death moments, as well as the performativity in his gesture of death. In Qi Biaoja's case, when taking the death as an alternative way of withdrawal, the theatricalized garden could be seen as the mediate landscape, created under the manipulation of the garden owner, and bridges the glorious death of a loyalist and the poetic retreat into his favourite garden.

The second case study focuses on Gong Xian, one of the most influential

individualistic painters in early Qing, who returned and settled in Nanjing twenty years after Ming's fall. Gong Xian's landscape paintings featured the heavy accumulation of ink and dense composition of elements, both of which initiated the substantiality of his landscape. Regarding the creation of his landscape, Gong claimed that his landscape was born from his mind and boosted by *qi* (breath), and it did not represent any reality. Therefore, the dark-toned landscape he created opposes the common expression of "Remnant Mountains and Leftover Waters" 殘山剩水 shared in the perception of landscape among Ming remnants. His works under the theme of "A Thousand Peaks and Myriad Ravines" 千岩萬壑 were the best examples of his artistic ideal, where the few scattered lonely homes represented his ideal withdrawal. They seemed to echo the gated garden at the mountain foot Gong constructed for himself. In Gong Xian's case, the substantial landscape functions as the mediate landscape, connecting his artistic creation of a firm and strong world and his retreat into the bamboo-thicket garden.

The third case examines the novelist Dong Yue, who was overwhelmed by dreams after the frustration of his official career. Attracted by the transitory nature of dreams, Dong Yue kept a dated dream record and developed his theories of dreams centring on the imagination of the Land of Dreams. Although writing was not able to grasp the genuine mutability of dreams, it

provided a possibility of foregrounding changes and transformation, so that offered him a therapeutic withdrawal from a depleted reality. After the dynastic change, Dong more profoundly understood the nature of dreams as mutable illusions and tended to take dreaming as a mode of self-cultivation and therapy in real life, which revealed his being influenced by the shift in Buddhist thinking on relating to dreams as a way of achieving enlightenment. Therefore, through his various efforts in bringing dreams into real life, Dong Yue realized that only unobstructed movement and free transformation could lead to the ideal withdrawal, which would be realised through his floating existence on a boat in his late years. In this case, the mutability of dreams acts as the mediate landscape that bridges Dong Yue's withdrawal of rootless floating and his poetic exploration of the realm of dreams.



## CHAPTER 2 MIDNIGHT THEATRICALITY

### Qi Biaoja's Garden, His Return and Suicide in the Garden

- 2.1 Intro: The death of a garden owner
- 2.2 Theatricality in Qi Biaoja's garden record
  - 2.2.1 The theatrical scheme of Mountain Yu
  - 2.2.2 Alienating the theatrical self: who is the Master?
- 2.3 Late-Ming moonlit theatricality
  - 2.3.1 Nocturnal gardens and landscape
  - 2.3.2 Obscurity, theatrical effects, and temporal stages
- 2.4 The finale: theatricals between life and death
  - 2.4.1 Scene one: obsession and confession
  - 2.4.2 Scene two: the emergence of the "theatrical self" after nightfall
  - 2.4.3 Scene three: the theatricality of the martyr's body
- 2.5 Death as a modality of withdrawal
  - 2.5.1 Withdrawal into the garden: to lodge
  - 2.5.2 Death in the garden: to return

## 2.1 Intro: The death of a garden owner

At the end of the year 1644, Qi Biaoja 祁彪佳 (1602-1645), a competent official and an exemplary literatus, resigned from the court of the Southern Ming Dynasty and returned to his hometown of Shanyin County<sup>1</sup>. Earlier that year, the Ming Dynasty had collapsed, Beijing was captured, and the Emperor Chongzhen had committed suicide by hanging himself. Ming loyalists then held the Southern Ming court in Nanjing to continue their loyalist movement in revolt against the Manchu government.

This was the third and last time Qi took leave from the court, feeling a sense of futility and desperation in realizing the new court would never achieve what it aimed for. In the fifth month of 1645, Nanjing fell, and by the sixth month, Hangzhou too. The increasing pressure of accepting the new office under the new dynasty had left Qi Biaoja nowhere to hide. On the 4th day of the succeeding intercalary month, he had his son warmed several cups of wine, and invited a number of relatives and friends to his private garden. Having told his family that he was going to repair early to his bedchamber, he proceeded to the inner lake wherein he sat bolt upright and awaited his death. He, thus,

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<sup>1</sup> Shanyin is Shaoxing in Zhejiang Province today.

became a martyr upon the fall of Ming, at the age of forty-four.

In 1776, the Qianlong Emperor of the Qing Dynasty bestowed honours upon those who had committed suicide in loyalty to the old Ming Dynasty. A total of 3800-odd loyalists was listed and the thirty-three most distinguished ones were granted a specialized posthumous title – Qi was one of them. Short biographies of these thirty-three loyalists were appended to the list, from which we can discern that most of them refused to yield to the new order after being arrested by Manchu troops, choosing instead to sacrifice themselves, with some among them generals who fought to their deaths.<sup>2</sup> Qi was among the very few who practiced a more contemplative and, some might say, elegant suicide during the turmoil. Almost every text on Qi Biao's suicide, even the shortest and driest ones, do not miss the sense of melancholy and loneliness in the setting of his dramatic death. A one-sentence record in the Qing official document of martyrs notes that Qi “On hearing about the fall of Hangzhou, [Qi] sent his family to bed and then drowned himself in water” 聞杭州破，給家人先

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<sup>2</sup> Based on the research of the contemporary scholar He Guanbiao, an official record made in early Qing, “Imperial-ordered record of the martyrs of the preceding dynasty” recorded that more than 3883 Ming loyalists “died for the country” after 1644. Most of them were civil service officials. See He Guanbiao 何冠彪, *Sheng yu si: Min ji shidafu de xuanze* 生與死: 明季士大夫的選擇 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1997): 15-19.



寢，投水死，<sup>3</sup> stressing that he died alone with no accompany. Another brief account from a Southern-Ming historian observes that “Qi drowned himself under the shadows of willow trees on the bank of the ‘Pond for Releasing Captive Animals’” in the Garden of Mountain *Yu*, not witnessed by his wife, sons nor brothers” 投于寓園放生池柳樹之陰，夫人子弟不知也，<sup>4</sup> indicating that he died at midnight, in the garden, alone and secretly. Among all the records, the chronicle of Qi Biaoja, written by his friend Wang Siren 王思任 (1574-1646)<sup>5</sup>, is the most elaborate one that poetically depicts his death.<sup>6</sup> It

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<sup>3</sup> Shu Hede 舒赫德 et al ed., *Qinding shengchao xunjie zhuchen lu* (欽定勝朝殉節諸臣錄, Imperial-ordered record of the martyrs of the preceding dynasty), vol.1: 8.

<sup>4</sup> Xu Fanglie 徐芳烈, *Zhedong jilue* 浙東紀略 (Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1985): 101.

<sup>5</sup> Wang Siren was Qi Biaoja’s fellow Shanyin native. When the Manchus conquered Nanjing, he was made Minister of Rites of the ruler of the Southern Ming, yet after the downfall of his hometown Shaoxing, he decided to starve himself to death instead of serving the Manchus. As a close friend of Qi, he had visited the Garden of Mountain *Yu* many times and had contributed to the literature of the garden.

<sup>6</sup> The Chronicle of Duke Qi Zhongmin 祁忠敏公年譜 by Wang Siren is reprinted and annotated in the appendix of Qi Biaoja 祁彪佳, *Qi Biaoja riji* 祁彪佳日記 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2016), vol. 3: 845-934. According to Zhao Suwen’s study on Qi Biaoja’s chronicle, the author could not be Wang Siren. Wang was twenty-seven years older than Qi and was then a respected scholar, so it might not be appropriate for him to write the chronicle for Qi. The chronicle is more likely to have been written by Qi’s close disciples and sent to Wang for modification. See Zhao Suwen 趙素文. “‘Qi Zhongmin gong nianpu’ sige benzi de xianghu guanxi jiqi zhuanxie zhe bianxi” (《祁忠敏公年譜》四個本子的相互關係及其撰寫者辨析. *Wen Xian*. Vol. 4, 2002: 147-56.

records in detail the last moment of Qi's life, the dramatic gesture of his midnight suicide in the garden and also his actions prior to the act. Qi's garden was originally built as a perfect home that enabled him to withdraw from the social and political troubles of his time, and ultimately, it provided the stage for his withdrawal from the living world.

This chapter will firstly reveal Qi Biaoja's theatrical viewing of Mountain Yu through the investigation of his writing on the garden. As the master, he not only personifies the sites in the garden and imagines the humanly interaction between them, but also demonstrates his theatrical view of the human agency interacting with the garden space. Most importantly, I grasp the immediate emergence of his alter ego, a "theatrical self", whose interaction with the garden was observed and recorded in Qi's self-noting of the garden with a tone of an outsider.

Then, focusing on Wang's text on Qi's finale, this chapter will articulate the particular poetics of Qi Biaoja's suicide, so as to reveal a vivid figure of a literatus bidding his farewell to the living world. Qi made his beloved garden the stage for this and carefully designed his death in detail; the timing, the venue, and most importantly, the gesture. Taking the garden as the stage, his suicide was by no means a rash decision but something that was deliberately

choreographed. It demonstrates the late-Ming obsession with theatricality, which celebrates the human capacity to produce illusions and theatrics, as well as to freely transcend the opposition between the illusory and the real. In his elaborate manipulation, we are brought to see and profoundly comprehend the politics and poetics of his death as a martyr and a garden owner in the context of the dynastic transition.

## 2.2 Viewing garden as a stage

### 2.2.1 The literary construction of Mountain Yu

Qi Biaoja's private garden, Mountain *Yu* (寓山 *Yushan*), was named after the small hill where the garden occupied. It was first built when Qi was granted leave to quit his post with the Censorate in the Ming court and return to his hometown in 1635. The construction lasted off and on for nine years, up until one month before his suicide. The garden no longer exists, but a sizable amount of literature by Qi Biaoja and his contemporary remains and helps to represent the garden. His compilation of the *Chorography of Mountain Yu* (寓山志, *Yushan zhi*) includes an exhaustive collection of writings on the garden in various forms of literature.<sup>7</sup> Over two hundred literati contributed almost one thousand poems, *ci*-poems and prose in total, with more commentaries following each piece of writing, as listed here:

Chen Guoguang 陳國光, "Paintings of Mountain Yu" 寓山圖

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<sup>7</sup> According to the study of Cao Shujuan, the *Chorography of Mountain Yu* was first mentioned in Qi Biaoja's diary by mid-1637 and had been revised by Qi several times, so the contents of different editions are quite different. For a comprehensive study of all editions and contents, see Cao Shujuan 曹淑娟, *Liubian zhong de shuxie: Qi Biaoja yu yushan yuanlin lunshu* 流變中的書寫: 祁彪佳與寓山園林論述 (Taipei: Liren shuju, 2006):93-152.

Wang Siren 王思任, "Account of visiting Mountain Yu" 遊寓山記

Chen Hanhui 陳函輝, "A *fu* of Mountain Yu" 寓山賦

Chen Dun 陳遯, "Another *fu* of Mountain Yu" 寓山賦

Dong Xuan 董玄, "Experiencing Mountain Yu" 寓山涉

Wang Yexun 王業洵, "Comments on Mountain Yu" 寓山評

Li Canji 李燦箕, "Dreams of Mountain Yu" 寓山夢

Zhang Dai 張岱, "Inscriptions of Mountain Yu" 寓山銘

Chen QiYuan 陳起元, "Inquiring about Mountain Yu" 寓山問

Meng Chengshun 孟稱舜, "Interpreting Mountain Yu" 寓山解

Qi Chengxun 祁承勳, "Descriptions of Mountain Yu" 寓山述

40 poems entitled site names in Mountain Yu" 寓山題詠

80 poems on visiting Mountain Yu 寓山遊吟

19 *ci*-poems on Mountain Yu 寓山詞

77 sets of *ci*-poems on Sixteen views of Mountain Yu 寓山十六景詞

*Qu* awaiting to be completed 曲嗣出

Besides the Chronography, there are also a great number of literary works about the garden by Qi, his family and friends in other collections. Before the 1620s or 1630s, Chinese gardens were not a discursive format and were barely mentioned in miscellaneous writings, such as the agronomic text, the household manual and the topographical gazetteer. So, "writing about gardens,

in the sense of a coherent, cross-referencing text,” was almost impossible.<sup>8</sup> In the late-Ming period, garden literature revealed its significance and an enormous amount of literature on gardens was produced, especially formal literature on general garden culture and specific gardens. These writing about gardens provided alternative ways to “visit” a garden, and even to “own” a garden. People believed that the gardens in textual record would last longer than the real ones, as advocated by Wen Zhenheng 文震亨 (1585-1645) when he notes: “it is better that gardens gain reputation for the literary works rather than their splendour.” 園林之以金碧著，不若以文章著也。<sup>9</sup>

Qi’s own account of his garden “Notes on Mountain *Yu*” (寓山注 *Yushan zhu*)<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This argument is offered by Clunas in his influential book on Ming garden culture, see Craig, Clunas. “The Discourse of Gardens”, *Fruitful Sites: Garden Culture in Ming Dynasty China* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 1996): 137-39. The quotation is on 137.

<sup>9</sup> Wen Zhenheng, “Wangwenkegong yilaoyuan ji” 王文恪公怡老園記 (Account of Garden Yilao of Duke Wang Wenke), *Suzhou lidai mingyuan ji* 蘇州歷代名園記, Shao Zhong 邵忠, Li Jin 李瑾 eds. (Zhongguo linye chubenshe, 2004): 65.

<sup>10</sup> According to Qi Biaoja’s diaries, he started his writing on “Notes on Mountain *Yu*” in mid-1637. It included over 30 sites by the seventh month in the same year. In 1638, Qi started writing a sequel to the original one and finished it in the sixth month. In 1637, the “Notes” was first published, with forty-nine scenic spots in total. The Chongzhen 崇禎 edition of the “Notes” in the National Library in Taipei includes Qi Biaoja’s account, as well as extensive poetic commentaries by his friends. The Chinese

stands in the centre as the source of all subsequent literary production on this garden. Unlike the common narrative in most garden records of this period, constituted by a linear timeline of one's visit, Qi introduces his garden in forty-nine separate sections entitled with site names, under the structure of "notes" (注 *zhu*)<sup>11</sup>. Although the garden no longer exists, Qi's systematic literary construction of his garden invites us to seriously take the text as an alternative, separate existence of the garden instead of a compromised substitute, since it was imprinted with the owner's imagination of, and could indicate a further depth of engagement with the garden.

The names of the forty-nine scenic spots were given by Qi Biaoja, which was no exception to the custom of naming sites in gardens, popular since the

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texts of the "Notes" quoted in this chapter all refer to the modern reproduction of this edition in the appendix of Zhao Haiyan's book; see Zhao Haiyan 趙海燕, *Yushanzhu yanjiu* 寓山注研究 (Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2016): 336-93. Part of the English translation refers to Duncan Campbell, "Footnotes to Allegory Mountain: Introduction and Translation," in *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes* 19.3-4 (1999): 243-71. Duncan translated *yu* as allegory and the garden's name as "Allegory Mountain", but I chose not to translate it, since *yu* itself has such an important and complex notion to understand the garden that it should not be simplified by the translation.

<sup>11</sup> "Notes" is usually applied in canonical classics that embody profound meanings and call for exegetical comments. For example, the *Notes to the Classic of the waterways* 水經注, which was repeatedly quoted in Qi's "Notes".

Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127).<sup>12</sup> In addition, literati would continue attaching significance to the names through poems, essays, and other miscellaneous writings. Therefore, a literary scheme always existed that was concurrent with the visual or pictorial scheme in one's tour of a garden or a scenic spot, in many cases, the two schemes would echo each other. With the literary form of "notes", including forty-nine separate sections for scenic spots, Qi's garden record valued the independence of each spot and the specificity of its moment in time, as much as its interactive relations with other sites.

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<sup>12</sup> For the tradition of site names in gardens, see John Makeham. "The Confucian role of names in traditional Chinese gardens", *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 18:3 (2012), 187-210.





Figure 2-1 Painting of Mountain Yu 寓山圖, Chen Guoguang 陳國光. This woodcut reproduction of Chen's original painting is in the Chongzhen edition of Chorography of Mountain Yu. The characters are names of the scenic spots, but they do not completely correspond to those in Qi's "Notes on Mountain Yu", since it was finished earlier than the finalization of the "Notes". (Source: Cao Shujuan, *Liubian zhong de shuxie*, Figure 7, 8)

In his systemized writing, Qi applied a structure composed of three parts: the first part was the location of the site and a simple description of it; the second rendered the most impressive spectacle regarding this site; and the third explained where the site name came from, which is often related to the second part. Here, I will demonstrate this structure of writing with the section “Terrace of Floating Reflection” 浮影台 (Figure 2-1a):

① Viewing from the “Treading Fragrance Dyke”, one can see a terrace situated in mid-water. ② Across the deep translucent water, turned blue-green by the rays of the moon, one can reach it. Whenever the moon raises a swell upon the surface of the pond and the red cliffs [of the terrace] seem surrounded by the pure clear water, the terrace disappears one moment only to reappear the next, as if floating between the ripples of the mist and the white crested waves. It looks at the one thousand lotuses around, as imposing as a Lotus Throne itself, surging into the flowers. ③ The *Notes to the Classic of the Waterways* has the line: “The two peaks observe each other, the solitary reflection seems to be afloat,” which presents an exact description of the present scene.

①從踏香堤望之，迥然有台，蓋在水中央也。②翠碧澄鮮，空明可測，得至金蟾戲浪，丹嶂回清，此台乍無乍有，上下于煙波雪浪之間。環視千柄芙蓉，又

似蓮座莊嚴，為眾香湧出。㊦《水經注》所云：“回峙相望，孤影若浮”，似為寫照矣。<sup>13</sup>

Sometimes Qi Biaoji refers to his experience on the site instead of pure scenery to bring out its spatial characteristics. The “Rotten Axe-Handle Mountain House” 爛柯山房 on the hillside was named after a myth about a woodcutter walking in the forest who met some children playing chess, so he stayed and watched them play. (Figure 2-1b) When he realized it was time for him to leave, the axe-handle in his hand had already become rotten and he no longer knew anybody in his village.<sup>14</sup> This story speaks about a dramatic change of time, and highlights the ignorance and huge puzzlement of the spectator. Qi often experienced a distortion of distance and time in this specific spot since the guests arrived much slower than he expected:

The Master reads inside, leaning on the handrail and looking over.

Whenever guests arrive at my garden, I can catch sight of them while they are still several miles away, so I dispatch a serving boy to investigate. After quite a while, their boat is still in the midst of the water.

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<sup>13</sup> Qi, “Yushan zhu”, 343.

<sup>14</sup> This myth is first seen in the *Tales of Strange Matters* 述異記 (*Shu yi ji*), a collection of novellas and stories of strange events attributed to Ren Fang 任昉 (460–508). See Ren Fang, *Shu yi ji*, vol. 1: 13b.

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主人讀書其中，倦則倚欄四望。凡客至，輒於數裡外見之。遣童子出探，良久，一舟猶在中流也。<sup>15</sup>

Qi Biaoja's noting of his garden leads us to forty-nine apertures to alternative realms where, in a unique composition of time and event, the imaginative viewing of the site departs its everyday beauty, displaying some intensified meaning. Since different moments and events are celebrated here, only the master of the garden will be able to claim his awareness and sensitivity of all the particular beauty in the garden. Reading Qi Biaoja's "Notes on Mountain Yu", his friend Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597-1684) wrote a postscript wherein he commented that, "when the master notes his garden, ...he is able to catch the subtlety that is exclusively known to himself. 主人作注, ....., 真有一種人不及知而己獨知之妙." This serves as a good point to start my following analysis on the emergence of a "theatrical self" in Qi's theatrical viewing of his garden, which can be only seen by himself.

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<sup>15</sup> Qi, "Yushan zhu", 369.

## 2.2.2 The immediate emergence of the theatrical self: the Master

Qi Biaoja gained his prominent reputation in drama criticism at a very young age. In his anthology of drama criticism *Evaluation of Southern Plays of Yuanshantang* 遠山堂曲品 and *Evaluation of Northern Plays of Yuanshantang* 遠山堂劇品,<sup>16</sup> he recorded his critiques on an unsurpassed amount of dramas. On his retirement in 1635, he stated that he would like to overcome his addiction to dramas. It was also at this time when he picked up a new hobby that was soon to develop into another obsession—the gardens. The late-Ming period witnessed a flourishing of private theatrical performances, after the disappearance of balustrade theatre (勾欄, *goulan*) in the mid-Ming period and before the prevalence of new types of playhouses (戲院, *xiyuan*) in

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<sup>16</sup> For a study on Qi Biaoja's drama critique and its significance, see Zhao Suwen, *Qi Biaoja yanjiu*, 207-76, and Yang Yanqi 楊艷琪, *Qi Biaoja yu Yuanshantang qupin jupin yanjiu* 祁彪佳與遠山堂曲品劇品研究 (Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2007): 68-178. The two critiques are reprinted with collation and annotation in Huang Shang 黃裳. *Yuanshantang ming qupin jupin jiaolu* 遠山堂明曲品劇品校錄 (Shanghai: Shanghai chuban gongsi, 1955). *Yuanshantang* (The Hall of Distant Mountains) is the name of Qi Biaoja's studio.

the early-Qing period.<sup>17</sup> The drama writer and theorist Wang Jide 王冀德 (1542?-1623) listed what he believed made for a suitable environment for the performance of drama. “Splendid halls, famous gardens, waterside kiosks, snow-bound pavilions, painted boats, among the flowers, beside the willows”, are listed as the first among those which are considered favourable.<sup>18</sup> Gardens provided perfect natural settings and poetic ambience for acting, and were comfortable places for the audience, and they thus became popular for theatrical performances.

Not surprisingly, Qi’s garden was one of the most popular places for theatrical performances in his county. In Qi’s diaries, where he recorded the various theatrical performances, a total of eighty-six plays are mentioned.<sup>19</sup> Qi and his friends usually enjoyed salon-style drama performances, singing and dancing

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<sup>17</sup> The *goulan* theatre refers to the commercial theatre built amidst marketplaces, brothel districts, and other urban environment with active commerce and heavy traffic. For the development of private theatres in late Ming, see He Yuming. *Productive space: Performance texts in the late Ming*. Ph. D. Dissertation (Berkeley: University of California, 2003): 29-49.

<sup>18</sup> Wang Jide was accomplished as a writer of several literary genres, including drama. His *Principles of Lyric Drama* is a comprehensive theoretical book of drama aesthetics. See Wang Jide. “On Qū’s Being Blessed or Cursed” 論曲亨屯, *Qūlu* 曲律 (Zhihai congshu 指海叢書 edition), vol. 4: 35a-36b.

<sup>19</sup> Zhao Suwen, *Qi Biaoja yanjiu*, 138-206. Zhao has a comprehensive study of the plays Qi Biaoja watched, recorded in his personal diary, with a brief introduction to the plays.

while having a banquet in the Hall of Four Failures 四負堂.<sup>20</sup> (Figure 2-1c) The spatial layout of the garden allowed for a flexible arrangement of outdoor stages and auditoriums. On a clear evening, Qi Biaoqia and his friends would stay outdoors, having a casual drink, and then they would sit in the Belvedere of Complete Pleasure 咸暢閣 (Figure 2-1d) to listen to a singer in the Pavilion of Great Antiquity 太古亭.<sup>21</sup> (Figure 2-1e) We can learn from Qi's "Notes" that the belvedere was located at a higher level on a multi-storeyed structure, which was perfect for the audience, while the pavilion, with a wall-less structure, was appropriate to act as a stage. Except for the performances specially arranged for Qi's aged mother, all the others took place at night and even midnight, and "ended after we had the ultimate pleasure," 極歡而罷, as Qi recorded.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Taking the year of 1637 as an example, after the Hall was accomplished in the fourth month, such banquets were recorded in Qi, *Qi Biaoqia riji*, 264, 276, 293.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 591. The Belvedere of Complete Pleasure was not built when *Painting of Mountain Yu* and the "Notes" were finished, therefore it was mentioned in neither of them. Here in the painting, I mark the Belvedere of Distance 遠閣, which has the same architectural structure of belvedere (閣 *ge*) and also not far away from the Pavilion of Great Antiquity, to demonstrate the probable setting of the this activity. The Pavilion, as shown in the painting and introduced in Qi's "Notes", is not a real pavilion, but an open ground surrounded by old pines, which serves better as a stage since it does not block views from a higher spot.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 730.

Among her massive study on Qi Biaoqia and his garden, Cao Shujuan notices that Qi projected his sensitivity of theatricals onto his viewing of the garden; in such viewing, the garden was taken as a stage.<sup>23</sup> She regards Qi's "Song for the Educated Females Visiting Mountain Yu in Spring" 寓山士女春遊曲 in the collection of twelve songs by the various literati, as a play starred by the young female visitors and put on the outdoor theatre, himself being the spectator. Cao divides this song into five scenes. In the first scene, the young ladies dressed themselves up in the early morning and arrived at the garden; in the second and third scenes, they wandered around different parts of the garden and enjoyed the spring scenery. Then, in the fourth scene, Qi has the young gentlemen joined in – they leisurely commented on the beauty of the ladies. Some young gentleman passing the crowd of female visitors dropped his horsewhip purposely, wishing some young lady would notice it -- this is one of familiar plots of encounter used in love dramas to start a romance. Qi optimistically anticipated the progression of this story that they would fall in love with each other like a pair of butterflies.

Besides Qi Biaoqia, other literati who contributed to this song collection also

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<sup>23</sup> Cao. *Liubian zhong de shuxie*, 281-91.



focused on the potential romantics. Impressed by the beautiful flowers, the young ladies picked some of them and hid in their sleeves cautiously in order not to be spotted by the gardeners; the path being too narrow, when encountering the males, they attempted to evade but accidentally stepped into the grass; the corridors being too long with too many turns, the ladies got lost and puzzled.<sup>24</sup> Again, those plots were nothing unusual in dramas taking place in gardens. The writing on the young females' interaction with the garden by the literati not only directly cites from drama plots, but also indicates their theatrical viewing of the garden since the plots were so closely connected to the characteristics of the space in the garden.

Such sensitivity for theatrics in the viewing of the garden not only manifests in Qi's viewing of human activities, but also in the garden itself. Qi had his favourite rock, named "Cold Cloud" 冷雲 (Figure 2-1f) after its nebulous shape and took the rock as his "little friend" 小友, and built "Gazebo for Friendship with the Rock" 友石榭, sitting opposite to the Rock, to celebrate their precious and unusual friendship. (Figure 2-1g) The little friend was the only one that the Master of the Garden could sit opposite and converse,

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<sup>24</sup> The three extracts are respectively from the song by Zhang Dai, Zhang Hong and Wang Siren. Quoted from Cao Shujuan's work, see Cao. *Liubian zhong de shuxie*, 288-89.

despite the many visitors coming to the garden, since the Rock “does not allow himself to become inflamed by the vicissitudes of human affairs and can be said to be my true winter friend.”<sup>25</sup> In addition, Qi built “Retreat for the Return of Clouds” 歸雲寄 (Figure 2-1h) for that, “my garden has a fine rock named ‘Cold Cloud’. I fear that [the ‘clouds’] may ‘unthinkingly leave the peak,’ thus failing to stay true to the Master of the Garden’s delight in the mist and clouds. Therefore, I return it to this place for a sojourn.” 余園有佳石名冷雲。恐其無心而出岫，負主人煙霞之趣，故於寄焉歸之。<sup>26</sup> The Retreat did not stay with the rock but sat close to the entrance of the garden facing the outer lake, a convenient spot to greet the returning clouds. Hence, two more sites were personified and co-starred in the play starred by the Rock and directed by the garden owner. The spatial relations between the three sites are formed by the owner’s theatrical imagination of their interaction with the Rock.

In Qi’s noting of the Retreat, as I have quoted and underlined above, “my” (余,

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<sup>25</sup> Qi, “Yushan zhu”, 349.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 347-48. The site name is alluded to the couplets “the clouds, unthinking, leave the peaks; the birds, tired of flying, know it is time to return” 雲無心以出岫，鳥倦飛而知還 in Tao Qian’s 陶潛 “The Prose-poem of Returning Home” 歸去來兮辭, the famous poem advocating retiring from public life and returning to rustic simplicity.

*Yu*), the possessive case of “I”, and “the Master” (主人, *zhuren*) were mentioned here in the same sentence. It is evident that the “Master” here is not an alternative way to mention himself as the owner of the garden but a third-person objective referring to another role. This caused interesting separation between the master who observes and notes and the “Master” whose interaction with the garden is being observed.

The term *zhuren* was not invented by Qi, nor by his contemporary literati, but was extensively discussed in the garden literature of this period. In *The Crafts of Garden* (園冶 *Yuanye*), seen as the first “general manual on landscape gardening in the Chinese tradition”<sup>27</sup>, Ji Cheng 計成 (1582-1642) makes an impressive claim on what makes a *zhuren*:

Generally, in construction, responsibility is given to a “master” who assembles a team of craftsman; for is there not a proverb that though three-tenths of the work is the workmen’s, seven-tenths is the master’s? By “master” here I do not mean the owner of the property, but the man who is master of his craft.

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<sup>27</sup> Ji Cheng. Alison, Hardie, trans., *The Crafts of Gardens: The Classic Chinese Text on Garden Design* (Yale University Press, 1988): 9. The following quotation and translation is from page 39.

世之興造，專主鳩匠，獨不聞三分匠、七分主人之諺乎？非主人也，能主之人也。

Based on such understanding of *zhuren*, the master of Mountain Yu, in all senses, can be nobody but Qi Biaoja – he was the owner of the property, the sponsor of the construction, the designer and the most insightful user. Actually, Qi Biaoja repeatedly uses this special term “*zhuren*” in ten out of the forty-nine scenic spots, where it initiated the narrative instead of “I”. In Duncan Campbell’s translation of the “Notes”, he capitalizes the first letter of the phrase “the Master of the Garden” to indicate the nuances between this term, and the more commonly used “I” (*Yu* 余 or *Yu* 予) as the subject of the narrative.<sup>28</sup>

In “Relinquished to the Gull's Pond” 讓鷗池 for example, Qi describes how the setting sun illuminates the surface of the Pond in an incredible scene which “the Master calls joy indeed” 主人于此，亦云樂矣， while the gulls “do not see the difference” 不作兩觀. Therefore, “The Master of the Garden dares not lay claim to the pond for himself but rather relinquishes it to the gulls.” 主人故不敢自有其池，而以讓之鷗。<sup>29</sup> (Figure 2-1i) Another example can be found in the

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<sup>28</sup> Duncan, Campbell. “Qi Biaoja's ‘Footnotes to Allegory Mountain’: introduction and translation”, 261.

<sup>29</sup> Qi, “Yushan zhu”, 341.

“Hibiscus Ford” 芙蓉渡. (Figure 2-1j) The “theatrical self” claims that among all the attractions around the ford, the few cold-fragrant hibiscus flowers “most appeals to the Master,” 主人會心處, for they remind him that when the autumnal river brings a sense of loneliness upon him, hibiscus will become, along with the distant peaks and the deep cold pond, his boon companions.<sup>30</sup>

Similar with his theatrical viewing of the young female visitors, in Qi’s writing on his garden, “the Master” was viewed (imagined) as another human spectacle, interacting with the rock, the gulls and the hibiscus, which are personified to be the proper actors. The dreamlike quality of these texts dissimulates the subtle switching of the narrative subject. When noting his garden, Qi Biaoja set himself in the figure of an omniscient spectator who looks on the “Master of the Garden” as part of the spectacle. In Qi’s theatrical spectatorship of the garden, the garden, in such circumstances, functions the same as the stage, providing a place where he could turn his gaze upon his alter-ego, which can also be delineated as his “theatrical self”.

In such scenes, the “Master” as the “theatrical self” of the garden owner showed up in various interactions with other actors or spectacles in the garden.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 360.

The capacity for simultaneous impassioned participation and dispassionate viewing makes him an omniscient observer, with a mode of spectatorship that is both participatory and panoramic. In this sense, the theatrical viewing of the garden enables the Master to cross the line between the creation of a spectacle/illusion and participation in it, allowing movement between the illusion and the conditions of its construction. Thus, he could embrace sensual involvement and detached observation, although playful, at the same time.

In the aforementioned Zhang Dai's commentary on "Notes", He recalled Su Shi's 蘇軾 (1037-1101) experience of viewing the Buddhist frescos drawn by Wang Wei 王維 (701-761) in a temple late at night, his lamplight almost dead. Looking at the frescos closely with "the weak and flickering lamp" 殘燈耿然, Su felt that "the Buddha in the painting seemed to be moving" 踽踽欲動. Zhang noted that it was not the exquisiteness of the painting itself but Su Shi's specific way of viewing it, with the dying lamplight, that really impressed him.<sup>31</sup> The movement of flames and Su himself created a dynamic relation between

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<sup>31</sup> Zhang Dai, "Ba Yushan zhu" 跋寓山注 (Postscript of "Notes on Mountain Yu"), *Langhuan wenji* 琅嬛文集 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1985): 210-11. Su Shi's story was recorded in his poem "Inscription for Wang Wei's fresco in the eastern courtyard of Fengxiang Temple" 題鳳翔東院右丞畫壁, collected in Su Shi, "The Supplement", *Dongpo quanji* 東坡全集.

spectacle and spectatorship— Su himself participated in the spectacle as the moving lighting and indirectly, he saw himself. It was perhaps unintentional, but Su Shi's viewing of the fresco can also be considered as the participatory spectatorship, an appropriate counterpart to Qi's theatrical viewing of his garden, both of which could be "only known to himself" 己獨知 due to their secret participation in the spectacle.

Nowhere in Qi Biaoqia's writing did he use explicit theatrical comparisons, such as "the garden is like a stage", but Qi's theatrical spectatorship of his garden indicated in his writing and Zhang's comments on this prompt us to notice the participatory spectatorship and the emergence of the "theatrical self" in Qi's interaction with his garden. To consider the garden in relation to the stage on a more profound level, I will attempt to investigate the theatricality that emerges on stages related to gardens in the broad context of the late-Ming fascination with theatricals and illusions.

## 2.3 Gardens in the night: Late-Ming moonlit theatricality

### 2.3.1 The nocturnal obscurity for transitions to alternative realms

In Qi Biaoja's garden, the theatrical performances were often played in the night, which was common for private theatrical performances in private venues in late Ming. The well-known playwright, novelist and publisher, Li Yu 李渔 (1610-1670), who was a drama expert engaged with the directing, acting and training of his own troupe, explained the preference for nocturnal performances. He stated that dramas should be performed "under obscurity instead of brightness" 宜晦不宜明 for two reasons:

[Firstly,] the performances do not inform realities. Their exquisiteness lies in obscurity. If dramas are played during daytime, it will be too distinct for the actors to create the illusion with their acting skills. Only half of their voices and facial expressions could be properly perceived, since the acting is largely distracted. Moreover, everyone, whether rich or poor, noble, or low, will have work to do in the daytime. When the play is performed at dusk, both the hosts and the guests are at ease, and free from any anxiety of failing things. Therefore, the ancients enjoyed the night tour with candles.



優孟衣冠，原非實事，妙在隱隱躍躍之間。若於日間搬弄，則太覺分明，演者難施幻巧，十分音容，止作得五分觀聽，以耳目聲音散而不聚故也。且人無論富貴貧賤，日間盡有當行之事，閱之未免妨工。抵暮登場，則主客心安，無妨時失事之慮，古人秉燭夜遊，正為此也。<sup>32</sup>

The first reason considers the lighting environment on stage, and the second refers to the conditions off-stage. For Li Yu, obscurity is necessary for both, especially in private venues, where the demarcation between the stage and the audience could barely be established, due to the limited space and its provisionality. The night offered both natural and social obscurity, which, on the one hand helped the actors to act convincingly and, on the other, helped distance the audience from the disturbances of mundane affairs, both in a perceptual and psychological sense, so that they could become totally immersed in the illusory world. When performances had to be played in the daytime, hosts of the private venues, such as Ruan Dacheng 阮大鍼 (1587-1646), would set up layers of curtains enclosing the venue and lit decorated

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<sup>32</sup> This passage is originally from the session of “Acting and Training” 演習部 in Li Yu’s *Idle feelings in casual expressions* 閒情偶寄. The quotation refers to the modern reproduction in Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji* 李漁全集 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1991): 71.

torches inside.<sup>33</sup> The curtains blocked possible distractions and constructed an isolated realm of obscurity, allowing the scene to function in a similar way to the night.

Li Yu articulates the logical connection between the night and things that “do not inform realities” 原非實事 for that the night provided the opportunity of the transition to another realm. In late Ming, night-time parties in gardens and natural landscape became widely popular. It was interesting that usually the lovers of dramas and theatre were most sensible to the subtle change induced by the nocturnal obscurity. Dramatist Zhang Dafu 張大復 (1554-1630) once had a night-time drink with his friend in a shabby monastery. Walking into the courtyard, he found it quiet, elegant and beautiful, however when he entered it the next day during the daytime, he came to find that the courtyard was nothing more than collection of vessels scattered all about, and crude ground paved with mixed tiles and stones. He suddenly recalled what his poet friend Shao Maoqi 邵茂齊 (1566-1611) had once said: “Moonlight could move the

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<sup>33</sup> Ruan Dacheng 阮大鍼 (1587-1646), emerged as a leading political force in the newly designated resistance capital of Nanjing, was also one of the most renowned owners of private troupes. In 1645 he surrendered to the Manchu. This record is from Jiao Xun 焦循, *Ju shuo* 劇說 (Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1957): 128.

world [elsewhere].” 天上月色，能移世界。<sup>34</sup> Shao used the word “yí” 移，originally meaning “to move”, to describe the magic that moonlight plays on the world, indicating the occurrence of a displacement. Concerning this play, Zhang further noted:

[Under the moonlight,] Rivers, mountains and the earth seem to come from the distant past; dogs' barking and pines' roaring sound as if they come from faraway valleys; the trees and grass are actively growing but seem to leisurely sit and lie; a man under the moonlight will also forget who he is.

河山大地，邈若皇古；犬吠松濤，遠于岩穀；草生木長，閑如坐臥；人在月下，亦嘗忘我之為我也。

The four sentences refer to the occurrence of displacement on different planes—from the present to the past, from the proximal to the distant, from interior activity to exterior tranquillity, and finally, from one's usual self to one's immediate self. “忘我之為我”，literally means “forgetting how I am I”. The differentiation between the first “I” under the moonlight and the second “I” without the moonlight is informed by the action of “forgetting”. In this way, the moonlight's capacity to displace the real world is actualized by the presence

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<sup>34</sup> This story is recorded in Zhang Dafu. *Meihua caotang bitan* 梅花草堂筆談 (Shanghai zazhi gongsi, 1936): 51-52. This line by Shao Maoqi is only mentioned in Zhang's essay.

of an immediate self. The “theatrical self”, as I have observed in Qi’s interaction with his garden, is one of the immediate selves that emerges provisionally in certain circumstances and enables an immediate alienation from everyday life.

A sizable amount of references to nocturnal happenings in Mountain Yu can be found throughout Qi’s diaries, including large banquets with family or friends and small gatherings with close friends or his wife. In the Mid-autumn Festival of 1637, the moon could not be seen, so Qi hung gorgeous lanterns to represent the moon and invited friends to banquets and to write poems to celebrate. On another autumn day, he invited friends to have a night party and enjoy theatrical performances, after which they sat on an open terrace to watch the fireworks. Once in a while, Qi would invite his wife to appreciate the moon and listen to spring water on a boat with him.<sup>35</sup>

Among the Buddhist services held in Mountain Yu, it was Qi’s favourite to arrange lanterns in his garden or lamps on the water surface and along the water bank and he always connected these scenes to the Buddhist realms. In the aforementioned “Terrace of Floating Reflection”, he compares the terrace illuminated by moonlight and surrounded by the lotuses to the Buddha’s seat

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 288, and 293.

in the form of a lotus flower. In his note of the “Water Bright Gallery” 水明廊, the first scenic spot next to the entrance of Mountain *Yu*, Qi describes how the water reflects the moonlight onto the visitors in the gallery, so that “both the Master and guest look as if they have travelled from the ‘Kingdom of Glazed Glass’; their beards and eyebrows seem to drip and their clothes are drenched.” 主與客似從琉璃國來，鬚眉若浣，衣袖皆濕。<sup>36</sup> (Figure 2-1k) The metaphor of the Kingdom of Glazed Glass not only renders the reflection of light on the visitors, but also connects to the Buddhist realm of the pure land. Here, we catch another moment where the Master is seen by the master himself.

John Dardess also observes this from his study of the landscape in Tai-ho County in Jiangxi Province,<sup>37</sup> in which he refers to two accounts of night parties in the 1670s. One was a small boating party on a lake, when the nocturnal landscape inspired the author with an intellectual reading of his pleasant experience. Another example involved a boating excursion at night and during a chance flood, when the members of a party forgot their real-life

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<sup>36</sup> Qi, “Yushan zhu”, 338. The “Kingdom of Glazed Glass” refers to the pure land of the Medicine Buddha, the Vaidūryanirbhāsā.

<sup>37</sup> John W., Dardess. “A Ming Landscape: Settlement, Land Use, Labor, and Estheticism in T'ai-Ho County, Kiangsi.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 49, no. 2 (1989): 362-63.

anxieties when they contemplated their reflections in the calm, moonlit floodwater.

In the end of his investigation, Dardess points out the crucial change in landscape appreciation in late-Ming: “From the early Ming discovery of beauty and value in the real world of nature and life on the land, one ends in the late Ming and early Qing determination to ignore or avoid that world, with the creation of toy fantasies in artificial lakes and landscaped gardens, and a preference for moonlit surrealisms to the daylight world of settlement, work, and subsistence.”<sup>38</sup> Qi Biaoja’s garden life, as recorded in his diaries, offers a perfect footnote to this argument. Compared with the daytime he spent in Mountain *Yu*, when he was occupied with daily affairs, such as dealing with the family issues, supervising the garden construction, completing the accounts for the project, and cultivating the vegetation, etc., the night-time activities offered an opportunity to embrace sensual pleasures and escape from mundane affairs.

Dardess’s observation of late-Ming perception of landscape is echoed by Craig Clunas in his analysis of the commodification of gardens and the individual

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 363.

elements in gardens in the late-Ming period. From the social and commercial aspect, setting visual spectacles, especially nocturnal scenes in gardens are undoubtedly a way to show off taste and wealth, but the private aspect of these scenes should also be noted. For the garden owner, the nocturnal scenes and activities in the garden “moved” the world temporarily into alternative realms and opened up space for the “theatrical self” to be enacted. The intention to manipulate and celebrate those special moments not only reveals the literati’s affection for dramatic renderings of the landscape, but also speaks to a burgeoning trend in the late-Ming period. It was no longer a case of internal “feelings” (情, *qing*) meeting with the external “landscape” (景, *jing*), which had been the essential basis of Chinese landscape aesthetics,<sup>39</sup> but rather, the external world was itself manipulated to stimulate the senses and the mind. The popularity of artificial intervention in the landscape, and the deliberate cultivation of ways to view and feel it, suggested that such arrangements privileged natural beauty itself; as Dardess observes, “nature fell to the edges of consciousness”.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> For a chronicle study on this aesthetics tradition and its specific influence on landscape and gardens, see Hui Zou, “*Jing* (景): A Phenomenological Reflection on Chinese Landscape and *Qing* (情)”, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 35.2 (2008):353-68.

<sup>40</sup> Dardess, “A Ming Landscape”, 357.

### 2.3.2 Manipulation of temporal stages and celebration of temporality

A memory of Zhang Dai shows us how the human manipulation of theatrics surpassed the natural beauty and made a spectacle in the landscape. On the day after the Mid-Autumn festival, in the year 1629, Zhang Dai impulsively stopped his boat at the celebrated Gold Mountain Monastery. Firstly, he was attracted by the poetic night scene on the river and in the monastery.

The moonlight entered the water as if spilled from a bag, being swallowed and spit out by the billows on the river. The air with dew sucked in the moonlight so that the sky grew white. I was surprised and delighted and steered the boat so that we passed Jinshan temple. It was already past the second drum roll of the night watch. Coming to the Dragon King's chamber, we entered the great hall. Everything was as still as though it had been lacquered. Moonlight filtered through the trees, leaving sparse patches of moonlight on the ground that looked like leftover snow.

倒囊入水，江濤吞吐，露氣吸之，暎天為白。余大驚喜。移舟過金山寺，已二鼓矣。經龍王堂，入大殿，皆漆靜。林下漏月光，疏疏如殘雪。

And then, on a whim, he called his servants to bring the theatrical props, and lit up the great hall with many lanterns, and performed two boisterous dramas.



Consequently:

The cymbals and drums made a great noise, and everyone in the temple got up to watch. There was an old monk who rubbed his eyes with the back of his hands, his mouth open, sneezes and laughs issuing from his mouth all at once. He slowly fixed his gaze, staring at us wondering from whence we had come, when we had arrived, and for what purpose, but daring not to ask anything. When the play was over, it was almost dawn, and we untied the boat and crossed the river. The monks of the mountain went as far as the foot of the mountain, their eyes following us for a long time. They did not know whether we were men, ghouls, or ghosts.

鑼鼓喧闐，一寺人皆起看。有老僧以手背採眼翳，翕然張口，呵欠與笑嚏俱至。徐定睛，視為何許人，以何事何時至，皆不敢問。劇完，將曙，解纜過江。山僧至山腳，目送久之，不知是人、是怪、是鬼。<sup>41</sup>

Zhang's story portrays a special realm under moonlight in a monastery hall, where atypical performances were enacted on an atypical stage, displacing the shocked audience from their sense of reality. Late-Ming literati valued the nocturnal obscurity for its convenience of constructing illusions. By making the

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 15. My translation of this passage is based on Vlopp, Sophie. *Worldly Stage: theatricality in seventeenth-century China*. (Harvard University Asia Centre, 2011): 75-76.

monastery hall and the garden a temporal stage, Qi Biaoja and Zhang Dai took a further step from the magic of moonlight and initially pursued the manipulation of theatrics stages and illusions in the night. In Sophie Volpp's research on the late-Ming theatrical sensibility, she refers to this story to elaborate the particularity of provisional stages. The temporal boundaries of such stages define the ontological realm of a stage, instead of the usual spatial boundaries, and led to the lack of fixed distance between the spectator and spectacle. The hall was turned into a provisional theatre under the dim moonlight, and it embraced both the stage and the audience without physically dividing them.<sup>42</sup>

Another interesting observation of this story is that, as the producer of such a spectacle, Zhang manipulated the theatrical scenes, not only in a sense that he had the performances on, but also that, with great interest, he spectated and interpreted how the monks reacted to the performances, thus made himself somewhat out of the illusions stimulated by himself. It is the same with Qi Biaoja's theatrical viewing of his garden when the various actors and sometimes the theatrical "Master" were on the stage while the master himself

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<sup>42</sup> Volpp. *Worldly stage*, 77.

stayed in front of the stage as the spectator and behind the stage as the director. The tension between enchantment and disenchantment, illusion and disillusion, has attracted abundant scholarship in the study of seventeenth-century fiction, drama and acting culture in China. In Lee Wai-yee's reading of this passage, she regards the nocturnal performance manipulated by Zhang as typifying "the late-Ming fascination with illusion and the sheer delight in its manipulation,"<sup>43</sup> since it not only celebrates the human capacity and freedom to produce illusions, but also the consciousness of the narrow, shifting margin between being within and being outside of illusions. In this case, the natural night scenery in the first extract presented a tranquillity that contrasted with the lively nocturnal activities aroused by Zhang's immediate desire and manipulation. His text clearly reveals how the transition was created under his manipulation and offers an example of the aspect of theatricals that extends what Dardess observes as the changing perception of landscape in late-Ming; the pursuit of nocturnal enjoyments, artificial engagements and the sense of displacement from reality.

In Dardess's study, he further attributes the changing perceptions of landscape

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<sup>43</sup> Wai-yee, Lee. "The Late-Ming Moment", in *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993): 47.

to changing social pressures of the time. After the more optimistic and civilised period of the sixteenth century, the literati's world was replaced by "a more limited, more problematical, and more distasteful one" in the seventeenth century.<sup>44</sup> In his letter to the Confucian philosopher Tao Shiling 陶奭齡 (1571-1640) in 1637, Qi Biaoja admitted that the current problems of the nation were "neither the foreign invasion [of the Manchus] nor the domestic bandits [in the peasants rebellion]", 不在外夷內寇,<sup>45</sup> indicating the existing, but hidden, danger inside the nation. Although he did not mention specific concerns about the political and social situation in the "Notes", he revealed his profound understanding of the transience and temporality of the human world in the section entitled "Studio for reading the *Book of Changes*" 讀易居. (Figure 2-1m) The studio sits by the bank of the inner lake in the garden:

When along the bank the lamps are lit, their inverted reflections dance enticingly upon the surface of the water, and when the sound of strings and flutes is echoed by the surface of the pond like billows of snow swirled by wind. It is at times such as this that I feel the scene to have been Heaven-sent.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 363.

<sup>45</sup> Qi, *Qi Biaoja riji*, 275.

及於匣岸燃燈，倒影相媚，絲竹之響，卷雪回波，覺此景恍來天上。<sup>46</sup>

This studio was the place where Qi spent his days studying the *Book of Changes* 易經 when he was wearied of the mundane affairs, allowing him to gain a sense of release from the vexations of life. Following the description above, Qi further claimed that, “Even Heaven and Earth cannot determine its fortune of completion or devastation.” 成毀之數，天地不免。 This comment conveys how he had glimpsed subtle insights into the nature of transience, and even the eventual destruction of his garden, so that he chose to “take joy in those pleasures in this present life instead of the future of the garden.” 所樂在此不在彼。 The juxtaposition of affection for beautiful scenes with the insightful awareness that nothing lasts long, vividly portrays the dilemma Qi and his contemporaries faced in the late-Ming world.

The manipulation of illusion celebrates the temporality of things, which helps the literati to evade the reality by immersing themselves in illusions, and further

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<sup>46</sup> Qi, “Yushan zhu”, 339. The *Book of Changes* is an ancient Chinese divination text and among the oldest of the Chinese classics. With more than two and a half millennia’s worth of commentary and interpretation, the book is an influential text providing inspiration to religion, philosophy, literature, and art. For the connections between Qi’s interest in this book and his writing of “Notes”, see Cao, *Liubian zhong de shuxie*, 157-59.

boosts their acknowledgement of the transient nature of all things. Such manipulation prepares themselves for loss, which might be taken as a wise strategy for such a world.

### 2.3.3 Reviewing the role of Master and the name Yu

*Yu*, originally means “to lodge, to reside”, and was a synonym of *ji* 寄<sup>47</sup>. Decoding and interpreting *yu* is an important theme in the literature on Mountain Yu among all the authors. Recounting his visit to Mountain Yu, Wang Siren wrote, “why is the garden named Yu? Qi said, to lodge. The stars lodge in the sky, the mountains and rivers lodge on the earth; the sky and the earth lodge in *qi* (breath); for human beings, their souls lodge in their mind-hearts, and their mind-hearts lodge in their body. They lodge wherever they go.” 園以寓名何? 曰: 寓之乎爾。星斗之寓在天, 山川之寓在地, 而天地之寓在氣, 在人則神寓於心也, 心寓於身也。無往而非寓也。<sup>48</sup> Wang Shimei 王士美 also echoed the theme of “*yu*” stating that, “on the one hand, a long stay could not be called ‘lodging’; on the other hand, even a long stay is still ‘lodging’.” 一則

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<sup>47</sup> The explanation is based on the 2nd-century dictionary *Origin of Chinese Characters* 說文解字.

<sup>48</sup> Wang Siren, “You Yushan ji” 遊寓山記 (Account of visiting Mountain Yu), *Chorography of Mountain Yu*. Quoted from the secondary source, see Zhao, *Yushan zhu yanjiu*, 296.

見久留可不稱寓，一則見久留終亦是寓。<sup>49</sup> From their interpretation, we can find that Qi Biaoja and his friends embraced the temporality of inevitable change and hence the “lodging” of everything. Regardless of substantially existent something is, or how long it may stay, they came to view its essential condition to be one of lodging.

As the owner, Qi had accepted his temporal ownership of his garden and prepared himself for the foreseeable loss. Following this logic, Qi even negated his identity as the master of the garden by stating that, “who lodges is the guest and cannot be the master, so I am also a guest as you are.” 寓則客而安得主，吾與若皆客也。<sup>50</sup> The dialectical view of the master and the guest guides us back to the juxtaposition of “I” and “Master of the Garden” in Qi’s “Notes”, when the immediate alienation of the “theatrical self” emerges. The theatricality is naturally interweaved into his perception of the garden, since at times he felt himself to be just one guest of the garden among many, especially when he perceived something theatrical and posited himself in the bivalent role of “spectacle-spectator”.

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<sup>49</sup> Wang Shimei’s annotation on Zhang Dai, “Yushan ming” (寓山銘, Inscriptions on Mountain *Yu*). Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Chen Qiyuan 陳起元, “Yushan wen” 寓山問 (Inquiring about Mountain *Yu*). Ibid.

In this sense, the idea of “lodging” embodies the unconfined and unstable attachment of things to the world they lodge in, and the dynamic possibility of changes. Based on this idea, Qi further reflected on dreams and wakefulness as the realms where the garden lodges and the relations between them:

As for where my mountain lodges: it is lodged in wakefulness, but also lodged in dreams. If one can understand that both dreams and wakefulness are but states one lodges in, how is one to know that dreams are not wakefulness, or wakefulness not dreams?

吾山之寓，寓於覺，亦寓於夢。能解夢覺皆寓，安知夢非覺，覺非夢也。<sup>51</sup>

When staging the illusions and dreams, the garden also became part of them. The volatile boundary between dreams and wakefulness, the real and the illusory, the master and the guest, the spectator and spectacle lent Qi the capacity to gain insight into with the illusory nature of all things. In this sense, the garden became a symbol of the world for Qi Biaoqia to reflect on the multiple dualisms, all of which led to the relationship between an individual and the world he lives.

The idea of “lodging” brings us back to “temporality”, which had been stressed

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<sup>51</sup> Qi, “Yushan zhu”, 387.



by Qi Biaoja in his reflection on the fragile substances of the garden and was also seen in those many occasions where the scenarios inviting theatricals “shifted” the garden into a temporal stage and gave rise to the play of phantasms of the master. John Minford notices the magic of transition of the private gardens after examining sizable fictions which take place in the setting of gardens in early Qing<sup>52</sup>. He claims that, “The garden in its various forms is again a halfway house. It is here that characters encounter the strange, the supernatural, the erotic. Within the house normality prevails, but once out in the open space, down a walkway or an overgrown temple cloister, and the transition can all too easily be made.”<sup>53</sup> The transition here refers to the unfolding of theatrical/fictional illusions, where the quotidian familiarity of the house gives way to the theatrical garden.

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<sup>52</sup> The scholarship on gardens in Chinese dramas and fictions during late-Ming and early-Qing is substantial, see Mary, Scott, “The Image of the Garden in Jin Ping Mei and Hongloulou”, *CLEAR*, 8 (1986); Xiao Chi. *The Chinese garden as lyric enclave: A generic study of the story of the stone*. No. 93. University of Michigan Centre for Chinese, 2001; Plaks, Andrew H. *Archetype and Allegory in the Dream of the Red Chamber*. Princeton University Press, 2015; Jin, Lei. “Erotic Enclaves and Contested Beds: Gardens in Pu Songling’s Chuanqi Tales.” *ASIANetwork Exchange: A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts* 22, no. 1 (2015): 23-37.

<sup>53</sup> John, Minford. “The Chinese garden: death of a symbol.” *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 18, no. 3 (1998): 260.

## 2.4 i Biaoja's finale: theatricals between life and death

Now it is time that we fix our sights again on Qi Biaoja's suicide. Similar to the monastery hall in Zhang's story, Qi's garden also became a provisional stage when theatrical schemes were put on by the master and his "theatrical self" emerged. The elaborated record by Wang Siren shown at the beginning of this chapter portrayed a manipulated finale, which took the garden as a provisional stage and ended at dawn when the sunlight came out. I am now going to retell this story in three scenes: before nightfall, after nightfall and after midnight.

### 2.4.1 Scene One: Obsession and confession

In the afternoon of his last day, Qi biaoja came to Mountain Yu with his son. In the Hall of Four Failures, Qi told his son that although he did not fail in his familial duties, he was however to be blamed for being somewhat too addicted to gardens and the construction of them.<sup>54</sup> Qi told his son to turn the garden into a Buddhist temple after he died.

In both the "Notes" and his diary, Qi mentioned a letter from his friend Wang

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<sup>54</sup> Wang, "Qi Zhongmingong nianpu", 890.

Jinru 王金如, written after his visit to the garden. Wang posited four failures of Qi's obsession with his garden – the first three referred to Qi: he “failed the ruler” 負君 by turning away from service to the state, “failed his father” 負親 by falling short of the latter's example,<sup>55</sup> “failed himself” 負己 by not making proper use of his talents and integrity. The fourth failure was posited on Wang himself, for he “failed his friend [Qi]” 負友 by neglecting to remonstrate with him in time. Qi accepted Wang's criticism as more than justified, and further acknowledged that the person who, so to speak, “failed his friend”, should be Qi himself since he decided not to mend his way. Hence, Qi named the hall “Four Failures” to mark how he had exacerbated his failure.<sup>56</sup> It was supposed to be a token of the ultimate obsession of garden building, yet the remorse Qi professes did not seem to run deep, for he had numerous companions who endorsed the pleasure of wealth and tipped him away from Wang's stern judgement.

Ni Yuanlu 倪元璐 (1594-1644) was one of the perfect counterparts of Qi

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<sup>55</sup> Qi's father, Qi Chenghan 祁承燦 (1565-1628), was renowned as a bibliophile and garden designer, and was the important sponsor of the local Yunmen Monastery. His library was one of the four renowned private libraries in the Lower Yangzi region in late-Ming.

<sup>56</sup> Qi, *Qi Biaojia riji*, 256.

Biaojia, who was indeed a good friend of his. Both of them were criticized for their obsession with gardens, and both of them chose to commit suicide for the nation upon the fall of Ming, and subsequently earned glowing reports in history. Ni Yuanlu held the position of Minister of Revenue in the Ming government and was an influential poet, calligrapher and painter. He used to paint the walls in his garden with the most precious and expensive ink that was specifically for painting. Even the most skilful craftsmen were amazed by the exquisiteness of his skill. Ni owned several gardens. The most prestigious one is the “Belvedere Dressed in Clouds” 衣雲閣, a three-storey belvedere, facing Mountain Qinwang 秦望山, with thousands of bamboos planted on the third floor. Ni was quite proud of his belvedere, and he boasted of it to Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610-1695), one of the prominent Neo-Confucian masters in late-Ming, when Huang came to visit: “Bamboos normally rely on water to grow, but I managed to let them grow at the level of over thirty meters above the ground. How do you think of it?”

Although it is difficult to analyse the shady impact their obsession of gardens had on their political careers and reputations, we could find clues in writing from other literati. Qi Biaojia’s biography shows that in the Southern Ming court, he was once accused by his political opponents of constructing his garden with

“the flesh and blood of the Wu and Min region” 三吳八閩膏血.<sup>57</sup> In Ni’s case, Huang Zongxi recorded his visit to the Belvedere in his memoir of the renowned figures during the Ming-Qing transition, but he did not answer Ni’s question. In the commentary, he lamented that Ni Yuanlu’s obsession with gardens was “the blind spot of a man with great understanding.”通人之弊.<sup>58</sup>

The concept of obsession (癖 *pi*), refers to “a pathological fondness of something 嗜好之病”, according to the definition from a late-Ming dictionary *Mastery of Correct Characters* (正字通 *Zhengzi tong*).<sup>59</sup> In this period when the culture of obsession was highly developed, dialectical opinions on different forms of obsessions had been recognized and differentiated. For example, the official-scholar Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛 (1567-1624) cautioned his contemporaries that any preference, if sufficiently one-sided and extreme,

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<sup>57</sup> Dong Yang 董昉, “Yishi” (遺事, the Memoir), *Qi Biaojia ji* (Zhonghua shuju, 1960): 251. Wu refers to a region in China centred on Lake Tai in the south of the Yangzi River, and Min refers to the coastal region to the south of Wu. During 1623-1635, when Qi was serving the court, he basically worked in the Min and Wu region.

<sup>58</sup> Huang Zongxi. *Huang Lizhou wenji* 黃梨洲文集. Edited by Chen Naiqian 陳乃乾. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959): 343. Huang, Ni and Qi were all disciples of the Neo-Confucius master Liu Zongzhou.

<sup>59</sup> Zhang Zilie 張自烈, *Zhengzi tong*, vol. 5, 24a. This popular dictionary in late Ming and early Qing includes twelve volumes with a collection of 33,549 characters.

would become “a form of illness”.<sup>60</sup> The most well-known embellishment of *pi* must come from Zhang Dai in his comments on Qi Biaoqia’s brother Qi Zhixiang’s 祁止祥 obsession with theatrical performance when he claims that, “one cannot befriend a man without obsessions, for he lacks deep emotion; nor can one befriend a man without a flaw, for he is without any sense of authenticity,” 人無癖不可與交，以其無深情也；人無疵不可與交，以其無真氣。<sup>61</sup>

The break between aesthetic obsession and moral principles was clearly seen in official-scholars, such as Qi Biaoqia and Ni Yuanlu. A good official does not necessarily live poor, behave rigidly, or repress his desires. Instead, obsession had become an important component of all aspects of late-Ming culture, and was, according to many notable figures of the period, something that a gentleman could not be without, even if the obsession involved spending money and using up resources.<sup>62</sup> In this sense, their obsession with the sensuous pleasures of literati culture should not necessarily be considered as

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<sup>60</sup> Xie Zhaozhe, *Wu zazu* 五杂俎 (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001): 145.

<sup>61</sup> Zhang Dai, “Qi Zhixiang pi” 祁止祥癖 (Qi Zhixiang’s Obsessions), *Tao’an mengyi*, 55.

<sup>62</sup> Zhao Yuan 趙園, *Xiangxiang yu xushu* 想象與敘述 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2009): 58.

moral flaws.

Compared with his brother Zhixiang and his friend Zhang Dai, who saw obsession as a virtue and correlated obsession with emotion and authenticity, Qi understood his own obsession as an illness, when he confessed in the preface of the “Notes”, “I again felt sick and recovered; and after recovering, I again fell sick. This then is an account of my crazy obsession when creating my garden,” 予亦病而愈，愈而複病，此開園之癡癖也。<sup>63</sup> The sense of guilt had been with him since the start of the construction of the garden in 1635, as he confessed that, “what makes me happy is precisely what puts me to shame” 予之所以為快者，正予之所以為愧者也。<sup>64</sup> In the preface of the diary of 1639, Qi Biaoqia wrote, “one’s guilt is valuable if one can repent; one’s repentance is valuable if one can amend. Feeling guilty without any repentance, repenting without any amendment, is truly giving up on one’s self,” 所貴乎愧者，以其能悔也。所貴乎悔者，以其能改也。愧而不悔，悔而不改，直為自棄而已矣!<sup>65</sup> The expression of “giving-up” here can be read in a double sense. Qi speaks out

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<sup>63</sup> Qi, “Yushan zhu”, 337.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted from Qi’s preface to his diary of 1635. See Qi, *Qi Biaoqia riji*, 148.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 367.

directly about his disappointment with himself, and by doing this, he attempted to release himself from the battle between obsession and confession, although he hardly succeeded. His obsessive construction seems irrational and paradoxical, when considered in parallel with his awareness of the fragility of reality and his insistence on construction at the same time. This irrationality is further magnified when viewed in the context of the great catastrophe the nation was going through.

#### **2.4.2 Scene Two: Emergence of the “theatrical self” after nightfall**

In his talk with his nephew Yiyuan after dinner in the Flask Hideaway 瓶隱, Qi Biaoja discussed the history of ancient heroes and loyal subjects at length, and asked Yiyuan not to stop him from killing himself so he could fulfil his desire to be a loyalist. At the end of the first scene of his finale, he asked all his family and servants to rest, leaving only his friend Shanren to remain in his company. Then night fell.

Qi walked to the corridor, and it was dim. Looking at the South Mountain, he smiled and said, “Mountains and rivers, as well as human beings, are all illusions; never do mountains and rivers change, while quickly another lifetime passed.” Entering the room, Qi pointed to the zither scores and said,



“These are all traces of the past!” Suddenly he said to Shanren, smiling, “..... If I decide to sacrifice my life for our nation, would you help me with that?” At the same time, he demonstrated the gesture of hanging himself with his hands. Shanren declined uneasily. Qi laughed and said, “I knew you dare not!” Then he sat with his eyes closed for a good while, and then opened his eyes and said, “Is it really difficult to die? If it is just like this, I shall not hesitate. It is almost midnight now, I need to finish a letter before sleep. You could go to rest now.” Qi then went to the Flask Hideaway.

先生步廊下，時光微明，先生望南山笑曰：“山川人物，皆屬幻影。山川無改，而人生則倏忽一世矣。”入室中，指點琴書，曰：“此皆故跡也！”忽笑謂山人曰：“.....日後吾欲殉節，子能為我一助乎？”因以手作投繯勢示之。山人踴躍謝不敢，先生笑曰：“固知子不能耳！”遂跌坐一榻，良久開目曰：“死果難耶？如此去即去矣。夜將過半，吾再作一書即復，子可歸臥。”先生仍至瓶隱。<sup>66</sup>

When Qi looked to the distant mountains illuminated by the dim moonlight and compared his existence as a human being with the eternal “mountains and rivers”, he was acknowledging the transience of life. When he saw the zither scores as “traces of the past”, he was pretending to be a posthumous soul witnessing his own death and his remains. When he fictively hung himself or

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<sup>66</sup> Wang, “Qi Zhongmingong nianpu”, 891.

sat with eyes closed, he was attempting to feel what it was like to die and persuade himself that dying was not so difficult. With these gestures and speech, he repetitiously immersed himself in scenarios where he was dying or already dead, crossing the boundary between life and death again and again, and consequently, obfuscating their demarcation.

A certain theatrical role emerged in this scene and allowed Qi Biaoja to let his strategy of making everything equally illusory manifest in the face of death, so as to imagine and rehearse his forthcoming death, suspending the Confucian obligations and loyalty in his mind. This part of the role play provided important supplement to the typical Confucian official and martyr in the first scene, who was prepared and determined to commit a principled suicide.

After Zhu Shanren went to sleep, Qi Biaoja was alone, with no more human beings to witness from then on.

After a while, Shanren was startled from his dream by the sound of a door opening. He went to the ancestral temple only to find the front door open and a candle standing behind the door. In front of the statues of the ancestors, there were three burning incense sticks and a piece of paper. Shanren held the candle to the letter immediately, and realized it was Qi's Farewell to the Ancestry Letter. He then went to the Pitcher Hideaway and again found its

door open. On the table there was one big envelop and three smaller ones.

He whined bitterly and cried, "Unexpectedly Mr. Qi killed himself for our nation tonight!"

頃之，山人倦夢中聞啟戶聲，驚起。見祠前門啟，一燭置門後。回首見像前熱香三柱，紙一幅，亟移炷視之，乃告別祖宗文也。再入瓶隱，門洞開，桌上置大封一、小封三。山人遽然號慟曰：“不意先生今夕即殉節也！”<sup>67</sup>

Although no witness was present, the open door, the letter, the burning of incense, and the candle, all contributed to marking Qi's movements. Although lifeless and still, they captured Qi's presence, where the theatricality is spatially registered. Through Shanren's revisiting of the traces left by Qi's movements, we are brought to the scene where he came in with the candle, put it behind the door, left the letter, lit the incense sticks and then left the temple alone in darkness.

A candle or a lamp was always necessary for walking at night, and so provided a form of tracing the movement of its holder. Qi, however, chose to leave his

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

candle behind and set off for a lonely and dark journey.<sup>68</sup> Perhaps he did not want the candlelight to reveal the final spot of his suicide. Perhaps he did not want it to illuminate the garden in fear that it would weaken his will to die. Or indeed, perhaps he saw the candle as a symbol of his life force and presence, and thus, left it with his ancestors as part of his pre-death rituals.

The detailed account of Qi's actions and his traces, reveals a sentimental "theatrical self", existing alongside the surface role of his sensitivity to Confucian obligations, which manifested in his repeated expressions of loyalty in his diaries, letters and final words. Owing to the presence of the "theatrical self", we are given another perspective from which to understand the dilemma and decision of a martyr in the dramatic situation of the Ming-Qing transition.

Late-Ming literati articulated the idea that the world is a theatre and that life itself is no more than a play, because theatre could be a means of interpreting

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<sup>68</sup> If we refer to Huang Zongxi's account of Qi Biao's death, Qi had "a candle separated from the candle in his ancestral temple to light up the waterside"分廟中之燭，出照水濱， which may lead to another interpretation of his manipulation. See Huang Zongxi, *Huang Zongxi quanji* 黃宗羲全集 (Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2005), vol. 2: 95.

almost any aspect of life.<sup>69</sup> This metaphor was widely used by the literati for issues of self-representation in an age that witnessed the corruption of officialdom, military setbacks and other calamities which ultimately lead to the decline of the dynasty. In this process, Buddhist thoughts were also evolving on the theatrical nature of the human world. Zhida 智達<sup>70</sup> was a Buddhist monk active in Hangzhou during the late seventeenth century, and was also a dramatist. His work *Mirror of the Return to the Origin* (歸元鏡, *Gui Yuan jing*) provides us with the opportunity to examine a Chinese monastic's engagement with playwriting and his opinions on theatre. Comparing the vicissitudes of human life to the plots of a play, and the human world to a stage, Zhida states that "theatre is the Way [towards enlightenment]" 戲劇即道.<sup>71</sup> Thus, if one realizes the impermanence of human life and body by attending a play, then

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<sup>69</sup> The association of drama and human life was prevailing in seventeenth-century China, not only in dramas, fictions, but also other literary works. See Yingzhi, Zhao. *Realm of Shadows and Dreams: Theatrical and Fictional Lyricism in Early Qing Literature*, Ph. D Thesis, 116-120. Zhao has several examples in early-Qing literature to develop her argument on the influence of theatrical culture on the metaphor of life and its interpretation.

<sup>70</sup> Thus far, scholars have found no record of Zhida outside of the *Guiyuan jing*. For contemporary studies on *Guiyuan jing*, see Mengxiao, Wang. "Building a Pure Land Lineage: A Study of Zhida's Play *Guiyuan jing* and a Translation of its Three Paratexts." *Journal of Chinese Buddhist Studies* 33 (2020): 3, fn. 3.

<sup>71</sup> Zhida, *Guiyuan jing*, 1a.

this experience can help lead to enlightenment. The Buddhist master, Juelang Daosheng 覺浪道盛 (1592-1659), summarized the same idea as “coming out of death and entering life, playing in both the mundane and sacred realms” 出死入生，遊戲凡聖。<sup>72</sup> Those who truly understand the theatrical nature of life can achieve Buddhist enlightenment, as well as freely transcending the limits of life and death.

Qi's significant counterpart Ni Yuanlu, who also happened to be fascinated by Buddhist thoughts, likewise displayed some theatricality in the garden in his finale. Before Ming's fall, Huang Daozhou 黃道周 (1585-1646) visited Ni's garden, finding that Ni had “decorated [his garden] with brocaded draperies and hung lamps to illuminate everywhere” 施以錦帷，張燈四照 to greet him. However, Huang was unhappy because the nation had been going through such distress that no banquets or entertainment would be appropriated at this moment, while Ni said laughing, “this is to bid farewell to you.” Soon after that,

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<sup>72</sup> Juelang, *Tianjie juefang chanshi quanlu* (界覺浪禪師全錄, vol. 25: 24-25. Buddhist monks using the metaphor of life as a play to enlighten listeners has appeared since the Song Dynasty and is developed in late Ming, under the reinvention of Chan Buddhism and the prosperity of dramas. See Liao Zhaoheng 廖肇亨. “Chanmen shuoxi: yige fojiao wenhuashi guandian de changshi” (Discoursing dramas with Buddhist thoughts: an attempt from the perspective of Buddhism cultural history 禪門說戲: 一個佛教文化史觀點的嘗試). *Hanxue yanjiu* 漢學研究, 17 (1999): 277.

Ni recruited troops with his family fortunes and headed north to Beijing. After the emperor hanged himself, Ni also hanged himself in his home, facing the south to confess his fault at not being able to protect the country and the emperor.<sup>73</sup> Another example of pre-death carnival could be that of the poet Xia Yunyi 夏允彝 (1596-1645), who also had a sumptuous feast before his suicide in the ninth month of 1645. Xia spent all his savings to prepare opulent food and wine, and invited people from a wide range of social status to the feast. When the guests were drinking, laughing, singing and playing games, Xia stood up, pretending to go to the bathroom, while instead going straight to drown himself in the nearby river.<sup>74</sup>

Through the manipulation of festive scenes before their suicides, Ni and Xia managed to render their last moments of life with theatricality, even if they themselves were clear about the underlying intention of the manipulation. Their stories were examples of highlighted moments of performativity before a

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<sup>73</sup> Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊, *Jingzhiju shihua* 靜志居詩話, vol. 12 (Hangzhou: Fuli shanfang 扶荔山房, 1819): 14b-15a. Huang Daozhou is a calligrapher, scholar and official. In his late years, he volunteered to fight against the new regime. He was captured and killed by the Manchu army for his refusal to surrender.

<sup>74</sup> Chen Zhenhuo 陳貞慧, *Shanyang lu* 山陽錄, reprinted by Taipei: Xin wenfeng chuban gongsi, 1988): 707.

contemplated and principled death, which could be seen as practicing the Buddhist thoughts of regarding dramas as the Way to enlightenment, to finally “playing in both mundane and sacred realms.” In this sense, the association between life and play was more than the literary rhetoric to convey conceptual acknowledgement of the nature of both but was truly instructive in the practice of transcending suffering and death.

### **2.4.3 Scene Three: Theatricality of the martyr’s body**

Yiyuan (Qi’s nephew) called up dozens of fishing boats to look for Qi’s body in the deep water, but failed. After a while, the east began to brighten and revealed inches of his square kerchief at the waterside around the stone steps in front of the Belvedere of Plums. When they hurried over, they found Qi sitting just under the water’s surface in a composed posture, with his hands down and his feet together. His forehead was submerged, while his hat and hair remained orderly. His face appeared smiling.



奕遠聞信，急呼漁舟數十，求之深水，不得。有頃，東方漸啟，見梅花閣前石梯水際，露角巾數寸，急就視。先生正衿垂手斂足而坐，水終過額，冠履儼然，鬚髯无丝毫紛亂，面有笑容。<sup>75</sup>

Qi's death was finally revealed. He did not simply throw himself into the water but drowned himself sitting up straight on the stone steps by the lake.<sup>76</sup> (Figure 2-1n) The finale of Qi Biao's life came to pass. Certainly, there are many complex meanings indicated by Qi's gesture of death, and multiple perspectives from which to examine it.

If we continue our thinking from the position of Qi's repentance, we could relate his death to the ritual of repentance from the "Jishan School" 蕺山學派, an important branch of Neo-Confucianism founded by Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周 (1578-1645)<sup>77</sup>, Qi Biao's teacher. Liu takes "repentance" as the one of the

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<sup>75</sup> Wang, "Qi Zhongmingong nianpu", 892.

<sup>76</sup> The spot of Qi's death has several versions in the large number of records on his death. Some of these probable spots are never mentioned in the writing on the garden, therefore impossible to locate. There are also some spots that can be traced, for example, the Willow Causeway 柳陌, which matches the saying that Qi died on the stone steps by the lake.

<sup>77</sup> Liu Zongzhou is considered the last master of Neo-Confucianism. He died from self-imposed starvation three days after Qi's death, at the age of sixty-eight. Qi Biao started starving after him but later decided to choose another way.

essential notions in Neo-Confucianism and invents “quiet sitting” as a way of meditating to “introspect and correct one’s faults” 訟過. A practitioner prepares a stick of incense and a basin of water. He bows and then sits upright, with his legs crossed, his hands touching each other, and his breath held.<sup>78</sup> Qi’s gesture of death could be seen to enact such a repentance ritual, echoing his confession to his son about his addiction to gardens earlier that afternoon.

The special gesture of Qi Biaoja’s suicide can also be seen as being similar to that of Gao Panlong 高攀龍 (1562-1626), a leading member of the Donglin Movement, who committed suicide as a result of conflicts between his faction and the eunuch leader Wei Zhongxian 魏忠賢 (1568-1627).<sup>79</sup> When Gao was found dead, the water submerged only the lower part of his body; he sat still, facing the north, with his hands next to his heart, and without any water inside his mouth.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Liu Zongzhou. *Liu Zongzhou quan ji* 劉宗周全集, vol. 2: 18-19.

<sup>79</sup> The Donglin movement 東林黨 was an ideological and philosophical movement of the late-Ming period and early Qing dynasties. The motivation for restoring the Academy was concern about the state of the bureaucracy and its inability to bring about improvement, but it later became a centre of dissent for public affairs in the late-Ming and early Qing periods. Their opposition of the eunuch Wei Zhongxian led to the closure of the Donglin Academy and the death of its cofounders.

<sup>80</sup> Wen Bing 文秉, *Xian ba zhi shi* 先撥志始, vol. 2 (Zhihai 指海叢書 Collection): 24b.

Gao was a major exponent of Neo-Confucianism in the late-Ming period whose main advocacy included the practice of “quiet sitting” as a form of self-cultivation. This practice was approved and encouraged by the Neo-Confucianism masters in Northern Song as a mode of Confucian contemplation conducive to attaining sagehood. In a general way, Buddhist ideals of nonattachment and peace of mind, along with meditative practices, exerted a strong attraction on Neo-Confucians of both Song and Ming traditions. Gao Panlong must have benefitted from the Buddhist thoughts and practices during his many visits to Buddhist monasteries to practice “quiet sitting”. In contrast to Liu Zongzhou’s “quiet sitting” of repentance, Buddhist meditation focused on forgetting the world and abandoning one’s self. After a long period of practice, Gao noticed that the natural world mixed with his mind in this return to the fundamental rhythms of life, creating a state of “quietude” (靜 *jing*), that ceased the manifestation of emotions, such as anger, grief or pleasure. Gao further identified it with “reverence” (敬 *jing*), a state in which “nothing’s in the mind” 心無一事.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, his practice of “quiet sitting”

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<sup>81</sup> Quoted from Gao Panlong, *Gaozi yishu* 高子遺書, vol. 1 (Qinding siku quanshu Collection): 4b. For more information on “quiet-sitting” and “quiescence” by Gao, see Busch, Heinrich. “The Tung-Lin Academy and Its Political and Philosophical Significance.” *Monumenta Serica* 14 (1949): 124-27.

and acquisition of “quietude” and “reverence” helped him to pursue a peaceful death.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Modern scholar Wu Jiang reflects on Qi’s death from the perspective of Chan Buddhism, noting Qi’s deep engagement with local Chan schools, and arguing that, “the Buddhist sense of emptiness did help him to make the final decision to step into the eternal realm of nonduality, and only in appearance his suicide made perfect moral sense in the Confucian world.”<sup>83</sup>

The latter part of Wu Jiang’s argumentation establishes another important perspective from which to view Qi’s death, that is, the Confucian loyalty in the performativity of the form of death. It was embedded with implications under the cooperation of both the deceased and the author recording his death. The deceased took this last chance to verify their loyalty and imbue their death with meaning, while the author presented the message received from the deceased in his writing. In Qi Biaoja’s case, the partially visible kerchief above the water, which guided his family to finally find his body, needs to be noted as bearing the message that he wished to transmit to the social spectators of his death. As the most typical part of the Han hairstyle, the square kerchief had become

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<sup>82</sup> This point of view is based on Wen Bing’s comments on Gao’s death, see note 73.

<sup>83</sup> Wu Jiang. *Enlightenment in dispute: the reinvention of Chan Buddhism in seventeenth-century China* (Oxford University Press, 2008): 81.

a symbol of loyalty to Ming since the “Queue Order” was enacted by the Qing government and executed by the Qing troops. It was at this moment that the greatest resistance activities broke out in the Lower Yangzi region.<sup>84</sup> Incisively, the author, or the witness who told this story to the author, noticed the detail of the kerchief, which was something only the Han people would have observed and thought to be significant enough to recount at this crucial moment.

Contemporary scholars have noticed the presence of theatrical and the existence of external spectators in the cultural practices of late-Ming period. In Vinograd’s reading of Chen Hongshou’s portraiture, he convincingly demonstrates the “theatricality” of those paintings, including the “masklike exaggeration” and “conscious posturing” of the figures, which indicates their awareness of the external viewer, and the analogy of the pictorial space to the

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<sup>84</sup> On July 21, 1645, the regent Dorgon issued an edict ordering all Han men to shave their foreheads and braid the rest of their hair into a queue identical to those worn by the Manchus. People resisted the order and the Qing struck back with deadly force, massacring all who refused to obey. It was seven days prior to Qi’s suicide, so Qi may not have heard about it. The authors writing on his death, however, must have known and struggled with the order.

stage.<sup>85</sup> And the theatricality is not only implicated by the literati via their gaze on others but also themselves, as Volpp observed in the contemporary study across the disciplines on late-Ming art, the scholars have remarked on a new sense of an “I” in seventeenth-century China, “an enhanced consciousness of the multiplicity of roles available to the self.” The literati are aware that their multiple roles are spectacles visible to others, which is evident in their “fascination with self-dramatization, masking, fabrication, and dissimulation.”<sup>86</sup>

Their investigation lends me eyes to observe the theatricality of Qi Biaoja’s death. The enchanting setting of an extravagant garden in the midnight, the dramatics in his acts prior to death and strong symbolism of Qi’s gesture of killing himself infuses his death with complex tensions. The manipulated theatricality, on the one hand, expresses his sensitivity facing death and his handling with it (by playing with the real and the illusory), and on the other, becomes the representation of his loyalty to Ming Dynasty. It allowed the social spectators to perceive his private realm, his inner thoughts and feelings, which

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<sup>85</sup> Vinograd. *Boundaries of the Self*, 31-33. Liu Shi-Yee further articulates the theatricality of Chen’s figure painting with more of Chen’s works in Liu. “The World’s a Stage: The Theatricality of Chen Hongshou’s Figure Painting.” *Ars Orientalis* 35 (2008): 155-91.

<sup>86</sup> Volpp. *Worldly stage*, 17.

would otherwise remain unknown. Therefore, the theatricalized garden negotiated with the dynastic transition by juxtaposing the politics of a martyr's death with the poetics of a literatus' sentimental farewell.

## 2.5 Death as a modality of withdrawal

The theme of “return” is longstanding in the culture of literati and indicates an ideal of life that usually conflicts with political ambitions. The dual identity of one who was both a scholar and an official caught them in the continuous tension between going to court and returning home. The titles of Qi Biaoqia’s diaries delineated a simplified biography of his life from 1631 to 1639, in which the painful conflicts were shown vividly.<sup>87</sup> From 1631-1633, when Qi was serving the court, his diaries were entitled as “Routine Words on My Journey to the North” 涉北程言 (1631), “Tedious Words While Staying in the North” 棲北冗言 (1632), “A Trivial Record of Serving in the South” 役南瑣記 (1633) – full of depression and impatience. Then during his first retirement from 1635-37, he lived a leisurely garden life, and the titles became optimistic --“A Joyous Record on Returning South” 歸南快錄 (1635), “Occasional Jottings While Residing the Woods” 林居適筆 (1636), and “A Record of Stupidity While Living in the Mountains” 山居拙錄 (1637). Later, however, the guilt of his

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<sup>87</sup> Qi Biaoqia’s fourteen diaries were recorded from the 29th day of the 7th month of 1631 to the 4th day of the 6th month of 1645. After his martyrdom, his works were officially banned by the Qing government, and therefore could not be published until the year 1937, when the local department of Republic of China in charge of gazetteer collection decided to publish it.



obsession with the garden began to compete with the joy he got from them, and can be seen expressed in such titles as “A Record of My Self-admonition” 自鑒錄 (1638) and “A Record of My Giving-up” 棄錄 (1639).

Although Qi Biaoja had profoundly understood that, “taking it seriously, to return is but to lodge,” 然究之，歸亦寄耳，<sup>88</sup> he was still longed for return to idle life and initially considered his withdrawal to Mountain Yu as a final homecoming and lofty detachment from worldly concerns. In a casual poem on his questions and answers with a rural old man, he wrote that, “in a hill and in a gully, I will age there.” 一丘一壑吾將老。<sup>89</sup> He was so excited during the construction of his garden that when hearing that one of his friends also started to build a private garden, he wrote him a poem saying: “you and I both have unusual obsessions, our long-cherished ambition is to get old in the garden.” 爾我抱奇癖，夙志在老圃。<sup>90</sup>

However, after the fall of Beijing, Qi felt his responsibility of the nation and went

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 384.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted from “Yushan xianhua” (寓山閒話, Casual talk on Mountain Yu), in Rao Zongyi 饒宗頤, Zhang Zhang 張章, *Quan Ming ci* (Zhonghua shuju, 2004): 1825.

<sup>90</sup> Qi, *Qi Biaoja riji*, 221.

to Nanjing soon to assist in the establishment of the new government of Southern Ming.<sup>91</sup> During his post of Governor of Suzhou and Songjiang (nowadays Shanghai), he quelled uprisings and opposed the restoration of a drastic penal system which would further antagonize the people. At that time, Gao Jie 高傑 (d. 1645) was tyrannizing Yangzhou and the whole southern Jiangsu region was disquieted. Qi Biaoja pacified the people and restored order. By his intrepidity and sincerity, he induced Gao to remain loyal to Ming. However, his outspoken criticism made him unpopular with Ma Shiying 馬士英 (1596-1647) and his corrupt associates, which led to his resign after only six-months' duty in court.<sup>92</sup>

Upon Qi's return, he had communicated with his friends about his despair of Southern Ming government and the necessity of suicide in the near future, and he claimed that he had been ready for this. While at the same time, Qi indulged himself in a new construction of Mountain Yu, which was more intensive than ever. Qi gradually moved from his official home in the city to the garden and

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<sup>91</sup> Qi had been actively and profoundly participating in the critical decision-making of affairs concerning the establishment of the new government, which later became the accusation charged by his opponents. For the details of his political career in Southern Ming, see Zhao. *Qi Biaoja yanjiu*, 36-48.

<sup>92</sup>

consequently spent more time there. Besides Mountain Yu, he also started a huge renovation on his father's Garden of Secret 密園, and invited the most celebrated professional garden designer, Zhang Lian 張漣 (1587-1673), to help him with the design. Zhang could not come in person, but he sent his son.<sup>93</sup> The massive construction cleaned out his pockets—Qi had to pawn jewellery and artworks to fund it. The construction continued until one month before his suicide, when, as we can tell from his diary records, he had the servants trim the bamboos in the garden.<sup>94</sup>

Besides the process of intensive construction, Qi Biaoqia spent much effort in finding his family a place to withdraw from the possible calamities caused by his rejection of the Qing reign. At the end of the fourth month in 1645, he decided that the whole Qi family move to Mountain Yu, and he continued looking for a further and deeper place for retreat. On the 21st day of the fifth month, he started the preparation to move the whole family into the mountains.

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<sup>93</sup> Zhang Lian (1587-1671) is one of the few garden professionals in the Ming dynasty who was especially good at making artificial mountains in gardens. For more information, see Alison, Hardie. "The Life of a Seventeenth-Century Chinese Garden Designer: 'The Biography of Zhang Nanyuan,' by Wu Weiye (1609-71)." *Garden History*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2004, 137-140.

<sup>94</sup> Qi, *Qi Biaoqia riji*, 824.

Three days later, he entrusted Mr. Gu with the task of finding a place in the Tiantai Mountain 天台山.<sup>95</sup> However, his plan was interrupted by the arrival of an official letter of appointment from the Qing court on the 25th day, although he had started drafting his rejection letter.

As one of Qi Biaoja's closest friends, Zhang Dai witnessed the process of Qi's striving to survive and his decision to die. He could sense Qi's sentimental attachment to the living world and was extremely honest in his comments on Qi's biography, in the *Sequel to the Book of the Stone Casket* (石匱書後集 *Shiguishu houji*). Zhang starts with elaborating on Qi's posthumous title given by the Southern Ming Emperor, “*zhong min*” 忠敏, meaning “loyalty and sagacity”. Zhang claims that, “the loyalty in Qi's death is achievable [for others], while sagacity is not,” 祁中丞之死，而名之曰忠，則可及也；名之曰敏，則不可及也，<sup>96</sup> since all of his loyalty is fulfilled by the sagacity of his committing a

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 826.

<sup>96</sup> Zhang Dai. “Liu Zongzhou, Qi Biaoja liezhuan” (劉宗周祁彪佳列傳, Biographies of Liu Zongzhou and Qi Biaoja), *Shiguishu houji*, vol. 36 (Zhonghua shuju, 1959): 218-19. Jonathan Spence has a contrasting understanding of Zhang Dai's comments on Qi Biaoja's death by translating it as “as to Qi Biaoja's death, it is appropriate to call him loyal, but not appropriate to call him really shrewd.” See Jonathan, Spence. *Return to Dragon Mountain: Memories of a Late Ming Man* (Penguin, 2007): 267.

timely suicide. Therefore, he sees Qi's martyrdom as "the wise making use of benevolence" 知者利仁, in comparison with "the benevolent resting in peace with benevolence" 仁者安仁. Both expressions refer to the Confucian classics *Analects* 論語 and signal different modes of attaining virtue.<sup>97</sup> Zhang assumes that the death of Qi was not primarily due to his faith in martyrdom, as commanded by the Confucian values and obligations. Instead, with his sharp perception, Qi saw clearly that to die was the only choice, and thus seized the opportunity and took his actions decisively.<sup>98</sup> Zhang sees his death as sagacious and making good use of virtue, as Qi's decisive action freed him from further struggles and earned him posthumous fame and glory.

In his later years, Zhang Dai wrote a beautiful yet sorrowful "Epitaph for Myself" 自為墓誌銘, which helps us to imagine the life Qi Biaoqia would possibly have

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However, in the book review by the Taiwanese scholar Wang Rongzu 汪榮祖, Wang also points out that Spence might have misunderstood the Chinese texts. See Wang's review in *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院近代史研究所集刊 65 (2009): 147-48.

<sup>97</sup> *Analects* 4.2. Quotation and interpretation refers to the modern reprint in Yang Bojun 楊伯峻. *Lunyu yizhu* 論語譯註 (Zhonghua shuju, 1980): 35.

<sup>98</sup> Qi himself was also honest about this. In his last words, he summarized the two choices that the collapse of Ming Dynasty had left him: to build up strong resistance and fight back, or to commit suicide to keep his loyalty to the Ming order. The latter choice proved to be the easier one for him. See Qi, *Qi Biaoqia riji*, 893.

lived if he survived and had not accepted the Qing appointment.<sup>99</sup> After his country lay shattered, his family dispersed, Zhang Dai took refuge in the mountains for twenty years, frequently suffering from hunger and the cold, as well as the agony of being a survivor:

Since the year 1644 I have lived as in a daze. I am neither able to enjoy life nor to seek death. With white hair fluttering all over my head, I am still among the living and breathing. I am afraid that I will one day disappear before the emergence of morning dew and rot away like grass and trees.

甲申以後，悠悠忽忽，既不能覓死，又不能聊生，白髮婆娑，猶視息人世，恐一旦溘先朝露，與草木同腐。<sup>100</sup>

Learning about the traumatic conditions of Zhang Dai's life, we can now understand his appreciation of the sagacity of Qi Biaoja's suicide. In this case, Qi's suicide in the garden might be seen as a logical move of "return", only a

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<sup>99</sup> Actually, Qi's situation would more than certainly have been worse than Zhang's, since he had been an established politician in Ming government and was among the first group of literati that were officially appointed by the new Manchu government. See Qi, *Qi Biaoja riji*, 835. Zhang recorded a dream he had while painfully making his way out of the mountains to accept an invitation from the court of Southern Ming. In this dream, Qi Biaoja came to him and advised him to remain in his mountain hideaway and, "finish the Stone Casket history." This anecdote would seem to be a self-justifying dream for Zhang. See Zhang, *Tao'an mengyi/Xihu mengxun*, 213.

<sup>100</sup> Zhang Dai, *Zhang Dai shiwen ji* 張岱詩文集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991): 294–297.

little unexpected in terms of the way he practiced it. His son buried him by the garden and built a statue of his father in the temple, actualizing his “return” by making him part of the constructed landscape.

The Garden of Mountain Yu became a place for fostering loyalist activities in the early Qing, as Qi Biaoja’s sons, Qi Lisun 祁理孫 (1627-ca. 1663) and Qi Bansun 祁班孫 (b.1632), offered refuge to Ming loyalists, such as Wei Geng 魏耕 (1614-1662) and Qu Dajun 屈大均 (1630-1696).<sup>101</sup> In yet another incarnation, it was the locus of a female literary community, the place where Qi’s wife, Shang Jinglan 商景蘭 (1604-ca. 1680), an influential female poet at that time, held poetic gatherings with other women in the family and with her friends.

Having a delightful landscape as the ideal company after one’s death is a common aspiration shared among Qi’s contemporaries. Huang Zongxi, for example, told his family that his would like his grave filled with fragrance, and the field next to it should be divided into three pools for lotus. Huang would be

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<sup>101</sup> Qi’s son Bansun was sent into exile in the far northeast Ningguta 寧古塔 by the Qing Kangxi Emperor for having provided protection to Wei Geng, who was convicted of rebellion and sentenced to death in 1662. See Sun Jing’an 孫靜庵, “Qi Bansun”, *Ming yimin lu* 明遺民錄, in Xie and Fan eds., *Ming yiminlu huji*.

grateful if those who came to mourn him could plant five plums on his grave. It would be even better if they could turn the balusters in front of the grave into a pavilion, by adding two more balusters, beams, and a roof.<sup>102</sup> Zhang Dai also wrote about the ideal landscape of his posthumous dwelling. It would be a small hill in the suburbs, with plenty of green bamboos growing on it. The burial place lay in a cave at the end of the mountain path, with a thatched cottage for the statues of the Buddha and Zhang himself next to it. The front gate would face a great river, with a small tower on its wing, on top of which one might command a view of the mountains. Along the river, there would be an old stone bridge with bush growing on it; a perfect spot “for sitting, for enjoying the breeze and for admiring the moon.” 可坐, 可风, 可月.<sup>103</sup>

Zhang Dai named this place the “Blessed Land of *Langhuan*” 琅嬛福地.<sup>104</sup> Here we see Zhang’s attempt to recover a proper garden space for his

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<sup>102</sup> Huang Zongxi, *Huang Zongxi quanji* 黄宗羲全集, vol. 1: 191.

<sup>103</sup> Zhang, *Tao'an mengyi/Xihu mengxun*, 105.

<sup>104</sup> The Blessed Land of *Langhuan*, according to the Yuan (1271-1368) writer Yi Shizhen 尹世珍 in his “Record of Langhuan” 琅嬛記, was visited by Zhang Hua 張華 (232-300) during the Jin period (266-420). It was a strange world inside a cave, arrayed in many rooms were books that chronicled events of highest antiquity. See Hegel, R. E. (2006). *Dreaming the Past: Memory and Continuity Beyond the Ming Fall. HARVARD EAST ASIAN MONOGRAPHS, 250*, 345.



posthumous return as a kind of psychic survival. His posthumous existence would be housed in a statue, just like Qi Biaoqia. Those spoken or written wishes were not made to be accomplished in practice but demonstrated how the idea of garden or landscape was deeply embedded in the ideal of posthumous living. Therefore, Qi's choice of dying in his garden could be seen as an extended withdrawal into the beloved landscape, and to some extent, this symbolic "return" guarantees a more stable and firm commitment between the remnants and their posthumous paradise, since it was absolutely illusory, instead of shifting between illusion and reality. Taking death as a modality of withdrawal, the remnant managed to release himself from the agonies of the political world and the ravages of dynastic transition through their imagination of posttraumatic landscape.

In Qi Biaoqia's case, the theatricalized garden served as a mediate landscape, mediating between his culturally negotiated realm (the garden) and the actual mode of withdrawal (death). Qi not only took Mountain Yu as the alternative home for his respites from hush realities, but also a stage where, through his cultural practices of theatrically viewing his garden, he managed to manipulate illusions and practice the free transitions into them, which finally enabled him to obscure the boundary between life and death.





## CHAPTER 3 DARK-TONED SUBSTANTIALITY

### Gong Xian's Landscape Painting, His Artistic and Bodily Disappearance

- 3.1 Intro: the solitary household in a thousand peaks and myriad ravines
- 3.2 The substantiality of the landscape on the surface
  - 3.2.1 Presenting the substances: piling the ink into *hunlun* effect
  - 3.2.2 Representing the substances: Decoding the texture strokes
- 3.3 The substantiality of "Mountains-valleys"
  - 3.3.1 A landscape with neither skies nor the earth
  - 3.3.2 The creativity of the painter's hands
- 3.4 *Qi*, its resonance and cultivation
- 3.5 The politics of "a thousand peaks and myriad ravines"
  - 3.5.1 The "Traveller of the Waves" upon Ming's fall
  - 3.5.2 Rejecting the "remnant mountains and leftover waters"
- 3.6 The poetics of withdrawal into the solitary household
  - 3.6.1 The bamboo groves in the gated garden
  - 3.6.2 The empty valley and the modalities of withdrawn space

### 3.1 Intro: the solitary household in a thousand peaks and myriad ravines

In the summer of 1664, ending a drifting life for nearly twenty years after the Manchu conquest, Gong Xian 龔賢 (1617-1689) returned to his hometown Nanjing. Three years later, he purchased a piece of land at the foot of Qingliang Mountain 清涼山 and built up his own garden, the Half-Acre Garden 半畝園<sup>1</sup>. Although small and rustic, the bamboo-thicket garden provided the essential protection from the mundane affairs and served as the refuge for his self-cultivation. Gong lived a reclusive life until he died in 1689 — he seldom left the mountain and kept limited social connections with several remnant subjects like him. As one of the leading individual artists in Nanjing, he was respected and admired by his contemporaries, as Qu Dajun 屈大均 (1630-1696) exclaimed, “(Gong was) truly a man among the immortals”, 此真神仙中人!<sup>2</sup>

Gong Xian gained considerable fame as a poet in his early career, and only

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<sup>1</sup> Half acre is as small as over 300 m<sup>2</sup>, according to the Chinese measurement of “acre”.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from Qu Dajun’s letter to Gong Xian, in Zhou Lianggong 周亮工. *Chidu xinchao* 尺牘新鈔, vol. 3 (Shanghai: Shanghai zazhi gongsi, 1936): 68.

after he settled down in Half-acre Garden, he was able to live a peaceful life and took up professional painting as his primary means of making a living. During the 1670s, Gong Xian got used to his reclusive mountain life and became more and more productive, thus achieved the height of artistic creativity.

But still, Gong Xian did not ignore the gap between his ideal level of isolation and the reality. In the eighth leaf from the 1676 album in the collection of “Tower of the Passing Clouds” 過雲樓, he depicted a solitary house sitting at the foot of imposing mountains, surrounded by bare trees.<sup>3</sup> (Figure 3-1) With the absence of paths indicating its isolation, the whole image reveals the lonely register of human life in the wilderness of landscape. Appended alongside was a poem by Gong:

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<sup>3</sup> This album was reprinted in *Paintings in the Collection of Belvedere of the Passing Clouds* 過雲樓畫冊. See Gu Wenbin 顧文彬. *Guoyunlou huace*. Suzhou: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1986. This is the last time it was reprinted. The text of the inscribed poem refers to Liu Haisu 劉海粟, Wang Daoyun 王道雲, Xiao Ping 蕭平, Liu Yujia 劉宇甲. *Gongxian yanjiuji* 龔賢研究集 (Jiangsu meishu chubanshe, 1988): 90.



Living in the mountains but not deep enough, I always sigh to myself,  
occasionally visitors come knocking at the gate and ask to have a look at my  
flowers.

I am indeed jealous of those who build their house (as depicted in this  
leaf)—

the only household in the thousand peaks and myriad ravines.

住山猶淺自嗟呀，有客敲門索看花。

妒殺此中結茆者，千岩萬壑一人家。

Figure 3-1 Gong Xian, Eighth leaf of *Landscape Album*. Album with twenty-six leaves, with twelve leaves of paintings accompanied by twelve verses, and two leaves of colophon, dated 1676, ink on paper. Collection of Belvedere of the Passing Clouds.

This image is scanned from the modern reprint of the original album, *Paintings in the Collection of Belvedere of the Passing Clouds* 過雲樓畫冊 (1986).

This album was completed by Gong in the bamboo groves of his Half-acre Garden in the pleasant summer days. Sitting in the garden, Gong was still imagining about an ideal place to retreat, where “the only household sits in the thousand peaks and the myriad ravines” 千岩萬壑一人家. He used this specific line in poems inscribed on paintings for several times. The drama of this ideal lies in the tension between the substantiality of “the thousand peaks and the myriad ravines” and the lonely isolation and fragility of “the solitary household”, a drama that was successfully brought out in Gong Xian’s artistic creation during the 1670s and early 1680s. It was during this period that he established his signature style of monumental landscape and indulged in the depiction of “great ravines and great peaks” 大丘大壑, which featured in several handscrolls that carried titles already suggesting such monumentality, such as “*A thousand peaks and the myriad ravines*” 千岩萬壑, “*A thousand peaks and the ravines in clouds*” 千岩雲壑, “*Streams and Mountains without End*” 溪山無盡. In those large paintings, he was able to suggest volume and mass by varying the density and darkness of brushworks and produce densely covered compositions by using repetitive forms.

This chapter will attempt to decode Gong Xian’s artistic creation of “a thousand peaks and myriad ravines” wherein the “solitary household” sits.

The substantiality in Gong’s works is created both through the landscape of



amorphous ink on the surface of the paintings, and the landscape of his imagined mountains and rivers in the painting. In this process, *qi* (氣 breath) is responsible for boosting the substantiality in the lively yet solemn landscape and serves as the essential idea that connects the practices of painting with the self-cultivation of the inner vitality of the painter.

Gong Xian's individual style was informed, on the one hand, by the influence of the vibrant contemporary artistic styles in seventeenth-century China, and on the other, by the political implications of the dynastic transition. Therefore, this chapter attempts to develop a discussion leading to a political understanding of his "big valleys and big mountains" and correspondingly, his existential reflection on living in the solitary household.

## 3.2 Gong Xian's world upon Ming's fall

### 3.2.1 The "Traveller of the Waves" entering the mountain

It is important to relate Gong Xian's reclusion in Qingliang Mountain to the contemporary political context. After all, to be a recluse-painter is inevitably a political gesture that passively demonstrates one's resistance to the new ruler. Gong Xian was among the literati who positioned themselves against the Manchu order throughout his life. Details about Gong Xian's drifting life between 1645 and 1664 are mostly unknown, with limited evidence to be found in his poetry written in this period. What we do know is that Gong left Nanjing after Ming's fall and lived in exile for ten years. "A traveller of the waves" 浪遊人 was how he saw himself in his years of exile.<sup>4</sup> In an undated poem written after the Ming dynasty collapsed, Gong Xian wrote to memorize the moment he left his hometown Nanjing by boat:

In my small boat I set out at dawn, the sandy shore melts into the void.

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<sup>4</sup> Gong, "Missing Mr. Qiu, Mr. Hu and Mr. Yan of Shanyang" 懷山陽丘子胡子閻子, *Gong Xian yanjiu ji*, 42. For biographies that make thorough use of the sparse sources on Gong's life, see Liu Gangji, "Gong Xian shengping siji zaikao" 龔賢生平事跡再考, *Gong Xian yanjiu* (Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2005): 15-31; and Liu Yujia, "Gong Xian de shengping."

From beyond the wild mist comes the clamour of human voices, like cocks  
crowing in the distant blue.

In humble clothing I fled my country. Now, white-headed, I am still drifting  
without direction.

I did not read the tale of Jing Ke - I am embarrassed to have become a one-  
sword hero.

扁舟當曉發，沙岸杳然空。

人語蠻煙外，雞鳴海色中。

短衣曾去國，白首尚飄蓬。

不讀荊軻傳，羞為一劍雄。<sup>5</sup>

Jing Ke 荊軻 (? – 227 BC) is regarded as the model of patriotic heroes in Chinese literature. After his country was absorbed by Qin, Jing made a failed assassination attempt of the King of the Qin state, who later became China's first emperor (reign from 221 BC to 210 BC). By referring to Jing Ke with a sense of embarrassment, Gong expresses the shame he must have felt at not being able to contribute to the revival of his country.

Other evidence from his poetry show that Gong Xian might have spent some

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<sup>5</sup> Liu etc., *Gong Xian yanjiu ji*, 38.

time in the north, probably somewhere in the Northern China Plain and was involved in agricultural work.<sup>6</sup> In his late years, Gong recalled this painful period of his life:

Seeking for food in the place where no vegetation grew, the ice and frost  
damaged my clothes.

My skin was flattened against my bones, my hair became dry and my throat  
dumb.

覓食不毛地，冰霜壞衣襟。

皮寬止裹骨，鬢焦喉亦暗。<sup>7</sup>

However, this mode of work seems to have been short lived, as soon, “being broken, I had to quit my farming,” 破產罷躬耕。<sup>8</sup> Gong then returned to Nanjing in 1647, only to find that eight people in his family, including his wife and

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<sup>6</sup> Several contemporary Chinese scholars suggested that Gong Xian had been to the Northern China Plain right after Ming's fall and participated in the land reclamation, which was common in that period as part of the loyalist activities aiming at the revival of Ming, since he had many poems indicating that he had been to the north. See Liu Gangji, “Gong Xian shengping siji zaikao”, 21-26. However, some scholars hold a different opinion that Gong's northern life should be during his years later as a family tutor in Hai'an. See Wu Guobao, “Gong Xian youji kao” 龔賢遊跡考, in *Gong Xian yanjiu wenji*, 132-35.

<sup>7</sup> “The poem of Half-acre Garden” 半畝園詩, in *Gong Xian yanjiuji*, 108.

<sup>8</sup> “The poem for my birthday” 生日作, written in 1648 in Yangzhou, in *Gong Xian yanjiuji*, 33.

children, had died in the turmoil. Therefore, Gong Xian left Nanjing again and went to Yangzhou. His life in Yangzhou was also tough—the city had become a “weed-covered city” 蕪城 after ten days of pillage and massacre in the fifth month of 1645, and was then recovering with difficulties. The next year, Gong Xian accepted the invitation of his friend and went to Hai’an to be a family tutor.

In 1653, Gong returned to Nanjing again and stayed for over a year, during which time he visited places with historical significance and wrote dozens of poems lamenting the dynastic transition, the dramatic changes of the city and of his life. His poetry reveals a profound serenity expressed in landscape forms, featuring images of wilderness and isolation, such as the river and sky, moonlight, sunset, a lonely boat, white birds, etc., which are common to the Chinese poetic tradition to stand for the world of politics.<sup>9</sup> For example, after a visit to the Qingliang Terrace with his friend Fei Mi 费密 (1625-1701), the well-known staunch Confucian poet and loyalist, Gong Xian composed the following lines of verse:

Finishing a cup of wine with you;

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<sup>9</sup> For the comprehensive study on Gong Xian’s landscape poetry and the political symbolism, see Silbergeld, *Political Symbolism*, 119-37.

We leisurely climb to the terrace on the [Qingliang] Hill.

The lofty terrace rises far above the city watchtowers;

The great river Yangzi unfolds in a single view.

The sun has sunk low, beneath the cattle and sheep;

Wild geese fly forth from an empty sky.

No remains from the Six Dynasties still exist,

The earth is all covered with dark green moss.

與爾傾杯酒，閑登山上臺。

台高出城闕，一望大江開。

日入牛羊下，天空鴻雁來。

六朝無廢址，滿地是蒼苔。<sup>10</sup>

The Six Dynasties (222-589) is a period of national division when Nanjing, at the height of its cultural renown, was the capital of the southern dynasties. As Gong notes above, nothing from the Six Dynasties remained after centuries, and everything was covered in dark green moss. With the character *cang* 蒼 (lit. hoary), a hint of longevity is added to the colour of dark green, with the indication being that the vital force of nature is undoubtedly much stronger than

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<sup>10</sup> "Climbing up the Qingliang Terrace with Fei Mi" 與費密登清涼台, in Zhuo Erkan 卓爾堪, ed. *Ming yimin shi* 明遺民詩 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1960): 330.

any human construction. With this comparison, Gong Xian mourned the fall of dynasties and the transience of life.

Overwhelmed by such a mood of dismay, Gong did not seem to have a pleasant stay in Nanjing. In 1655, he went to Yangzhou again and lived there for ten years, and it was during this time that Gong started his career of painting. Yangzhou had somewhat recovered from the massacre and was then an active market for artworks. Gong had ample opportunity, therefore, to access a sizable number of masterpieces and cultivate his taste in painting, which was important for his own later artistic creation.

Gong Xian returned to Nanjing for the third time in 1664. In the first years of his return, he moved several times to find an ideal place of withdrawal. As Zhou Lianggong describes:

The constant moving almost damaged his inkstones,

but still, Gong was not deep enough in the mountains.

He could do nothing but hear about people who would like to buy his

calligraphy,

Painstakingly looking for him in the winding alleys.

硯亦移將破，山猶入未深。

空聞買字者，曲巷費追尋。<sup>11</sup>

In 1667, Gong finally found an ideal place of withdrawal, a small piece of land at the foot of Qingliang Mountain, where he built his Half-acre Garden, and lived there until his death.

### 3.2.2 Landscape representation of “Remnant Mountains and Leftover Waters”

Compared with his poetry, the political implications in Gong Xian’s paintings and the appended poems are more allusive. The fourth leaf of his *Landscape Album* in 1671 may have conveyed his reflection on his contemporary situation, both in the world of living and the world of painting. (Figure 3-2) In this leaf, a row of substantial triangular peaks rises in the background, cutting sharp silhouettes against the sky, the highest of which projects out of view. The three barren huts lying at its base are the focal point of the composition, and yet are impossibly remote, frigidly inhospitable and weighing so little in the shadows of the surrounding mountains. The inscription reads:

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<sup>11</sup> Zhou Lianggong, “Banqian yijia” (半千移家, Banqian’s moving home), quoted in *Gong Xian yanjiuji*, 207.





Painting of the ancients compels respect and admiration from people when they view it, like the Five Sacred Mountains, their peaks tower majestically upward. [From this] one knows for sure that they harboured no remnant mountains and leftover waters in their breasts. 古人畫使人見之生敬，其巒頭儼儼如五嶽，固知古人胸中不蓄殘山剩水也。

Figure 3-2 Gong Xian, First leaf in *Landscape Album*, album of ten leaves, dated 1671, ink and colour on paper, 24.45 x 45.09cm. Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas. Inscription on the upper left corner.

The Five Sacred Mountains were, amongst other things, the symbolic guardians of the nation, while the term *canshan shengshui* 殘山剩水, meaning “the remnant mountains and leftover waters”, was a standard way of referring to the loss of the nation. This expression is the spatial metaphor most employed in the writings of the remnant subjects when they expressed their commitment to the fallen Ming dynasty and unwillingness to join the socio-political order of the Qing. According to a historical record in the early fifteenth century, some court painters once recommended paintings of Southern Song (1127-1270) masters Xia Gui 夏珪 and Ma Yuan 馬遠, to Emperor Chengzu (1360-1424) in the Ming Dynasty. They were the leaders of the Ma-Xia School, whose compositions were of a type called “one corner” or “one side”, after the fact that is they were constructed asymmetrically, with the compositional weight loaded to one side, and the rest of the silk or paper left bare or slightly tinted. (Figure 3-3) As a brilliant, ambitious and tough emperor whose usurpation of the throne is sometimes called the “Second Founding” of the Ming dynasty, Emperor Chengzu replied disdainfully, “these remnant mountains and leftover waters represent the Southern Song who cowardly drift along in the remote south. How could this be desirable? 是殘山剩水, 宋僻安

之物也，何取焉？”<sup>12</sup> He connected this term with the damaged reign, thus giving it a certain political implication.

As previously mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, a great deal of cultural production was created using the ruins of landscape to speak to analogously speak to the country's turmoil — “remnant mountains and leftover waters” was part of this. Kuncan 髡殘 (1612-ca.1675), one of the “Four Monk Masters” 四僧 in painting, became a misanthropic abbot at a Buddhist monastery near Nanjing after the fall of Ming. He favoured the character *can* 殘 (lit. broken, crippled) in his monastic and artistic name, such as “the *can* monk” 殘衲, “the *can* baldhead” 殘禿, and even labelled his paintings as, “remnant (*can*) mountains and leftovers rivers are the features of my paintings.” 殘山剩水，是我道人家些子活計。<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ye Sheng 葉盛, “Painters and calligraphers adored by Emperor Chengzu” 長陵所賞書畫家, *Shuidong riji* 水東日記, vol. 3: 11a.

<sup>13</sup> Zhou Liangong, *Du hua lu* 讀畫錄, vol. 2: 953.



Figure 3-3 Ma Yuan, *Viewing plum blossoms by moonlight* 月下賞梅圖. Fan mounted as an album leaf, dated early 13th century, ink and colour on silk, 25.1 × 26.7 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 3-4 Zhang Feng, A leaf in *Album of Landscapes*. Album of twelve leaves, ink and colour on paper, dated 1644, 15.4 x 22.9 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Gong Xian's generation displayed a marked preference in taste for the literati styles of the later Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) masters. This resulted in the ascendancy of the calligraphic approach in painting and the so-called abbreviated style, with limited brushwork and a simplified composition. According to the art criticism of this period, the painters "mostly used dry brush to catch the beauty, and grudged water just like they grudged ink" 多以渴筆取妍, 其惜水也亦如惜墨.<sup>14</sup> In Fu Shen's analysis of the popularity of the "Dry Brush" style in Chinese Painting during the Ming-Qing transition, he mentions that the dynastic transition played a critical role in promoting the style, since the feeble brushworks signified a disengagement from the harsh realities of the time and revealed the inner spirit of the subject rather than the outward appearance.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Qu Dajun, "Shu Wangzi huace" (書汪子畫冊, Inscribing Mr. Wang's painting album), *Wengshan wenwai*, vol. 11, 17-18.

<sup>15</sup> Fu Shen 傅申. "Ming Qing zhiji de kebi goule fengshang yu Shitao de zaoqi zuopin," (明清之際的渴筆勾勒風尚與石濤的早期作品, An Aspect of the "Dry Linear" Style in Chinese Painting during Ming-Qing transition and the Early Works of Shitao), *The Journal of the Institute of Chinese Studies of the Chinese University of Hong Kong*, vol. 8, no. 2 (December, 1976), 587-88. Fu analyses why the dry-linear style became popular in the specific period of the Ming-Qing transition from various aspects, in which some early works of Gong Xian are also considered.

The preference for “remnant mountains and leftover waters” is embodied not only in the styles of brushworks but also the theme and atmosphere of paintings. Jonathan Hay uses the works of Zhang Feng 張風 (active ca. 1628-1662) in Nanjing as examples to show the mood that “fluctuates between melancholy and desolation,” and with a theme centred on loss through death (亡 *wang*) and wilderness (野 *ye*), common to remnant paintings.<sup>16</sup> For example, in this album leaf, finished in 1644, Zhang depicted a wild scene composed of bare rocks and a withered willow growing on them, accompanied by dispersed birds. (Figure 3-4)

However, there were also literati who refused such expression. The famous Ming poet and loyalist Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629-1709) related this style with the expression of remnant mountains and leftover waters to criticize the contemporary landscape paintings in the Lower Yangzi region, writing that “in those remnant mountains and leftover waters trees offer no shade,” 殘山剩水樹無陰.<sup>17</sup> This specific highlighting of the lack of shade may have been a commentary indicating that they lacked substantiality. Gong Xian had been

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<sup>16</sup> Jonathan, Hay. “The suspension of dynastic time”, *Boundaries in China* (1994): 179.

<sup>17</sup> Zhu Yizun, “Remarks on paintings presenting to Governor Song (a set of twelve poems)” 論畫和宋中丞十二首, *Pushuting ji* 曝書亭集, vol. 16: 16a.

working in the abbreviated style since the second half of the 1640s, when he first learnt to paint. But as early as the mid-1650s, Gong had instead showed interest in the earlier Song styles of Dong Yuan 董源 (ca.934-962) and Juran 巨然<sup>18</sup>, and resisted participating in the common expression of frustration and sorrow among the remnants. The following chapter will gradually articulate how Gong Xian made a thousand peaks and myriad ravines in his paintings which rebel against the landscape representation of his time and at the same time, find himself a place of refuge confronting the world he lived in. For both reasons, the solidity and substantiality of the peaks and ravines are crucial.

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<sup>18</sup> Dong Yuan was known for both figure and landscape paintings and exemplified the elegant style which would become the standard for brush painting in China for the next nine centuries. He and his pupil Juran 巨然 (fl. 10th century) were regarded as the founders of the Southern style of landscape painting. Gong Xian was not alone in the Northern-Song retrospective in the seventeenth century. In her study on Gong Xian, Wang Chung-lan points out that his pursuit of the Northern Song monumentality was heavily influenced by the trending preference for the Song style among Nanjing painters in his time. See Wang Chung-lan, *Gong Xian (1619-1689): A Seventeenth-Century Nanjing Intellectual and His Aesthetic World*, Dissertation (Yale University, 2005): 14.

### 3.3 Making A Thousand Peaks and Myriad Ravines

#### 3.3.1 Substantiality of *hunlun* (chaos) in the brushworks

In his retrospective pursuit of the Northern Song style, Gong Xian took Dong Yuan as his most important artistic model, especially in his ink style, as he confessed in 1668 that he “usually liked the ink method of Dong Yuan.” 平日喜董源墨法.<sup>19</sup> Dong Yuan was famous for his invention of hemp-fibre strokes (披麻皴, *pima cun*), and the wonderful skill in depicting light-shadow effects and recession into space, which were highly recognized by later artists. Gong Xian learnt from Dong Yuan his most important tool, the hemp-fibre texture stroke, and renovated it. Gong shortened it to reduce its linearity and added more layers to create a wider range of tones. The subtle layering of texture strokes creates a wide range of tonality, thus has the potential to indicate depth and volume, and renders his painting with considerable solidity, which contradicts to the aforementioned “dry-linear” style.

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<sup>19</sup> Gong Xian's inscription on *Landscape*, hanging scroll, dated 1668, in the Roy and Marilyn Papp Collection in the Phoenix Art Museum.



An extract from Gong Xian's painting manuals that he produced for instructing pupils<sup>20</sup> provides us with an insight into his application of this technique, layering short hemp-fire strokes to depict the bright and dark sides of rocks (Figure 3-5):

Delineate slightly once; this is the contour. Within the contour the strands of dividing lines are called rock markings. After this, add texture strokes. 勾一遍謂之輪廓，輪廓之內縷縷分者謂之石文，石文之後，然後加皴。

When applying texture strokes, texture strokes should be applied to the bottom part of rocks and not to the top; this is to distinguish the *yin* (shaded side) from the *yang* (sunny side). The dark area where texture strokes are applied to is *yin*; the light area where they are not is *yang*. 加皴法，皴上不皴下，分陰分陽也。皴處色黑為陰，不皴處色白為陽。

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<sup>20</sup> Gong Xian produced several instructional manuals which cover almost his entire artistic life from the early 1650s to the early 1680s, which is his crucial contribution to the education of painting in his time and later generations. The probable chronological order of the extant painting manuals is as follows: *Gong Banqian's Instructional Remarks on Painting* 龔半千課徒畫說, early to mid-1650s; *The Painting Remarks of Chaizhang* 柴丈畫說, late 1650s; *The Sketches of Chaizhang* 柴丈畫稿, late 1650s; *Instructional Manual on Trees*, 課徒畫樹稿 early to mid-1660s; *The Secrets of Painting* 畫訣, late 1660s or 1670s; *Gong Banqian's Instructional Manual* 龔半千課徒稿, 1670s; *Gong Banqian's Instructional Manual on Painting* 龔半千課徒畫稿, early 1680s. All citations from his painting manuals in this chapter refer to the modern reproduction in *Gong Xian yanjiuji*, 126-51.

Texture strokes on the rocks represent markings, those on the ground represent fissures. Dark piled up texture strokes represent either traces of moss and lichen or the remaining roots of plants. 皴在石為紋，在土為痕。積而至於黑者，非苔蘚之故跡，即草木之餘根。<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 124. From "Gong Banqian's Instructional Manual on Painting".



Figure 3-5 The page of instructions on depicting the volume of rocks, from *Gong Banqian's Instructional Manual on Painting*, pp.12.

In a painting system where chiaroscuro has not been invented or learned, shades and shadows are not separated from their objects or identified on their own. A painter can simply leave the white paper blank to depict bright surfaces, while to depict dark surfaces, he has to rely on proper application of texture strokes. The third extract reveals what these texture strokes represent – the painters transfer his observation of darkness to the existence of some tangible substances. In this way, the concave-convex lighting effect on the surface of rock and earth is successfully realised through the principled accumulation of texture strokes. Markings, fissures, traces of moss and lichen, remaining roots of plants, these are all details that renders the darkness in rocks and earth, which also build up the substantiality of the landscape.

The association between texture strokes and minute existences such as those on the surface of rocks, stresses the ontology of single strokes. They themselves are substantive, thus enable us to comprehend the graded amorphousness beyond the competency of simply improving the pictorial quality and observe how they initiate and build up the substantiality of the painting. Therefore, Gong Xian's endeavour to subtly portray the volume and texture of objects not only aims at visual likeness, but also at grasping the genuine substance of materials.

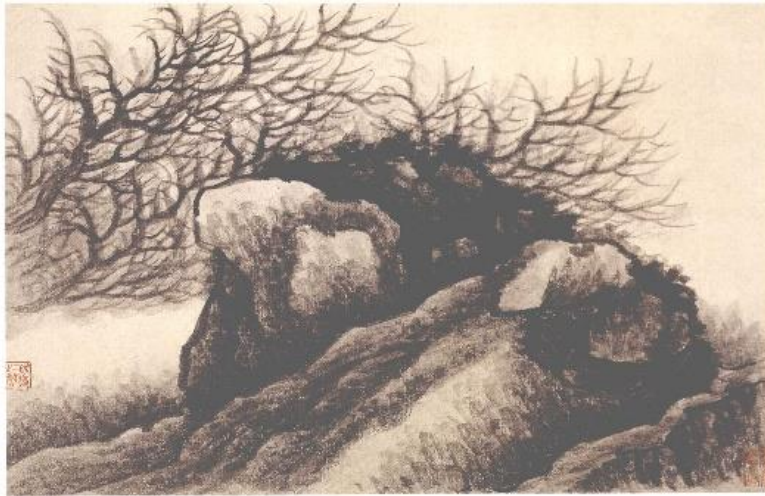


Figure 3-6 Gong Xian, Fifteenth leaf in *Landscape Album Presented to Zhou Yanji*. Album of twenty leaves, dated 1675, ink on paper, 22.2x33.3cm. The Palace Museum, Beijing.

In his landscape albums dated 1675, Gong Xian practiced an extremely close focus on objects, such as rocks and trees taking up the whole frame, which reveals his studious interest in brushworks and the individual elements of his compositional vocabulary. In the fifteenth leaf, he depicts a massive rock in front of branches of crooked trees. The subtle representation of the materiality of specific objects reflects his recognition of pure natural beauty and appreciation for the life force in nature. (Figure 3-6) Here, we see not only the rock-markings, moss and other vegetation, but also the layered texture strokes that delicately depicted them. The denser they were accumulated, the denser the substances of things assembled, the more substantial the painting appears.

In terms of the technique of piling brushworks, his demonstration of depicting rainy, wet, humid forests is a good example to show how it works (Figure 3-5):

In general, one layer is composed of dots, a second of texture strokes, and a third of wash; a fourth, fifth and sixth layer repeat these. With this technique, the painting may truly be called deep, dense, and wet. 大約一遍為點，二遍為皴，三遍為染，四、五、六遍仍之。如此可謂深矣濃矣濕矣。<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "Instructional Remarks on Painting", *Gongxian yanjiuji*, 132.



Figure 3-7 Pages of instructions on depicting the foliage, from Gong Banqian's *Instructional Manual on Painting*, in Rongbaozhai huapu Collection, 2001, pp.29 and 37.

In general, the instruction could be summarized as “accumulating the dry [brushstrokes] to reach the moist” 積枯成潤.<sup>23</sup> He further explained that the moist does not equal the wet, since “Ink which is contained within the stroke is moist; ink which floats outside the brushwork is wet.” 墨含筆內為潤，墨浮筆外為濕. Two leaves in Gong Xian’s landscape album in 1675 exhibit his aesthetic exploration in his application of piling different texture strokes, to depict different types of trees. (Figure 3-7) Both leaves show a large block of dominating trees forming a dense wall of foliage, with a band of heavy fog moving up from the base of the trunk. In details, Gong Xian’s masterly touch with subdued ink tonality interweaves the multi-layers of tree leaves into a permeable and amorphous darkness, so that the foliage seems to hold lots of moisture, which matches the latent dynamism in the fog.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid: 138. From “The Painting Remarks of Chaizhang”.





Figure 3-8 Gong Xian, Fifth and seventh leaf of *Landscape Album Presented to Zhou Yanji*. Album of twenty-four leaves, dated 1675, ink on paper, 22.2 x 33.3cm. The Palace Museum, Beijing.

From light and dry to dark and moist, with the seemingly simple accumulation of light texture strokes and the proliferation of dark moss-dots, Gong Xian established his individual style of brushworks. Although heavily accumulated, the brushworks stand out as discernible strokes in their singularity, rather than being submerged into the integral effect of the painting. This makes the most important criteria for the brushworks in Gong Xian's painting treatise, *hunlun* 渾淪. In a letter to a fellow Nanjing painter Hu Yuanrun 胡元潤 (fl. ca. 1630-1670), he stated:

Yet there are painters who also take the blurry and vague (*mohu*) and call it mingled mess (*hunlun*): but this is not what a [true] mingled mess is. Only when both brush and ink are excellent, and one cannot tell the brush method from the breath of the ink, is this a true mingled mess (*hunlun*). 畫家亦有以模糊而謂之渾淪者，非渾淪也。惟筆墨俱妙，而無筆法墨氣之分，此真渾淪也。<sup>24</sup>

*Mohu* refers to a negative mess, while *hunlun* refers to a positive mess where the subtlety in both the ink and brushwork are well preserved. It is a term that designated chaos (*hun* for muddied water and *lun* for ripples on water) and a

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<sup>24</sup> Gong, "Yu Hu Yuanrun shu" (與胡元潤書, A letter to Hu Yuanrun), in *Gong Xian yanjiuji*, 177.

state of unconsciousness. It appears in two texts, *Liezi* 列子 (compiled around 4th century) and a Han-dynasty (202 B.C.-220 A.D.) apocryphal text on *Yijing* (易經, *The Book of Changes*), with the same line: “When *qi* (breath), form and substances are prepared but still indistinguishably blended together, it is called Chaos.” 氣形質具而未相離，故曰渾淪。<sup>25</sup> In this way, *hunlun* resembles the primordial unconscious state before any differentiation—chaotic and messy, yet full of life energy and possibilities.

There are two points to be highlighted here. Firstly, Gong Xian demonstrated his interest in the overall effect of the brushworks instead of what the brushworks managed to depict. Secondly, regarding the profound philosophical backdrop of *hunlun*, we cannot ignore its connection to the forming/transforming nature of material existences and their capacity to generate a meaningful landscape. Thus, we are able to conceive the landscape of amorphous ink on the surface of the finished painting as the dynamic cooperation between the ink and the brush, and understand its substantiality in terms of what it makes rather than what it depicts.

The theme of “mountain-clouds” is one that commonly emerges in Chinese

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<sup>25</sup> *Liezi*, vol. 1: 3b.

landscape paintings and in Gong Xian's work it is the best example of the *hunlun* effect. In his painting manual in the 1650s, Gong Xian states that, "The cloud enhances the volume of a mountain, banks make water appear long" 山因雲厚, 水以灘長.<sup>26</sup> He is referring here to the traditional approach Chinese painters took when depicting mountains, where the clouds permeate the body of the mountains to boost the three-dimensional effect (thickness), as well as to render a poetic atmosphere. However, in his later painting manual of the 1680s, Gong renovated this approach by saying, "In painting mountains with clouds, the clouds should be full. I was not able to understand this for 30 years. Subsequently I encountered an old master who said that if the mountains were thick then the clouds would become thick." 雲山, 雲宜厚. 悟之三十年不可得, 後遇老師曰: 山厚雲即厚矣.<sup>27</sup> The twist in his approach offers a profound understanding of how to create *hou* 厚 (lit. thickness) on the surface of the painting, depending on whether the clouds or the mountains should be one to boost the other, that is, whether the clouds make the mountains appear thick or the other way round. Instead of using the blank/white parts between the

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<sup>26</sup> "Gong Banqian's Instructional Remarks on Painting", *Gongxian yanjiu*, 136. Usually, the character *hou* is translated as "full" in contemporary western scholarship on Chinese paintings, but I wish to keep its original meaning, since "thickness" is better for stressing the three-dimensional spatiality.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 150. From "Gong Banqian's Instructional Manual on Painting".

substantial/black parts to create the relational composition and then to indicate the depth in painting, he created a new method which took advantage of the substantial/black parts of different tones to render the solidity of the mountains, and then to make the permeating clouds appear accordingly thick.

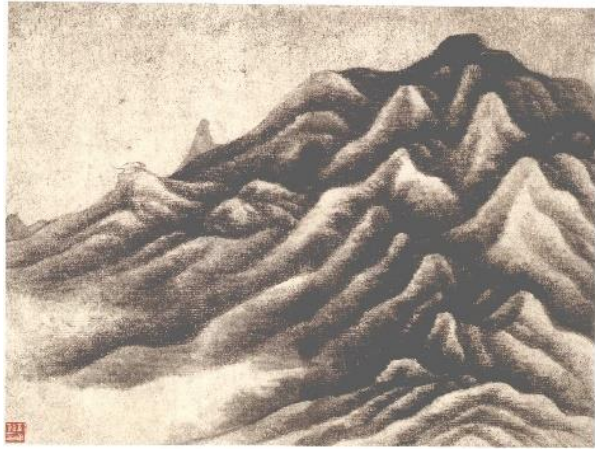


Figure 3-9 Three album leaves with “Mountain-Clouds” theme

Upper: Gong Xian, A leaf of *Landscape Album*. Album of twelve leaves, dated 1657, ink on paper, 22.8 x 30 cm. Shanghai Museum.

Middle: Gong Xian. A leaf of *Landscape Album*. Album of twelve leaves, dated 1668, ink on paper, 23.5 x 34.2 cm. Shanghai Museum.

Below: Gong Xian, A leaf of *Landscape Album*. Album of twenty-four leaves, dated 1676, ink on paper, 36.5 x 27.7 cm. Shanghai Museum.

Leaves from three albums, spanning the years 1657, 1668 and 1676, show the evolution in his way of depicting the mountain-clouds theme. (Figure 3-7)

The 1657 album leaf is obviously concentrated more on architectonic composition and the formal patterns built up by the parallel piled mountains.

In the 1668 album leaf, the compositional layers are grouped in several volumes, which allows a less mechanized and more meticulous rendering of both light and darkness on the surface, and better suggests the volume of the mountains.

In the 1676 album leaf, he eliminated the complicated mountain structure by concentrating on the nuance of the ink effect, such as the bent mountain edge shown with careful gradation, in order to make it appear to bulge and look full.

The details seem more vague, but the *hou* 厚 (thickness) of the mountains and clouds is intensified. This becomes a

common feature of his style, as can be seen in the leaves of the 1676

*Landscape Album*, as well as in paintings created in and after this period. As

his manifestation of accumulating texture strokes achieved an exquisite

rendering of a chiaroscuro-like effect depicting the volume of objects and

structure of space, and the effect of light and darkness, modern scholars

were led to suspect that he had accessed and learnt from the European prints of landscape in the churches of Nanjing.<sup>28</sup>

*Hou* could be regarded as one of his most consistent artistic ideals in painting. Besides the mountain-clouds theme, Gong Xian also associated it with the brushworks for tree leaves and used it as an alternative to the aforementioned *run* (moist) in his criteria of the quality of brushworks.<sup>29</sup> In this sense, *hou* also referred to the overall effect of amorphousness with recognizable brushworks, mainly texture strokes; furthermore, it emphasized using the amorphousness to suggest volume, depth and spatiality. Regarding my earlier analysis of the materiality of texture strokes, it is noteworthy that the sense of volume and depth here invites the imagination of the thickness of materials on the surface of the painting, as well as indicating depth within it. Gong Xian's exploration of the "mountain-clouds" motif reflected the important progression of his artistic style from the late 1650s to the late 1670s, when he gradually established his

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<sup>28</sup> James Cahill is among the earliest to resort to the western influence to interpret the unusual light-dark effect and contrast in Gong Xian's paintings. He assumed that Gong might have accessed the western woodcut print in the Christian churches of Nanjing. See James, Cahill. *The compelling image: Nature and style in seventeenth-century Chinese painting*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982): 169.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 150. From "Gong Banqian's Instructional Manual on Painting".



individual system of painting that valued the substantiality of the landscape on the surface of the painting, which was an essential part of his pursuit of “A Thousand Mountains and Myriad Ravines”.<sup>30</sup>

### 3.3.2 A landscape with neither skies nor the earth

Apart from the heavy tonality brought by the accumulation of brushworks, the highly dense composition was another prominent feature in Gong Xian’s monumental works from the early 1670s and early 1680s. Gong uses the term *shi* 實 (lit. solid) in his critical discourse to describe such fullness of composition and asserts that: “[To paint] a sparse composition is easy, a substantial composition, difficult.” 空景易，實景難。<sup>31</sup> The sparse composition refers to the abbreviated style of paintings that most painters in the Southern school were dedicated to in Gong Xian’s time, in contrast with his “substantial” and “difficult” composition. *A thousand peaks and the myriad ravines* 千岩萬壑圖 in the Drenowatz Collection in Switzerland is a perfect example of such

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<sup>30</sup> In relation to the phases of Gong Xian’s changes in style, this chapter mainly refers to the phases as described in William Wu, *Kung Hsien*. In the early 1680s, Gong experienced what Wu has described as his second transitional period, returning to his roots in the literati traditions of the Ming dynasty.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 138. From “The Painting Remarks of Chaizhang”.

heavy ink and full composition, contained in a monumental format with the dimension of an album leaf.<sup>32</sup> (Figure 3-10) The techniques for depicting mountain texture still belong to the 1668 album leaf, and the sense of “thickness” in the composition is expressed by the grand panorama of shattered peaks, plunging cascades, and torn clouds. No space exists even for paths nor passageways, compounding the fullness of the depiction.

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<sup>32</sup> The format of this painting is rather unusual. The portion cannot be of a hanging scroll nor a handscroll. Based on the line made by folding in the middle, it is more likely to be an album leaf, yet it is unusually big.



Figure 3-10 Gong Xian, *A thousand peaks and myriad ravines* 千岩萬壑圖. Hanging scroll (or album leaf), dated around 1670, ink on paper, 62 x 102 cm. Drenowatz Collection in Switzerland, Zurich.

By means of the ideas of *shi* in the composition, Gong Xian strengthened his artistic ideal of substantiality through the accumulation of elements in composing the whole landscape. Combined with the accumulation of texture strokes, his landscape achieves the maximum accumulation, forming a system with multiple levels of details. In this process, the earliest work on the theme of “a thousand peaks and myriad ravines” around 1670 could be seen as an extreme attempt in a relatively small format. His later paintings on this theme mostly work in a more moderate way in terms of the density of composition, but appear more impressive as they are in the form of handscrolls.

Before moving to the details of Gong Xian’s handscroll, we should first look at the sixth leaf of his 1671 *Landscape Album* 辛亥山水冊 in the Nelson-Atkins Museum. A mountain in the foreground diagonally blocks our view of the lakeside village behind it and makes the depicted landscape far from welcoming. (Figure 3-12) This small and simple scene provides a motif of vertical visual barriers to conceal the foreground. Gong modified the bevelled shape of mountains to be more elastic in form and continued deploying this motif in his other works.



Figure 3-11 Gong Xian, Sixth leaf of *Landscape Album*. Album of ten leaves, dated 1671, ink and colour on paper, 24.45x45.09 cm. Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City.

Gong's handscroll *Landscape Presented to Changweng* 贈長翁山水卷 (1679) exhibits a dense and oppressing composition. (Figure 3-13) The layering of landscape elements is highly intensified in the foreground to create visual barriers. My graphic analysis on Figure 3-13 highlights the density of the vertical obstacles in the foreground. The bulk of mountains repeatedly appear like walls, such is the substantiality of their volume. As the viewer appreciates the handscroll from the beginning (right) to the end (left), he can hardly find any crack for a possible pedestrian to penetrate. Even when it comes to the open water, it is only the branches of the trees which are visible, indicating the existence of a foreground that drops below the frame of the painting. As for the dwellings, which should be seen as indicators of ground, they are either screened by the foreground obstacles (▲), or standing alone in the middle of the handscroll, seeming not to be connected to anywhere (△). The adaptation for travelling and wandering is mostly neglected in his composition, since the paths are impossible to find.



Figure 3-12 Gong Xian, *Landscape presented to Changweng* 贈長翁山水卷. Handscroll, dated 1679, ink on paper, 24.5x927.4cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.

The lightly coloured parts mark those vertical obstacles in the foreground. The clouds are taken as horizontal elements because they suggest a recession in depth.





In the meanwhile, only a little portion of sky is included and most of the mountaintops disappear beyond the top edge. The absence of sky not only results in a lack of whiteness in the painting, but also indicates a lack of light, which matches the dark tonality. Gong Xian took full advantage of the extreme portion of the handscroll and captured merely the middle part of the traditional composition of a landscape – compared with the handscroll by Wang Hui – by leaving out the sky and the ground, especially the foreground. In this way, the composition of his works presents an effect that is “densely covered as if there is no sky; open and void as if there is no earth.” 密如無天，曠如無地。 It was a suggestion from one of his friends Liang Yizhang 梁以樟 (1608-1665), later echoed by Zhou Lianggong 周亮工 (1612-1672), that “Gong Xian’s versatility of brushwork encompasses the past five hundred years in time and ten thousand miles in space. They are indeed with no skies nor the earth,” 半千落筆，上下五百年，縱橫一萬里，實是無天無地。<sup>33</sup> Zhou’s comments could be

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<sup>33</sup> Liang Yizhang was an official scholar in the late-Ming Dynasty and rejected an invitation from the new government after the Qing came into power. This sentence is found in his letter to Gong Xian, collected in Zhou Lianggong’s *Chidu Xinchao* (尺牘新抄, New selection of letters), a remarkable collection of letters among the literati group, along with Zhou’s comments on this letter. See Zhou Lianggong, *Chidu xinchao* (Fenghuang chubanshe, 2008): 539. Zhou was a scholar-official under two dynasties, as well as a poet, literary critic, connoisseur, and art patron. He was the most

seen as echoing the name Gong's style name for himself, *Banqian* 半千, literally meaning "half-thousand", by interpreting it as referring to a length of time.<sup>34</sup>

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important patron and closest friend of Gong Xian, as well as his. For more information on Zhou, see Kim, Hongnam, *The Life of a Patron: Zhou Lianggong (1612-1672) and the Painters of Seventeenth-century China* (China Institute in America, 1996).

<sup>34</sup> Regarding the date of his death, Zhou's comment came earlier than Gong Xian's handscrolls analysed here. So, it could not be taken as comments specifically on these works, but generally on Gong's individual style, when he had been working on similar strategies in the late 1660s.



Figure 3-13 Gong Xian, *Streams and Mountains with No End* 溪山無盡圖卷.  
Handscroll, dated 1682, ink on paper, 27.7x726.7cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.



Gong Xian spent two years, from 1680 to 1682, finishing the *Streams and Mountains with No End* 溪山無盡圖, a handscroll composed of twelve album leaves placed end to end. Due to the higher viewpoint and denser composition, little of the mountaintops and or sky could be included inside the frame. (Figure 3-13) When it comes to the *Landscape Handscroll* 山水卷 in 1688, the last work under this theme finished one year before his death, the portion of sky and foreground is further reduced, and the viewpoint is further elevated, becoming almost a bird's-eye view. (Figure 3-14) Almost all the mountain tops rise above the top border and the large sheet of water occupies almost half of the scroll's height in the foreground. The compilation of rocks is so dense that it leaves no space for any paths. The viewer is suspended in the air and can hardly find a spot to alight, let alone to wander.

Most representative in his handscrolls, the composition of landscape “with neither skies nor the earth” became another trademark of Gong Xian's individual style, through which he repeatedly experimented the artistic theme of “A thousand peaks and myriad ravines”. The particular composition of “mountain-valleys” boosts the substantiality of his landscape in two senses: firstly, because reduced blankness allows for a denser accumulation of landscape elements and brushworks, and thus creates a denser presence of materials. Secondly, as Zhou Lianggong's interpretation of Gong Xian's

composition indicates, the absence of sky and earth result in works that seem to be cut loose from the sense of space and time in the world. Instead, as Zhou wrote, the substantial landscape “covers five hundred years in time and ten thousand miles in space”. Or, perhaps, on the contrary, we might say that it brings normal time to a halt and the normal world into a frozen condition. In either case, Gong’s works bring us to a world that rests in eternity and stillness.



Figure 3-14 Gong Xian, *Landscape* 山水卷. Handscroll, dated 1688, ink on paper, 24.5x927.4cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.





### 3.3.3 The creation of landscape: illusory vs substantial

To fully understand the substantiality of landscape, we need to attend to the process of how they were created by Gong Xian. In the colophon of his 1688 handscroll (Figure 13), he notes that:

This scroll of mine is first set forth within my mind. ... Though it is said to be an illusory world, while you view it from the eyes of *dao*, it is the same as the real world. It is not only wine that can bring people to a fascinating wonderland! 余此卷皆從心中肇述雲物，……，雖曰幻境，然自有道觀之，同一實境也。引人著勝地，豈獨酒哉！

In the “Four Essentials for Painters”, Gong Xian stated that perfect “mountain-valleys” should be both *wen* (穩, stable) and *qi* (奇, imaginative).<sup>35</sup> In an inscription written in the 1650s, he further discussed his idea of the parallelism between the stable and the imaginative by saying that:

Composition should be stable (*an* 安). But it must be strange and imaginative (*qi* 奇) as well as stable, for if it is not, then what would be the value of its stability? If it has stability but is not imaginative, this marks the

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<sup>35</sup> “Painting Remarks of Chaizhang”, 137.

hand of an artisan. If it is imaginative but not stable, this marks the hand of an amateur. 位置宜安，然必奇而安，不奇無貴于安。安而不奇，庸手也，奇而不安，生手也。<sup>36</sup>

Gong's point is that the highest class of painting needs both the technical expertise that enables compositional balance and new ideas that enrich the works with intellectual concepts. Although he endeavoured to develop his personal style, he also consciously avoided the kind of superficial individualism that merely looked different but actually had nothing else to offer. In terms of depictive quality, his meticulous observation and handling of objects, as discussed in the previous section, allows his landscape to be steadily grounded on earth, while in terms of the logic of represented space, it floats in the air. Therefore, his monumental works represent, as James Cahill has pointed out, "a completely convincing alternate world, as real in its unearthly logic as the real world but separate from it."<sup>37</sup> Since spatial structure in the painting is too vague to be properly comprehended, the substantial and

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<sup>36</sup> See Gong Xian, *Landscape Album*, seven leaves (one leaf and two colophons are missing), undated, in the Shanghai Museum. Translation with changes adopted from William Wu, *Kung Hsien*, 80-81.

<sup>37</sup> Cahill, *The Compelling Images*, 279.

visually pervasive depiction of the landscape with his advantageous techniques is confronted with the absurdity of the dramatically congested composition.

By advocating the significance of the “strange and imaginative” (*qi* 奇), Gong Xian did not encourage meaningless strangeness but rather emphasised originality of conceptions. This is also what distinguishes Gong’s works from the Northern Song tradition, as the unity and coherence of his paintings derive not from the natural order of the world but from his own mind. Gong Xian’s landscape is an extension of human consciousness. By stating that “anything that exists in the breasts of artists equals to what exists in the world” 凡畫家胸中之所有皆世間之所有,<sup>38</sup> he insisted that there was no ontological difference between the manifest physical world and the imagined depicted world. The boundary between them was dissolved because:

Painting is not a small craft; it creates with the same hand that created the heavens and the earth. When the paper is not painted, people see hands and not paintings; when it has been painted, people see the painting and not

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<sup>38</sup> *Shibaizhai shuhua lu* 十百齋書畫錄, compiled by Jin Yuan 金瑗, in *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu*, vol. 10: 551.

the hand. Today the risings and fallings of the heaven and the earth, the positions of the mountains and rivers, were done by whose hand? Seeing the painting but not the hand, can we say there is no hand? Whoever wonders what hands created the heaven and the earth, please refer to the painter's hands.

畫非小技也，與生天生地同一手。當其未畫時，人見手而不見畫；當其已畫時，人見畫而不見手。今天地升沉，山川位置是誰手為之者乎？見畫而不見手，遂謂無手烏可乎？欲問生天生地之手，請觀畫手。<sup>39</sup>

Gong boasts here with confidence and pride, claiming that the creative force bestowed on the hands of painters matches that of the natural world. Noting that the painterly gestures disappear upon the completion of the paintings, he further stresses, the manifestation of painter's hands should not be ignored even though they were invisible.

Dong Qichang once had a similar hint of appreciation for the artist as a free-willed creator when he notes that: "The way of painting is to be found in the painter who controls the universe in his own hands." 畫之道，所謂宇宙在乎手

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<sup>39</sup> From "Gong Banqian's Instructional Manual on Painting", *Gong Xian yanjiuji*, 150-51.

者.<sup>40</sup> His landscape paintings are deeply rooted in this principle. He was devoted to the creative *fang* (仿, imitation) of the ancient masters, especially in his complex and innovative compositional structures. Hence, his austere, solitary, semi-abstract landscapes are concerned not with representing an actual place but rather expressing the artist's inner spiritual world. As summarized by Loehr, "His mountains are nothing but stereometric bodies, mainly of conical shape, of uncertain substance, inexpressive in themselves, of formal function only. ...His interest seems to be the basic structure of imaginary landscapes divested of poetry or feeling."<sup>41</sup> (Figure 3-15)

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<sup>40</sup> Dong Qichang, *Huachanshi suibi* 畫禪室隨筆, in *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu*, vol. 3 (Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2000), 1018.

<sup>41</sup> Max, Loehr. "Chinese Landscape Painting and Its Real Content." *Rice Institute Pamphlet-Rice University Studies* 59, no. 4 (1973): 90.

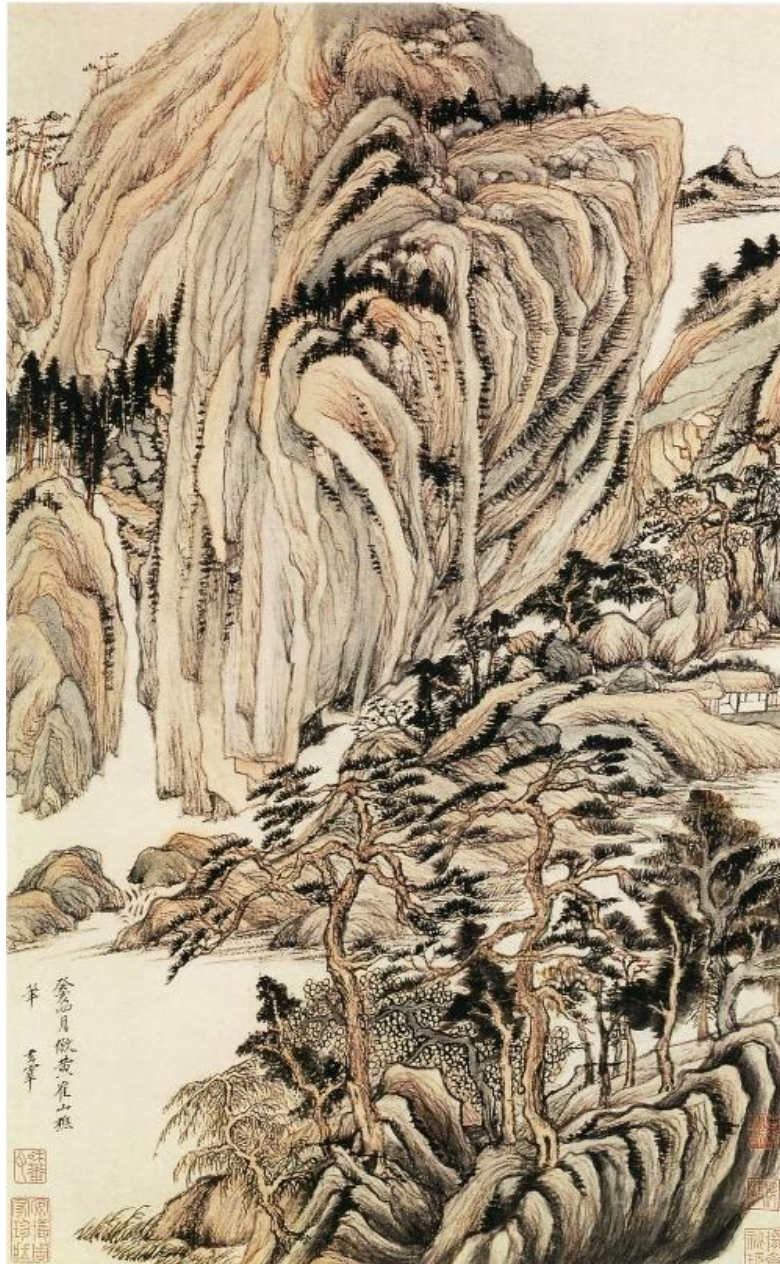


Figure 3-15 Dong Qichang, *Landscape after Wang Meng* 仿王蒙山水圖. Album leaf, dated 1623, ink and colour on paper, 55.88 x 34.93 cm. Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City.

Painters like Dong Qichang and Gong Xian relied heavily on their own creativity of imagination, so their way of painting is, above all, an intellectual process. In *Gong Banqian's Instructional Manual* in the 1670s, Gong Xian referred to a Buddhist story to talk about the creation of “mountains-valleys”:

A monk asked a knowledgeable fellow: “How can there suddenly be mountains, rivers, and the great earth?” He answered: “How can there suddenly be mountains, rivers, and the great earth?” This is the beginning of creation and there is no limit of a painter, that one needs to know. 一僧問一善知識曰：如何忽有山河大地？答云：如何忽有山河大地。此造物之權輿，畫家之無極也，不可不知。<sup>42</sup>

This dialogue about the emergence of mountains, rivers and the great earth originally comes from a dialogue between Master Huijue 慧覺 and his disciple in the Song Dynasty. The disciple asks, “if the original state is clean and pure, then how do rivers, mountains and the great earth suddenly emerge,” 清淨本然，云何忽生山河大地？ The “original state being pure and clear” refers to the fundamental understanding in Buddhism that the origin of the world is originally

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<sup>42</sup> “Gong Banqian's Instructional Manual on Painting”, *Gongxian yanjiuji*, 150.

unconditioned. Huijue replies by simply repeating the question.<sup>43</sup> This dialogue itself can also be seen to reference an earlier one in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* 楞嚴經. In this version, the Buddha asks his disciple Pūrṇa: “if the original state is clean and pure, then how do rivers, mountains and the great earth suddenly emerge?”<sup>44</sup> It follows a long string of questions and answers, wherein the Buddha explains that the separation between mountains, etc., and human beings is itself a delusion. There is no such duality between the world and a separate I, nor is there a moment when the former is able to be independently perceived and cognized by the latter.<sup>45</sup> In this sense, we can understand that by repeating the question, Huijue makes it a statement indicating that there should not be the sudden emergence of the external world. The world of landscape exists on its own, instead of in the human’s eyes; in

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<sup>43</sup> Quoted from Master Huijue’s “Quotations” in *Gu zunsu yulu* (古尊宿語錄, Quotation of Respectable Buddhist Masters), vol. 46. Huijie’s Quotation was published during 1403-1424.

<sup>44</sup> The *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* is a Mahayana Buddhist sutra that has been influential in Chan Buddhism since it was first introduced in Tang Dynasty in 705 and was especially popular in the seventeenth century. This dialogue is quoted from [http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/T19n0945\\_004](http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/T19n0945_004).

<sup>45</sup> I owe my thanks to Professor Zhu Liangzhi from Department of Philosophy in Peking University for the interpretation of the Buddhist text and its application in Gong Xian’s painting discourses, see Zhu Liangzhi 朱良志, “Gong Xian de huangyuan yixiang” (龔賢的荒原意象, The image of “wild land” in Gong Xian’s works), *Gong Xian yanjiu wenji*, Yan Xiaojun 顏曉軍, Tian Hong 田洪 eds. (Hangzhou: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe, 2014): 66-67.

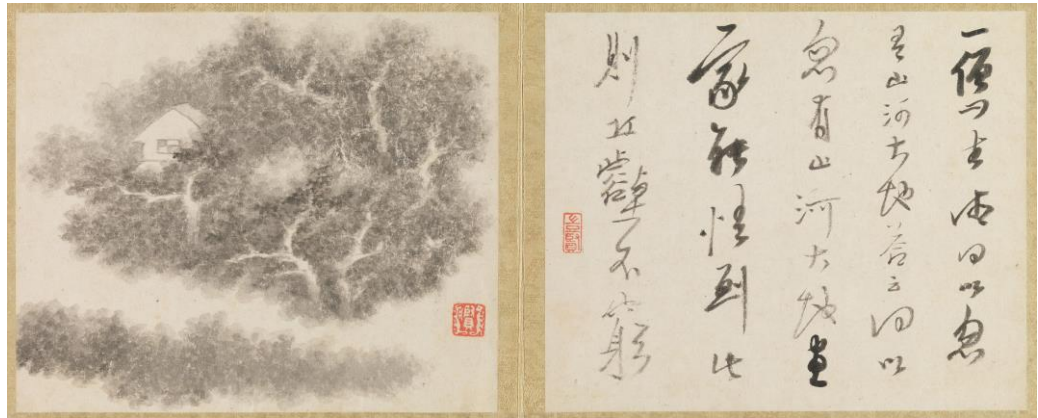


turn, human beings are tasked with maintaining the purity of their minds instead of “seeing” the external world of landscape. Another Buddhist master, Baiyun, was questioned by his disciple, who referred to Huijue’s dialogue, and he echoed Huijue by saying: “Although gold crumbs are precious, when falling into people’s eyes, they cause nebula,” 金屑雖貴，落眼成翳.<sup>46</sup>

In Gong Xian’s own interpretation following his quotation of this dialogue, he relates the *quanyu* 權輿 (“beginning”) of creation to the painter’s creation of “mountains and valleys” and describes this power of creation as *wuji* 無極 (“unlimited”) to advocate that the painter’s creation of landscape should start from a blank state and not from the limitation of the human being’s cognitive knowledge. A few years later, approximately 1679, Gong Xian repeated this story on a leaf of an album (Figure 3-16):

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<sup>46</sup> Quoted from Master Baiyun’s “Quotations” in *Gu zunsu yulu* (古尊宿語錄, Quotation of Respectable Buddhist Masters), vol. 21.



A monk asked his old master, “how can rivers, mountains and the great earth suddenly emerge?” The master answered, “how can rivers, mountains and the great earth suddenly emerge.” A painter who can understand this will never be lacking in hills and valleys. 一僧問古德，何以忽有山河大地？答雲：何以忽有山河大地。畫家能悟到此，則丘壑不窮。

Figure 3-16 Gong Xian, Fifth leaf of *Landscape Album*. Album of twenty-four leaves, dated 1679, ink on paper, 15.9x19.1cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The inscription is on the right side.

On the leaf, the amorphous brushworks precisely imply the early phase of transformation, when everything - trees, mists and clouds - are taking shape. Emerging from the surrounding misty clouds, a half-exposed house sits amid a forest where brush strokes mingle with ink dots to achieve an almost shapeless mass. In the inscription, Gong Xian stresses again that it is essential to understand the artistic creativity of painters, so as to attain this creativity.

The two stories above reveal Gong Xian's reflection on the creation of the illusory world of landscape. Gong does not register himself as the human agent who was to interact with the landscape while making the landscape. In his view, human beings are not supposed to stand facing the landscape (meaning that they are outside it), to observe it and empathise with it, instead, they are always inside the world they perceive. For the painter who makes the landscape and for the audience who view it, there should be no such process of "seeing" in the sense that he connects what he sees with what he already has in his mind; instead, they should see the imagined landscape just as it is. Therefore, Gong claims that "the illusory state, although named so, ..., is the same as the real state." 雖曰幻境, ..., 同一實境也. To emphasise it in a more direct way— it is not that the illusory could be perceived as the real, but rather, that the illusory *is* the real, for it highlights the ontological status of the illusory world.

Starting from the attempt to connect to Northern Song monumentality, Gong Xian's works had departed from the harmony between man and nature, which was the basis of the Song ethic, and exceeded it through their cosmological drama. The landscape he created purely with intellectual effort does not represent the superior ideal (either material or spiritual) of landscape embedded with the nature-human duality. The pursuit for landscapes suitable for "wandering and living"<sup>47</sup>, had been lost in the dramatic extraction of human events in his landscape. Dong and Gong always painted pure landscapes without human figures, nor narrative interest, and with few elements of human presence. Max Loehr's assessment of Dong's paintings as "wholly devoid of feeling" would also fit Gong's works. The communication between the audience and Gong Xian's self-created universe has to be highly abstract and intellectual, since it is only in this way, and not through sentimental communication, that the human beings feel related to it.

Based on an investigation into the composition of Gong Xian's landscape and the logic underlying in its creation, I have attempted to argue for an

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<sup>47</sup> Northern-Song painter and theorist Guo Xi 郭熙 (ca. 1020-1090) elaborates, "those [landscapes] suitable for traveling and sightseeing are not as admirable in achievement as those suitable for wandering and living" 可行可望, 不如可居可遊之為得. See Guo Xi, *Linqun gaozhi* (林泉高致, The Lofty Message of Forest and Streams), in *Zhongguo gudai hualun leibian*, 632.

understanding of the substantiality of his landscape in relation to the represented world in the paintings. The landscape that is “without the sky or the earth” and created by the painter’s imagination attains substantiality and achieves eternity by creating a universe that detaches itself from the real world but attains equal substantiality.

### 3.4 Cultivating *Qi* to Achieve Substantiality

#### 3.4.1 *Qi* in artistic ideal of painting

The “Four Essentials for Painters” 畫家四要 is the most instructive principle in Gong Xian’s entire treatise of painting. The “Four Essentials” includes the “brush-method” 筆法, “ink-breath” 墨氣, “hills-valleys” 丘壑 and “breath-resonance” 氣韻.<sup>48</sup> It follows the pattern of the “Six Essentials” 六要 by the tenth-century painter and theorist Jing Hao 荆浩 (ca. 855-915), which includes *qi* 氣 (breath), *yun* 韻 (resonance), *si* 思 (thoughts), *jing* 景 (scenery), *bi* 筆 (brush), and *mo* 墨 (ink).<sup>49</sup> *Qi* and *yun*, the first two essentials, are combined into *qi-yun* (breath-resonance) in Gong’s discourse, which is the most critical and a direct consequence of the three other essentials. Besides including *qi* (breath) in *qi-yun*, Gong Xian also identified the ink with *qi*, while the brush with method, stressing the different focus of their working. He then reinforced the connection between ink and breath by

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<sup>48</sup> Gong Xian talks about the four essentials repeatedly in his writing. The earliest and most comprehensive one is in his “Painting Remarks of Chaizhang”, in *Gong Xian yanjiuji*, 137.

<sup>49</sup> Jing Hao, *Hua shanshui lu* 畫山水錄 in *Tang wudai hualun*, eds. Pan Yunhao, Li Yugang. (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997): 252.

stating that “the ‘Six Laws’ regards breath-resonance as the best, only the one who is good at ink is able to achieve breath-resonance [in his painting],” 六法以氣運為上，唯善用墨者能氣運。<sup>50</sup> Indeed, it was this aspect that earned him praise from his contemporaries: “[Gong’s] ink surpassed his brush” 墨勝於筆 (as recorded by Gong himself in his colophon of the Landscape Album in 1676).<sup>51</sup> Yet at the same time it was also the reception of more negative comments remarking upon the dark tonality of his works. As Qin Zuyong 秦祖永 (1825-1884) notes, “[Gong’s] ink is too dense and thick, lacking the delight of lucidity, grace and sparsity.” 墨太濃重，無清疏秀逸之趣。<sup>52</sup> As demonstrated in those remarks, Gong Xian’s innovative application of layered brushworks seems to value the significance of ink beyond a simple correlation between the ink and the brushwork.

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<sup>50</sup> The “Six Laws” of painting were established by Xie He 謝赫 in the preface to his book *Gu huapin lu* 古畫品錄, written circa 550, which includes “Breath Resonance” 氣韻, “Bone Method” 骨法, “Correspondence to the Object” 應物, “Suitability to Type” 隨類, “Division and Planning” 經營, and “Transmission by Copying” 傳移. See Xie He, *Gu huapin lu*, in *Zhongguo gudai hualun leibian*, 355. In Gong Xian’s quotation of Xie He, he used the character 運, which pronounces the same with 韻, and literally means movement, or operation. Considering that he used 韻 in his own “Four Essentials”, he did not mean to differentiate the two characters.

<sup>51</sup> *Gong Xian yanjiuji*, 158.

<sup>52</sup> Qin records this comment in his painting critique *Comments on Paintings by Tongming* 桐明論畫. My quotation refers to the modern reproduction in *Gong Xian yanjiuji*, 164.

Generally, a painting is accomplished by the simultaneous movements of brush and ink—the brush works with ink. Neither of them can proceed without the other, and it is from the intensity of their relationship and exchange that the pictorial process is accomplished. As Han Zhuo 韓拙 (active. 1119-1125) noted in the eleventh century, they are complementary but work differently: “the brush serves to establish forms and their texture, while the ink separates *yin* (the dark) from *yang* (the bright)” 筆以立其形質，墨以分其陰陽。<sup>53</sup> However, the relationship between the ink and the brush gets more complicated when considering the agency of artists in the process of painting, when the brush is made to move and the ink follows. For example, Shitao notes: “Ink is received from heaven” 墨受於天 while the brush is “managed by man” 筆操於人<sup>54</sup>, by which the given and the acquired are suggestively divided up. As the recipient, the ink “encompasses and carries like the ocean” 墨海抱負, while the brush “dominates and guides like mountains” 筆山駕馭。<sup>55</sup> Based on above interpretation of the nature of ink, we could perceive the

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<sup>53</sup> Han Zhuo, *Shanshui chun quanji* 山水純全集, in *Zhongguo gudai hualun leibian* 中國古代畫論類編, vol. 2, ed. Yu Jianhua 俞劍華 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2006): 674.

<sup>54</sup> Shitao, *Huayu lu*, 24.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.



correlation between the ink and *qi* as one of receptivity; they do not occupy but permeate; the ink is fluid and *qi* flows. Therefore, the ink receives, encompasses, and carries, operating as a medium between the painter's initial impulse and the finished work through the chain of relations in the process of painting that "the stroke/painting 'receives' the ink, which 'receives' the brush, which 'receives' the wrist, which 'receives' the heart-mind," 畫受墨, 墨受筆, 筆受腕, 腕受心.<sup>56</sup>

To understand the significance of *qi*, we also need to investigate its role in the compound "*qi-yun*". Jing Hao's profound understanding of *qi* and *yun* indicates his concern about the fluidity of the brushworks and the concealment of painterly traces in the finished works. He elaborates that, "*qi* is attained when the mind moves along with the brush, and thus has no hesitation of grasping the image, while *yun* is attained when one establishes forms by hiding the traces, thus creating an effect which is not drab." 氣者, 心隨筆運, 取象不惑. 韻者, 隱跡立形, 備儀不俗.<sup>57</sup> In Gong Xian's painting treatise, the fluidity of brushworks and the concealment of painterly traces is also important. For

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 253.

example, in his elaboration of the *hunlun* effect of brushworks, the stage before reaching *hunlun* is remarked as that which has “no traces of knots and stasis,” 無結滯之跡. This corresponds to the weakness or flaw of pictorial practices, which he states as follows: “there are three major flaws of paintings: stiff (like a board), engraved, and knotted. ... Having fully understood the ink and the brush, one could be free from these three flaws. 古稱畫之大病有三, 曰: 板, 刻, 結. ... 解筆墨二字, 無三病矣.”<sup>58</sup> Being “stiff, engraved, and knotted” all result from a superfluous residue of painterly traces, which should be erased to allow a lively, free, and relaxed expression of forms, but when the brushworks get stuck, traces will be deposited on the paper and become visible.

In this sense, Gong Xian’s artistic pursuit of “a thousand peaks and myriad ravines” can be regarded as a challenging experiment on brushworks, since the substantiality had to be accomplished by the heavy accumulation of brushstrokes and dense composition of landscape elements. Hence, Gong values the “coolness” of brushworks in fulfilling “the traceless” in substantial landscape:

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<sup>58</sup> Gong, “Gong Banqian’s Instructional Manual”, in *Gong Xian yanjiuji*, 151. The three flaws are not Gong’s invention and originally proposed by Han Zhuo, see Han, *Shanshui chun quanji*, 675.

A composition that has a thousand mountains and myriad ravines can still remain cool due to its calmness. One that has only a rock and a tree could still seem noisy because of the coarse and foul brushworks. Coolness comes naturally with simple and lofty brushwork. 有千秋萬壑，而仍冷者靜故也。有一石一木，而鬧者筆粗惡也。筆墨簡貴自冷。<sup>59</sup>

The composition of his paintings is extremely full, but the simple yet disciplined brushworks give a sense of control, which leads to the creation of a sense of quietude and, in Gong's own language, *coolness*. Gong Xian stressed the repose of the ink while constraining the motion of the brush to keep his brushworks simple and lofty. He rediscovered the power of ink as the recipient—the expressive efficiency of brushworks gives way to undemonstrative ink, and momentum is reduced. The paintings thus attain a sense of great solidity and tranquillity. Therefore, it is interesting to consider how Gong Xian's style of "ink surpassing the brush" contributes to the "breath-resonance" of his work. He described the ideal "breath-resonance" as *hun* 渾 (mingled) and *ya* (雅 elegant); the *hun* is the same character in the term *hunlun*, borrowed by Gong from the early classics to describe the amorphous effect of

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<sup>59</sup> *Gong Xian yanjiuji*, 138. Translation with some adaptations from William Wu, *Kung Hsien*, 326.

brushworks. In general, the ideal effect of *qi-yun* should be a balance between the lively and powerful (*hun*), and the quiet and refined (*ya*). It encapsulates my discussion above on the manifestation of ink and its contribution to the completion of the painting.

### 3.4.2 *Qi* in political symbolism and individual cultivation

One of Gong Xian's friends, Zheng Zifang 鄭子房, compared his ink-breath to the refining of *dan*, a Daoist mode of self-cultivation: "when the breath of his ink becomes lively, then the transformation of *dan* can be completed." 墨氣活，丹成矣。<sup>60</sup> By refining his ink-breath, the painter is able to enliven the ink and avoid it being reduced to a simple tool of description, and avoid leaving stiff ruts on the paper. Zheng's description indicates the relevance between the perfection of ink-breath and the cultivation of the painters' interior energy, which echoes Gong Xian's emphasis on the significance of cultivating *qi* benefit the painting practice. He states that:

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<sup>60</sup> Chinese alchemy can be divided into two methods of practice which are *waidan* (external alchemy) and *neidan* (internal alchemy). What Zheng mentioned here should be *neidan*, which is an array of esoteric doctrines and physical, mental, and spiritual practices that Daoist initiates use to prolong life and create an immortal spiritual body that would survive after death.

As for great ravines and great peaks, unless one reads books, cultivates one's *qi*, keeps the door closed for several decades, one will not easily get the brush started. 若大丘大壑，非讀書、養氣、閉戶數十年，未許易下筆。<sup>61</sup>

Reading and cultivating *qi* is necessarily urgent for the painters. 讀書養氣，未必非畫苑家之急事也。<sup>62</sup>

We need to consider the layers of meaning of “great” (大, lit. large) in the “great peaks and great ravines” here, for it refers not only to the large volume of the landscape elements and the densely covered composition, but also designates the firm, full texturing and the sound, solid character of a painting, which is to say, its *substantiality*. In this sense, the “great peaks and great ravines” summarizes Gong Xian’s ideal for landscape in the best way. It can be examined in comparison with the landscape representation of “remnant mountains and leftover waters”, as Gong had asserted his rejection of such expression.

for this ideal landscape in his imagination rejects the imprints of harsh realities.

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<sup>61</sup> Zhou Erxue 周二學, *Yijiao bian* 一角編, vol. 2 (Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1986): 40-41.

<sup>62</sup> From the inscription on the album leaf of “mountains-clouds”, see Figure 7.

Considering the political overtones in Gong Xian's works, some modern scholars may read his landscape as dominated by repressive constraint, lonely isolation, and a gloomy atmosphere. The heavy tonality, the strong sense of detachment and the absence of human traces might lead people to see his paintings as sentimental expressions of his personal encounter with contemporary political realities. We could find Arthur Wiley's reading of his works: "[Gong Xian] saw Nature as a vast battle ground strewn with sinister wreckage. His skies lower with a sodden pall of gray. ...Such houses as he does put into his pictures have a blank, tomb-like appearance; his villages look like graveyards."<sup>63</sup> Similarly, in his comprehensive study on the political symbolism of Gong Xian's paintings, Jerome Silbergeld understands them as a pictorial reflection of the political context.<sup>64</sup> For example, he interprets the empty houses in Figure 3-11 as the fishing villages along the Zhejiang coast after the Manchus devastated the population. Silbergeld argues that "Gong

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<sup>63</sup> Arthur, Waley, *An Introduction to the Study of Chinese Painting* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923): 251.

<sup>64</sup> Silbergeld completed a comprehensive study on the political symbolism in Gong Xian's works in his PhD dissertation, see Jerome, Silbergeld. *Political Symbolism in the Landscape Painting and Poetry of Kung Hsien (c. 1620-1689)*. Department of Art, Stanford University, 1974. Fundamentally, however, we have a different interpretation regarding the darkness and the atmosphere brought by darkness in his works, as well as the absence of human traces.

Xian's painted universe seems to ripple with a dark, haunted energy, silently confronting the refugee and denying him the salvation once offered by the natural harmony of the Song or Yuan landscape. The woes of man seem to have spilled over the land."<sup>65</sup>

Silbergeld is certainly right about the absence of natural harmony for human beings in Gong's paintings, but this absence, I would argue, is not concerned with "confronting the refugee and denying him the salvation". As I have argued regarding Gong's reflection on the creation of visionary landscape, the wild land, born from his imagination, does not indicate emotional expression and communication. His reference to the "remnant mountains and leftover waters" should not be examined merely in the light of the competition of styles and tastes of his time, but also in view of how the painter communicates his ideal of landscape via his paintings. As a wordless medium, paintings can be a form of political protest, but this expression is not, I would argue, necessarily psychological or sentimental. For remnant painters in the early Qing Dynasty who were appalled by the political turmoil and whose paintings reflect this, "remnant mountains and leftover rivers" represent the dissolution of their ideal

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 91-92.

of landscape. Gong's landscapes, however, are neither ruins nor leftovers. The amorphous accumulation of ink in the full composition renders a withdrawn but healthy landscape. The dark tonality and the atmosphere in Gong Xian's works are indicative not of any physical or spiritual enfeeblement; but, conversely, are the way he creates substantiality in the landscape, and presents the fullness of *qi*.

Gong Xian assigned reading, cultivating *qi* and "staying behind the closed door" as the critical practices to fulfil the ideal of "great peaks and great ravines". Those practices indicate his preference for an erudition based on insight gained from meditation rather than extensive travel in artistic inspiration.<sup>66</sup> This would seem to indicate another reason for Gong Xian to withdraw into his garden at the foot of the mountain, apart from the necessity to follow the pattern of reclusion under the political context of his time.

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<sup>66</sup> His inclination to paint visionary landscapes may be due, in part, to his lack of experience in travelling – among the major painters of the seventeenth century, Gong Xian travelled the least. Travelling became popular for landscape painters since the period of middle-Ming while the financial issue could be part of the reason for his lack of experience travelling. From his writing, we can tell that he remained rather poor throughout his life, and therefore had to keep painting and teaching to support his family.



In this sense, *qi* and its cultivation matter in both Gong Xian's artistic world and the real world, which, at the same time, vividly presents the entanglement between the two, especially considering the political context. The substantiality in landscape, as an important part of his artistic ideal and individualist style, also represents the resistance to reality thus attains the political symbolism; on the other hand, his mountain seclusion in practice, as the solution of remnant living and a symbol of resistance, also contributes to the acquirement of *qi*, which is essential in refining his brushworks and fulfilling the substantial landscape in painting.

## 3.5 Withdrawal into the solitary household

### 3.5.1 Empty valley without sound of footsteps

Now we can turn to those paper-like dwellings in the paintings that are hidden deep in the mountains and valleys. Although Gong Xian aimed at an unpopulated landscape in all respects, he insisted on drawing simple houses – mostly rural cottages – in his paintings, no matter how different they were from the surrounding landscape in terms of solidity. The humble but peaceful existence of these paper-like houses are signs that reflect the ideal dwelling of human beings – the solitary house, in Gong Xian's imagination. In the 1673 handscroll *A thousand peaks and the myriad ravines* 千岩萬壑圖卷 (Figure 3-17), we find a prominent set of motifs of solitary dwellings. Some of them sit by the lakeside or on the small island amid the water; some sit on the top of a small hill, or on the hillside facing the cliff; and some sit in the deep valley or on the plain embraced by forests. All of them are well protected by the surrounding landscape with substantiality and present a gesture of withdrawal by making the access to those dwellings rather difficult.

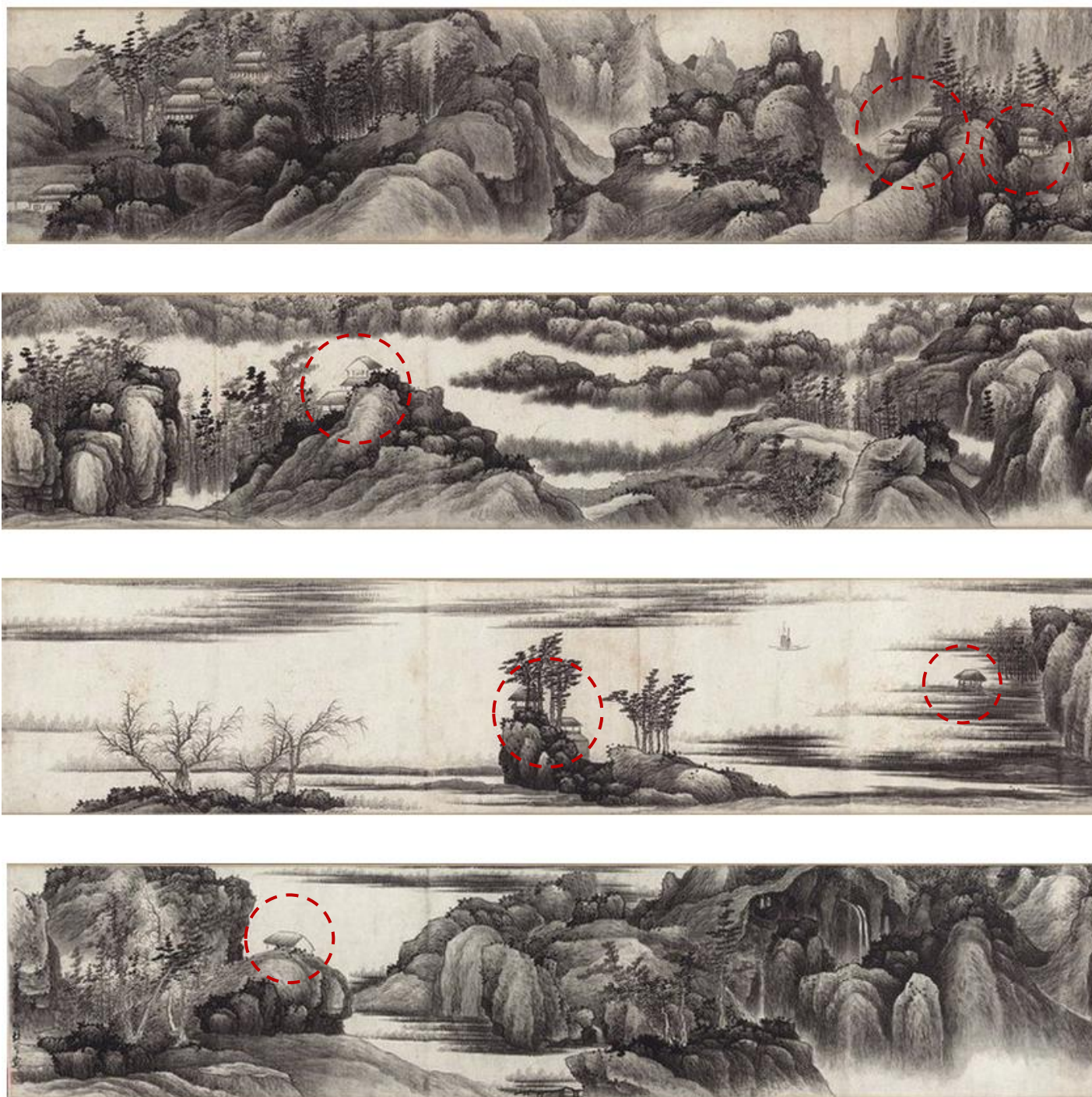


Figure 3-17 Gong Xian, *A thousand peaks and the myriad ravines* 千岩萬壑圖卷. Handscroll, dated 1673, ink on paper, 27.8x980cm. Nanjing Museum, Nanjing. The solitary homes are in red circles.



Silbergeld describes these huts as that, “The world of man has seemingly been left behind, but the hut of the recluse, who has fled from that world, casts a lonely spell across many of the scenes.”<sup>67</sup> I assume that Gong Xian would take this loneliness as positive and admirable.

Among Gong Xian’s works, there is a very rare painting that contains a human figure. In the exemplary *Landscape Album Presented to Zhou Yanji* 贈周燕及山水冊 of twenty leaves, dated 1675, one leaf has the rare appearance of a human figure — an old man holding a walking stick going into the mountains. (Figure 3-18) In the appended inscription, Gong Xian wrote:

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<sup>67</sup> Silbergeld, *Political Symbolism*, 91.



Entering the mountains, I only worry that I am not going deep enough. Who  
hears the footsteps in the empty valley?

入山唯恐不深，誰聞空谷之足音？

Figure 3-18 Gong Xian, Fifteenth leaf in *Landscape Album Presented to Zhou Yanji*.  
Album of twenty leaves, dated 1675, ink on paper, 22.2x33.3cm. The Palace  
Museum, Beijing.  
Inscription on the right side.

The “empty valley” 空谷 and “sound of footstep” 足音 are both important themes in Chinese literature and art criticism, as is their combination. The “empty valley” comes from a poem in *The Classic of Poetry* 詩經: “The brilliant white colt, Is there in that empty valley,” 皎皎白駒，在彼空谷， which captures the sense of loss over a friend’s departure. The “sound of footsteps” comes from an extract in *Zhuangzi* 莊子: “[The men who withdraw to empty valleys,] are glad when they hear the sounds of human footsteps,” 聞人足音，蹵然而喜也， which evokes the joy of hearing the coming of visitors.<sup>68</sup> The compound phrase “the footsteps in the empty valley” refers to rare visits, messages and rare and precious things. But Gong Xian’s usage of this phrase is brought up in a rhetorical question, “who hears the footsteps in the empty valley?”, to imply that he did not want to hear the footsteps, since he was too determined to move into deep mountains and was engaged in it. Thus, in contrast to the common pleasant depiction of the “empty valley” and “sound of footsteps”, this album leaf conveys a strong feeling of tension. The little human figure seems rather insignificant confronting the foreground rock with the surreal size of monochromatic volume.

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<sup>68</sup> Respectively, see “The white horse” 白駒, in the session of Xiaoya (小雅, Lesser Court Hymns) in *The Classic of Poetry*, and “Ghostless Xu” 徐无鬼, in *Zhuangzi*.

Viewing this work in comparison with Gong Xian's other paintings without human figures, can tell us more. In the monumental paintings discussed previously, Gong was the withdrawn creator standing in the distance, while in this album leaf, he portrayed himself as a figure struggling to retreat into deep seclusion. This scene can be understood, I believe, as his self-portrait. Compared with those monumental handscrolls that rest in substantiality and eternity, this small leaf captures a vibrant moment. It presents a rare expression of turbulence in his works—the man is in motion, and the texture strokes of the mountains and clouds are relatively coarse, thus making them unstable, as if they could be blown away by a sudden wind. Therefore, the misgivings of not going deep enough expressed in this leaf has double meaning: as for his artistic pursuit, it implicated a status when the ideal had not been achieved; as for his practical life, he had not attained enough peace and serenity to live a reclusive life and cultivate his breath. For both situations, the ideal would be a landscape of "A Thousand Peaks and Myriad Ravines".

The substantiality of peaks and ravines enables the fragments of solitary homes to have an empty valley to reside. The different forms of homes seem easily understandable as the embodiments of this ideal of reclusion and part of his subjective creation, which indicate his metonymic self-reference. Therefore, we could turn to his Half-acre Garden to investigate whether this



ideal was fulfilled in the real life.

### 3.5.2 In the bamboo groves, in the gated garden, in the mountain

Gong Xian's Half-Acre Garden was named after its humble size. There was a burgeoning trend in the seventeenth century of garden names reflecting their miniature nature, examples include: "Half-Acre" 半畝, "Mustard Seed" 芥子, "In A Pot" 壺中, "Remaining Grain" 殘粒.<sup>69</sup> This was due in part to the limited economic capacity of the owners, but it was also part of a trend of the time, where the tiny space of the garden promised an "inner space" for literati and guaranteed an abode of intimacy. It was even more praiseworthy if the miniature garden could find compensation for its size in aesthetic excellence.

In 1685, Gong Xian invited Wang Hui 王翬 (1632–1717) to paint the Half-acre Garden, writing him a letter with some simple texts about the physical appearance and geographic features of the garden:

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<sup>69</sup> Wang Yi 王毅, *Yuanlin yu Zhongguo wenhua* 園林與中國文化 (Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1990): 173-76.

To the south of my thatched dwelling, a spare space of half an acre has a few flowers and bamboo, hence its name, yet it is not enough to be called a garden. Qingliang is the mountain's name. On the mountain is a terrace and looking far into the distance, the Qinhuai River lies to the front, while Mount Zhong reclines at the rear. On the left is Lake Mochou, its ladle-like water as smooth as a mirror. On the right is Lion Ridge, a pinch of earth which looks like an eyebrow. My house is right under the terrace, turn your body to the northeast and point to it, the brushwood door and barking dogs are likely to be seen.

余家草堂之南，餘地半畝，稍有花竹，因以名之，不足稱園也。清涼山上有台，亦名清涼台。登臺而觀，大江橫於前，鐘阜橫於後。左有莫愁，勺水如鏡；右有獅嶺，撮土若眉；余家即在此台之下。轉身東北，引客視之，則柴門犬吠，仿佛見之。<sup>70</sup>

Gong Xian spoke much of the surrounding scenery of the garden, while only a few words are uttered on the garden itself. From his description, we can tell that the garden was a humble environment, surrounded by splendid natural beauty. Considering that this was a hint Gong offered to the painter who had

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<sup>70</sup> It is the postscript to Gong's poem asking for a painting from Wang Hui, in Xu Yongxuan 徐永宣 ed., *Qinghui Zengyan* 淸暉贈言, quoted in *Gong Xian yanjiuji*, 83.

never visited his garden, we could imagine what he was expecting. The garden in the painting will appear insignificant within its substantial surroundings, as insignificant as the lonely huts in his own paintings.

Although Wang Hui's painting could not be traced, we may have a glance at the scenery of Qingliang Mountain from Gong Xian's own painting, *The Green Surrounding Mountain Qingliang* 清涼環翠圖. (Figure 3-19) It was probably painted after 1676, when Gong had resided in his Half-acre Garden for a decade, and had accumulated lots of everyday experience within the topographical landscape.<sup>71</sup> Here, the painting depicts the panoramic scenic view with leafy trees around Mountain Qingliang from a level distance, with mists and clouds between mountains that give it a vivid, atmospheric touch. Reading the ariel map along with Gong Xian's text, we could know that he described the surrounding view on the Terrace facing west. (Figure 3-20) In the painting, a pavilion is located at the mountaintop, which could be marking Qingliang Terrace. The monastic building at the foot behind a shade of trees

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<sup>71</sup> According to the official introduction on the website of Palace Museum, the dating of this painting was evidenced by the fact that Gong Xian stated that he "never tried a painting in colour till the age of nearly sixty," 年近六十, 未嘗一為設色畫, in a colophon to his painting *Waterfall in Autumn Mountain* 秋山飛瀑圖 (1676) in Guangzhou Art Museum, which was also in light colour.

at the left bottom should be the Qingliang Temple.<sup>72</sup> Right in the gap between mountains at the left lies a city wall that encircles the mountain, and the vast blank at the furthestmost is Yangzi River. This painting depicts exactly what Gong Xian described about the surrounding scenery of his garden, except that there was no hint of the garden. According to Gong's description, his garden was to the northeast of the Terrace, we could assume that it hid behind the bulging volume of the foreground mountains at the lower right corner.

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<sup>72</sup> Chan Yuen Lai has a nice analysis of the scenery around Qingliang Mountain depicted by Gong based on his earlier work on Qingliang Terrace and two prints of maps in early 1600s. See Chan Yuen Lai. *Conformity and Divergence: Perception of Garden Spaces by Gong Xian and Yuan Jiang from Nanjing in Early Qing Dynasty*. Master Thesis. The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2007. I refer to his/her analysis here to describe the painting.



Figure 3-19 Gong Xian, *The Green Surrounding Mountain Qingliang* 清涼環翠圖. Handscroll, dated 1676, ink and colour on paper, 30cm x 144.5cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.

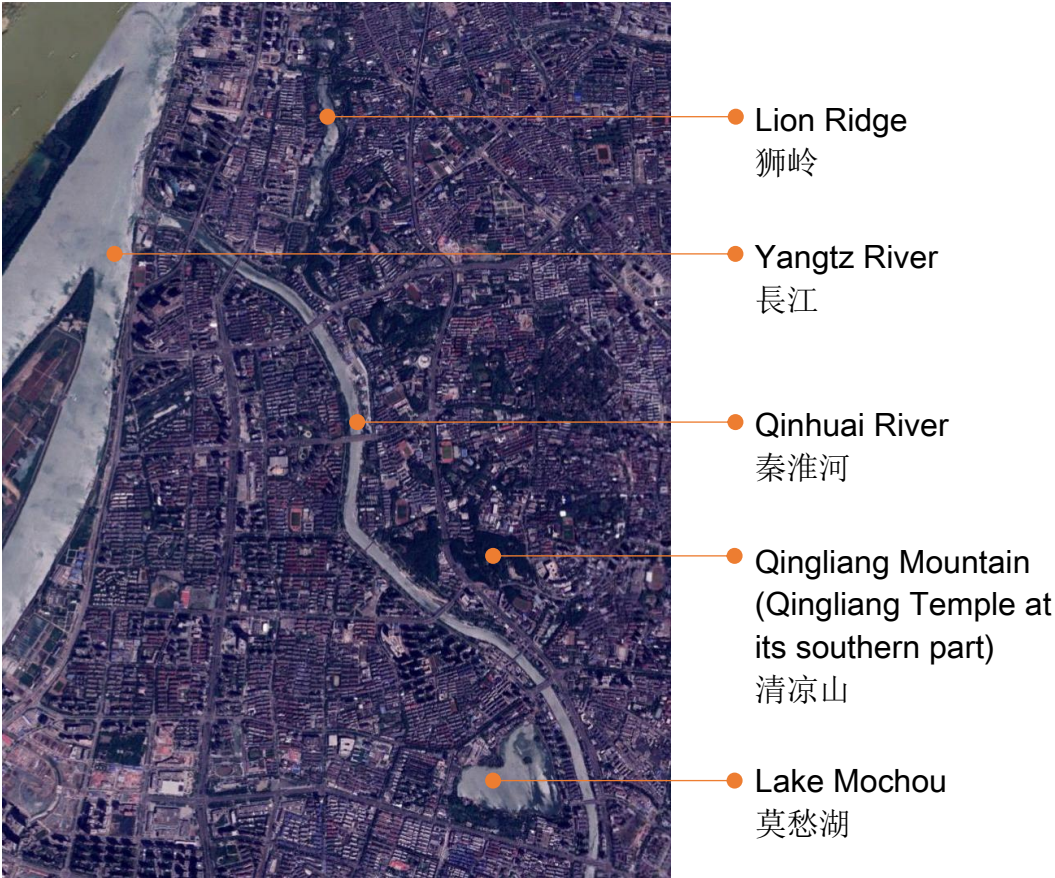


Figure 3-20 Aerial photo of Qingliang Mountain and its surrounding area (2km above) (Google Map, 2020/04)

Gong Xian practiced a very strict seclusion in the pattern of “moving into the mountains” and was very clear about his rejection of mundane disturbance, emphasizing this repeatedly. As his important friend and patron Zhou Lianggong remarked, “Gong has an awkward personality, and he can barely get on well with others.” 性孤僻，與人落落難和。<sup>73</sup> Two couplets from the set of poems by Zhou delineated the image of the closed door of Gong’s garden:

With the world itself there are no affairs,

all year long the door is closed.

於世殊無事， 經年合閉門。

The wild old fellow leisurely says he is sick,

the brushwood door is closed all day.

野老閒稱病， 柴門永日關。<sup>74</sup>

The “gated space” alludes to an important theme in Tang poetry,<sup>75</sup> where

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<sup>73</sup> Zhou Lianggong, *Du hua lu*, 957.

<sup>74</sup> Zhou Lianggong’s set of poems “Visiting the Half-Acre Garden Presented to Gong Banqian” 過半畝園贈半千, quoted in Gong *Xian yanjiuji*, 208.

<sup>75</sup> Yang Xiaoshan, *Metamorphosis of the private sphere: Gardens and objects in Tang-Song poetry*. (Harvard University Asia Centre, 2003): 51-56.

shutting the gate had always been an emblematic gesture of enclosing oneself within a mental space of reclusion. A poem written in his old age tells how he spent a winter morning in peace: “Although my ears are nearly deaf and my eyes nearly blind, I still keep the door closed; with a volume of *Zhuangzi*, I sit in my little hut.” 耳聾目暗仍扃戶，一卷南華坐小齋。<sup>76</sup> Apart from the poetic implications, the gated space was also used for the practical purpose of keeping out mundane affairs. Located just within the west perimeter of the city wall, the Qingliang Mountain is still conveniently reached. Gong had been occupied by commissions of paintings and teaching throughout his life, and even died from forced commissions. Kong Shangren 孔尚任 (1648-1718), a remnant and a dramatist whose best-known work is the political drama *The Peach Blossom Fan* 桃花扇 about the last days of the Ming dynasty, wrote in memory of Gong Xian upon his death. Before his death, Gong had written to Kong mentioning that he had been suffering from the extortion for his works from the local villains and consulting how to “get over these dragons and tigers”

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<sup>76</sup> “Reading in a winter morning” 冬曉書事, in his *Caoxiangtang shiji* 草香堂集, quoted in *Gong Xian yanjiuji*, 83.



降龍伏虎.<sup>77</sup> Kong had not managed to give his suggestions before he was informed of Gong's death due to the extortion. We can now sympathise with his longing for a peaceful reclusive life, which he had not really attained throughout his life.

The closed gate was not the only protection Gong Xian set for himself. The bamboo grove appeared as a prominent feature of his dwelling in poems by himself and his friends addressed to the Half-acre Garden. In "The Half-Acre Garden Poem" 半畝園詩, Gong spoke of how he began his garden life:

The tiled house of four or five rooms,  
was bought with almost a hundred gold pieces.  
Spare space is only half an acre,  
and new bamboo has just begun to provide shade.  
瓦屋四五間，購之將百金。  
餘地才半畝，新竹乍成陰。<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Kong, "Reply to Gong Banqian" 答龔半千, *Gong Xian yanjiuji*, 197; "Wailing for Gong Banqian" 哭龔半千, *Ibid.*, 199. Gong's death is taken as relevant to his reputation as a Ming loyalist and the local villains who forced him to paint had close relationship with local Qing officials.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

The bamboos served as an important element in modifying his dwelling, so Gong Xian specially had a poem on “Begging for Bamboo” 乞竹, in which he explained the benefit of having bamboos in his garden:

I do not dare to plant green pines,  
for in front of pines, men are quick to decay.  
But I will transplant a few stalks of bamboo,  
to quickly cover the ugliness of my poor household.

不敢種青松，松前人易朽。<sup>79</sup>  
願移竹數竿，急掩貧家醜。

The bamboo grove offers a precious experience of the wildness of nature, by bringing wildness into the garden itself. In this limited space, he withdraws further into himself as his intimacy with nature produces a new optimism in his life. As I have mentioned, the album leaf depicting “the only household in a thousand peaks and myriad ravines” was painted in the bamboo groves, as he wrote in the colophon:

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 110.

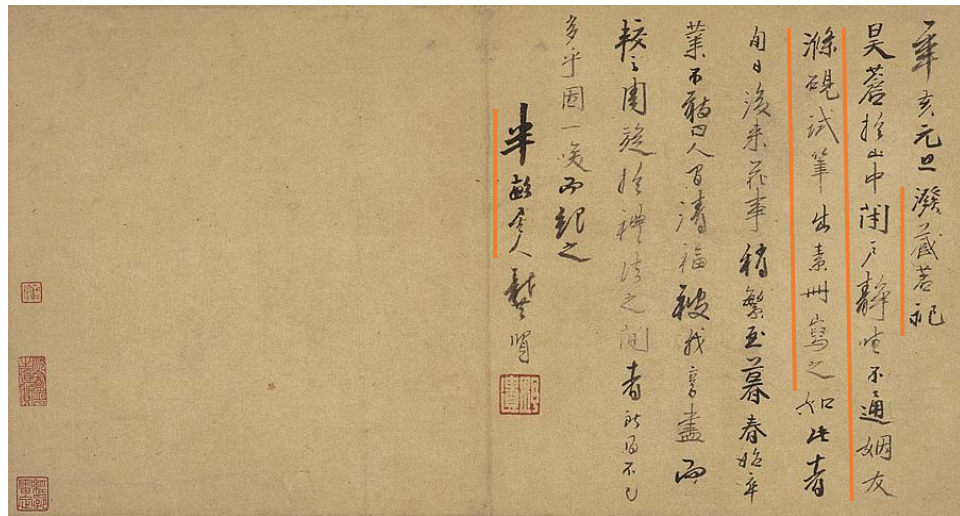
There is nothing to do in the mountain during this long summer. I woke up early in the morning, moved a side table inside the bamboo groves and sat. I painted and inscribed without hurries, finish one in a day, just like daily lessons that are not commissioned by the others. It set me free from determining its density, lightness and intensity.

長夏，山中無事。晨起移小幾，坐竹中，隨畫隨題，日得一幅，以為清課。非應他人之命，故濃淡多寡，得以自由。<sup>80</sup>

Instead of painting indoors in a studio, Gong Xian painted outdoors in the bamboo groves, directly embracing the natural landscape. The “daily lesson” refers to the Buddhist daily ritual, and here it is used for the ritual of cultivation Gong Xian arranged for himself— among the scholarly arts, painting a landscape is an essential part of their spiritual activity. Gong Xian mentioned in the postscript of the 1671 album that: (Figure 3-22)

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<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Gu Wenbin 顧文彬, *Guoyunlou shuhuaiji* 過雲樓書畫記 (1882), vol. Painting 5, 32a.



Sprinkling some tea about that I had specially set aside, I made a sacrifice in the mountains to the vast heavens. I closed the gate and sat quietly, communicating with neither relatives nor friends. Having washed my inkstone and tried out my brush, I brought out this plain album.

潑藏茗，杞昊蒼，於山中閉戶靜坐，不通姻友。滌硯試筆，出素冊寫之。

Figure 3-21 Gong Xian, Postscript of 1671 *Landscape Album*. Album of ten leaves, dated 1671, ink on paper. 24.1 x 44.7 cm. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City.

The quoted part is as underlined.

This renders the condition of Gong Xian's garden life when he started to work on a new album, which includes some ritual acts thus indicates his taking painting as a serious spiritual activity regarding self-cultivation. In this condition, the closed gate was mentioned again.

This chapter articulates the significant and complicated connection between Gong Xian's artistic creation of "A Thousand Peaks and Myriad Ravines" and his practical living in the mountain hut. His longing for a substantial landscape, on the one hand, is due to his preference for the robust landscape that resists the depressive representation of loss, while on the other, is part of his imagination of ideal living, which is capable to protect him from all the disturbance. In the practical level, the substantiality of his living could only be fulfilled by the suburban mountain, the closed gate and the bamboo grove, an attempt however compromised, to form a solitary household replicating the condition of the empty valley. In a painting that also inscribed with the same poem I quoted in the introduction with the line "the only household in a thousand peaks and myriad ravines", Gong used the vertical organization of myriad mountains to create the endless landscape. At the lower right corner, there is a small courtyard with three huts, almost impossible to be spotted in the imposing landscape. Around the huts, there are bamboos.

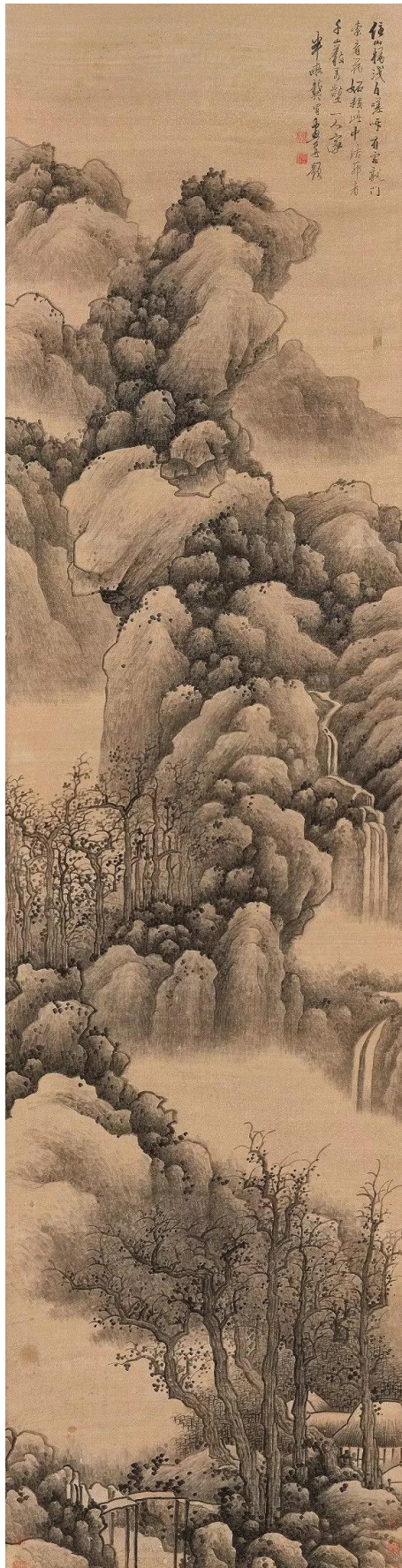


Figure 3-22 Gong Xian, *Secluded dwelling in the mountain* 山居幽賞圖. Hanging scroll, ink on silk, 316x80cm. Private Collection.

Therefore, I regard “A Thousand Peaks and Myriad Ravines” as the mediate landscape, which is manifest in his bamboo-thicket gated garden at the foot of the mountain - the destination for his bodily withdrawal, as well as in his artistic creation of substantial landscape. Through this mediate landscape, Gong Xian reflected on his existence as a remnant subject of dynastic change, and his crucial relationship with the world he lived in.

## **CHAPTER 4 IN AND OUT OF DARK DREAMS:**

### **Dong Yue's Dream Writing, His Depression and Buddhist Enlightenment**

- 4.1 Intro: recording the Garden of Intent
- 4.2 Dong Yue's Discourses on dreaming before Ming's fall
  - 4.2.1 The Land of Dreams as a compensatory realm
  - 4.2.2 Writing as a way of construction
  - 4.2.3 Dreams, anxiety, and an identity crisis
- 4.3 Towards Buddhist enlightenment
  - 4.3.1 Buddhist imprints on Dong Yue's early dreams
  - 4.3.2 Dreaming as a way of cultivation
  - 4.3.3 Dreams as herbs and the Journey in Sickness
  - 4.3.4 The dreaming-writing paradox and its solution
  - 4.3.5 Writing, burning and existential reflection
- 4.4 Dreams and the spatiality of withdrawal
  - 4.4.1 The mud hut, the Tower of Dreams
  - 4.4.2 The drifting life on the Boating Home



## 4.1 Intro: Recording the Garden of Intent

Caught up in the vast political and social upheavals after the Ming collapse in 1644, Dong Yue 董說 (1620-1686) became increasingly interested in a life of seclusion. He dismissed his students and shut himself up in his studio, cutting off most of his social connections. In 1645, his friend Yu Shengmin 虞聖民, a Confucian scholar, asked Dong to write an account of his Garden of Intent (志園, *Zhi yuan*). Yu was too poor to build a real garden, so he based on a painting to imagine modelling his garden and asked Dong Yue to record it in writing: “this is my garden, but it exists only as an intent (*zhi*, 志), hence the name Garden of Intent. The abode is built hugging the mountain. Surrounded by bamboos, it faces a clear stream.” After viewing the painting, Dong Yue said, “How strange! This is what I would call the Land of Dreams (夢鄉).”<sup>1</sup>

Since 1643, Dong Yue had been obsessed with mysterious dream journeys. Yu Shengmin’s invitation inspired him to imagine his own Tower of Dreams. Soon after being invited by Yu, he dreamt about a secluded stone tower with a stone plaque reading “Morning chill arises on seventy-two peaks” 七十二峰

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<sup>1</sup> Dong Yue, “Account of the Garden of Intent”, *Fengcao’an qianji* 豐草庵前集 (Former Collection of the Studio of Luxuriant Grasses), vol. 4 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1987): 16b.

生曉寒。Impressed by this dream, Dong decided to “build” his Tower of Dreams, along with Yu Shengmin’s Garden of Intent in his writing.

However, in the following two years, Yu brought another two paintings with different themes asking Dong Yue to have them described as his “Garden of Intent”. On this occasion, Dong observed that it was difficult to definitively represent the Garden through pictorial depiction. As he notes:

As a matter of fact, intent is like a dream. Streams and mountains are different from one another; so how can a garden [of intent] be painted? Executing a painting in order to express an intent; I have not seen that they would match each other. 夫志猶夢也。溪山各異，而園烏能圖？執圖以言志，我未見其合也。<sup>2</sup>

Dong Yue had had a similar realisation previously when he had three dreams in a single night. In his first dream, he ascended a ladder of clouds and reached a terrace surrounded by a forest of green plum trees where the flowers were

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 17a.

like emerald feathers. Then he dreamed of being in Mount Lu 廬山<sup>3</sup>, reaching an extremely high peak, and seeing the tassel-like moist atmosphere at the belly of the mountain. When roosters began to cry, he dreamed of sitting in a fishing boat and playing “A Sad Song of the Human World” 人間可哀曲 on an iron flute<sup>4</sup>, several immortals riding deer from the place where the sun was setting. In one single night, the scenes of the dreams changed rapidly. It was the night when he was going to carve the blocks for printing his essay “Treatise on the Land of Dreams” (夢鄉志, *Mengxiang Zhi*). But after having three dreams in a row, he began to regret his intent to record the realm of dreams and “realized that the Land of Dreams could not be recorded (zhi),” 知夢鄉之不可志也.<sup>5</sup>

The use of the character zhi in the name of Yu Shengmin’s Garden is slightly

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<sup>3</sup> Mount Lu has been a well-known spot for secluded life since the fourth century. See Susan E, Nelson. “Catching Sight of South Mountain: Tao Yuanming, Mount Lu, and the Iconographies of Escape.” *Archives of Asian Art*, vol. 52 (Duke University Press, 2000): 11-43.

<sup>4</sup> The lute iron may come from the magical iron flute given to the blind fortune teller Sun Shourong 孫守榮 (act. ca. 1225), which later became a popular symbol of seclusion. For the story of Sun, see Toqto’a, Alutu. *Song Shi* 宋史 (Zhonghua shuju, 1977), vol. 39: 13533. For a contemporary interpretation, see Victor H., Mair, ed. *The Columbia history of Chinese literature*. (Columbia University Press, 2010): 393.

<sup>5</sup> Dong Yue, “Account of the Garden of Intent”, 16a.

different from that in the title of the “Treatise of the Land of Dreams”. The former, translated as “intent”, implies ambition and the deliberate pursuit of an ideal garden. As it remains merely an intent, it highlights the significance of representation, whether painting or writing, as the mode of construction. The latter title, translated as “treatise”, refers to a formal and systematic written discourse on the subjectively constructed realm. Dong Yue assigned himself to the role of “Historian of Dreams” 夢史, and sometimes the “Great Historian of the Land of Dreams” 夢鄉太史, who was in charge of the collecting and organizing the dreams of the Land.<sup>6</sup> However, both *zhi* refer to consciously constructing to celebrate the capacity of words in forming narrated truths. This story also reveals the paradox intrinsic to the notion of *zhi*, between inevitable change and the desire of attaining significance and constancy, especially when applied to illusory realms, such as imagined gardens and dreams.

However, there was a vital turn in the end of this story—Dong Yue realized that despite the fluidity of the intent that defies the writer’s attempt to record it, “this would suffice as a record of the Garden of Intent” 此足以記志園矣<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 12b.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 17a.

Therefore, Dong took a painting by the fifteenth-century master Shen Zhou 沈周 (1427-1509) from his family collection, as his Garden of Intent and wrote the account for his friend and himself. This account is actually a record of Dong's vacillating as to the possibility of ever being able to record the illusory realms. Similarly, in spite of a short regret about his attempt to ever “*zh*” his Land of Dreams, he kept writing and discoursing on dreaming.

The logical transition indicated when Dong Yue says “however, this would suffice as a record” could be understood as an admittance of compromise, but it may also indicate the critical moment in Dong's changing understanding of the nature of dreams and writing on dreams. Echoing Dong Yue's enthusiasm for chronology, this chapter discusses his evolving understanding of the mutability of illusory realms and how this corresponded to the greater reality crisis of his contemporary moment and, ultimately, influenced his modality of withdrawal. His early writing on dreams in the turmoil of late-Ming took the all-illusory Land of Dreams as an alternative realm into which he could withdraw from personal and national traumas. After the dynastic change, he tended to take dream experiences as a mode of self-cultivation and therapy in real life, which revealed his being influenced by the shift in Buddhist thinking on relating to dreams as a way of achieving enlightenment, rather than an escape from the world. This process was accompanied by his evolving understanding of

writing and its role in capturing the illusory realms. In the early stage of this process, Dong relied on writing to construct the illusory realm of dreams. Although he understood that writing would never be able to capture the mutability of illusions, it made a positive contribution in clarifying the nature of dreams by presenting its own limitation. Later, Dong came to realize that his obsession with writing, seen by himself as “irresponsible”, was, from a Buddhist perspective, a barrier to enlightenment.

Having benefited from Buddhist thought in the disenchantment of dreams and writing, Dong Yue had tonsure in 1657 and became an official monk. In his late years, he lived a drifting life on his boathouse and practiced the unobstructed and free changes he had used to describe dreams – a true withdrawal from the world.

## 4.2 Dong Yue's Discourses on dreaming before Ming's fall

### 4.2.1 The Land of Dreams as a compensatory realm

Inspired by his dreaming experiences, Dong Yue became particularly interested in the discourse of dreams. He wrote extensively about dreams, including personal dream records and systematic discourses on his imagination of the Land of Dreams. Although he claimed to have demolished the printing blocks of the "Treatise of the Land of Dreams", he did publish it years later, together with two other essays "Inviting Submissions of Dreams" 征夢篇 and "Pact for the Dream Society" 夢社約.<sup>8</sup> These essays explicate his theory of dreams and propose a convincing masterplan for the Land of Dreams in terms of its spatial configuration, institutional administration and social communication.

Like the ancient "nine regions" 九州 in China, the Land of Dreams has seven internal divisions: Land of the dark and the mysterious 玄怪鄉; of mountains and rivers 山水鄉; of the netherworld 冥鄉; of confining thoughts, emotions, and cognitions 識鄉; of wishful fantasies 如意鄉; of the hidden past 藏往鄉;

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<sup>8</sup> Dong, *Fengcao'an qianji*, vol. 2: 12a-16b.

and of the future 未來鄉. The seven internal lands form a collage of various dreamscapes under certain themes. The Land is governed by the following Six Ministers 六官: 夢塚宰 Minister of Personnel, 夢司徒 Minister of Revenue, 夢宗伯 Minister of Rites, 夢司馬 Minister of War, 夢司寇 Minister of Justice, and 夢司空 Minister of Public Works. There are four departments 四科 to issue the books of the seven lands. The first is the official in charge of dreams 司夢史; the second is the Orchid Terrace of Dream Collection, where dreams are stored 藏夢蘭台; the third is Mirror of Dreams 夢監, in which dreams are recorded with dates given to the official in charge of dreams; the fourth is the Dream Society 夢社, where members get together and travel in company.<sup>9</sup> The official system is borrowed from the canonical *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli* 周禮, 4th–3rd century BC) which allegedly reflects the perfect administrative structure of the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 1045–771 BC).

Dong Yue's imagination of the Land of Dreams follows a type of thematic writing on ideal worlds in Chinese history that stem from literary imagination. He recalled the "Account on the Land of Drunkenness" 醉鄉記 by Wang Ji 王績 (589?-644) and the "Account on the Land of Sleep" 睡鄉記 by Su Shi 蘇

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 13a.



軾 (1037-1101) in his own writing on the dreamlands. Their literary construction of the illusory worlds relied heavily on negative expressions to convey how the diametrically opposed they were to the real world:

The Land of Drunkenness is a vast territory, with no boundaries, no hills nor steep slopes. The environment is mild, and has no brightness nor darkness, no winter nor summer. The customs are harmonious, so that there are no towns nor villages. People there live with no love nor hatred, happiness nor anger; (they) eat winds and dews, but no grains. They sleep in ease and walk slowly. They live with all kinds of animals and know nothing about the use of boats, carriages, nor machines. 其土曠然無涯，無丘陵阪險；其氣和平一揆，無晦明寒暑；其俗大同，無邑居聚落；其人甚精，無愛憎喜怒，吸風飲露，不食五穀；其寢于于，其行徐徐，與鳥獸魚鱉雜處，不知有舟車械器之用。<sup>10</sup>

The Land of Sleep is flat and broad and is without the four cardinal directions. Its people are peaceful and comfortable, and are not bothered by illness or plague. They are in a daze, and do not generate seven sentiments. They are in complete ignorance, not dealing with anything. They are utterly ignorant, not knowing there exists the sky, earth, sun,

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<sup>10</sup> Dong Gao 董誥 ed, *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文, vol. 132: 1.

and moon. Not weaving silk or growing grains, they are satisfied with themselves just by leisurely lying down. Taking no boat or carriage, they travel afar at their desire. 其土平夷廣大，無東西南北，其人安恬舒適，無疾痛割癢。昏然不生七情，茫然不交萬事，蕩然不知天地日月。不絲不縠，佚臥而自足；不舟不車，極意而遠遊。<sup>11</sup>

The two illusory worlds coexist with the human world, and are envisioned as pure, homogenous, ignorant and primitive. The heavy use of negative expression conveys the authors' critical thoughts of existing human polity and civilization. On the contrary, the meticulous structure of the Land of Dreams parallels that of human society, thus offering an alternative existence of a civilized counterpart. In Dong Yue's imagination, the Land of Sleep is the neighbour of the Land of Dreams:

The Sea of Chaos is between (the two lands), which is neither cold nor hot. If you cross the sea, in a short while you will be on the "Road of Getting Lost", and then you will walk on the path of the dreamland. You come across the Land of Sleep before arriving at the Land of Dreams.

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<sup>11</sup> Su Shi 蘇軾, *Dongpo quanji* 東坡全集, vol. 38: 11a-12a.

有混沌海，不寒不暑，濟此海，屈申臂頃抵迷家路，遂夢鄉道上，睡前而  
夢後。<sup>12</sup>

The “Sea of Chaos” does not seem a commonly used term in either Buddhist or Daoist classics, but “chaos” 混沌 must be applied here based on Dong’s comprehension of the Chinese myth of the primordial chaos of the universe, before the separation of heaven and earth. In the “Inviting Dreams”, he compared dreaming to “playing the tune of chaos with the secluded zither” 幽琴彈混沌之調 and “planting enchanting flowers in the Garden of Mysteries” 玄圃種迷境之花<sup>13</sup>. In the Daoist myth, the Garden of Mysteries (玄圃, *xuanpu*) sits on the top of one peak of the huge divine mountain, Mount Kunlun, which appears as a pillar supporting the sky located at the centre of the world.<sup>14</sup> As an analogue for *hundun* (混沌 chaos) in form and sound, within the context of early Daoism, Kunlun also suggests an image of primordial and central Chaos,

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<sup>12</sup> Dong, “Treatise of the Land of Dreams”, *Fengcao’an qianji*, vol. 2: 12b.

<sup>13</sup> Dong, “Inviting Submissions of Dreams”. *Ibid.*, 14b.

<sup>14</sup> The name of *Xuanpu* comes from the name of a peak in the legendary accounts about Mount Kunlun. See Chen Guangzhong 陳廣中, *Huainanzi yizhu* 淮南子譯註: 184-85.

utterly closed and dark.<sup>15</sup>

The self-invented “Sea of Chaos”, “Road of Getting Lost” and the allusive “Garden of Mysteries” and “Mount Kunlun” render the underlying cosmological setting of the Land of Dreams as a world that emerges from primordial chaos, which is articulated by means of established myths and philosophy. When one crosses chaos and then gets lost, one has departed from the innocence and dumbness of the Land of Sleep and sets off for the journey of chaos to witness the birth of an alternative world. This “other world”, does not negate the real world in a straightforward way, but presents an ideal version that is not ruined or polluted. It is noteworthy that Dong’s construction of the Land of Dreams took place before the Ming collapse, which means this compensatory realm should not be seen as directly reacting to the dynastic change but, more subtly, can be seen as a response to the diverse crises that emerged from the troubling general context. Therefore, the construction was aimed at amendment and refinement, so that the Land of Dreams finds itself a better version of the real world with recognizable resemblances.

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<sup>15</sup> For the relationship between *hundun* and Kunlun, as well as another synonymous *hunlun*, see Isabelle, Robinet. “*Hundun* 混沌 Chaos; inchoate state”, in Fabrizio, Pregadio ed. *The Encyclopaedia of Taoism* (Routledge, 2007): 524–25.

Dong Yue's imagination of the Land of Dreams may have involved political ideas from his earlier study and writing on politics and governance.<sup>16</sup> Dong was interested in politics when he was young and wrote extensively on politically innocuous subjects, although his engagement with political practices was short-lived. He might have referred to the Revival Society 復社 when imagining the Dream Society, and the "Inviting Submission of Dreams" parodies the "calls for submissions" inside those societies in late-Ming and early-Qing times, by substituting records of interesting dreams as the desired material for sharing. Dong Yue was involved with the Revival Society for two years after he failed the 1639 provincial examination in Nanjing, and became incensed by what he perceived as gross unfairness in the results. He became a student of Zhang Pu 張溥 (1602-1641)<sup>17</sup>, the founder of the Revival Society, and was about to assist him in confronting the depressing situation of late-Ming politics. Zhang, however, passed away in the same year, so Dong Yue

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<sup>16</sup> For Dong Yue's works on history and politics during his late-teen years, see Zhao Hongjuan 趙紅娟, *Ming yimin Dong Yue yanjiu* 明遺民董說研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2006): 311-12.

<sup>17</sup> Fu She (The Revival Society) was a politically oriented literary society. On Fu She and Zhang Pu, see Arthur W., Hummel, ed. *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1943), vol.1: 52-53. On Dong's sanguine early activity in literary societies and his relationship with Zhang, see Zhao, *Ming yimin Dong Yue*, 72-74, 86-102.

never had the opportunity to seriously practice his ideas and ambitions in politics.

Taking this into consideration, it is not surprising that Dong Yue took the Land of Dreams as a compensatory realm – as he asserted at the very beginning of the “Treatise”: “since China fell into frustration, intellectuals all returned to the Land of Dreams.” 自中國愁苦，達士皆歸夢鄉。<sup>18</sup> He further explained that rich people did not dream, because dreaming implied wishing, and there would be nothing for them to dream of except what they do not have. Conversely, “it is appropriate for those in poverty, inferiority, sadness and the chaotic world to have dreams,” 貧賤宜夢，憂愁宜夢，亂世宜夢。<sup>19</sup> The life of Dong Yue after his failure in officialdom exactly matched such a description. He was poor, so from time to time he starved and could not afford to travel as he wished; he suffered from chronic illness, both physical and mental,<sup>20</sup> was another obstacle to travel and affected his mental health; and the world of late Ming

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<sup>18</sup> Dong, “Treatise of the Land of Dreams”, *Fengcao'an qianji*, vol. 2: 12a.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 16a.

<sup>20</sup> A tendency to suffer from chronic illnesses had been characteristic of men in Dong’s lineage for generations. This hereditary condition is often marked by strange mental phenomena, which Dong Yue suffered to extremes. See Zhao, *Ming yimin Dong Yue yanjiu*, 44-48.

had long been in constant turbulence. He described his perception of reality as “the earth and heaven are empty and boundless, and they seem to be about to be blocked. There is no sun in the day and no moon in the night. The Milky Way is as thin as a rope and looks squiggly,” 天地荡荡无极，若将闭塞；昼不见日，夜不见月；河汉如绳，望之屈曲。<sup>21</sup> In such circumstances, Dong Yue lived a life in which, “except for taking in food and water, I did nothing but wept,” 飲食之外，唯有涕泣。<sup>22</sup>

In the dreamworld, however, Dong Yue could have spiritually uplifting experiences in sacred places, attain vast perspectives by ascending to wondrous heights, or, bodily transformed, enter scenes from the past or future.<sup>23</sup> The three dreams he had in one night, recorded in the “Account of the Garden of Intent”, represented the compensatory realms that he had been connected to, which included not only secluded landscape settings, but also conspicuous symbols for reclusion: the Mountain Lu as a location; the fishing

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<sup>21</sup> Originally from Dong’s preface to his nephew Jiranzi’s 計然子 book. Quoted from a secondary source, see *Ibid.*, 371.

<sup>22</sup> Dong, “Tiaowen dashu xu” 荅文大舒序, *Fengcao’an qianji*, vol. 3: 1b.

<sup>23</sup> These four kinds of dream experiences are prescribed by Dong Yue in the “Pact for the Dream Society” for himself and his “dream friends”. See “Pact for the Dream Society”, 16a.

boat and the iron flute as the elements of reclusive life; and the “Sad Song of the Human World” as an expression of a reclusive mood. Moreover, to pursue those desirable dreams in real life, Dong Yue invented the “Eight assistants” 八佐 to help purify the realm of seven dreamlands: the medicine furnace 藥鑪; the storied tower 樓居; the tripod caldron for tea 茶鼎; the Daoist classics 道書; the stone pillow 石枕; the moulded incense 香篆; the secluded flower 幽花; and the chill rain 寒雨. They are all familiar elements of the literati’s lifestyle and their self-cultivation, and thus we find here the superimposition of the daily cultivation of inner peace and the making of a dream-friendly environment. Therefore, the Land of Dream not only projects an illusory realm of compensation, but also urges him to take care of his real life.

#### 4.2.2 Writing as a mode of construction

Another striking equivalence that can be found between the human world and the Land of Dreams is the recording of history. He valued the collection of dream records as much as the recording of history is valued in the real world—just as each imperial dynasty writes its own historical records, the dreamland has the “Mirror of Dreams” 夢鑑 to keep a record of dreams. The character 鑑



*jian* (lit. mirror), refers specifically to the collection of annals.<sup>24</sup> Dong Yue stated that all the associates of the Society of Dreams must practice the rules of dream recording respectfully and carefully:

The next morning after you have a dream, you should write it down without scepticism. When you write it on paper, do not cheat yourselves, do not mix it with trivial things such as rice and salt, and be specific with dates. 夢之明旦，筆記勿疑。寫以尺紙，勿妄自欺，無凌雜米鹽，干支必詳。<sup>25</sup>

Then, the records should be sent to the “Historian of Dreams” on the bank of *Xun* River to store them. In the “Inviting Submission of Dreams”, Dong Yue offered an extended poetic articulation of this process: “accomplish your word in butterfly binding, mount it with silk that looks like sunlight at dawn, seal it in a bookcase decorated in dragon motifs, and release it to the islands on Lake

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<sup>24</sup> In the preface to *Ming Ji* (the Chronicle Accounts of Ming Dynasty 明紀), Feng Guifen 馮桂芬 wrote, “there are two names for the chronicle historiography, one is *jian*, and the other is *ji*. *Jian* started from the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid Government* by Sima Guang. 編年之名亦有二，曰鑒，曰紀。鑒始溫公資治通鑒。” See Chen He 陳鶴, *Ming Ji* (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1921-1934), 2.

<sup>25</sup> Dong, “Pact for the Dream Society”, 16a-b.

Tai. 字成蝴蝶之書，寫用霞光之練，封以蛟龍之笈，浮於震澤之洲。”<sup>26</sup> When the Historian received the letters, he would open them and store them. Once the history of dreams was created every sixty years<sup>27</sup>, he would carve it on a block made of jade. The solemn process in all senses renders how these records are to be cherished.

Although Dong Yue’s call for submissions of dreams was written in ornate rhetoric, it was more than a piece of imaginary fantasy. It was to be practiced in real life – he advocated that his nearby friends contribute to his dream collection. Dong mentioned that he had received a sizeable amount of dream records from his friends after he circulated his invitation, but unfortunately, none of them met his expectations.<sup>28</sup>

Dong once compiled the *Book of Xun* 澠書 for the reason that, while he was too poor to travel around the world, he was “such a sad person that cannot be trapped here with melancholia for too long.” 性情憂愁，又不能久鬱鬱困此土

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<sup>26</sup> Dong, “Inviting Submission of Dreams”, 14b.

<sup>27</sup> Sixty years is the completion of one circle of the ten Heaven Stems and twelve Earthly Branches. They are used as serial numbers to designate years, months, days, and hours.

<sup>28</sup> Dong Yue, *Lianhua ji suibi* 棟花磯隨筆, vol. 2: 9a. Dong Yue explained that the dream records from his friends were like the “anecdotes and folklore” (稗说 *baishuo*) popular in Tang Dynasty.

也。<sup>29</sup> Therefore, he selected forty-four literati who were born, bred and taught in his hometown by the *Xun* river and compiled their essays into this book. Dong Yue used the activity of compiling books as a form of spiritual exploration and another tool for overcoming his physical immobility. It worked in the same way as dreaming in the sense that it extended the realms of his exploration. It helps us to understand his insistence on collecting dream records.

After his collection of the dream records, Dong Yue detailed the design of the place where the dream records were to be stored:

Beyond the blue sky and the yellow earth, I build up an immortal palace.

Inside the enclosed stone chamber on the Orchid Terrace, illusory

valleys stand out. The Peach Blossom Spring is vague, but it is

immortalized in books and historical records. Its mirage will disappear

soon, but it lasts forever in paintings. 碧天黃土之外，草創靈宮；蘭臺石

室之中，孤標幻嶺。桃源杳杳，圖史千秋；海市飄飄，丹青萬古。<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Dong, "Preface to the Boof of *Xun*", *Fengcao'an qianji*, vol. 1: 9b.

<sup>30</sup> Dong, "Inviting Submission of Dreams", 14b. The Peach Blossom Spring was a fable written by Tao Yuanming in 421 CE about a chance discovery of an ethereal utopia where the people lead an ideal existence in harmony with nature, unaware of the outside world for centuries. It then became the

The stone chamber may have referred to “the golden cabinets in the stone chamber” 石室金匱<sup>31</sup>, the place where the most important books were officially stored in ancient China, as a way of emphasizing the importance of the dream records. This contrast Dong Yue created, between the eternal, solid space where history was stored, and the vague, fragile realms of the Peach Blossom Spring and the mirage, demonstrates how these illusory realms attain eternity when written down in books and historical records. Similarly, the writing on dreams/dreaming is given so much significance in his systematic construction of the Land of Dreams because writing stabilises and fixes, and in a way makes the transitory nature of the dream “permanent”. Repeatedly rendering the writing, collection and storage of dream records, Dong took the dream records as a serious institutional compilation, rather than a personal collection. Therefore, when he compared dream records with human history, dreams were no longer casual objects to be written

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prominent symbol of paradisaical realms in Chinese culture. See Stephen R. Bokenkamp (1986). “The Peach Flower Font and the Grotto Passage”. *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. 106 (1): 65–77.

<sup>31</sup> The phrase is first seen in Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (145BC-ca. 86BC) “Self-Preface” to *Records of the Grand Historian* (史記, *Shiji*), the monumental history of ancient China and the world finished around 94 BC: “Qian was assigned as the Grand Historian, sorting out the Records-books in the stone chamber and golden cabinets. 遷為太史令，緬史記，石室金匱之書。” See Sima Qian. *Shiji*, vol. 130, 8a.

about, but materials to construct an alternative reality.

In this sense, Dong Yue did not look to his dreams for instruction or prediction, nor did he venture much interpretation about them, both of which would impose reality on the dreams and imbue them with a utilitarian purpose.<sup>32</sup> Dong's stance on the validity of recording dreams was premised on the "three prohibitions" 三禁: "do not talk about salacious dreams with selected guests; do not forcedly dress up the record of banal dreams; do not tell irresponsibly made-up dreams." 不擇客而語褻夢, 不強記慢夢, 不罔言誣夢.<sup>33</sup> The three acts: narrate 語, record 記, tell 言, all relate to the reproduction of dreams with words. Language tends to plunge dreams into the risk of being distorted, and

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<sup>32</sup> In ancient China, dreams are seen as important prediction of the future, so that they have been used for divination since Pre-Qin period. For more discussion, see John, Brennan. "Dreams, Divination, and Statecraft: The Politics of Dreams in Early Chinese History and Literature." In Carol S., Rupprecht, ed. *The Dream and the Text: Essays on Literature and Language* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993): 73–102. In Chen Shiyuan's 陳士元 *Lofty Principles of Dream Interpretation* 夢占逸旨, written and published in Dong Yue's time, Chen singles out two major approaches to the dream as prophecy 昭 and as illusion 幻. The former holds that dreams predict the future and thus reveal the working of fate; the latter treats the dream as a means to question the boundaries between illusion and reality. For an English translation and introduction, see Chen Shiyuan, and Richard E. Strassberg. *Wandering spirits: Chen Shiyuan's encyclopedia of dreams* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). Dong Yue was on the "illusion" side – he never used dreams for divination.

<sup>33</sup> Dong, "Treatise", 13a.

it was only in what he believed to be an honest recording of dreams that Dong Yue could pursue the purest exploration of dreaming and achieve a form of neutral writing.

#### 4.2.3 Dreams and the anxiety over the loss of written legacy

The death of Zhang Pu was a fatal blow to Dong Yue's pursuit of officialdom following his failure in the provincial examination. After participating in a large-scale interment ceremony for Zhang in the autumn of 1642, Dong returned home emotionally exhausted and forthwith plunged into severe depression and illness.<sup>34</sup> From March to December of 1643, he was overwhelmed by "dark and mysterious dream journeys" 玄怪夢遊. Those dream journeys, thirty-one pieces in total, were recorded and collected into a book entitled the

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<sup>34</sup> About Dong Yue's disease and the speculation in [not sure what you mean here – speculation about modern medicine or in contemporary medicine?] contemporary medicine, see Yang Yucheng 楊玉成, "Mengyi, outu yu yiliao: wanming Dong Yue wenxue yu xinli zhuanji" 夢嚙、嘔吐與醫療:晚明董說文學與心理傳記, in Liao Zhaoheng 廖肇亨, Li Maolin 李豐楙, eds. *Chenlun, chanhui yu jiudu: zhongguo wenhua de chanhui shuxie lunji* 沉淪、懺悔與救度: 中國文化的懺悔書寫論集 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan zhongguo wenxue yanjiusuo, 2013): 563-67.

*Zhaoyang History of Dreams* (昭陽夢史, *Zhaoyang mengshi*)<sup>35</sup>. This collection of his earliest dream experiences undoubtedly laid the foundation for his lifelong interest in dreams and provided the earliest inspiration for the Land of Dreams.

The words Dong Yue used to describe these dream journeys, “dark” (玄 *xuan*) and “mysterious” (怪 *guai*), were also those used in the name of the “Land of the Supernatural” (玄怪鄉, *Xuanguai xiang*) in the seven internal divisions of the Land of Dreams, where “birds wear hats and beasts wear belts, grasses fly and trees walk, and people have horns and fish-like bodies.” 鳥冠獸帶，草飛樹走，有人角而魚身.<sup>36</sup> His mysterious dream journeys in 1643 are not all about supernatural creatures but also things which take place in supernatural circumstances. Although Dong Yue favoured dreams that offered experiences of pleasant wandering, in an attempt to honestly record his dreams, he also chronicled those that left him puzzled and even frightened. Many of them are particularly impressive in terms of their feelings of grief, anxiety and despair, allowing us to witness the traces of Dong Yue’s identity crisis in 1643.

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<sup>35</sup> *Zhaoyang* refers to *gui* 癸, the tenth of the ten “heavenly stems” (天干, *tian’gan*), used together with the “earthly branches” as a 60-year calendrical cycle, thus indicating the year of its recording.

<sup>36</sup> Dong, “Treatise of the Land of Dreams”, 12b.

Dong Yue constantly dreamed of words. In the first dream recorded in *Zhaoyang History of Dreams*, he dreamed of raining black characters, which were the size of snowflakes at first and then gradually grew to be as big as palms (hands). He then murmured to himself, “since the world existed, no one has seen such evil spirits.” 天地开凿，此妖孽未有。<sup>37</sup> In the seventh month, Dong dreamed that he had a divination of his illness, but when he consulted *The Book of Changes* 易經 for an annotation of his divination result, he found a character in the shape of a bird that he had never seen before. Someone reminded him that the character was from the new version of the *Book of Changes* 新易, which he had never heard of. Dong felt so confused that he woke up.<sup>38</sup>

In a dream in the eighth month, Dong Yue engraved a pearl-like stone into the shape of a jaw and ate it—it tasted like dates. The next day, realizing that the jaw was a symbol of words, he proceeded to write the “Commandment of

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<sup>37</sup> “Tian yu zi” 天雨字, *Zhaoyang mengshi*, 1a.

<sup>38</sup> “Xin yi” 新易, *ibid.*, 4a. The text of the *Book of Changes* consists of sixty-four hexagrams and commentaries upon them. By using different methods, one randomly generates the six lines; one then studies the commentaries in the book associated with the generated hexagram. The meanings derived from such study can be interpreted as an oracle.



Words” 言誠.<sup>39</sup> The Commandment not only advocates speaking cautiously, but also reflects Dong Yue’s understanding of the relationship between a man and his words. His belief was that “the word is spoken, like the arrow is shot; it is gone, no longer with me.” 言發如矢，在彼不在我. If a man says something wrong, “the sealed coffin conceals the body, while the slipped words remain out of it.” 蓋棺藏形，失言在外. The connection between a man and his word is weak—someone could be easily deprived of his control and utilization of words and, hence, easily betrayed by his own words. It seems that Dong Yue would like to withhold his words after having this dream, but actually his desire to write never abated. He was a prolific writer, who described the difficulties of controlling the desire of expression as: “the mouth speaks at random, defying orders of the mind.” 口官橫行，不奉心令.

Dong Yue’s “Commandment of words” seems to be a response to the inherent risk of using words he was all too aware of and yet which he could not stop himself from taking. Just several days later, Dong had another dream about the loss of communication:

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<sup>39</sup> “Tun yi gua” 吞頤卦, *ibid.*, 5b-6a.

I looked down from a high mountain and was upset to see only plants and no human traces. I was so shocked, and I screamed. Who can I talk to in this world of plants? I cried loudly in my dream and when I woke, my pillow was saturated.

身在高山，望見天下皆草木，了然無人，大驚呼號；思此草木世界，我誰與語？慟哭，枕上盡濕。<sup>40</sup>

Standing on the top of the mountain and facing a world without humans, Dong Yue was spatially and socially alone, immediately noticing the loss of communication. This dream echoes another nightmare he had in the sixth month about an inability to talk:

Walking on a steep hill, I saw a big rock, on which the large characters “Mount Liuya” were written. I searched my sleeve for a brush and wrote on the back of the rock, “I cannot speak like the parrots, neither can I build houses like the bees. Five thousand years later, the Heaven and human beings can tell about today that I have bones as white as the snow. Written on the rock when the beasts lay low, I held my brush and cried.” (On the day of *jiazi* in June. The words on the rock were terrifying,

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<sup>40</sup> “Tianxia jie caomu” 天下皆草木, *ibid.*, 6a.

and “the moment when the beasts lay low” was even more incomprehensible.)

走危嶺上，見一石壁，大書曰六亞山，余索袖中得筆，因書石背曰，不能言，不若鸚鵡，不能作宮，不若蜂，五千年後皇天人言是日也，我有白骨如雪，獸伏之辰書此石壁，報筆而號。（六月甲子，書壁語並可駭，獸伏之辰尤難通）<sup>41</sup>

The atmosphere of this dream is dark and tense, full of Dong Yue’s frustration and sense of futility. Words and palaces could be maintained as evidence of his life, but he was not capable of producing any, so his white bones were the only evidence left of his existence after five thousand years.

The nightmares about the loss of words reflected Dong Yue’s identity crisis after his political ambitions died and his health deteriorated. On the one hand, he wished to maintain his faculty of speech to express and communicate, and regarded it as significant evidence of his existence, to the extent that he worried about losing it. At the same time, he doubted the honesty and loyalty of words to the author, and feared that words might be abused, resulting in their alienation from their speaker. In order to avoid this, Dong Yue ate his “jaw”

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<sup>41</sup> “Zou weiling shang” 走危嶺上, *ibid.*, 2a-b.

in the dream. The jaw made of gorgeous stone and tasting like dates, symbolizes words with overflowing tones and disguises, while the act of eating symbolizes a process of elimination, and more importantly, Dong's subconscious elimination of his words.

In the seventh month, Dong Yue had a bizarre dream about wordless books and rare birds singing, trapped in a cave:

There was a mountain in the colour of cinnabar. At the foot of the mountain there was an old cave in which thousands of rare birds, with black patterns and emerald crests, were singing in harmony. I was surprised to see books of hundreds of volumes at the east corner of the cave. I entered the cave and took the books. On the way, I met a monk who asked me about the books, and I told him what had just happened. He said, "These were transcribed by you—why did you then take them for yourself?" Hearing this, I opened the books, and saw that there was not a single word in it. He said, "These books had been burned to ashes, how could there be any word left? The birds in the cave are the souls of the books. Try to wail, and you will call the souls of the books back." I followed his instruction to wail, and the mysterious birds all flew in

different directions and cried sadly, but they stayed in the cave and did not come to me. Thus, I threw away the wordless books.

有山，色如丹砂，其下有古穴，穴中奇鳥千，玄文翠冠，其鳴有章。見書數百卷，在穴東隅，驚奇之。入穴，抱書而去。道遇禪客，問書根本，餘以情對。禪客曰：“即君手錄，何乃自收。”餘聞言開卷，蕩然無一文字。客曰：“此書已焚灰，安得有字。穴中鳥，書魂魄也。君試慟哭，書魂可招來。”餘法言，慟哭，奇鳥各飛，鳴悽愴，止穴不來。餘遂棄無字書也。<sup>42</sup>

The physical books were burnt to ashes, while the souls stayed and went into exile, maintaining a subtle entanglement between the author and his books. They could still hear the author's wailing and cried sadly instead of singing in harmony upon hearing the wailing however, they could not respond and come to him when the author attempted to beckon them back. The dream conveys a sophisticated image of the sympathy between the author and the soul of his books, where the detachment of words from the author seems irreversible, whilst at the same time, is not absolute.

Dong Yue had this dream in the middle of the seventh month. Five months later, he burned his own books, including all the prose pieces he had written

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<sup>42</sup> “Zhaoshu hunpo” 招書魂魄, *ibid.*, 3a-b.

before he was twenty years old. At the end of this dream record he annotated that, “the souls of books travelled a long way to inform me in the dream five months ago,” 七月中書魂長征，妖夢告餘.

The image of the “having-not-been-burnt 未焚 prevails in Dong Yue’s imagination of the paradisiacal realm of dreams. It is a strange term that can only be comprehended with an assumption that these books were doomed or marked as being under the threat of destruction. In the internal division of “Wishful fantasies” 如意鄉 in the Land of Dreams, “having-not-been-burnt books” 未焚詩書 was listed as one of the elements that was essential for creating the perfection of this place.<sup>43</sup> Another example is the eleventh chapter of his novel *The Supplement to the Journey to the West* (西遊補 *Xiyoubu*), which will be further discussed later in this chapter. Among the large amount of mirrors in the Tower of Myriad Mirrors, the Monkey saw “the world of the having-not-been-burnt books 未焚世界”.

In the year 213 B.C., the “burning of the books” was carried out by an imperial edict of the First Emperor of Qin 秦始皇 (259-210BC) for the sake of ideological control and political unification. According to the edict, all books,

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<sup>43</sup> Dong, “Treatise of the Land of Dreams”, 12b.

with the exception of those related to medicine and pharmacy, divination by the tortoise and milfoil, and agriculture and arboriculture, were to be collected and burned. Three categories were considered to be the most dangerous: poetry, history and philosophy, so they could only be preserved in imperial archives and accessible to government-sanctioned scholars.<sup>44</sup> Although the Qin Dynasty fell just seven years later, the consequence of the “burning of the books” was culturally more enduring. It has often been cited as one of the earliest examples of censorship in history, and the severe cultural devastation it wreaked has become an implacable psychological scar of many Chinese scholars, to be constantly revisited as a theme of cultural catastrophe.

In his essay “Discussion on the Extinction of Literature” 文亡論, Dong Yue had a clear statement that the “burning of the books” by First Emperor of Qin was the “origin of the decline of culture (rites and music)” 禮樂遂崩.<sup>45</sup> For Chinese literati, the specific act of book burning acquired great symbolic meaning, signifying the suppression of freedom of thought and expression. Living with the fear of death due to the external climate of the times and also his illness ,

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<sup>44</sup> For more introduction of this event and its influence, see Lois Mai, Chan. “The Burning of the Books in China, 213 B.C.” *The Journal of Library History*, no. 2 (University of Texas Press, 1972): 101-08.

<sup>45</sup> Dong, “Discussion on the Extinction of Literature”, *Fengcao'an qianji*, vol. 4: 12a.

Dong Yue asserted that, “having not supplemented all the extinct books in the world, I am too worried to die; having not met all the marvellous men in the world, I am too worried to die; having not read all the magnificent literary works in the world, I am too worried to die,” 董生不盡補天下之亡書，憂不得死；不盡見天下之奇士，憂不得死；不盡讀天下之奇文，憂不得死。<sup>46</sup> Dong Yue proclaimed his eagerness and responsibility to exhaust his exploration of the entire literary world. His dreams in 1643 are reflective of this concern. For example, dreaming about a book that was never recorded, (a book entitled *Cheng Yuanzhai's New Critiques* 程遠齋新論)<sup>47</sup>, or a version of a book different from the widespread ones (the *New Book of Changes* 新易), or a character that he never knew (the bird-like character for divination), or a form of words which was never witnessed (the raining characters). These dreams reflect his desire to explore the potential books that were extinct and the magnificent essays that had rarely been read. Hence, although bizarre in some cases, Dong Yue's dream journeys are journeys of discovery, especially in the

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<sup>46</sup> The quotation comes from the preface Dong Yue wrote for his nephew Ji Ranzi's 计然子 compilation of works, see Yang Yucheng, “Outu mengyi yu yiliao”, 562.

<sup>47</sup> In the eleventh month, Dong Yue dreamed that he found this book at home, with many other strange books. Cheng Yuanzhai 程遠齋 (1249-1318) was a politician and literatus in Yuan Dynasty. See Dong, *Zhaoyang mengshi*, 7b.



sense that they supplement the known entireties of normative cultural productions, and expand their boundaries.

Carefully examining Dong Yue's dreams in 1643 allows us to arrive at a deeper understanding of his attraction to dreams as a compensatory realm. Among all the different compensating effects of his dreams, there is one that especially needs to be highlighted—the compensation for the loss of cultural legacy in various forms. It was also in this year that Dong Yue regretted having wasted so much time “pursuing the flatulent fame in literature and politics” 競浮聲文字場 instead of “reading and learning the Dao diligently” 切實讀書學道.<sup>48</sup> The prior frustration of his official career and severe illness in 1643 urged Dong Yue to reflect extensively on the situation of his times and his own identity, resulting in a prolific literary production in this year, including his systematic theory on dreams and the Land of Dreams. In turn, his profound reflection was revealed by his dreams, through which his anxieties and aspirations were indicated.

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<sup>48</sup> Dong, *Lianhuaaji suibi*, vol. 1.

## 4.3 Towards Buddhist enlightenment

### 4.3.1 Buddhist imprints on Dong Yue's early dreams

The influence of Buddhism pervaded the life of Dong Yue, and it cannot be neglected when looking at his evolving understanding of dreams. He was born into a family in which Buddhism was practiced and Buddhist values and teachings were highly regarded. At a tender age he began to study not only the Confucian classics but also various Buddhist scriptures and Sanskrit.<sup>49</sup> In his theory of dreams, India 天竺, the cradle of Buddhism was taken as a paradisiacal destination that could be achieved from the Land of Dreams.<sup>50</sup>

In Dong Yue's dreams in 1643, he had encountered repeated scenarios about becoming a Buddhist monk. In the dream in the tenth month, he climbed up a high mountain, walked into an ancient temple and had an uncanny conversation with a god:

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<sup>49</sup> Dong Yue became a student of the Master Wengu 聞谷 (1566-1636) from the age of eight, and he also learned the Buddhist sutras from his father. See Dong, *Fengcao'an shiji*, vol. 1: 9b.

<sup>50</sup> Dong, "Treatise of the Land of Dreams", 12a-b.

There was a god wearing a black hat, holding a piece of jade and he looked majestic. Suddenly he said, “anyone who has hair can become a Daoist immortal.” I kowtowed, trembling and asked, “can I become an immortal?” The god said, “I have stayed here for six years since I moved from Mount Tai. Recently I read the *Nineteen Old Poems*<sup>51</sup> and found it very helpful.” I saluted and asked the god again, he said nothing. I went out of the temple and saw that the setting sun was like fire.

神玄冕執玉甚威，忽語曰：“凡有毛髮，皆能仙。”余戰慄，稽首問曰：“董說可仙否？”神曰：“我從泰山徙居於此六年矣。近誦十九首詩，甚有益。”餘舉前問神，默不言。趨出廟見落日如火。<sup>52</sup>

In Buddhist rites, hair serves as a symbol of mundane confusion and worldly attachment and its shaving shows a monk’s dedication to renounce all worldly desires. In contrast, Daoist monks cultivate their long hair. Dong Yue’s dream indicates his hesitation about committing to Buddhism at that time. According to what the god told him, there was an apparent contradiction between becoming a Daoist immortal – which was undoubtedly

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<sup>51</sup> The *Nineteen Old Poems* is an anthology of Chinese poems, consisting of nineteen poems which were probably originally collected during the Han Dynasty.

<sup>52</sup> “Gumiao shenyu” 古廟神語, *Zhaoyang mengshi, Ta*.

a more attractive option as a refuge of troublesome life – and becoming a Buddhist monk.

The image of the fiery setting sun leaves this dream with an open ending and can be read as an allusion to the first contemplation of the setting sun among the “Sixteen Contemplations” 十六觀 in Buddhist cultivation. In this practise one sits in the proper posture facing west and clearly gazes at the sun, with one’s sight and mind firmly fixed on it, “the sun is going down, like a drum suspended above the horizon.” 見日欲沒，狀如懸鼓。<sup>53</sup> The scene after Dong Yue walked out of the temple seems to have foreshadowed the first step of his Buddhist cultivation. Later in the eleventh month, he had another dream:

I shaved my head beside a pond. My hair fell into the pond and turned into a fish. I cried writing to Yan Jifang that, “I had removed my hair and it had turned into a fish.” I woke up when writing the character “fish”.

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<sup>53</sup> The sixteen contemplations are from the *Sutra on Contemplation of Amitayus* 觀無量壽經. For details of the first contemplation, see Kenneth K., Tanaka. *The Dawn of Chinese Pure Land Buddhist Doctrine: Ching-ying Hui-yuan's Commentary on the Visualization Sutra* (SUNY Press, 1990): 154. Kenneth translates the character *guan* (觀, lit. look at, observe) as visualization instead of contemplation.

臨池割去首發，發墮水中為魚。餘乃涕泣裁尺牘，寄嚴既方雲：“弟已墮發為魚”，書至“魚”而寤矣。<sup>54</sup>

This dream also again reflected his complex feelings regarding the Buddhist tonsure, as it is unclear as to whether he cried writing the letter in joy, fear, or grief. Similar to his overwhelming anxiety of using/losing his words in the dreamscape, Dong Yue's dreams of losing his hair also reveal his anxiety of cutting off his attachments to the human world, which brings psychological stress to his dreamscape and puzzles his mind.

#### 4.3.2 Dreaming as a way of cultivation

Late-Ming monks wrote extensively about dreams, and this prosperity in the discourse of dreams fostered new ways of understanding them.<sup>55</sup>

Early Buddhism holds a generally negative understanding of dreams and their

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<sup>54</sup> “Fa wei yu” 發為魚, *Zhaoyang mengshi*, 8a.

<sup>55</sup> For further discussion on this, see Liao Zhaoheng 廖肇亨. “Sengren shuomeng: wan Ming yelin menglun shixi 僧人說夢：晚明葉林夢論試析”, *Mingdai wenxue guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 明代文學國際學術研討會論文集 (Xueyuan chubanshe, 2005): 301-21, and Lynn A., Struve. *The Dreaming Mind and the End of the Ming World* (University of Hawaii Press, 2019): 94-104.

illusoriness. A condition close to being dreamless is characteristic of a perfected man in the Daoist text of *Zhuangzi*: “the True men of old did not dream when they slept. 古之真人，其寢不夢。”<sup>56</sup> Followers of all late-Ming schools of Buddhism continued the tradition of using the universal experience of dreaming and waking for salvific purposes. To begin with, dreams were used as a metaphor to characterize the ephemeral nature of the conditional realm, as in the six metaphors of the *Diamond Sutra* 金剛經 — “like a dream, illusion, bubble, shadow, dew, or lightning flash,” 如夢幻泡影，如露亦如電。<sup>57</sup> In this case, the salvation was to induce a longing to “awaken” and inspire mental detachment from all phenomena by showing that they were born of the mind, instead of externally objectifiable things.

In the meantime, several Buddhist masters promoted a more affirmative attitude toward dreaming rooted in the common doctrinal sources of their particular religious inspiration. They came to conceive of dreams as no less real than reality itself, and reality as no less illusory than dreams. New reflections, such as Zhanran Yuancheng’s 湛然圓澄 (1561-1626), challenged

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<sup>56</sup> Quoted from Chapter “The Great and Most Honoured Master” (大宗師, Da zhongshi), see Chen Guying 陳鼓應, *Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyii* 莊子今注今譯 (Zhonghua shuju, 1983): 168.

<sup>57</sup> *Jin'gang bore poluomi jing* 金剛般若波羅蜜經, 752b.

the absolute opposition between dreams and reality, captured in his statement when he says, “awakening is a dream and dreams are awakening” 覺即夢，夢即覺也。<sup>58</sup> Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546-1623) was one of the earliest masters who proposed the positive impact of dreams on the human mind, stating that, “entering dreams with awakening, mental perversion gets heavier; entering awakening with dreams, one gets disentangled instantly.” 以覺入夢，顛倒滋重；以夢入覺，當下解脫。<sup>59</sup> Deqing suggests that people equate wakefulness with dreams, rather than dreams with wakefulness, to overcome mental disturbance.

Cheyong Zhouli 徹庸周理 (1591-1648) advanced the most focused and extensive arguments in favour of dreams in his *Dream Talk Synopsis* 夢語摘要, with an explicit statement that “Dreams are the Dharma” 夢即佛法。<sup>60</sup> He proposed that dreams serve as a tool for self-cultivation, a universal, common and inevitable process for approaching enlightenment.

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<sup>58</sup> Quoted from Liao, “Sengren shuomeng”, 303.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 306.

<sup>60</sup> Cheyong, *Yunshan mengyu zhaiyao* 雲山夢語摘要, 281.

People say that the sage does not dream; while I say, it is not that the sage does not dream, it is that the sage knows dreams are dreams.

Those who know about dreams do not dream while those who do not know dream. 人說至人無夢，予謂不謂無夢，謂至人知夢，知夢則無夢也，不知則夢也。<sup>61</sup>

For Zhouli, not only do dreams offer relatively unmediated insight on the Mind, but repeated dreaming, waking, and reflecting on the interrelations between the two states becomes a prime method of contemplation for gradual insight on ultimate truth. Taking his own experiences of dreaming as an example to demonstrate the process of enlightenment, he states:

My earliest dreams were like entering dark rooms from dark rooms; later my dreams were like walking in the shadows of a lamp under the moonlight; now my dreams are like a piece of cloud floating in the Great Void. 我初時做夢，如以黑屋入黑屋，後來做夢，如走月下燈影中；而今做夢，如太虛空，飛片浮雲。<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.



His experiences of dreaming changed from extreme darkness to becoming slightly lighter, and finally reaching the Great Void. It is noteworthy that in the last stage, Zhouli did not mention anything regarding light or darkness, but used the state of “non-obstruction”, where the clouds float freely, as a metaphor of the emptiness and purity of dreams. This process vividly displays the potential of dreaming in aiding Buddhist awareness.

It is not known whether Dong Yue ever read these works on dreams by his contemporaries. Considering his broad reading on Buddhism and dense communication with Buddhist monks and laymen, it is highly possible.<sup>63</sup> The novel he published in 1641, *Supplement to the Journey to the West*<sup>64</sup>, tells a story of a Monkey passing from darkness to enlightenment and conveys a

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<sup>63</sup> Although Cheyong was mostly based in Southwestern China, he had a visit to the Lower Yangzi region in 1635-1636. See Liao, “Sengren shuomeng”, 308-09. Dong Yue might have had access to these masters or their works via his teacher Master Wengu or his father’s connections with the monks’ circles. See Zhao, *Ming yinmin Dong Yue yanjiu*, 59-62.

<sup>64</sup> It is a sequel to the older and more famous novel *Journey to the West* (西遊記, *Xiyou ji*), published in 1592 by Wu Cheng’en 吳承恩, which tells the tough journey of four pilgrims with eighty-one ordeals heading for far-off India to attain Sutras. The Monkey was one of the pilgrims and the most powerful one. On *Xiyou bu*, see Qiancheng. Li, *Fictions of Enlightenment*, chap. 4; Brandauer, *Tung Yüeh*, chaps. 5-9; Hegel, *Novel in Seventeenth-Century China*, 142-166.

profoundly Buddhist view of the world, man and reality.<sup>65</sup> At the beginning of the story, the Monkey is mesmerized by the “Demon of Desire” 情妖, so that he has one dream after another, most of which are full of displacements and terrors. He is alone but finds himself in a variety of unprecedented roles and intensively experiencing many forms of human desire. In the end, the “Master of the Void” 虛空主人 wakes him up by explaining that he has been trapped in the Demon’s dream, and that the Demon is an avatar of himself, his desire, something to be eliminated from his psyche or his “self”. Then the Monkey proceeds to finally defeat this monster. Dong Yue once explained his motivation to supplement the *Journey to the West* even though it had no obvious gap that needed to be filled:

To become enlightened and open to the Great Way, one must first empty and destroy the roots of desire. To empty and destroy the roots of desire one must first go inside desire. After going inside desire and seeing the emptiness of the root of the world’s desire, one can then go outside of desire and realize the reality of the root of the Way. 悟通大道，必先空破情根；空破情根，必先走人情內；走

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<sup>65</sup> For other discussions of Buddhist concepts and images in *Xiyou bu*, see Brandauer, *Tung Yüeh*, 88–93; and Qiancheng, Li, *Fictions of Enlightenment*, 35–45, 95–97.

入情內，見得世界情根之虛，然後走出情外，認得道根之實。<sup>66</sup>

Dong Yue would like the Monkey's way to the West to be supplemented with the toughening ordeal of "desire", so as to more profoundly understand his motivation for the journey. The process of enlightenment lies in an entry into and exit out of the illusory, so the purpose of experiencing the dreams is to transcend them, rather than to indulge in them. The novel, in this sense, can be seen as the dramatization of Deqing's paradigm of "entering awakening from dreams", with the Monkey's dream experiences reflective of Dong Yue's own anxiety, which had been inhibiting him from achieving enlightenment.<sup>67</sup>

Similar to Zhouli's analysis of his dream experiences, Dong Yue once made a statement on his changing experiences of dreaming, referring to the distinctive

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<sup>66</sup> Quoted from "Answering questions about *Xiyou Bu*" 西遊補答問, and the question is "since the Journey to the West does not have gaps, why do you supplement it," 西游不闕, 何以補之? Dong Yue lists twelve hypothetical questions that a reader might ask and answers them. This is included in the English translation *The Tower of Myriad Dreams*, trans. Shuan-fu, Lin, Larry J., Schulz (Centre for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2000): 133.

<sup>67</sup> For recent synopses of literary arguments supporting Dong Yue or his father Dong Sizhang, respectively, as the author of *Xiyou bu*, see Zhao, *Ming yimin Dong Yue yanjiu*, 3-7, 394-422; and Li Qiancheng's preface in "*Xiyou bu*" *jiaozhu*. At this point, I would like to offer my thoughts on the author of the novel. I believe that the anxieties introduced in the novel must belong to a young man, like Dong Yue, who was twenty years old when the novel was published, rather than his older father.

styles of four great poets:

The dreamlands are broad. If I make an analogy between my dreams and poetry, my dreams before 1640 are like Li He's poems; my dreams in 1641 are like Li Bai's poems; my dreams in 1643 are like Du Fu's poems; my dreams in recent years (until 1646) are like Wang Wei's poems. 夢鄉廣大，譬諸詩：我庚辰以前諸夢，長吉也；辛巳諸夢，太白也；癸未諸夢，少陵也；近年諸夢，摩詰也。<sup>68</sup>

The first literary style Dong Yue compares to his dreams, Li He 李賀 (790-816), is famous for his exploration of ghostly, supernatural and fantastic themes in poetry. Although no dream record from Dong Yue before 1643 survives, the *Supplement* allows us to have a glimpse at the style of his dreams at that time. The dreamscapes Dong created in the novel stand out for their unusual humour, sense of suspense, and their bizarre and even absurd nature. For instance, in the tenth chapter, when the Monkey attempted to jump off a tower to flee, the wooden railings, which were shaped like cracks in ice, suddenly transformed into hundreds of red threads

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<sup>68</sup> Dong, "Words of Layman Rain", *Fengcao'an qianji*, vol. 4: 11a.

that the Monkey became entangled in, so he couldn't move an inch.<sup>69</sup>

The style model for his “dark and mysterious dream journeys” in 1643 is Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770), known as the “Poet-Historian” 詩史 and the “Poet-Sage” 詩聖 for his realistic and political comments in poetry. In this year, Dong Yue started to be interested in the discourse of dreams and to keep dated dream records, even assigning himself as the “Great Historian of the Land of Dreams” in his imaginative Land of Dreams. As my analysis of the *Zhaoyang History of Dreams* has shown, although appearing uncanny and irrelevant to real life, those dreams reveal Dong Yue's anxiety of identity, which was not only reflective of his personal traumas, but also his concerns about the cultural, social and political realities of his time.

In the years between 1644 and 1646, the style of his dreams had changed significantly, and is echoed by his comparison of this period to the poetry of Wang Wei 王維 (701-761), known as the “Monk-Poet” 詩僧 or the “Buddha-Poet” 詩佛, who wrote meditative verse on man's relation to nature with Buddhist ideals of simplicity and detachment. This was the period during which the dramatic dynastic change took place, and the Manchu conquest headed

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<sup>69</sup> Dong Yue, *The Tower of Myriad Dreams*, trans, Shuan-fu, Lin, Larry J., Schulz, 86.

for the Lower Yangzi region, so Dong Yue's change in his conception of dreams may well correlate with the historical events and the impact they had on his life.

#### 4.3.3 Dreams as herbs and the Journey in Sickness

During this time, events of the Manchu conquest had begun to move Dong into a more serious engagement with Buddhism, and this is reflected in a fourth essay about dreams, "Dreams as herbs" (夢本草, *Meng bencao*), which he added in 1645 to his previous ones of 1643. In the essay, Dong established an analogy between dreams and herbs:

The smell of dreams is sweet and the nature of dreams is mellow. They are nontoxic. They benefit one's wits, smooth blood vessels, remove vexation, purify one's mind and let one keep a distance from vulgarity, and lengthen ones' lifespan. The herbs are produced in five places, but the best are produced in two places. One grows in the secluded and expansive realm of landscape, and the other grows in the realms of marvelous spirits beyond the mundane sphere. Both contribute to curing illness caused by the dusty world. What is produced in the realm of the past is named the lingering dream. Eating it makes one remember what

once existed. What is produced in the realm of the future is named the herb of knowing the future. Not all those who are fond of dreaming praise this herb, however, because it easily makes one vulgar, and can also increase worries. It is not a good herb and those who pick up herbs of dreams do not value it. The last type is produced in the land of surprise, also called the realm of surprise. Dreaming this can lift one beyond lethargy, but it also makes one crazy. Wise people cure illness with good dreams. Making them does not depend on water or fire, and once you close your eyes you can make them. Those who pick the herbs don't ask whether it is winter or spring, summer or autumn, but they always make them at night.

夢味甘性醇，無毒，益神智，鬯血脈，辟煩滯，清心遠俗，令人長壽。但此藥五產，其二最良。一產於山水幽曠境，一產于方外靈奇境。皆療塵疾有功。過去境產者名留夢，服之令人憶其在。未來境曰知來之藥，今世嗜夢者咸稱此藥，然易令人入俗，亦足以增戚攀憂，非良藥，采藥者弗寶也。其一產於驚鄉，謂之驚境，夢是能拔諸沉昏，然令人狂。達人以良夢療疾，修制不假水火，閉目即成。采此藥者不問冬春夏秋，然每以夜。<sup>70</sup>

The short essay entails a more critical idea of dreams. The categorization of

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<sup>70</sup> For the essay with its postscript, see Dong, *Fengcao'an qianji*, vol.3: 12a–b.

dreams follows a similar logic to that found in his earlier dream treatise on the Land of Dreams in 1643,<sup>71</sup> while focusing more on the dream's psychological effects on the dreamer, as the underlined sentences indicate. It is clearly explained in the postscript of this essay that it was inspired by the influential essay "Chan as Herbs" 禪本草 by the Southern Song monk Huiji Wenya 慧日文雅, which prescribes Buddhist meditation as a remedy for the ills of sentient beings.<sup>72</sup> Following his reference to this essay, Dong Yue states that, "my obsession with dreams has been so deep-rooted that I no longer see it as a disease but rather call it the medicine." 夢癖已痼, 不以為病而謂之藥. And from his letter to a friend, we know that dreams not only relieved Dong from his psychological complaints but to some extent, also released him from the discomfort of his physical body, as Dong felt that when he had good dreams he got better, while when he had vulgar dreams he became too sick to eat.<sup>73</sup> Both the Chan meditation and dreaming were supposed to "release one from constriction," 解人縛. Here, the Buddhist

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<sup>71</sup> In the "Treatise", Dong Yue invented the seven lands, and in the "Pact", he had the "Four principles of dreaming" covering four kinds of dreams.

<sup>72</sup> For Huiji Wenya's "Chan bencao," see Xiaoying 曉瑩, *Luohu yelu* 羅湖夜錄, vol. 2: 395b.

<sup>73</sup> Dong Yue, "Fu Yan Jifang shu" 復嚴既方書, *Fengcao'an qianji*, vol. 4: 18a.



traditions provided not only paradisiacal models symbolizing the ideal realm of dreams but also approaches towards enlightenment.

It was in this year that the Manchu troops took over more territory in the Lower Yangzi region and made the situation more difficult, so Dong Yue took his family and moved to Mountain Deer 鹿山 by boat. During two of his months as a river-dwelling refugee, suffering from stress, anguish, and insecurity, as well as his recurrent illnesses, Dong produced two essays on his dream records. The “Journey in Sickness” 病遊記 recorded his dreams in the ninth month, when he “repeatedly dreams about clouds.” 雲夢頻煩也。 During a short daytime nap, he dreamed of eating a bowl of clouds. In another dream, the clouds flew horizontally through the bamboo groves – he picked a handful of clouds and gave a piece of them to each passer-by and then left.<sup>74</sup>

As recorded in the “Sequel to the Journey in Sickness” 續病遊記, in the tenth month Dong Yue dreamed about writing the inscription for his brush rack. He wrote, “alas, you Brush, I will not burn you, may you rest here forever,” 嗟，女筆，吾不焚女，女其長寢於此。 The inscription suggests a way to quit

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<sup>74</sup> Dong, “Journey in Sickness”, *Fengcao'an qianji*, vol. 3, 14b–15a.

writing, peacefully, without the violence of burning.<sup>75</sup> Then, in the last dream of this month, Dong Yue felt so puzzled when seeing stones with human faces on the surface that he explained to the mountain dwellers that it was not unusual to have coins with faces and that this kind of coin circulated in several foreign countries. These stones were like those coins. The mountain dwellers laughed and said, “how could there be coins with human faces?” Dong asked, “how could there be stones with human faces?” Some mountain dwellers replied, “you have seen too little so you are so often surprised” 少見多怪. After recording this dream, Dong Yue reflected on his dreaming experiences and admitted that the debates on the stones and coins were “both based on nothingness” 皆馮虛無, while his insistence that human faces should be on coins indicated the existence of the “habituated heart-mind” (習心 *xixin*). He “attained the *xixin* from books and had not erased its residue (from his cognitions) completely,” 書卷習心, 除舊未畢.<sup>76</sup>

The notion of “habituated heart-mind” comes from Neo-Confucianism in the

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<sup>75</sup> As an expert in incense, Dong Yue started to steam the incense instead of burning them in 1651. Yang Yucheng suggests that, burning symbolizes violence and sacrifice, while steaming symbolizes cleansing and sublimation in spirit. See Yang Yucheng, “Mengyi, outu yu yiliao”, 640.

<sup>76</sup> Dong, “Journey in Sickness”, 15a–16a, 16a (quotation).

Northern Song dynasty. In his book entitled *Correcting the Unenlightened* (正蒙, *Zheng meng*), Zhang Zhai 張載 (1020-1077) explained how the habits already formed in mind affected dreams: “in the waking state, our body is open and our consciousness interacts with the external; in dreams, our body is closed and our *qi* will only focus on the internal. This is how in the waking state we learn new things through our ears and eyes, while in dreams we follow the old through the habituated *xin*.” 寤，形開而志交諸外也；夢，形閉而氣專乎內也。寤所以知新於耳目，夢所以緣舊於習心。<sup>77</sup>

In Dong Yue’s time, the Neo-Confucian scholars became generally more aware of the error and evil of the habituated mind-heart, since they realized that when the present consciousness took the habitual form of its past activity, it withdraws itself back to that form and solidified there, becoming partial and noncreative. Chen Que 陳確 (1604-1677) noted that “the habituated *xin* and the habituated visions imprisoned people” 習心習見，是處錮人，<sup>78</sup> the result of

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<sup>77</sup> Quoted from Zhang Zai 張載, *Zhang Zai ji* 張載集 (Zhonghua shuju, 2012): 19. For discussion of Zhang’s views on dreaming in various sections of *Zhengmeng*, see Fu Zhenggu 傅正谷, *Zhongguo meng wenhua* 中國夢文化 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1993): 101–106, and Ira E. Kasoff. *The Thought of Chang Tsai (1020-1077)*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

<sup>78</sup> Chen Que 陳確, “*Yu Wu Pouzhong shu*” 與吳袁仲書, *Chen Que ji* 陳確集, vol. 2: 581.

which was that “the enlightenment of my *xin* cannot dominate.” 使吾心之明不能作主.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, Dong Yue regarded his dream about human faces as a consequence of not having cleaned up his *xixin*, which implies his expectation of himself to embrace the dreamscapes of unknown objects and strange events – generally things repugnant to common sense and things other-worldly, without confusion.

In general, Dong Yue’s dream-themed writing in 1645 conveys his critical reflection on the psychological effects of the post-dreaming stage and the idea of “releasing one from the constriction” rooted in Buddhist thinking. He perceived dreams as a form of therapy, releasing anxiety and confusion by erasing the dreamers’ habituated *xin*. By practicing dreaming, Dong Yue gradually departed from his predilection for ghostly imaginative dreamscapes in the novel written in 1640 and his dark dreams reflecting his existential crisis in 1643, and came to work out a scheme of “dreaming as cultivation” inspired by seventeenth-century Buddhist thinking. Therefore, Dong described his dream experiences in 1645 as “admiring the pure dreams in darkness” 玄賞清夢, which differed from “the dark and mysterious dream journeys” 玄怪夢遊

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, vol. 1: 143.

in 1643. After 1645, Dong Yue no longer specifically kept record of his dreams, apart from random poems and diaries about dreams.<sup>80</sup> In this way, the dreams became a common object of writing and were not meant to be included in constructing an alternative world. Dreaming exerted its influence on Dong Yue's life not by preparing for him a place of spiritual refuge but, instead, by becoming the means of getting there – leading him to a mentality of withdrawal instead of merely a place of withdrawal. In this process, he used dreams as the Dharma to remove the residue of his past-self and achieve enlightenment.

#### 4.3.4 The dreaming-writing paradox and its solution

Dong Yue constantly dreamed about words, books and writing; and at the same time, he recorded and discoursed on dreams. Writing constantly accompanied his experiences with dreams even if writing and dreaming were starkly contrasting processes in several respects. In general, it can be argued that dreaming relates to the unconscious, while writing is a more conscious activity; dreams appear at night, while they are recorded and

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<sup>80</sup> Although Dong Yue still used the term “Land of Dreams”, but mostly as a symbol rather than articulating its content.

discussed in the day; dreaming transports people to the Land of Dreams and the practices of recording dreams draw dreams across the threshold of consciousness and conveys them into the waking world.

In the “Preface to the *Zhaoyang* History of Dreams” 昭陽夢史序, Dong Yue applied infinite changing shapes to articulate clouds and then compared dreams to the changing clouds. He concludes with the words, “The floating clouds change their forms, so the pattern of sky is always new; the dreams fly, so the souls and spirits never vanish. Clouds are like madness; dreams are like drunkenness.” 浮雲變化而天文常新, 夢寐飛揚而神靈不滅. 雲如狂, 夢如醉.<sup>81</sup> The scenes of dreams change rapidly and illogically, however, words bring clarity: “words are as bright as sunlight, they will not float like clouds; words are as solid as metal, they will not flow like water.” 言如日明, 不欲如雲浮; 言為金堅, 不欲為水流.<sup>82</sup>

The opposing metaphors of sunlight and clouds, metal and water bring out the intrinsic paradoxes between writing and dreaming, and return us to the discussion at the beginning of this chapter, about the possibility of recording

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<sup>81</sup> Dong, “Preface to the *Zhaoyang* History of Dreams”, *Fengcao’an qianji*, 12a.

<sup>82</sup> Dong, *Zhaoyang mengshi*, 6a.

(*zhi*) such phenomena. How can someone *zhi* the clouds-and-water-like with the sunlight-and-metal-like? If the changes are irrational, unstoppable and ceaseless, what would be the point of ever writing them down? The Garden of Intent and the Tower of Dreams both belong to the same genealogy of imaginary gardens, via artistic media that flesh out and reify intent and dreams. From the unique perspective of a dreamer, Dong Yue reiterates the struggle of artistically “capturing” amorphous intent.

The “Account of the Garden of Intent” offers a compromised solution in that it seeks to record every change of the imaginary gardens and does not aspire to an exclusive image. In the “Account”, interestingly, Yu kept talking about his garden while Dong kept talking about the Tower of Dreams. Although the account was finished, their imagination of desirable places of dwelling could forever be in process. With the compromised solution, Dong Yue must have realized that the possibility of *zhi* does not rely on grasping a permanent truth and that writing on dreams is actually about writing on mutability. Therefore, his appreciation and writing of dreams celebrates the aesthetics of dreaming itself, which lies not only in the illusions, but also the mutability of these illusions.

This mutability is fundamental to the understanding of Dong Yue’s theory of dreams since there was a growing consensus, in the mid-seventeenth

century, on the blurry boundary between dream-illusion and reality. Positive readings and uses of dream-illusion were seen in drama and fiction, and also in texts such as scholarly treatises and compendia, informal essays, autobiographical writings, poetry, and even paintings and woodblock illustrations.<sup>83</sup> This was due to the reinvention of Chan Buddhism and its diverse understanding of dreams, as previously discussed, and on the other hand also to the affinity between notions of “life is but a play” and “life is like a dream”, as well as the common equation of illusion, playacting, and dreams, as discussed in Qi Biaoqia’s case in Chapter 2. Therefore, the dilemma of *zhi* lies not in reproducing the dream-illusion through artistic media – as had been the case in Dong Yue’s time – but rather in capturing the incessant and unpredictable transformation of such dream-illusions.

In the early years of his obsession with dreams, (around 1643), Dong Yue takes dreams as a material for his writing. In a sense, he “writes” the dreams, but in the meantime the act of writing betrays the nature of the dream in doing so. Moreover, even the neutral recording of dreams can hardly avoid potential misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Thus, Dong Yue came

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<sup>83</sup> Such a statement is made by Judith T. Zeitlin in her *Historian of the strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese classical tale*. (Stanford University Press, 1993): 136.



to the comprised solution of a rhetorical method in literature, as seen in the “Preface to the *Zhaoyang* History of Dreams” and the “Account on the Garden of Intent” – that is, to record and date every dream/change as an alternative way of listing them. An earlier example could be found in his depiction of the “Tower of Myriad Mirrors” 萬鏡樓 in the *Supplement*. In the tower, there were a million mirrors in different shapes and materials, and in every mirror there was one individual world. The Monkey could not count them all, but Dong Yue listed dozens of them.<sup>84</sup> The rhetorical approach of exhaustive listing/recording, indicates his compromised solution for writing about countless changes.

We also have to note that the change in Dong Yue’s dreamscapes, from 1643 to 1646, and of his understanding of dreams in the same period, was intertwined with the days of greatest suffering during the dynastic transition. Moreover, it was also the time when the events chronicled in his “Account of the Garden of Intent” took place (1643-1647), and he settled for the compromised solution of the *zhi*-ability of illusory realms. Taking all of his

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<sup>84</sup> Zhao Hongjuan takes the piece of writing on the Tower of Myriad Towers as evidence for her argumentation for Dong Yue being the author of the *Supplement*, because this kind of arrayed metaphors of description were familiar in his works. See Zhao, *Ming yimin Dong Yue yanjiu*, 395-97.

experiences from 1643 to 1646 into consideration, I am interested in how his dream-based thinking could constitute an explanatory context for his existential thinking and the choices he made as a remnant in “real” life.

#### 4.3.5 Writing, burning and existential reflection

The logic of chronicle accounting in Dong Yue’s early dream records can also be seen in his other literary practices. In the preface to *Complete Works of the Studio of Luxuriant Grass* 豐草庵全集, Dong states that, “reading should be annalistic; writing books should be annalistic; writing prose and poems should be annalistic.” 讀書當編年, 著書當編年, 詩文當編年.<sup>85</sup> Articulating the benefits of such annalistic writing, he notes:

I can immediately abandon who I used to be. I am who I was in the past, but at the same time, I am not. Those I wrote years ago have been away from me for a long time. I used to treat them as precious herbs in my basket, but as long as I pushed them away, exposed them to the

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<sup>85</sup> Dong, “Author’s Preface”, *Fengcao’an qianji*, 1a.

passage of time and cast them to the heaven and earth, they have  
nothing to do with me, whether they are censured or praised.

可以立舍其前我。我雖昔人，非昔人也。彼辛壬癸醜之文，去我久矣，向  
者猶戀戀為篋中之稿，一旦推而遠之，暴其歲月，投置天壤，毀譽存亡而  
我不與焉。<sup>86</sup>

Dong Yue advocated pinning one's writing to the specific moment when it was produced, so that the written and spoken words departed from their author and became an independent entity. The logic of annalistic writing becomes about the way it makes one's life datable and cuts the living self off from their past, as that past is now incarnated in writing. In this way, the self is fragmented in a sense of liberation.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid: 1b-2a.

豐草庵詩集總目	
人閒可哀編	丙戌
采杉編	庚寅
落葉編	庚寅
西臺編	辛卯
病孔雀編	辛卯
紅蕉編	癸巳
登峰編	甲午
臨蘭亭編	乙未
雒陽編	乙未
洞庭雨編	乙未
	丁亥
	戊子

Figure 4-1 The "Contents" of Dong Yue's *Poetry Collection Studio of Luxuriant Grasses* 豐草庵詩集. In line with every session, there are records of the year of production.

Writing is generally considered to be the most important legacy of a literatus after he dies, so it was with Dong Yue, making this connection even stronger. In the “Words of Layman Rain” 雨道人家語, which was written in his thirties, and it read as if they are his last words. At the end of the essay, the “deceased” Dong tells his descendants that if they want to meet him again, they just needed to prepare a huge collection of his works to invite him back; his soul would then return and meet them.<sup>87</sup> Again, Dong Yue talked about books being an incarnation of the author and of the sympathy between books and their author.

Writing was so important to Dong Yue because it not only constructed narratives for an alternative reality – as it did in the “history of dreams” in the Land of Dreams – but it also constructed an alternative chronology of his life, which separated his enunciation from his living self. Therefore, he was unusually prolific as a writer, having completed over one hundred books in his life.<sup>88</sup> Even severe illness could not “stop [him] from being obsessed with

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<sup>87</sup> Dong, “Words of Layman Rain”, 10b-11b.

<sup>88</sup> Zhao Hongjuan has a detailed investigation on the wide range and extensive amount of Dong Yue’s works and their different versions, see Zhao, *Ming yimin Dong Yue yanjiu*, 235, 240-311.

words,” 不能斷文字緣,<sup>89</sup> and simultaneously, “the obsession with dreams became more severe [during illness],” 嗜夢益甚.<sup>90</sup>

However, Dong Yue’s obsession with writing was accompanied by his burning of it. Three years after his first burning of books in 1643, Dong had another burning session in the autumn of 1646, when he destroyed all of his essays in the examination style, together with some miscellaneous works and poetry. Subsequently, in the eighth month of 1656, he had a third burning, which was by far the most extensive. By the time he was interrupted by his sons he had burned several hundred volumes of books. If writing is the evidence of the moment when it was produced, then its burning proclaims the negation of that moment. Dong Yue’s three burnings, in general, were based on a reasonable self-assessment of his previous works. For example, he burned all the works he had written in his early twenties in the first burning because he was unsatisfied with their poor quality; and the second burning of examination-style essays reflected his contempt for the days when he was still in pursuit of an official career. However, it is noteworthy that in his latter two burnings, Dong

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<sup>89</sup> Dong, “Author’s Preface”, *Fengcao’an shiji*, 1b.

<sup>90</sup> Dong, “Fu Yan Jifang shu”, 18a.

Yue mentioned he “mistakenly burned” 誤焚 some anthologies of poems that he did not intend to. Liu Fu thinks that the wording of “mistakenly” is a disguise, and it is actually the bitterest word.<sup>91</sup> He conjectures that Dong reluctantly burned them to avoid trouble, especially from the Qing official persecution of scholars’ words. It was common practise at this time for Ming remnants to burn their books and manuscripts to protect themselves and their family.<sup>92</sup> As his reflection on the dream of eating a stone-jaw in the subsequent essay “Commandment of words” had indicated, words could be misused and misunderstood very easily, and his writing could easily have indicated negative sentiments towards the new reign.

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<sup>91</sup> Liu Fu 劉復. “*Xiyou Bu zuozhe Dong Ruoyu zhuan*” 西游补作者董若雨传, *Xiyou Bu* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1983). Liu Fu’s essay is one of the earliest modern studies on Dong Yue and his works, and is also the earliest to notice the unusual mental state reflected in his works. Modern scholars believe that the burnt works were destroyed due to the censorship of Qing, indicated by the names of the burnt works, such as the “Indignant Poetry of the year of *bingxu* (1646)”, . See Zhao, *Ming yimin Dong Yue yanjiu*, 237.

<sup>92</sup> Lü Liuliang 呂留良 (1629-1683) listed the reasons for Zhou Lianggong’s 周亮工 (1612-1672) burning of works in his preface to *Works of Laigu Hall* 賴古堂集 by Zhou. See “Yueyuan fenshi xu” 櫟園焚餘序, *Lü Wancun wenji* 呂晚村文集 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1977), vol. 5: 339-40. For a contemporary study on early-Qing literati’s burning of their own works, see Chapter 13 in Luo Shiji 羅時進, *Wenxue shehuixue: Ming Qing shiwen yanjiu de wenti yu shijiao* 文學社會學: 明清詩文研究的問題與視角 (Zhonghua shuju, 2018).

Two days before the third burning, Dong wrote the “Oath of Burning the Inkstone” 焚研誓辭 and bid a serious farewell to the desire that impelled his writing. He confessed in front of the Buddha that he had been “in corruption with words for over thirty years,” 墮文字因緣幾三十年, and that, “learning Buddhism for ten years, I have not achieved the ‘Great Place of Rest and Halt’ of the ancients. It is not only because of my weak spirit and body, but also because of the hindrance of writing.” 學道十年, 不到古人大休歇地, 非獨神骨懦, 亦筆墨之累也. He regarded his writing as irresponsible – “without terminating the ‘irresponsible speech’, I am betraying the mind of Buddha, and cannot achieve enlightenment.” 不斷綺語, 道岸不登; 不斷綺語, 離叛佛心.<sup>93</sup> “No irresponsible speech” is taken as one of “Ten Wholesome Deeds” 十善, and is articulated in the *Flower Adornment Sutra* 華嚴經 as follows:

The Bodhisattva always delights in thoughtful, examined speech, in appropriate speech, in true speech, in meaningful speech, lawful speech, speech that accords with the Way, skilfully taming and regulating speech, speech which is reckoned and measured according to the time

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<sup>93</sup> Dong, “Author’s Preface”, *Fengcao’an shiji*, 1a.



and which is decisive. This Bodhisattva, even when making jokes, always weighs his words, so how much the less would he deliberately pour out scattered and abandoned talk. 菩薩常樂思審語，時語實語，義語法語，順道理語，巧調伏語，隨時籌量決定語。是菩薩，乃至戲笑尚恒思審，何況故出散亂之言。<sup>94</sup>

Compared with the above description of “responsible speech”, Dong Yue’s writing indicates his preference for the opposite – it was focused on unconventional themes, styles and filled with sentimental expression and imagination.<sup>95</sup> Therefore, he confessed that his obsession with writing was a “corruption” 墮 and an encumbrance to his transcendence. His third burning, in this way, represented his effort to erase this obstacle.

The dynastic catastrophe was an extension of Dong Yue’s personal crisis,

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<sup>94</sup> The “Ten Wholesome Deeds” 十善 was translated to Chinese during the Tang Dynasty. They outline these deeds as: abstention from 1) killing, 2) stealing, 3) sexual misconduct, 4) duplicity, 5) harsh speech, 6) lying, 7) irresponsible speech, 8) greed, 9) anger, 10) foolishness. Four of the ten deeds are concerned with words. For the details, see Chapter 26 in the *Flower Adornment Sutra* 華嚴經, and for an English translation, see Thomas, Cleary. *The flower ornament scripture: A translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra*. (Shambhala Publications, 1993): 714-15.

<sup>95</sup> Yang Yucheng analyses Dong Yue’s specific interest in irregular literary forms (some are the ancient styles seldom used in his time) based on the punctuation of his works and his ghostly rhetoric system with the heavy use of ghostlike elements. See Yang, “Mengyi, outu yu yiliao”, 614-25.

which led to a deeper level of helplessness and loneliness, and triggered an intensified questioning of his existence. His dual interest in dreaming and writing (on dreams and other topics) revealed his feeling and reflection on these crises. On the one hand, they revealed his anxiety of identity as a failed official, a useless literatus obsessed with sensuous pleasures, a pale patient with chronic illness, and a remnant who chose to live. On the other hand, his dreams about cultural “discovery”, his interest in the discourses of dreams, his reflection on the validity of words and recording, and the significance of writing to human life, etc., all present his concerns in the scope of general cultural production to do with words and meaning. The latter were essential for defining his identity as a literatus trying to make his contribution to the world. After the dynastic change, this identity collapsed, and the power of writing became a hindrance. Dreams served as an important factor in shaping his world as a literatus, helping him to profoundly comprehend the fragility, transience, and mutability of this world. Through the process that spans his early attempts at constructing the all-illusory Land of Dreams and its history in writing, to his awareness of the limitation of writing through the initial paradox between dreaming and writing, to his changing attitude towards writing and burning, Buddhist thoughts on the nature of dreams and illusions seems to have brought him closer to enlightenment. Dong Yue spent more and more time in

the Lingyan Monastery since 1651 and after his third burning in 1656, he had the official tonsure the next year.

## 4.4 Dreams and the spatiality of withdrawal

### 4.4.1 The mud hut and the Tower of Dreams

After Beijing's fall, Dong Yue felt that he lived in the constant shadow of death – as he said, “I am afraid that I will suddenly die of poverty, illness or depression before the morning dew. Even though I would like to keep writing, I may not have the time to do so. I am so scared.” 恐忽然先朝露貧死病死憂愁死，雖欲布紙濡筆，天不假日，甚自懼。<sup>96</sup> Like other remnants, he was faced with the crucial choice of how to live the rest of his life and whether to have a place – either physical or not – to return to. As recorded in *Records of Ming Remnants* 明遺民錄, after the turmoil Dong Yue lived in a mud hut (土室, *tushi*) for several years, with no door and only a small window through which to pass food. The record in the local gazetteer stressed his seclusion, noting that “even relatives and family could not see his face,” 宗親莫睹其面.

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From Dong's own literature, we know that the mud hut was possibly a

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<sup>96</sup> Dong, “Yandafu sijielu xu” 嚴大夫死節錄序, *Fengcao'an qianji*, vol. 3: 3b.

<sup>97</sup> Sun Jingan 孫靜庵, “Dong Yue”, *Ming yiminlu*, in Xie, Fan, eds, *Ming yiminlu huiji*.

shabby hut used as his study in his small garden named “Studio of Luxuriant Grasses” 豐草庵. Dong’s poem depicts the garden as follows:

The green shadows of vines fall on the little hut,  
the autumn water in the porcelain basin forms a mirror with red fish inside.  
Beside my bed I used to keep the Sword of Splitting the Frost with me,  
which was melted and made into a plain bell to accompany me in reading.  
碧玉藤蔭影小廬，磁盆秋水鏡紅魚。  
床頭一握崩霜劍，銷作清鐘伴讀書。<sup>98</sup>

The studio was one of the typical remnants’ gardens in the Lower Yangzi region, with a humble size and a simple but highly individualized layout of garden elements. Although the environment of the studio was much more pleasant than the mud hut, the considerable level of isolation was nearly the same.

Yu Shengmin’s invitation to record his Garden of Intent inspired Dong Yue with another way of encountering dreams, which was associated with a real

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<sup>98</sup> Dong, “Inscription to Studio of Luxuriant Grasses” 題豐草庵, *Fengcao’an shiji*, vol. 1: 12b. This earliest description of Dong’s garden was written in 1648. Dong Yue loved the sound of bells so much that he melted his sword to make a bell himself, since the temples around had been mostly deserted after the Manchu conquest. See “Fu Yan Jifang shu”, 18a.

place of reclusion. When Yu talked about his imagined garden, Dong immediately saw it in terms of a dream, and he found the dream that was ideal for this exchange:

I dreamed I was walking in rain and crossing riotous bamboos, and in a short moment seeing two mountains standing out like a gate. I entered the gate, walking ten miles under the shade of pine trees, and then climbed on a stone tower, where tables, chairs and windows were all made of stone. On the tower was a stone plaque with seven green seal characters. The characters were like flying phoenixes. They read, 'Morning chill arises on seventy-two peaks.' 夢踏雨穿亂篠，俄兩山拔立如門。餘從門中行，過松陰十裡遂登一石樓，樓中幾榻窗扉皆石也，其上有石榜，碧篆七字，字如飛鳳形，其文曰“七十二峰生曉寒”。<sup>99</sup>

Dong Yue stretched the imaginary connotation of the poetics of the landscape to the extreme by conflating it with a dreamscape. He held this dream as an ideal abode and adored the poetic line of “Morning chill arises on seventy-two peaks” so much that he constantly quoted and rephrased it in his poetry.<sup>100</sup> Several years after Dong Yue had this dream, he named the little tower at the

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<sup>99</sup> Dong, “Account of the Garden of Intent”, 22a-b.

<sup>100</sup> Zhao, *Ming yimin Dong Yue yanjiu*, 202-03.

west of his garden the “Tower of Morning Chill” 曉寒樓, and the small pond in front of the tower the “Pond of Dreaming about the Stone Tower” 夢石樓潭.<sup>101</sup> Beyond that, he gave himself a new style name, the “Stone Tower” 石樓<sup>102</sup>. In his poem about buying a new servant boy and naming him “Dreamlike” 如夢, he quoted this line again. Through this act of naming, Dong associated a specific dreamscape with a real place of refuge, and thus the poetics implied by the dreamscape merged with reality through a literary play – a dream could become incarnate as a tower, a pond, and even a person.

The tradition of naming the built elements in gardens had been prevalent in garden culture since Northern Song, and became extremely popular in the seventeenth century,<sup>103</sup> as a reference to decode the particular charm of the garden element. Dong Yue’s obsession of allowing ulterior worlds, especially

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<sup>101</sup> Quoted from “Ti xiaohan helu” 題曉寒合錄, *Fengcao’an qianji*, vol. 6: 17a. This essay is written in 1656, but Dong Yue did not mention when he named the tower and the pond. Based on his other literature on the garden, two poems in 1654 should be the earliest records of the tower. During 1651-1652, Dong had extensive construction and writing on his garden, but neither the tower nor the pond were mentioned. Therefore, they were built, or at least named, no earlier than 1652.

<sup>102</sup> Dong, *Lianhua ji suibi*, vol. 2: 9a.

<sup>103</sup> The site names given by Qi Biaoqia to his private garden the Mountain *Yu* are perfect examples of this trend. For detailed discussion, see (page no.) in Chapter 2.

wonderful landscapes, to surround him in dreams and in real life is analogous to that of Qi Biaoja. Weary of politics, Qi became obsessed with creating his own refuge, the Garden of Mountain *Yu*, with ideas “formed in dreams” 形諸夢寐 which seemed to be “revealed as though from Heaven” 宛若天開.<sup>104</sup> In general, the names of garden elements could be given on account of various poetics and allusions connected to the most celebrated scenes of the specific element. Nonetheless, the paradigm remained the same – to open up alternative realms and to transport people there.

Apart from recording dreams, Dong Yue named intimate things in real life with allusions developed from dreams, which offers another way to fix and stabilize dreams and then allows him to revisit his dreams. Using the poetic dreamscape as a model of imagined paradise instead of the epic construction of a Land of Dreams and merging it with real life may indicate a shift of interest in Dong Yue’s later period of dream-obsession. It seemed to echo his changing dream styles, from recognizing himself as the “Poet-Historian” to the “Poet-Monk”, with the focus shifting from politics to poetics. Different as the approaches were, what remained the same was how Dong Yue took dreams

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<sup>104</sup> Quoted from Qi Biaoja’s self-preface to “Notes on Mountain *Yu*” (寓山注 *Yushan zhu*). See Zhao Haiyan, *Yushanzhu yanjiu*, 336.



to present a less precarious alternative reality. The comparison between the mud hut and the Tower of Dreams stresses the effectiveness of dreams in invoking this alternative reality.

#### 4.4.2 The drifting life on the Boating Home

In 1651, Monk Hongchu 弘儲 (1605-1672) in the Lingyan Monastery 靈岩寺 was arrested by the Qing government. Hongchu devoted himself to Buddhist learning while still embracing loyalty and filial piety and made Lingyan a base of underground anti-Qing resistance in the southeast coastal area. After his arrest, his followers in the monastery fled in all directions. Hearing what happened, Dong Yue went up to the monastery and restored order—he had never met with Hongchu before and was not even a registered monk then. In 1657, one year after his third burning of books, Dong Yue took the official tonsure in Lingyan. He left home to study Buddhism with Hongchu and soon became one of the most influential masters in the region of Lake Tai. As Hongchu commented in 1662, the Lingyan Monastery had three masters at that point and Dong Yue was the most capable one of them, but he constantly wandered around and seldom stayed at the monastery to deal with the

administrative work and teaching.<sup>105</sup> His idleness was not only because of his personality, but also due to his awareness of the risk of being too deeply engaged with the monastery and the circles of monks.

In 1670, Dong Yue received a letter from his friend, the famous Confucian philosopher Zhang Luxiang 張履祥 (1611-1674), who pointed out that Dong Yue's long-term stay in the Lingyan Monastery indicated that his "mind of fame and benefits" 名利之心 had not yet cooled down, since the monastery was so popular and so engaged with the current situation of politics. Zhang suggested for him to select a cool and quiet place for retreat.<sup>106</sup> In this sense, Dong Yue's choice to seriously begin a life of drifting, after his teacher Hongchu died in 1672, seems to be an appropriate response to Zhang's suggestion.<sup>107</sup> Dong regarded "boating" as another modality of withdrawal, in the sense that it was a mobile and transitory home, and thus named his boat "the Hut of Bamboo Splints" 篾屋, "the Boating Home" 泛宅 and "the Berthing Home" 泊宅.

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<sup>105</sup> Originally from the *Diary of the Hut of Bamboo Splints* 篾屋記. Quoted from a secondary source, see Zhao, *Ming yimin Dong Yue yanjiu*, 310.

<sup>106</sup> Zhang Luxiang, "yu Dong Ruoyu shu" 與董若雨書, *Yangyuan xiansheng quanji* 楊園先生全集, vol. 4 (Nanjing: Jiangsu shuju, 1871): 33b.

<sup>107</sup> Dong, "Author's Preface", *Baoyun shiji* 寶雲詩集, 2a.

The Berthing Home was the name of the village where Zhang Zhihe 張志和 (fl. 8th century), the former government official and Daoist master, moored his boat. The local officer came to visit and offered him a proper residence, but Zhang rejected it and said he “would like to live a drifting life on the boating home, among the Tiao Stream and Zha Stream.” 願為浮家泛宅，往來苕霅間。<sup>108</sup> Thereafter, the “drifting life and boating home” 浮家泛宅 became a symbol of seclusion for the literati.

The Lower Yangzi region, especially Dong Yue and Zhang Zhihe’s hometown, Nanxun, is famous for its variegated waters and water transportation, so it was common to have boats for daily trips. It was also common for the literati to name their boats as subjective expressions – for example, Qi Biaoqia’s boats were named as the “All-Garden” 皆園 and “Garden of Contentment” 隨園,<sup>109</sup> and Wang Ruqian’s 汪汝謙 (1577-1655) well-known magnificent boat on the West Lake was named the “Unmoored Garden” 不系園<sup>110</sup>. Their boats were

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<sup>108</sup> Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 and Song Qi 宋祁, eds. *New Book of Tang* 新唐書, vol. 196.

<sup>109</sup> Qi Biaoqia 祁彪佳, *Qi Biaoqia riji* 祁彪佳日記 (Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2016), vol. 3: 813, 815.

<sup>110</sup> Wang’s large pleasure boat was a famous place where the famous and talented met, see Joanna F. Handlin Smith. “Gardens in Ch’i Piao-chia’s Social World: Wealth and Values in Late-Ming Kiangnan.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 51, no. 1 (1992): 73-74.

places for leisure and casual tours, however Dong Yue's boat was a place of mobile living, which found an affinity with the self-initiated exile practiced by Ming remnants. After the Ming collapse, some of them kept drifting on a boat or on horseback to avoid touching the ground under the Manchu reign. In this sense, Dong's boathouse could be seen as a moderate version of exile balanced with allusions to the literati's boat-garden, and thus, was one that did not involve excessive political symbolism but rather pursued the enjoyment of landscape and the sense of freedom. He then lived in seclusion among streams and lakes, mostly on a boat, where his students could hardly find him. Only a few of them could luckily "catch" him by the stream or under the bridge with prepared tea, food, and a stove. He would then moor his boat and have a long conversation with them.<sup>111</sup> Dong once commented that the wonderful thing about living on boats was that, "I can find others while others cannot find me; the wonderful landscape cannot keep me away nor can it make me stay," 尋得人著，人尋不著；好山水隔我不得，好山水留我不得。<sup>112</sup> Therefore, drifting on a boathouse, Dong Yue was able to embrace his most valued landscape

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<sup>111</sup> Xiangyu Jiyin 湘雨紀蔭, *Zongtong biannian* 宗統編年, vol. 32.

<sup>112</sup> Dong Yue, "Bu qiao shu" 補樵書, *Miewu ji* 篋屋記, 28. Quoted from the secondary source, Yang Yuchang, "Mengyi outu yu yiliao", 673 (fn. 287).

dreams in practice and more importantly, obtained a physical space of non-obstruction, and a lifestyle of freely choosing to appear or disappear. The way how Dong's disciples managed to meet him with prepared food and tea during his temporary berthing displays a reversed relationship between the master and the guest.

In 1666, Dong Yue accompanied Hongchu on a long trip to Hunan Province, where they sailed on the River Xiang and had a profound conversation about the river mist:

[The Master asked,] What is special about the so-called "mist on the Xiang River" by the ancients? I bowed my head and said, "is it because it stays between being and non-being?" The Master said, "this is indeed the essence of the mist on the Xiang River. What else?" I said, "it is difficult to predict whether it goes or stays, or whether it is bright or dark."

The Master said, "this is indeed the transformation of the mist on the Xiang River. What else?" Then I said that the mist turns into the Xiang River; the Xiang turns into the mist; the mist turns into landscape; the landscape turns into me. The Master exclaimed, "this is the Great Forgetting of the mist on the Xiang River. Truly wondrous!"

（先師謂，）古人所亟稱湘煙者，何取於煙也？南潛俯首曰：“其有無之間乎？”先師曰：“是湘煙之質也。試進之。”南潛曰：“其去其留，明與暗之難籌。”先師曰：“是湘煙之轉也。更進之。”則進之以煙之為湘，湘之為煙，煙之為山水，山水之為我，而後先師歎之，以為此湘煙之大忘也，觀止矣！<sup>113</sup>

The mist acted as a new symbol of endless change and for thinking about such change. Dong Yue's observation of the mist had a striking resemblance to the nature of dreams. The dynamism of "being and non-being" refers to illusoriness, while that of "going and staying" refers to the changes of illusions, their mutability. Ultimately, in the ceaseless transformations, the mist finally reaches the Great Forgetting, a state of non-obstruction and free transformation.

Like the mist, the boathouse goes and stays on water. On the eve of the Chinese New Year of 1670, Dong Yue took the boat to the West Dongting Mountains 西洞庭山, where he encountered heavy snow and his boat became frozen on the lake, forcing him to stop and stay. Trapped in the middle of the lake for the whole night, he was amazed at the bizarreness

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<sup>113</sup> Dong Yue, *Fengcao'an houji* 豐草庵後集, vol. 2 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1987): 5a-b.

and hollowness of the scene.<sup>114</sup> Dong wrote a poem to memorize this impressive experience, in which a line reads, “the thirty thousand hectares of ice is enormous; me, a miserable monk, was alone, with a boat full of books,” 三萬頃冰嵯峨然，寒僧一個書滿船。

In the early spring of 1676, Dong Yue visited the waterfalls nearby and wrote an essay entitled “Account of the Waterfalls and Snow” 瀑雪記：

The snow melts, thus turning into waterfalls, while the waterfalls burst out, thus turning into snow. The melting and bursting are illusory, so are [my] observing, listening, and recording. From this day on, I will record such illusoriness every day, just like the waterfall and the snow. 雪消而為瀑，瀑飛而為雪，幻消、幻飛、幻觀、幻聽而幻記之。從此日記其幻，皆瀑雪也。<sup>115</sup>

The snow and the waterfalls are both forms of water. Dong Yue imagined their transformation of melting and bursting, and imagined himself seeing, hearing, and recording the transformation. Again, we can see his desire to attempt to “record the illusoriness” 記其幻, but this time he decided that

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<sup>114</sup> Dong Yue, *Nanqian riji* 南潛日記 (Hangzhou: Hangzhou guji jushudian, 1982), 2a.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 7a.

the act of recording was equally illusory, so there were, in fact, no more records of the snow and the waterfalls in the following days.

During his boating life on water, Dong Yue frequently encountered the transformation of water, as seen in the talk on the mist on the Xiang River, the water turning into ice overnight and the transformation between the snow and the waterfalls. Reflecting on the materiality of water and its transitory nature, Dong expanded the theme that fascinated him – that of mutable changes. His withdrawal in the form of drifting on a boat could also be seen as the actualization of the paradigm he gained from decades of being entangled with dreams. The ideal modality of withdrawal should be as free as the dreams/mist, and it should feel easy, whether it is real or illusory, if it goes or stays, and should not be entangled by any constraint.





## **CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION**

### **The Poetics and Politics of Withdrawal**

- 5.1 Individual withdrawal through cultural negotiation
- 5.2 Imagining the body and space: the mediate landscape
- 5.3 Dualism in the cultural negotiations of 17th-century China
  - 5.3.1 The real and the illusory
  - 5.3.2 Self-cultivation and obsession
  - 5.3.3 The manifest and the hidden
- 5.4 Implications for future research

## **5.1 Individual withdrawal through cultural negotiation**

This thesis examines the remnants' negotiation of the traumas of dynastic change through their cultural productions. In the alternative realms established by those production, the remnants were awarded with compensation for harsh realities, which contributed to their reconciliation with real life and directed to individualized modalities of withdrawal. In this thesis, I have demonstrated three modalities and in each case highlighted the differentiated and nuanced complexities of each specific negotiation of reclusion.

In Qi Biaoja's case, we see how withdrawal is negotiated through the theatricalization of reality, as seen in the moonlit spectacles he manipulated in his garden and the midnight suicide he enacted. The theatricalized night-time garden compensated for his frustration with the problematic situation in the late-Ming period and made the ordeal of martyrdom easier to take.

In Gong Xian's case, we see how withdrawal is negotiated through the substantialization of illusions, as presented by his paintings under the theme of "a thousand peaks and myriad ravines". These works representing his desire for a substantial landscape indicated an absolute level of isolation, security and peace that Gong himself had never attained in practice throughout

his life as he was too occupied by commissions of painting and teaching.

In Dong Yue's case we see how withdrawal is negotiated through the imagination of a new reality, where drifting was no longer a bitter choice, as he could soar anywhere. Dong's ambitious construction of the Land of Dreams as a polity was stimulated by his own failure in officialdom and the consequent disappointments of the late-Ming world. Initially it negotiates with his personal crisis and then the dynastic transition.

It is noteworthy that this thesis endeavours to shed light on how an individual perceives and reacts to the dynastic change in relation to his own existence, and how this is not motivated by joining a collective expression or as a consideration of the collective existences. Although the modalities of withdrawal examined here – to die, to withdraw by enclosing oneself and to detach oneself from a ground through rootless drifting – followed the legible tradition of reclusion, they offered something more through the individualised and nuanced cultural practices, which, in this sense, perfectly embodies the private sphere in these individual thoughts and reactions. The private, having begun as an aspect of sociability in late-Ming, was then transformed into an atomized phenomenon: a personal and embattled territory of defence and, sometimes, dissent.

To review

Ming loyalist Wu Zhongluan 吳鐘巒 (1577-1651) once claimed that, “each room he dwelled in was a room of Ming restoral.” 居一室是一室之恢復也。 His commitment would remain as long as he lived, so that within his lifespan “every single day he lived was a day of Ming restoral.” 生一日是一日之恢復也。<sup>1</sup> Even if the Qing reign managed to dominate almost every piece of land and the entire Chinese people, he, and his little room, would be the exception. In this sense, “a nation could remain even for one of its subjects.” 國以一人存。 Symbolically, one room, one day, and one person, made the minimum unit of Ming legitimacy for the remnants, although as time went by, the target would change from “restoring” to “remaining”. Practically, this minimum unit provided the individual remnant with an easier path towards autonomy in the particular historical context, distancing the confluence of different ideologies, moral values and lifestyles. It housed more than the daily life of a human being, but also included their personal feelings, intellectual reflection and poetic

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<sup>1</sup> Quan Zuwang 全祖望. *Jieqiting ji waibian* 鮚埼亭集外編 (Yuyao, Zhejaing: Jieshushanfang 借樹山房, 1872), vol. 9: 3b-4a. Wu held the Minister of Rites in the Southern Ming court, and never gave up his effort to restore the Ming dynasty. In 1651, Wu burnt himself in a Confucian temple before a foreseeable military defeat as a Southern Ming official. For Wu’s brief biography, see Chapter 164 in Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉 et al. eds. *Ming shi* 明史.

imagination.

Therefore, the concept of cultural negotiation provides an alternative and potentially more productive framework through which to consider reactions to the dynastic transition and the place of individuals within that transition, in contrast to what the inherited conceptions of reclusion have allowed. It should be understood from two perspectives: the political and the poetic. Politically, it represented the individual claim of withdrawal, which equalled the glorious historical exemplars of reclusion in endorsing their loyalty to the old dynasty. Poetically, it produced alternative realms of spiritual refuge, through which the remnant literati reflected on their actual withdrawal. The politics and poetics can roughly be reckoned as the public and private sphere in individual choices, which were two significant perspectives from which to understand the choices of people who lived with the identity of remnants and literati in the dilemmas of the “inter-dynastic” situation.

## 5.2 Imagining the body and space: the mediate landscape

In the three cases, the alternative realms refer to the theatricalized garden, the substantial landscape, and the mutable realm of dreams. I define them as the “mediate landscape”, to emphasise their mediating between this culturally negotiated realm and the actual mode of withdrawal. As a result, the space of their bodily withdrawal is more than a physical space but includes the imagination that the owner attaches to the space.

In this mediate landscape, the function of inhabiting is sophisticated by the specific historical context of Ming-Qing transition, for it needs to deal with the spatial relation between an individual and the world he refuses to live in. The prominent master of Confucian ethics, Sun Qifeng 孫奇逢 (1584-1675), demonstrated and compared two options for this relationship: “hiding away from the world” 避世 and “escaping from the world” 遁世:

To hide away from the world, one needs to conceal oneself, while to escape from the world, one needs not. For the former, one goes into the mountain and only worries that one did not go deep enough. This is why some ancients do not leave their names in the Heaven and Earth. For the latter, it is like the sky and the mountain looking at each other but without touching.

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辟世必隱，遁世不必隱。辟則入山惟恐不深，古人所以有不留姓字於天壤者是已；遁世則如天山兩相望而不相依。<sup>2</sup>

Sun further related options of withdrawal to different moral agents by saying that, “To hide away from the world is lofty, while to escape gains more freedom. This is the difference between the choices of the sage and the wise man.” 辟世高，遁世大，此聖人賢者之所由分也。 According to his differentiation, the remnant literati who chose to escape, as the wise men, were freed from moral, political and historical burdens.

The three cases in the thesis provide three modalities of individual withdrawal under the principle of “escaping from the world”. Those modalities indicate a change of gesture facing post-traumatic living, which turns the existential burden of passive stalemate into self-initiated transcendence. It is fundamentally new, since it no longer explores possibility under the principle of “hiding away from the world”, but prepares an “alternative home”, which is simple in terms of interior spatiality, but focus on one’s intimate and essential living. And due to its simpleness, the body joins in the imagination and is used

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<sup>2</sup> Sun Qifeng 孫奇逢, “Xunyi pouji xu” 遁義衰集序, *Xiaofeng xiansheng ji* 夏峰先生集 (Roncheng sunshi 容城孫氏, 1845): vol. 5: 30a.



as important tool to demonstrate the interior spatiality.

In Qi Biaoqia's case, when taking death as an alternative mode of withdrawal, the theatricalized garden could be regarded as the mediate landscape. It is created under the manipulation of Qi, with his "theatrical self" on stage, bridging the glorious death of a loyalist and the poetic retreat into his favourite garden. Qi used his body as a political mode of demonstration, and at the same time, the gesture of being submerged by the water could also be seen as staging his in-depth attachment to the garden. Thus, through the dramatic gesture of his actual suicide and his actions prior to the act, we can see how he uses the garden space and his body to complete a theatrical farewell to the living world.

In Gong Xian's case, the substantial landscape functions as the mediate landscape, connecting his artistic creation of the empty valley within a firm and strong world and his retreat into the gated and bamboo-thicket garden. Gong's advocacy of cultivating the "*qi*" (breath) of a painter draws my attention to his bodily withdrawal. Enfolded in layers of enclosure, he painted in bamboo groves, or behind the closed door of the gated garden, located at the foot of a mountain on the fringes of the city. Such layers of withdrawn space provide him with protection and to serve as an empty valley that Gong thought as the

substantial landscape that would manifest the peace and isolation he so vehemently sought.

In Dong Yue's case, the mutability of dreams acts as the mediate landscape that bridges Dong Yue's exploration in the realm of dreams and his withdrawal on the boat-home. Throughout his life, Dong had invented various approaches to introduce dreams into his real life, among which his final choice, the boat-home, can hardly be called a home, as it lacks exterior solidity and functionality, but its rootless moving allows him to freely move and stay, just as the mutable dreams do.

In the mediate landscape of each case, incarnation of its creator can be discerned, such as the "theatrical self" of Qi Biaoqia, the little figure walking into the deep mountains in Gong Xian's album leaf, and the "Historian of Dreams" to which Dong Yue assigned himself. The incarnation, as the remnant's imagination of himself, represents a new fragility of the remnant life on the soil as it is both transient and fragile; never lasting long and always an illusion. However, the incarnation functions in the mediate landscape as the artistic agent, and, thus, it is essential for our protagonists in order to escape from the real world into an alternative realm. In this thesis, it is the emergence of incarnation and the mediate landscape that guides us to discover how the

remnants negotiated with the dynastic change through their cultural productions.

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### **5.3 Dualism in the cultural negotiations of seventeenth-century China**

The suspension of dynastic time blurred the boundary between two dynasties, as well as the boundary drawn in the personal histories of the Ming remnants. They found alternative realms to escape from the burden of history and politics and embrace the poetics of withdrawal through cultural productions. In these, politics and poetics interacted with one another in the flux between the illusory and the real; obsession and self-cultivation; and the manifest and the hidden. This retrospective look at the thesis explores several significant issues that shed new light on a broader image in the cultural phenomenon of the Ming-Qing transition.

#### **5.3.1 The real and the illusory**

The prevailing notion of “illusion” in the art and culture of seventeenth-century China makes a significant contribution to cultural negotiations of withdrawal, since the mediate landscapes (the theatricalized garden, the substantial landscape and the mutable dreams) are all presented as illusory realms. Therefore, the mediate landscape in their cultural productions finds its place in the middle ground between the real and the illusory: Qi Biaoja’s garden physically exists but becomes illusory, while Gong Xian’s landscape painting

becomes material and “realistic”<sup>3</sup>. Dong Yue’s dreams are apparently illusory, but the Land of Dreams is based fully upon human polity and the recording of dreams is participated in by real people.

This approach might be compared to the playful installation of Li Yu 李漁 (1611-1680) entitled the “convenient elevation” (便面 *bianmian*). Li did not like flowers in pots, birds in cages, fish in bowls, and rocks on the table with pedestals, since “they are so cramped, reminding me of a trapped phoenix.” 局促不舒，令人作囚鸞繫鳳之想。<sup>4</sup> Hence, he created an installation to formally free them. The instruction is that one adhere a horizontal board to the window from the outside and put the flowers, birds, or rocks on it, then place several scattered pebbles on the board to cover the pots, bowls and pedestals trapping the flowers, birds and rocks. In this way, when viewed from inside, all the trapped objects are framed into a picturesque landscape, and become part of an illusion.

By displaying them in *bianmian*, Li Yu provided an ephemeral solution to

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<sup>3</sup> The word “realistic” here does not refer to any established terms of styles in Western art history and theory, but only emphasizes on the illusory quality that Gong Xian’s landscape paintings have achieved.

<sup>4</sup> Li Yu 李漁, *Xianqing ouji* 閒情偶寄 (Zhonghua shuju, 2007): 56.

liberate trapped creatures so that something he hated became transformed into something that he adored. As the creator and the practitioner, he was fully aware of how the illusion was constructed in detail, but this did not hamper him from indulging himself in it. Li Yu's model is perfect for articulating the individual cultural escape of the remnants, which is also premised on the agency and mastery of the subject, even as he yields to the self-created illusion. Moreover, the cultural negotiations rescue the remnants themselves instead of physical objects, thus entailing a greater complexity of being both inside and outside the "convenient elevation"; that is, being located both in illusion and in reality.

To smoothly traverse to the alternative realms, it was essential to generate the obscurity or chaos of intertwining reality and illusion. Before his suicide, Qi Biaoia remarked upon the transience of everything in the world, when he looked at the vague profiles of the faraway mountains under the moonlight:

Mountains and rivers, as well as human beings, are all illusions; never do mountains and rivers change, while quickly another lifetime passed.

山川人物，皆屬幻影。山川無改，而人生倏忽又一世矣。

In his theory of painting, Gong Xian proposed the idea of "chaos" (渾淪 *hunlun*) and explained that the true *hunlun* was accomplished by the amorphousness

of the brushwork and ink:

Only when both brushwork and ink are excellent, and one cannot distinguish the brush method from the breath of the ink, is this a true mingled mess (*hunlun*).

惟筆墨俱妙，而無筆法墨氣之分，此真渾淪也。

To access the Land of Dreams constructed by Dong Yue, one has to enter the chaos of unconsciousness and get lost:

There is the Sea of Chaos (*hundun*), neither cold nor hot. If you cross the sea, in a short while you will be on the “Road of Getting Lost”, and then you will walk on the way of the Land of Dreams.

有混沌海，不寒不暑，濟此海，屈申臂頃抵迷家路，遂行夢鄉道上。

In the process of revealing the mediate landscape, they face dimness and obscurity as part of the atmospherics in their own ways. This obscurity, in Qi Biaoja's case, refers to the concept of illusion (幻 *huan*) in Buddhism; in Gong Xian and Dong Yue's work it refers to the concept of chaos (混沌 *hundun*) in early Daoism, or its synonym *hunlun* 渾淪. The former admits and embraces the illusoriness of all things, and the latter emphasises the vibrant mix of the contoured and legible, and the amorphous and ambiguous.

The garden, as one of the essential embodiments of literati life since the Tang

Dynasty (618-907), reveals the profound perception of the fragility of dwelling during the dynastic change. Each of the three protagonists had his own garden. Qi Biaoja's Mountain *Yu* was among the typical literati gardens in late-Ming, built with high taste and cost, while Dong Yue's Tower of Dreams (in the Studio of Luxuriant Grasses) and Berthing Home, and Gong Xian's Half-Acre Garden, constructed after the dynastic change, were as small and rustic as most remnants' gardens. The rustic quality of their gardens was undoubtedly subject to their financial and social conditions, but it also signified a kind of transience or insubstantiality in relation to the grounds on which they existed. If the cultivation of an elaborate garden is taken as a sign of assumed stability in the passage of that garden down through the family, then their gardens reflected the changing perceptions of home or house during the dynastic transition. Due to the lack of confidence about property and ownership, substantiality and solidity were no longer considered to be priorities. Even Qi Biaoja, who had built a magnificent garden, preferred to accept and embrace the fragility of the substances of his garden and the temporality of his ownership of it. In this sense, the spaces where the remnants lived became part of their fugitive existence, which was attended by the imagination of space and body in the reconstruction of their withdrawn living.



### 5.3.2 Self-cultivation and obsession

It is not surprising that the cultural negotiation could not be accomplished in one action only. In each of the three cases, we can witness a process of persistent cultivation of their capacity to construct their compensatory realms until they are finally achieved. Dong Yue's invention of "Eight Assistants" that help him purify the Land of Dreams indicates the critical impacts of literati's daily self-cultivation of a on the pursuit of alternative realms. The "Eight Assistants" included several typical activities of a literati's self-cultivation, such as the storied tower, the tripod caldron for tea, and the secluded flower, as well as some customized ones that specifically fascinated Dong Yue. For example, Dong had been ill for a long time, and had a medicine furnace as the first assistant; he also liked to burn incense and listen to the rain, so these two appear as the "moulded incense" and the "chill rain".

The idea of self-cultivation here was different from the conventional notion that had long existed in Chinese philosophy, although it did borrow some principles from it. For Confucius, the completion of an exemplary person (君子 *junzi*) was based on the cooperation between the two spheres of human life, *li* 禮 (ritual

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action, orders) and *yue* 樂 (music, art)<sup>5</sup>, which roughly translate as “on-duty” and “off-duty”, or the public and the private, the outer and the inner. The constitution of a flourishing life was secured more by the inner force (sensibilities, attitudes, and dispositions) of each individual, as it was more clearly within the control of the individual, who was capable of concentrating on the “inner” force as opposed to the “outer” values: “Let one’s character be stimulated by Poetry, established by rituals; and perfected by music.” 興於詩, 立於禮, 成於樂.<sup>6</sup> Naturally, in the circumstances of remnant living, the inner force was given more importance.

In this regard, the self-cultivation in the three cases is a combination of conventional Confucian principles and the essential practices of their cultural productions. These practices were more than just practical techniques required by the productions, but were a series of highly customized principles in self-cultivation, that aimed to refine the construction of the alternative realms and free traversal between those realm and real life.

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<sup>5</sup> Zehou, Li, and Bell Samei, Maija. *The Chinese aesthetic tradition* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010): 17–28.

<sup>6</sup> Analects 8-8.

In the three cases, the construction relies on the repeated practices of certain paradigms or approaches, according to various forms of cultural production.

For Qi Biaoja, in the long process of designing, building, appreciating and naming his garden (as well as the scenic sites) he had been constantly refining his garden and his “Notes” on the garden, from which he cultivated a capacity with himself to concoct theatricalized illusions and, at the same time, remain outside of them. For Gong Xian, it was the cultivation of *qi* (氣, lit. breath) that enabled him to create the “big mountains and big ravines” with the technique of “piled-ink”, in the compositions that were dense and calm. For Dong Yue, with the help of Buddhist thinking, having dreams enabled him to find a therapeutic realm that established peace and purity, so that he could escape from the depressive dreams that reflected his own anxiety. Dong Yue also talked about the cultivation of *qi*. When he was young, he planned “to spend thirty years reading, and thirty years travelling, so that I would be not be lacking *qi*.” 三十年讀書，三十年遊覽，差不至短氣。 Although poverty and illness prevented him from travelling, his wandering in dreams made up for this and boosted his *qi*. A similar thing happens with Gong Xian’s lack of travelling and his taking to reading behind closed door for decades as a way to cultivate *qi*.

This self-cultivation, in connection with the construction of alternative realms, inspires us to consider the flourishing of “obsession” in seventeenth-century

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China. Qi Biaoqia had repeatedly used the character “*pi*” 癖 and “*chi*” 癡, both meaning “obsession”, to describe his relation to his garden. Dong Yue also described himself as having “the *pi* of dreaming” 夢癖 and “*pi* of rain” 雨癖, and he wrote extensively to argue that obsession with dreams was not an illness but rather medicine. To describe the literati’s affection for paintings, Gong Xian compared the human being with non-human objects and said, “the reason why human beings are different from the grass, plants, tiles and gravel is that people have tempers and emotions. Those who have temper and emotion have obsessions.” 人之所以異於草木瓦礫者，以有性情。有性情便有嗜好。<sup>7</sup>

Their construction of alternative realms can be seen as an obsession since it requires continuous effort and allows something to be constantly revisited. The seemingly obsessive construction was not only part of the approach of forming the alternative realm, but it also became an essential part of its significance.

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted from the inscription on Gong Xian’s 1680 scroll of *Streams and mountains with no end* 溪山無盡圖卷.

Therefore, the obsession became “a studied act of self-cultivation”,<sup>8</sup> the process of which, could be observed externally as the exploration of personal styles or themes in the artistic creation, while it was driven internally by the process of negotiation with the ideal of withdrawal.

### 5.3.3 The manifest and the hidden

Among the mass of remnants' stories, there was a story about a Mr. Sun who would retreat into the famous Yellow Mountains and invited many literati to eulogize his behaviour. Wang Yan 王岩, a respected remnant, admonished him that he should not look for a famous place for his reclusion, since historically, ancient recluses retreating into the mountains only wished to go deep enough in order not to be discovered by others; their places of reclusion gained fame for who they were, but not the opposite. Moreover, Wang suggested that Sun should not make his reclusion even more evident by

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<sup>8</sup> Zeitlin suggests that the obsession with a particular object becomes an action of self-cultivation when the object (such as the rocks and the chrysanthemums) has become a fixed emblem of certain virtues. See Judith T. Zeitlin. *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993): 73. Here I borrow her expression to articulate that the obsession is no longer the spontaneous impulse of a particular nature when the obsessional act/object has been associated with particular ideals.

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having people praise it, since the “genuine withdrawal” 真隱 should be “decisive to withdraw so that no one could predict.” 果於歸去，使人莫測其歸也。<sup>9</sup> It is noteworthy that this story is recorded in Wang Yan’s biography, thus making it more complexly interesting for that Wang, as the one who stopped others from being recorded was recorded with respect.

This story displays the issue of performing withdrawal among the Ming remnants. Explicitly, Sun’s attempt was seen as hunting fame by performing his withdrawal to his contemporaries and even circulating it to later generations through written eulogies. However, Wang Yan’s persuasion was also indirectly presenting withdrawal by performing his will not to perform. The different actions of Sun and Wang summarize the paradoxes between all forms of representation of withdrawal and the original intention of withdrawal; the deeper the remnant withdrew, the more renowned he was, and the more silent he kept, the more he was heard. In the three cases, we see similar attempts of performing withdrawal: they hid in reclusion and at the same time performed or staged it (or its ideal form) in artistic forms, thus making the hidden manifest. Qi Biao committed his suicide in loneliness, quietude, and darkness, an

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<sup>9</sup> Liu Baonan 劉寶楠, “Biography of Wang Yan” 王岩傳, in Min Erchang 閔爾昌 ed, *Beizhuan ji bu* 碑傳集補, vol. 36 (Beijing: Yanjing daxue guoxue yanjiusuo, 1923): 21a.

atmosphere that was reserved for himself and repelled others' attention, while the performativity of his death presented the political implications that endorsed his will of withdrawal (death). Gong Xian's garden, with its permanently shut gate, and Dong Yue's ever drifting boat-home, both signified their determination to conceal their presence, while their landscape paintings and dream writing revealed and represented their ideal of withdrawal.

The necessary individualism of the gesture in such forms of cultural negotiation would not have obscured their significance for the community, instead, their performances could be decoded and circulated among remnants in an obscure way. In his preface to Huang Zhouxing's 黃周星 (1611-1680) "Ode to the Land of *Yudanyue*" 郁單越頌, a work of prose on an inexistent paradisiacal realm in Daoism, Dong Yue wrote, "those who do not know think Layman Jiuyan is being playful [in writing this], but I know his grief." 不知者以為九煙居士為遊戲，而余知其悲。<sup>10</sup> Dong must have sensed the grief when he conceived the indelible boundary between the illusory paradise Huang

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<sup>10</sup> Dong's preface is in *Xiaweitang bieji* 夏為堂別集, a posthumous collection of Huang's works, now held in Beijing Library. This is quoted from the secondary source, see Ellen Widmer, "Between Worlds: Huang Zhouxing's Imaginary Garden", in Idema, Wilt L., Wai-yee Li, and Ellen Widmer, eds. *Trauma and Transcendence in Early Qing Literature* (Harvard University Asia Centre, 2006): 263.

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established and reality. This capacity of conceiving the underlying intent of overlapping illusions with reality became a code of communication and sympathy among the remnant literati.

This thesis attempts to uncover the hidden “grief” in the permeable obscurity between reality and illusion in their cultural productions, since their modalities of withdrawal are not as manifest as those manifest models of reclusion. All three case studies rely heavily on writing by the three protagonists that decodes the illusory realms they constructed and reflects on them from the perspective of reality. This writing allows others to glimpse the particular mechanisms through which the illusory realms were created and accessed, thus making their cultural productions on withdrawal manifest.

The tension between the manifest and the hidden prevailed in the stories of withdrawal of Ming remnants, especially in the private historiography written by the survivors.<sup>11</sup> In the general context where all remnants endeavoured to

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<sup>11</sup> From the late-Ming period, private history had been popular among literati, see Ng, On-cho. “Private Historiography of the Late Ming: Some Notes on Five Works.” *Ming Studies* 1984, no. 1 (1984): 46-68. After Ming-Qing transition, the remnants felt more motivated to write their own history for the sake of Ming dignity and also justice. Their works were important supplements to the official history sponsored by Qing court. See Zhao Yuan 趙園, *Xiangxiang yu xushu* 想象與敘述. (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2009): 187-90.



conceal their presence, writing (as the most common cultural practice) about concealing their presence became a way of revealing their presence. The abundant production of remnants' stories were recorded and collected in the so-called "records" 錄, which were supposed to be non-fictional and seldom literary. In fact, they were impressively performative, embedded with wishful alternative realities and excessive meanings, which produced further obscurity in the stories and impeded an instinctive understanding of those materials. For example, Dong Yue's mud hut, recorded in the *Accounts of Ming Remnants* 明遺民錄 by Huang Rong 黃容, was understood as following a conventional pattern found in history, where it was made with mud, with no doors, and only a window for passing food. From Dong' own writing on the mud hut, we know that it was actually a shabby hut used as his studio, where the beams were broken and the roof was leaking. Dong Yue was too poor to have it furnished, so he removed the weeds and planted orchids inside for company. In this case, the performative gesture of "pushing down the walls [of his mud hut] to get out" 排壁而出 in Huang's record, was also doubtful.<sup>12</sup> As shown in Dong Yue's story, the mud hut of Ming remnants can sometimes be seen more as a symbol than a fact. For the Ming remnants who had been perceiving the sense of

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<sup>12</sup> Xie, Fan, eds, *Ming yiminlu huiji* (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1995).

turbulence, impermanence, and mutability imprinted by the historical context, the performativity in their withdrawal became important for their self-verification. Writing became an important way of not only recording, but also shaping the life story of remnants, while at the same time it endorsed their loyalty to the nation by presenting their post-traumatic living. Therefore, the cultural production discussed in this thesis can also be seen as certain forms of performative historization of the remnants' life stories and existence. Such performativity could be discerned in Dong Yue's mud hut, as well as in his boating home, Qi Biao's gesture of suicide and Gong Xian's closed door of his garden, as seen in both the official and private historiography about their stories.

In her comprehensive research on the history of Ming remnants, Zhao Yuan notes the issue of imaginative writing on the history of the Ming-Qing transition, and concludes that, while the stories cannot be verified, they offer meaningful evidence that allows us to understand the preference for performative imagination in the Ming remnants' history telling.<sup>13</sup> She also points out that, even the private writing, such as private letters and diaries, were never "private"

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<sup>13</sup> Zhao, *Xiangxiang yu xushu*, 146-57.

in an absolute sense, since they were to be compiled and published the moment they were written.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid: 161.

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## 5.4 Implications for future research

Several cultural phenomena have been discussed in this thesis. Above all, this research has been concerned with the withdrawal of an individual from the world in relation to a certain process of spatiotemporal social change. In particular, this study takes space and the body as the focal point, and by doing so reveals a potential new direction for landscape and architecture studies. Although the investigation into the notion of withdrawal in this thesis focuses on a specific period and context of China, it may reflect some common interests in the discussion of withdrawal in different cultures and contexts. To detach oneself from the world, which may be motivated by various reasons, is one of the essential perspectives for human beings to contemplate on their existence in and relationship with the world. The thesis also manages to extract basic principles and archetypes from specific cases concerning individual escapes, which indicates the possibility of connecting to future research on “withdrawal” from different spatial-temporal frameworks.

The individual escapes examined in this thesis, including the three main cases and other examples, rely heavily on landscape imagination that was stimulated by the general political situation, as well as the immediate condition of the remnants’ lives. The remnant literati took the representation of their landscape

imagination, as symbols to claim their moral values and artistic pursuits. In this sense, this thesis can be seen as being part of an enormous field of study on how the idea of landscape participates in various forms of cultural productions, especially when it is attended by imagination. It therefore invites further investigation via cooperation with other interests in the research field of landscape imagination.

The imagination of alternative realms by the remnants interacts with a wide range of literary and art forms, and sophisticated social-political situations, necessitating an inter-disciplinary approach to examine them. Whilst this approach is hardly novel in contemporary academic research, this study re-emphasises that by connecting architectural interests, such as landscape, or the space and the body, with other research fields of endeavour, it may indeed prove fruitful. As the thesis has demonstrated, the study may be taken up in connection with existing scholarship of literature, art, philosophy and history. For example, it touches on several cultural phenomena regarding the fruitful yet controversial research on “early modern China”, developed from the concept of “early modern period” (1500-1800) in the context of western

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culture.<sup>15</sup> A quick search on books published since the 1990s on this topic will bring us to these keywords in the book titles: Publishing, Culture, and Power; Pictures and Visuality; Pharmacy and Culture; Industrial Entrepreneurship; Healing, Literature, and Popular Knowledge; Material Culture and Social Status; Decorative Object; Contract and Property; Novel and Theatrical Imagination; and so on. These keywords draw an image of contemporary interests in the study of early modern China, suggesting a range of future directions for a rethinking of the cultural productions examined in this thesis.

This thesis considers cultural practices as a way of negotiating with the suffering induced by trauma. It is discerned in this study that by reflecting on the trauma in one's artistic creation, the output can provide an alternative realm into which one can escape and transform the trauma. In the cases studied here, the mental and physical state of the remnant literati and the impact of

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<sup>15</sup> In contemporary studies, "early modern China" is widely used as an established term to refer to the period from mid-Ming to early-Qing (roughly equivalent to 1500-1800), sometimes overlapping with the term "late-imperial". For the discussion and disputes on the usage of this term, see Craig, Clunas, "Introduction", *Superfluous things: material culture and social status in early modern China* (University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 4. Here, Clunas's discussion refers to the Chinese scholar Zhu Weizheng's innovative analysis which turns the demarcation of "early modern China" to "the end of Middle Ages". See Zhu Weizheng 朱維錚. *Zouchu zhongshiji* 走出中世紀 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2007), 15.

cultural practices on them have been noted. Hence, this work can also be seen as being part of a field of study on the therapeutic effect of cultural practices, especially when dealing with the existential crisis of individuals. This direction of future studies may indicate more engagement with expertise from the field of psychology and others, which also signals a possibility of inter-disciplinary cooperation.

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