

## CHINESE LANDSCAPE PAINTING AND ITS REAL CONTENT

by *Max Loehr*

Painting, particularly landscape painting, must be counted as one of China's great contributions to the arts of all time. It was a late accomplishment when measured by the history of Chinese literature and of Chinese calligraphy: only in 1167 was it possible for a writer to claim, as did Teng Ch'un in his *Hua-chi*, "More on Painting," that painting means nothing less than the perfection of culture.<sup>1</sup> In 1947, 780 years later, his claim was broadly confirmed by the voice of an American scholar, George Rowley, who found that

the Chinese way of looking at life was not primarily through religion, or philosophy, or science, but through art. All their other activities seem to have been colored by their artistic sensitivity.<sup>2</sup>

It was not a lonely voice, however, but was preceded by a statement of comparable tenor in the remarkable book on Li Lung-mien written by Agnes E. Meyer in 1923. The passage says,

In this way the Taoist artist achieved . . . a metaphysical reality, and expressed it more accurately than language ever could, inasmuch as words are more elusive than forms and spaces. They painted reason—succeeded in expressing organically a whole system of philosophic thought.<sup>3</sup>

The system of philosophic thought referred to is, of course, that of Taoism, and the word 'reason' might accordingly be replaced by the term *Tao*—a notion which Rowley explained as embodying the concept of the realms of spirit and of matter of being one.<sup>4</sup> And he concludes further that

[Chinese] painting would never become as religious, imitative, or personally expressive as our painting; and that art would tend to take over the functions of religion and philosophy, and would become the prime vehicle for man's most profound thoughts and his feelings about the mystery of the universe.<sup>5</sup>

His conclusion sounds a bit unsettling. How can thought be represented in art? And how, for that matter, philosophy or religion? They are of the sphere of discursive or verbal thinking and have nothing to do with plastic thinking.

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For thoughts to be represented they would have to be imagined visually and concretely, as symbols or as allegories. Or, since the Chinese avoided allegory, 'thought' would somehow have to be expressed by way of concrete subject-matter, such as a tree, a rock, or a landscape. Apparently, therefore, we are expected to be able to read a Chinese picture like a book and comprehend at once what it has to say, its expression, its meaning, or its content.

The term 'content,' of course, is fairly vague and needs definition. A workable and satisfactory definition appears to be that of "intrinsic meaning," used by Panofsky, who characterized the term further by quoting Peirce's subtle observation on "content" as that "which a work betrays but does not parade,"<sup>6</sup> in contrast to subject-matter. Ordinarily, however, we speak of "form and content" as though these were opposites or polarities, which is plainly wrong. There is no such thing as content unless there is form. In a work of art, content is "given to perception with its form."<sup>7</sup> And "forms are either empty abstractions or they do have a content," according to Susanne Langer, who explained that "all forms in art are abstracted forms" but "abstracted only to be made clearly apparent" in order to "act as symbols, to become expressive of human feeling."<sup>8</sup>

If the content of a work of art is "given with its form" (and only with its form), it can only be experienced in a work, an actual work of art. For "expression" is no act of the pure mind, but, as Louis Arnaud Reid said, "a progressive discovery through manipulation of real material."<sup>9</sup> In other words, there is no intrinsic meaning or substance that is not tied to artistic form. When the form changes, content also changes.

Style, as the biggest factor to effect such changes of form and content, would deserve to be discussed thoroughly in the present context. I believe it will be more rewarding to focus on matters of style in connection with the individual works to be discussed and illustrated further on.

In China, art-critical literature goes far back in time. Surprisingly it is the earliest of these texts, the *Ku Hua P'in Lu*, written by Hsieh Ho toward A.D. 500, that has enjoyed a lasting reputation and become the foundation of Chinese art-criticism through the ages. Therefore a recent writer, Leo Steinberg, could refer to Chinese painting as "so self-conscious that it operated for a thousand years within six explicit canons. . . ."<sup>10</sup> These so-called six canons are the substance of Hsieh Ho's contribution, although he may in turn have been indebted to an older source that is lost. They are enumerated in an apparently descending order of importance:

1. Spirit resonance or vitality.
2. Bone method or [structural] use of the brush.
3. Correspondence to the objects in the depiction of forms.
4. Suitability to type in the application of color.
5. Division and planning, that is, the composition.
6. Transmission of models by copying.<sup>11</sup>

Only the first of these canons is concerned with expressiveness, a quality related to content to some extent, but primarily considered as the formal quality of aliveness. The other five categories, by contrast, might be taken to be instructional advice on basic requirements of good painting. Only of the first canon was it said by the many Chinese commentators of later ages that it cannot be acquired by study or conscious effort.

Four centuries after Hsieh Ho, the six canons or principles were reformulated as the *Liu Yao*, "Six Requirements," by a painter named Ching Hao, who was active around A.D. 900. His *Pi Fa Chi* (*Notes on Brushwork*) "offers more concrete ideas on the aims and methods of landscape painting than any previous work," according to Sakanishi.<sup>12</sup> His formulations are precise, logical, and simple as compared to those of Hsieh Ho. His six essentials are

1. spirit,
2. rhythm,
3. thought,
4. motif,
5. brush,
6. ink.

But most interesting in his essay is the exposition of the problem of likeness and truth. He asks,

What is resemblance? And what is truth? [And answers:] Resemblance reproduces the formal aspect of objects but neglects their spirit; truth shows the spirit and substance in like perfection. He who tries to transmit the spirit by means of the formal aspect and ends by merely obtaining the outward appearance, will produce a dead thing.<sup>13</sup>

This passage reveals an awareness of, and concern with, a content that cannot be represented but only conveyed through the total structure of a painter's work. Ching Hao further defined the meaning of what he calls 'truth' by equating resemblance with outward form and truth with inner reality. He is unquestionably aware of a peculiar potential of his artistic form, namely, that (in a contemporary Western interpretation) "it reaches beyond itself," and that "it is semblance, but seems to be charged with reality."<sup>14</sup>

The only possibly authentic extant work attributed to this late T'ang master, Ching Hao, is the picture of the *Lu-shan* mountains in the Chinese National Palace Museum at Taipei (*Fig. 1*). The scenery consists of a cluster of tall, vertically fissured, inaccessible cliffs whose layered, very regularly repeated shapes possess an architectonic quality. The vegetation is sparse and does not obscure those shapes, which are executed in an almost transparent technique of innumerable small dabs of diluted ink. In its total effect the design has a tone of solemnity and remoteness. It gives a meaningful, almost sublime interpretation of reality, without therefore being realistic.

A glance at two somewhat similar mountainscapes will at once make the specific qualities of the *Lu-shan* more apparent. One is an earlier work, no



FIG. 1. CHING HAO: *Lu-shan*. Taipei, Chinese National Palace Museum. After *Ku-kung ming-hua san-pai chung*, Vol. I.

doubt (although it happens to bear a spurious signature naming the same Ching Hao), a work presumably dating from the ninth century, in the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery at Kansas City (*Fig. 2*). This picture shows a colossal, writhing mountain formation of sharply creviced rock, with a perilous overhang at the top, seen against a very high horizon. Nowhere is there any clear vertical drop, any gentle slope. The scenery seems to be an overwhelming chaos, a furious upsurge—suddenly congealed in a menacing mass of crushing dimensions. It is readily seen that this work is even less realistic than the Ching Hao (in *Fig. 1*). Much of its character depends on the fact that it belongs in a more primitive phase, when more purely imaginary, bold, and drastic forms were the rule.

The second work to compare is the famous *Travellers Among Streams and Mountains* by Fan K'uan, dating from about or soon after A.D. 1000, in the Palace Museum at Taipei (*Fig. 3*). Seen from the level of this majestic conception and rationally ordered mountain image, the relative proximity of the Ching Hao to the archaic picture in Kansas City becomes obvious. All the arbitrary geometric shapes of rock and cliff have disappeared. Instead there are more organically conceived and unobtrusive forms. In addition, the immense surface of the towering mass of sheer rock is modelled and characterized by a new method: short vertical strokes of varying value, applied by the thousands. The spatial recession is clear and convincing, and intensified by alternating light and dark areas. Of this painter, Fan K'uan, it was said by an eleventh-century biographer that he was "a skilful landscape painter, [in whom] rational order was joined to spiritual insight";<sup>15</sup> and Mi Fei (1051–1107) remarks upon "the mysterious nobility with which he invests material things."<sup>16</sup> By the time these judgments were made, in the late eleventh century, landscapes of a somewhat different character had come into being. The leading master of the period was Kuo Hsi (ca. 1020–1090), whose handscroll at the Freer Gallery in Washington, *Autumn in the Yellow River Valley*, is shown in part (*Fig. 4*). The mountains are set in a deep space, and the space is filled with atmosphere. The contours of the rocks and hills are softer. The sharp definitions of the tree trunks and foliage as seen in the Fan K'uan are replaced by a more genial, less painstaking manner. There is a tendency toward movement, and in the scenery at large we notice a graceful rhythm. The motionless, heroic cliffs of the ninth and tenth centuries are a matter of the past.

A detail of a *Forest Scene* attributed to Li Ch'eng (919–967) can give us an idea of the intense empathy and profound thought on the part of the Chinese painters concerned with the matter of life in nature (*Fig. 5*). We are not faced with a study of ancient trees but with an authoritative and final formulation of many experiences. Apropos of this work I cannot forego quoting a passage from Ching Hao's *Pi-fa-chi*:

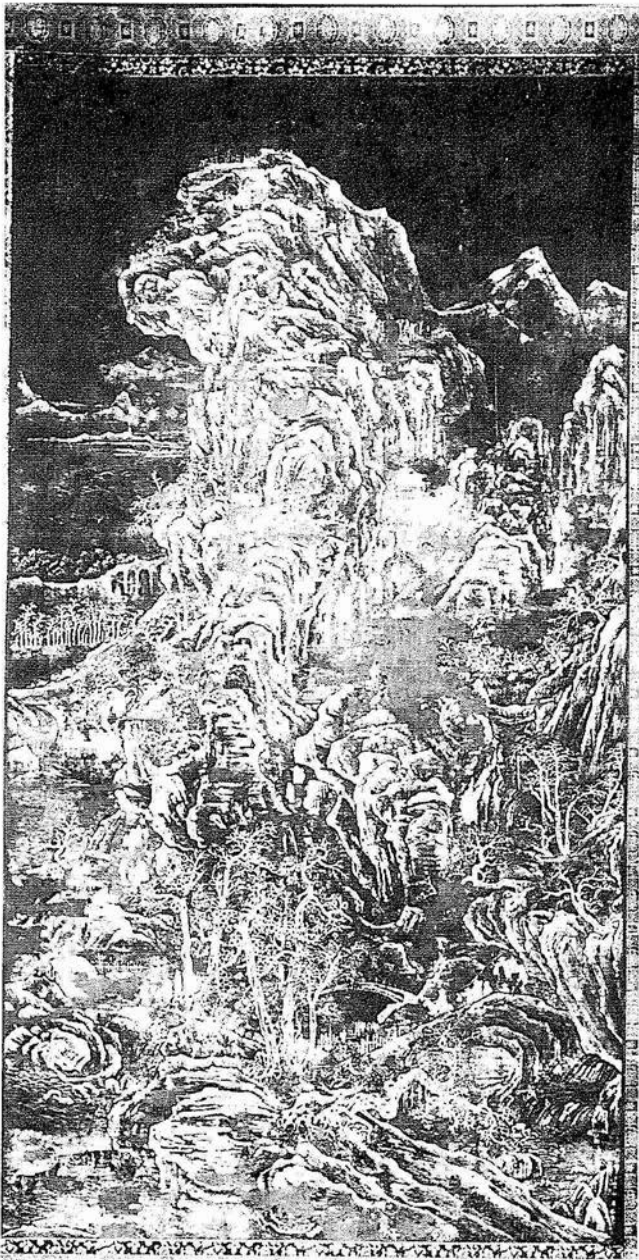


FIG. 2. ANONYMOUS: *Mountain Scene*. Ninth century (?). Kansas City, Mo., Nelson-Atkins Museum. After photograph of the Museum.

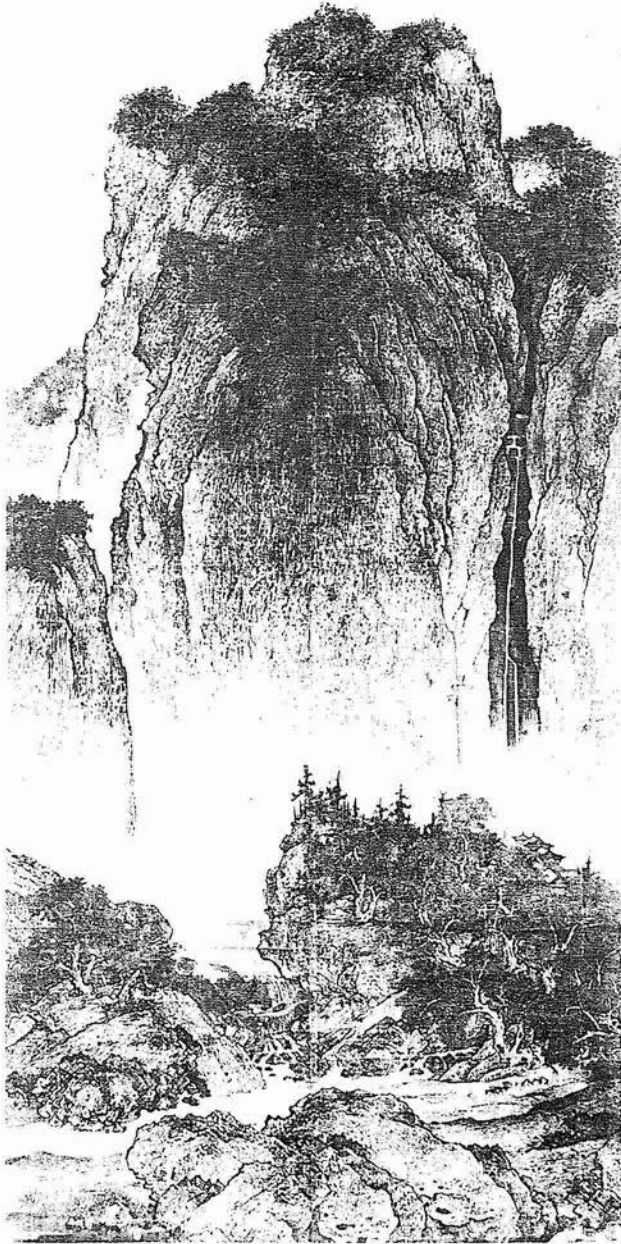


FIG. 3. FAN K'UAN: *Travellers Among Streams and Mountains*. Early eleventh century. Taipei, Chinese National Palace Museum. After *Ku-kung ming-hua san-pai chung*, Vol. II.



FIG. 4. Kuo Hsi: *Autumn in the Yellow River Valley*, detail. Late eleventh century. Washington, D.C., Freer Gallery of Art. From a photograph of the Gallery.



FIG. 5. LI CH'ENG: *Forest Scene*, detail. Late tenth century (?), Sao Paolo, Chang Ta-ch'ien collection.



I came upon an entrance to some large cliffs. The moss-grown path was dripping with dew-drops, and the curiously-shaped stones were enveloped in a mist of felicitous omen. Among them, especially, there was a gigantic pine-tree; its aged bark was overgrown with green lichen, and its winged scales seemed to ride in the air. In stature it was like that of the coiling dragon which tries to reach the milky way.

The other pine-trees which composed the grove were likewise vigorous and full of spirit. The smaller ones, too young to form a forest, stood courteously beside them, bending low. Some of the winding roots were reaching out of the ground, while others were hanging over a large stream; still others were suspended over the cliffs or crouched in the rocky ravines. Some were tearing the mosses; others were cleaving the stones.

Astonished by this curious spectacle, I walked around and admired it. The next day I returned with my brushes and sketched some of the pine-trees. After drawing several they seemed real to me.<sup>17</sup>

Tree images remain important throughout the history of Chinese painting. A fan-shaped album leaf in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, *Forest With Rocks*, by an unknown painter of the twelfth century (Fig. 6), exemplifies well the intensity and seriousness with which this subject matter was then explored. We contemplate a remote corner in the woods. A few tangled trees that fade into a murky depth and a few nondescript rocks in a dissected terrain are all there is to see. None of the objects is remarkable by itself. They form part of the whole in a matter-of-course fashion, submerged in the image of the forest. Nor do these things appear to be observed things. Rather they appear to be drawn from a deep inward knowledge, as it were unconsciously and with disregard of such matters as effect, and style, and expression. It seems as if this picture were free of sentiment, and quite neutral as regards its expression. Nothing seems to stand between object and execution. The technique is unstudied, even commonplace. There is no dash or brilliance, no readily definable style, and no personal "hand" either. The painter virtually disappears in the subject-matter of his small work that has the marks of true spontaneity. *Forest With Rocks* seems almost frighteningly real. It is not like a depicted phenomenon but "as if the object alone were there, without any one to perceive it," in the words of Schopenhauer,<sup>18</sup> who has described so well what in this picture is paradigmatically given: the outcome of a state of complete identification of the knower and the known. Whether it is called the idea, or the eternal form, or simply the object, it is inescapable that the *Forest* transcends ordinary reality. It is a painting that offers proof of the deep objectivity of Sung representational art. And this objectivity gives a work such as *Forest With Rocks* an almost scientific character. Its value has nothing to do with emotion but with insight—much as to judge it critically requires not taste, but understanding.

One circumstance that accords with this scientific character accounts in part for the enormously intense and knowing Sung images of nature: some masters specialized in certain fields or subjects. There were celebrated paint-

FIG. 6. ANONYMOUS: *Forest with Rocks*. Fan-shaped album leaf. Twelfth century. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts. After K. Tomita, *Portfolio of Chinese Paintings, Han to Sung Periods*.



ers of fire, of water, of bamboo, of architecture, of ships. Su Tung-p'ò (1036-1101) wrote an essay on water painters (whose works are all lost). Fortunately a few twelfth-century water pictures have survived. One of these pictures, not a mere study, by an anonymous master, may serve as an example of this category: *Autumn Moon Over Lake Tung-t'ing* (Fig. 7). Waters billow under the full moon. Infinite space is suggested by the fading out of the waves in the distance. The design is amazing. All forms are rendered in pure lineament, so that at first sight one may have the impression of looking at a woodcut. Unbroken undulating lines form combinations which depict both the shapes of the swells and the variations of tone.

In a Sung text of 1121 by Han Cho, a writer close to the Academy of Painting under the reign of Emperor Hui-tsung, one chapter is devoted exclusively to water-painting, of which a comprehensive classification is given. The chapter opens,

water has aspects of sluggishness or swiftness, shallowness or depth. These are its main features. As for sea water, its wind and waves are big and vast, and its great billows turn and toss. In landscape painting it is rarely used.<sup>19</sup>

What in this remarkable image (Fig. 7) should be noted is the fact that it has no focus. Every element in it exists securely, as in a pattern, not seen, but in a mind-derived structure.

In ordinary landscape painting from around A.D. 1100 we observe something like an awakening visual awareness of external reality. The eye became active, as it were, and in wonderment took possession of things long known, always known, but never before seen. By the end of the twelfth century, that shift toward the purely visual becomes quite unmistakable, as indicated by Hsia Kuei's *Morning by a Lakeside* from about 1200 (Fig. 8). No longer do we see completely defined objects. The forms are abbreviated or suggested. The space, filled with atmosphere, becomes an expressive element. So does a tonality achieved by carefully graded washes, which not only contribute to clarifying spatial relationships but also, surprisingly, result in establishing a sense of time, of image time. A painting of this kind suggests a specific time—not just a season, summer, but a time of day, the early morning. It thereby evokes a feeling of transience. With masterful economy the painter has reduced the scenery to essentials. All specific textures are suppressed.

These tendencies lead, in the end, to such almost paradoxically abbreviated images of landscape as those of Ying[?] Yü-chien from around 1250, here exemplified by his *Boat and Distant Shore* in the Tokugawa Reimei-kai (Fig. 9). The solids are so enveloped in atmosphere that they are about to disappear altogether. Perhaps we should not speak of solids at all, but of shreds of visible matter, deprived of physical properties and suspended in a vast void. What alone seems fully real is the vast, hazy space as such. A new feature in our brief series of landscapes is the type of brushwork here

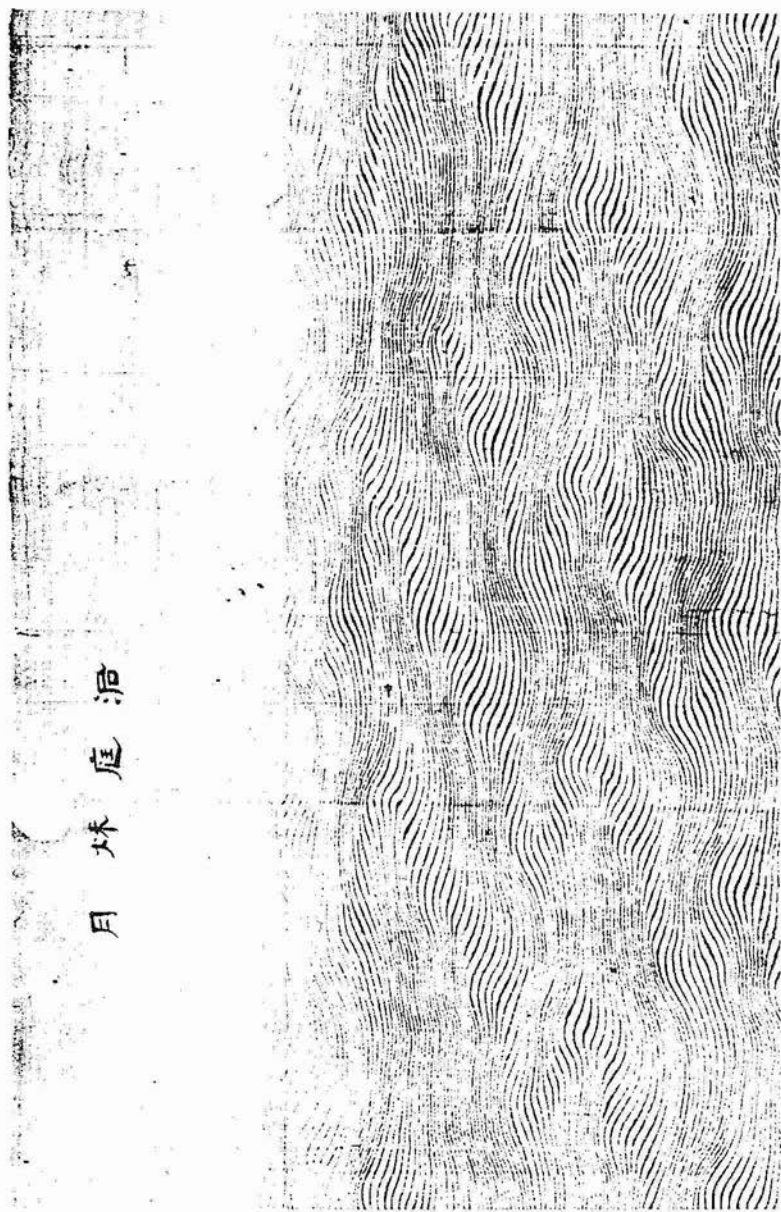


FIG. 7. ANONYMOUS: *Autumn Moon Over Lake Tung-t'ing*. Twelfth century. After Tseng Yu-Ho, *Some Contemporary Elements in Classical Chinese Art* (University of Hawaii Press, 1963).



FIG. 8. HSIA KUEI: *Morning by a Lakeside*. Around 1200. Tokyo, Iwasaki collection. After *Tōyō Bijutsu Taikan*, Vol. VIII.



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FIG. 9. YÜ-CHIEN: *Boat and Distant Shore*. Around 1250. Nagoya, The Tokugawa Art Museum. After Tokugawa Bijutsukan meihin zuroku, 1969.

displayed. We are in the presence of a "hand," a hand that appears to have moved with tremendous energy and explosive speed. It is a feature which enters into, and drastically alters, the content of this work. The brushwork itself becomes an expressive factor but loses its descriptive power.

The story of landscape imagery has reached a critical point here. There was no way of continuing in the direction of a further reduction or, almost, elimination, of visual matter. What counted in the beginning, the fully described object in its timeless existence, has gone overboard. What remains, a vibrant atmosphere, is not nothing—but it marks the end of a long tradition of representational art. A new beginning had to be made.

A new art in the making by the late thirteenth century, under the Mongol régime, found its bearings in old art. There are many instances of plain archaism. The leading painters of that period betray a thorough art-consciousness. Masters of the T'ang, Wu Tai, and early Sung periods supplied the models for their re-orientation. The outcome of their search was not another period style, but several entirely distinct, new, personal styles.

In the future, all painting was somehow tied to those new, individual styles of the Yüan masters, to whom painting meant subjective expression in a self-won style. The names to mention here are those of Chao Meng-fu (1254-1322), Huang Kung-wang (1269-1354), Wu Chen (1280-1354), Ni Tsan (1301-1374), and Wang Meng (ca. 1308-1385).

They do not form a homogeneous group. Their individual qualities are too pronounced for that. What they do have in common, however, is their concern with subject-matter and interesting design.

The painting by Chao Meng-fu, of which we see the left half only, is a short hand-scroll entitled *Water Village* and dated 1302 (*Fig. 10*), in the Palace Museum in Peking. It is a landscape which, typically, has no atmosphere whatsoever. The forms are complete and neatly structured. There is almost no tonality, as washes (and therewith tone) have been abandoned. The brush is used for linear elements. The motif is ordinary, unspectacular, unexciting, and placid. All that is remarkable is the linear structure.

Huang Kung-wang's small picture of the *Mountain Village* (*Fig. 11*), a work of 1342 formerly in the Manchu Imperial collection, is very unlike Sung landscapes. Again, we find no tone or atmosphere, but graphic formulae instead, used to "construct" the motifs of village, forest, and mountain. Even the single tree is a constructed thing: not seen, not experienced, not really organic nor beautiful—just a graphic element required in the *ensemble* we have before us. An un-painterly attitude of concern with structure rather than appearance is unmistakable. And a picture of this kind is farther removed from reality than any Sung work we might compare; it is not so much nature as it is Huang Kung-wang.

A similarly constructivistic, almost abstract, graphic manner appears in an album leaf by, or at any rate attributed to, Wu Chen, from the collection



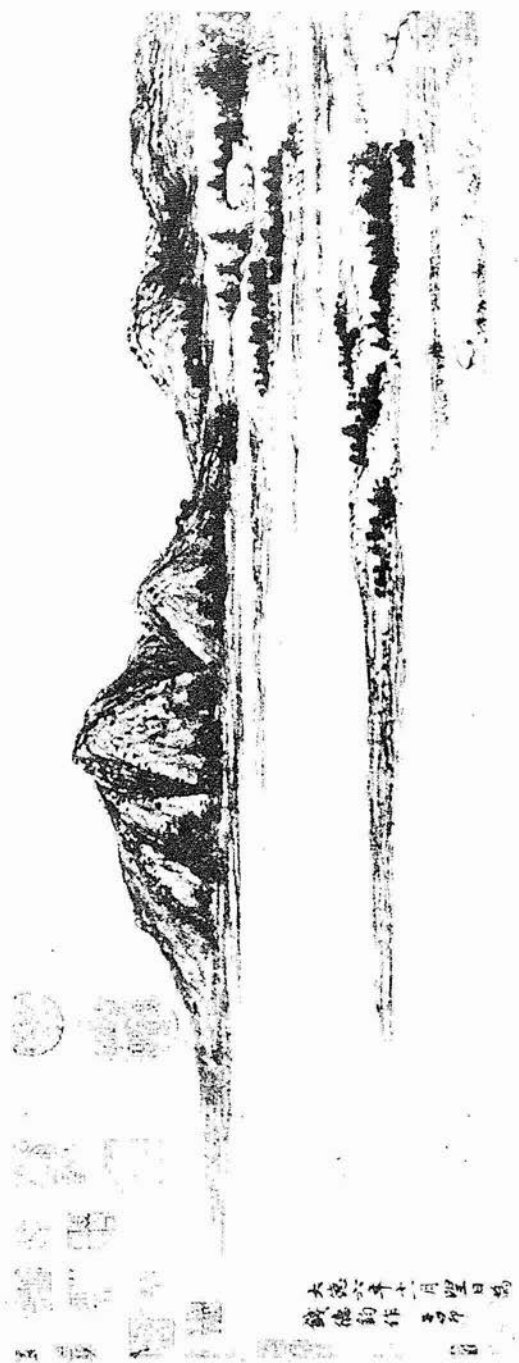


FIG. 10. CHAO MENG-FU: *The Water Village*, detail. A.D. 1302. Taipei, Chinese National Palace Museum. After Chu-ting Li, *The Autumn Colors on the Ch'iao and Hua Mountains* (Ascona, 1965).



FIG. 11. HUANG KUNG-WANG: *Mountain Village*. Whereabouts unknown. After Sirén, *Histoire de la Peinture Chinoise*, Vol. II (Paris, 1935).

FIG. 12. WU CHEN: Album leaf  
from an album entitled *Mei-hua*  
*Tao-jen shan-shui ts'e* (published  
by Hakubundo, Tokyo, n.d.).



of Lo Chen-yü (*Fig. 12*). The motifs serve as mere carriers of a daringly personal design which is not representational, and, again, which reveals not the slightest preoccupation with the beautiful object.

Striking as a pictorial concept is Wang Meng's picture of the *Forest Dwellings at Chü-ch'ü* in the Palace Museum collection at Taipei (*Fig. 13*). From the bottom to the top the picture plane is crowded with sharply defined forms. The horizon lies well beyond the upper edge. What looks like the sky in the upper right corner actually is water, with a neatly rippled surface. A feature that sets this peculiarly intense work apart from other Yüan landscapes, let alone Sung landscapes, is its strong, almost gaudy coloring. The foliage is done in green, red, russet, and yellow; the rocks in cool grays and brownish shades; the water in a turquoise tint. A painting of this kind, with its restless, crowded forms, combines much of the artist's own psyche with archaistic reminiscences, symbolic values, and purely decorative qualities. A description that fails to take these diversified factors into account cannot do justice to its inner complexity.

A later work of the same Wang Meng (*Fig. 14*), a mountain landscape of 1366 in the Shanghai Museum, the title of which is *Living in Seclusion at [Mt.] Ch'ing-pien*, shows the same urge to fill the entire height of the picture with restlessly moving forms. While carefully defined, these forms, in themselves highly unrealistic, are here seized by the unifying rhythm of a violent, upsurging motion; and instead of the sharp and brittle linear description seen in the preceding work we find a more pliant, wet, and supple brush technique which furthers the effect of unification of the bewilderingly diverse shapes of the slopes and cliffs and walls—so that in their totality they assume the character of a gigantic, writhing organism, as opposed to a static assemblage. Though doubtless embodying memories of an archaic phase (compare *Fig. 2*), this work is so deeply personal that it would never be taken as anything but a Wang Meng. As for its content, the painter's otherwise inaccessible inner world counts above all else; his archaistic reference ranks next; the motif of mountainscape takes third place. "Inner world," of course, is an inference, something the viewer imagines he reads in the picture but actually reads into it. The reality is the style of the painting, created by the painter, and therefore revealing—plasticly, but not verbally.

In the early Ming period (1368–1644) we are faced with an unprecedented condition. Side by side with the Yüan tradition of subjective expressionism there existed the Sung tradition of objective realism. The latter was favored by the Ming court, on grounds of political ideology. Under the Mongols, who apparently were indifferent to the arcane matter of painting styles, the painters enjoyed complete freedom. Under the Ming, nationalism began to interfere with artistic affairs. Pre-Mongol art was regarded as superior because it was pre-Mongol.

A typical example of the intended Sung-revival is the mid-fifteenth-century

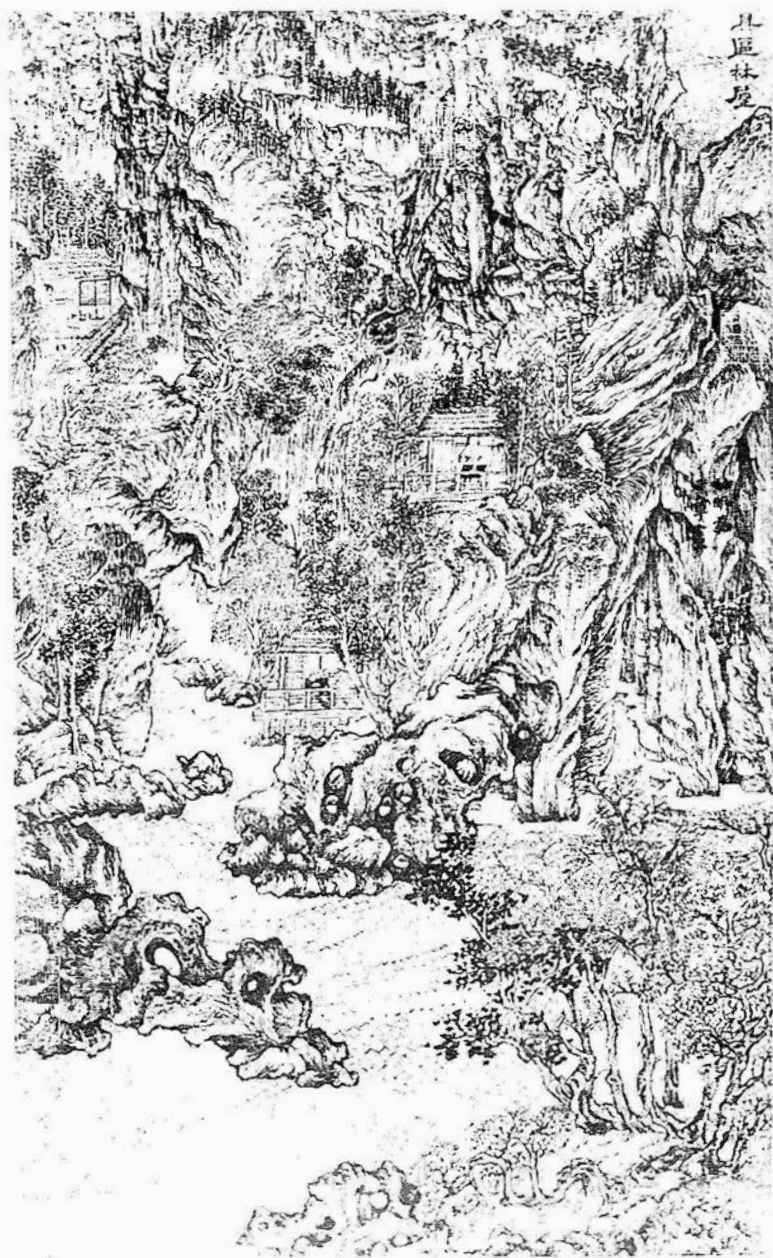


FIG. 13. WANG MENG: *Forest Dwellings at Chü-ch'ü*. Taipei, Chinese National Palace Museum. After *Ku-kung ming-hua san-pai chung*, Vol. V.



FIG. 14. WANG MENG: *Living in Seclusion at [Mt.] Ch'ing-pien*. Shanghai, Museum. After the Kodansha volume on Chinese Art, III, pls. 17-18 (Tokyo, 1965).



FIG. 16. WEN CHENG-MING: *The Peaks of Lung-ch'ih*. A.D. 1554. From a private collection in China. After *Sōgen Minshin meiga taikan*, Vol. I, pl. 58.

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FIG. 15. TAI CHIN: *Homeward Bound in Rain*. Taipei, Chinese National Palace Museum. After *Ku-kung ming-hua san-pai chung*, Vol. V.

Tai Chin, *Homeward Bound in Rain*, in the Palace Museum collection (Fig. 15). At the risk of doing injustice to the painter's personal accomplishment, I would say that the very landscape image presented here shows that 'Sung' was no longer a living tradition. Both style and subject-matter are Sung-derived, and little is left to individual expression.

Wen Cheng-ming (1470-1559), one of the great Ming painters, chose to link himself to the (living) Yüan tradition. *The Peaks of Lung-ch'ih* (Fig. 16) of the year 1554 exemplifies a complete denial of Sung, specifically Southern Sung, ideals. The format is tall and narrow and crowded with exceedingly complicated, yet fully defined forms which are nowhere obscured by atmospheric phenomena. Though reminiscent of Wang Meng as regards the composition, the painting is constructed of innumerable very small units—contrasting with Wang Meng's large and violently dynamic shapes. Movement, in the Wen Cheng-ming, depends to but a small extent on any discrete, individual unit of cliff or mountain, but rather on the relationships of all forms, and these relationships are worked out with unflinching precision. Moreover, Wang Meng's pronounced painterly touch and intense feeling are here replaced by a more graphic, drier technique and a detached intellectuality. Without going into further detail, we may find that this work exists for the sake of its enormously intricate structure, in relation to which its representational elements serve as mere carriers of form, being insignificant in themselves. In other words, the picture symbolizes the artist's intellect and moral discipline rather than nature (unless it be nature as interpreted by Wang Meng almost 200 years earlier), and least of all represents the topography of the peaks of Lung-ch'ih. The combination of sheer formalism and an awesome precision in the graphic realization of this work acquires a deeper significance when we consider that it was done by Wen Cheng-ming at the age of eighty-four. A lifetime of artistic struggle and experience is behind this admirable picture, and embodied in it.

Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555-1636), the foremost among the last Ming painters, differs vastly from Wen Cheng-ming, a Ming intellectual like himself. What in his fairly small mountainscape (Fig. 17) will seem most striking are the large and drastically simplified forms, the strong contrasts of light and dark, the elimination of textures, and the shaky manipulation of the space. All niceties of reference to ancient modes are suppressed. The trees are deprived of both organic feeling and volume; they are flattened, ghostly diagrams of trees, unbeautiful as trees if alluring on purely technical grounds. Tung's mountains are nothing but stereometric bodies, mainly of conical shape, of uncertain substance, inexpressive in themselves, of formal function only. There is no concern whatsoever with appearance. His interest seems to be the basic structure of imaginary landscapes divested of poetry or feeling. Yet he created a style that found a large following and, in Sherman E. Lee's estimate, "dramatically changed the course of Chinese landscape painting."<sup>20</sup>





FIG. 17. TUNG CH'I-CH'ANG: *Landscape*. Whereabouts unknown. After *Chung-kuo ming-hua* [*Famous Chinese Paintings*], Vol. I (Yu Cheng Book Company, Shanghai, 1934).

The features taken by Lee to be the most characteristic of Tung's typical works are summed up in the following passage:

While the result is a loss of the outward reality of nature, there is a really significant gain in an arbitrary, even fierce, reorganization of the elements of landscape painting into a monumental format. This aesthetic specialization involves striking distortions. . . . Ground or water planes are slanted, or raised and lowered at will. Foliage areas are forced into unified planes regardless of depth. . . . No small detail or minuscule textures are allowed to stand in the way of the artist's striving for a broad and universal expression. . . .<sup>21</sup>

Another aspect of Tung Ch'i-ch'ang's landscape to take into account is the seemingly contradictory occurrence of irrational formulations within his coolly rational constructions. This aspect, "a major element in the paintings of Tung and his followers," according to James Cahill, was rightly appraised by him as "a kind of calculated irrationality."<sup>22</sup>

One of those followers was the Anhui master Hung-jen, a priest of the latter part of the seventeenth century. In our series he is represented by a leaf from an album of fifty leaves. It is the only sketch in the series (*Fig. 18*). Despite its thus lessened authoritativeness the picture is revealing to some extent. It is composed of units of slopes and boulders which are repeated all over and lack all individuality. Their ordered relationship is all that counts. The vegetation is sparse and completely uniform. A stream is recognizable as such only through the boulders strewn in its path. As an image of a ravine, the picture is inexpressive. As a graphic design, on the other hand, it holds itself well, regardless of what it represents. Its basic orientation is that of a structural study, well compatible with the tendencies observable in the work of Tung Ch'i-ch'ang. It does not appear to be either a transposition of an older picture or a study from nature, but rather an attempt to come to terms with the functional effect of commonplace and conventional elements of landscape design.

The last of our examples is a work of Tao-chi, or Shih-t'ao (1641-ca. 1717),<sup>23</sup> the *River Bank in Rain* (*Fig. 19*). We become aware of an immeasurably changed "climate," a new inner world, where problems such as Tung Ch'i-ch'ang struggled with are irrelevant. There are no intricacies of style or archaistic references to ancient masters. In fact, style, in this case, seems to be given with the object—as though it were straight from nature. This interpretation accords with Tao-chi's declared rejection of established ancient styles. He said, "The style which consists in following no style is the perfect style."<sup>24</sup> Certainly he is no one's follower in the combination of a convincingly rendered orthogonal recession with a massive mist in the distance. The landscape reveals a deeper intimacy with external reality than we are likely to encounter through the centuries after Sung.

We look back now on a series of paintings which date from the ninth to the eighteenth century. There can be no question as to the diversity of their



FIG. 18. HUNG-JEN: Leaf from an album of fifty leaves. After *Shina Nanga taisei*.



FIG. 19. TAO-CHI: *River Bank in Rain*. Japan, Fujii Seidō collection. After *Kōhansha Shina meiga zenshū*, Vol. I, 14.

content or "intrinsic meaning," even though their subject matter, landscape, is the same throughout. And we may conclude therefrom that subject-matter cannot simply be equated with content.

Down to late Sung, the primary subject matter always was "nature," and the landscapes of Sung possess a quality of intensity that was never again equaled. During the same period, however, there occurred profound shifts of style which affected both expression and content of the Sung landscapes. Visual matter, or solids, gave way to space; permanence, to transience; and completeness, to suggestion.

But immediately thereafter, in the Yüan period, "nature" took second place, if not third. As the leading masters were now concerned with self-created, personal styles rather than realistic depictions, inevitably their psyche and intellect became the primary content of their paintings. When contemplating their works, the viewer is no longer confronted with interpretations of reality but something like subjective expressionism.

What follows upon the Yüan, in the Ming and Ch'ing periods, shows that there was no way of returning to the less complex world of Sung painting. Sung landscapes were imitated, of course, and with great skill at that; but the imitations lacked depth and substance. Yüan was no mere interlude. All future developments of real significance were rooted in the unprecedented subjectivism of the great Yüan masters. What the Ming contributed was a deeply rational attitude of learning, of encyclopedism, and also its denial in the form of irrationality.

#### NOTES

1. *Hua-chi*, ch. 9, first sentence. Cf. Robert Maeda, *Two Twelfth Century Texts on Chinese Painting, Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies*, No. 8 (Ann Arbor, 1970) p. 54.
2. George Rowley, *Principles of Chinese Painting* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 3.
3. Agnes E. Meyer, *Chinese Painting as Reflected in the Thought and Art of Li Lung-mien* (New York, 1923), p. 184.
4. Rowley, *Chinese Painting*, p. 5.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Garden City, N.Y., 1955), pp. 14 and 30.
7. Susanne Langer, *Feeling and Form* (New York, 1953), p. 52.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 50 ff.
9. Susanne Langer, *Reflections on Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 44 (from L. A. Reid, "Beauty and Significance," 1928-29).
10. *Ibid.*, p. 246 (from L. Steinberg, "The Eye Is a Part of the Mind," 1953).
11. Cf. W. R. B. Acker, *Some T'ang and pre-T'ang Texts on Chinese Painting* (Leiden, 1954), pp. xx ff., 4 ff.
12. Shio Sakanishi, *The Spirit of the Brush* (The Wisdom of the East Series), (London, 1939), p. 83.

13. Ibid., p. 87.
14. Langer, *Feeling and Form*, p. 52.
15. Alexander C. Soper, tr., *Kuo Jo-hsü's Experiences in Painting (T'u-hua chien-wen-chih)* (Washington, D.C.: American Council of Learned Societies, 1951), p. 57.
16. Ibid., p. 172 A, after Mi Fei's *Hua-shih*.
17. Sakanishi, *Spirit of the Brush*, p. 86.
18. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, tr. R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp (Garden City-New York, 1961), p. 192.
19. Maeda, *Twelfth Century Texts*, p. 18 ff.
20. Sherman E. Lee, *Chinese Landscape Painting* (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1962), p. 87.
21. Ibid., p. 87.
22. James Cahill, *Fantastics and Eccentrics in Chinese Painting* (New York: The Asia Society, 1967), p. 19.
23. The dates established by Wen Fong, "A Letter from Shih-t'ao to Pa-ta-shan-jen and the Problem of Shih-t'ao's Chronology," *Archives Chinese Art Society of America*, XIII (1959), 22-53.
24. Cf. Osvald Sirén, *The Chinese on the Art of Painting* (Peking, 1936), p. 187. Also Richard Edwards, "Tao-chi, The Painter," in *The Painting of Tao-chi* (Ann Arbor: Museum of Art, The University of Michigan, 1967), p. 23.