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CHINESE PAINTING

LEADING MASTERS AND PRINCIPLES

PART I

THE FIRST MILLENNIUM

Vol. I. Early Chinese Painting. Vol. II. The Sung Period

Vol. III. Plates

PART II

THE LATER CENTURIES

Vol. IV. The Yüan and Early Ming Masters

Vol. V. The Later Ming and Leading Ch'ing Masters

Vol. VI. Plates

Vol. VII. Annotated Lists of the works of Chinese Painters of the
Yüan, Ming and Ch'ing periods



Two Old Men Drinking Tea on a Garden Terrace in Spring.
Portion of a scroll by T'ang Yin, dated 1521. National Museum, Stockholm.

Oswald Sirén

Chinese Painting

LEADING MASTERS AND PRINCIPLES

PART II

The Later Centuries

VOLUME IV

THE YÜAN AND EARLY MING MASTERS

17030



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Sir

LUND HUMPHRIES, LONDON
THE RONALD PRESS COMPANY, NEW YORK

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MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
PERCY LUND, HUMPHRIES AND COMPANY LIMITED
LONDON AND BRADFORD

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Author's Preface to Part Two

THE GENERAL plan and purpose of the present work on Chinese painting, broadly indicated by its sub-title: "Leading Masters and Principles", were further discussed in the preface to the first three volumes forming Part One of a general history of Chinese painting and published nearly two years ago. Those volumes make an independent unit with their own indices, bibliographies, catalogues of pictures, etc., covering a period of more than a thousand years (counting from the Eastern Han to the end of the Sung dynasty), and are headed by the title *The First Millennium*. The general indications of the first preface do not need to be repeated here; they disclose, so to speak, the main lines of the ground-plan, but a few additional remarks as to the composition and contents of Part Two may not be superfluous at this place.

This second part forms likewise an independent unit consisting of elements similar to those of Part One, though in different proportions, this depending on the qualities and changes in the material under consideration, or what may be called the general rhythm in the aesthetic development of Chinese painting. Though intrinsically a counterpart to Part One, "*The First Millennium*", it does not embrace another thousand years of history of painting in China, but only half the length of that span of time, *i.e.* five hundred years, counting from the beginning of the Yüan dynasty down to the end of the Ch'ien-lung reign. It covers the successive epochs of the Yüan, Ming and best part of the Ch'ing dynasties, a rather composite era of successive dynasties, for which no better name or appellation

could be found than simply "*The Later Centuries*" – a title which, indeed, may be lacking in definition yet seems acceptable, because it does not exclude anything of importance that falls within the period of the five hundred years mentioned above. It illustrates, furthermore, the futility of trying to establish exact correspondences or concordances between the dynastic periods of Chinese history and the general rhythm in the development of pictorial art in China. We shall have occasion to return to these somewhat restrictive problems of historical chronology and artistic activity in our discussions of some of the later Ming painters, and may thus for the present limit ourselves to a few additional remarks about the plan and contents of this second section called "*The Later Centuries*".

The relative disproportion between Part One and Part Two which becomes obvious if we compare the two units, the first consisting of three, the second of four somewhat heavier volumes, is the unavoidable result of important changes in the nature and quantity of the artistic material, and also of the different methods of presentation that seemed most concordant with the respective parts.

It is so well known that it hardly needs repeating at this place that authentic paintings by leading masters of the early centuries of our era are extremely rare and certainly not sufficient to serve as a general basis for a methodical history of Chinese painting during the "first millennium", an expression which here may be taken to signify the centuries up to the end of the Northern Sung dynasty. Such pictures are hardly more than scattered remnants or

blurred reflexes of the brilliant florescence of painting that occurred at various times and places in China during this long era. If we seek more knowledge about the great masters and their artistic ideals in those distant times, we have to turn to literary records about their lives, descriptions of their paintings, and above all, to such discursive essays or treatises as contain their ideas about the art of painting. Literary records of this kind may, indeed, be valuable, but owing to their various degrees of authenticity they are apt to lead the student into the fecund fields of aesthetic speculation or along the byways of philological text-criticism, for which Western art-historians are seldom prepared.

The history of Chinese painting during "the first millennium" thus inevitably becomes a report based on literary traditions and biographical chronicles rather than an account of stylistic development illustrated by authentic works of leading masters, and offers as such little inducement or opportunity for Western art-historians to express any critical opinions or estimates which are not in conformity with the indigenous traditions. This can hardly be said to accord with modern ideas about art-history, but sometimes offers valuable stimulation to further studies, as it opens up to the novice the old traditional roads which have been trodden by Chinese historians since very early times. Students who have established their first contact with Chinese pictorial art through books such as Herbert Giles' *Introduction* (1912) will no doubt agree with the above statement, even though they may have found more inspiration in Fenellosa's or Petrucci's contemporary writings, which are more constructive and attempt to place the history of Chinese painting on a broader basis of stylistic or aesthetic analysis. It need hardly be added that neither method is in itself sufficient as a guarantee of success; it all depends on how each is applied, i.e. on the individual capacity behind the method.

Further discussions of the merits and faults of the respective methods would carry us beyond the limits of this preface, but the above remarks may be useful

as indications or pointers along two principal roads of approach which have been combined in the two units of the present work, Part One being based mainly on a summary of the literary sources or documentary evidence with regard to the history of painting during the "first millennium", whereas Part Two is, as far as possible, a stylistic analysis of the development of painting during the succeeding five centuries. It need hardly be added that the two different methods or approaches to the constantly shifting material have been followed not only successively but also in combination. Information gathered from literary sources has proved no less useful for the historical accounts in Part Two than in Part One, but the author has no longer been obliged to follow in the footsteps of the Chinese critics and historians so closely. He has been able to take a more independent view of problems and personalities now known through the medium of their pictorial productions rather than simply through more or less vague accounts by native critics; the formal analysis of the local schools or divisions has gradually become more important for the characterization of the leading masters and their ideals.

The new approach to the historical and artistic material is most evident in the analysis of the late Ming and the early Ch'ing masters' production, and it has also given cause for adjustments of the general plan to accord with changes in the stylistic currents, and is consequently reflected in several of the descriptive headings to the successive chapters. A closer study of the general Table of Contents for Vol. V should make the student realize that an attempt has been made to establish a more functional order of the various local schools and their leading masters. This could not be accomplished without a somewhat closer analysis of the steadily accumulating material of paintings (and reproductions) for study impracticable in the framework originally planned for this book. Part Two may thus be said to have grown into a rather independent product of historical research and stylistic analysis, which is discernible not only in the table of contents, the descriptive

presentations of the paintings, and its wealth of hitherto little known or entirely unknown illustrations, but also in the fact that the contents could no longer be confined within three volumes but had to be given an extra fourth volume of heavier weight.

* * *

This second part of *Chinese Painting* was recast in its present form in the course of the last two years, a rather long period of relative isolation during which I had no opportunity to renew my acquaintance with the public and private collections of Chinese paintings either in the Far East or in U.S.A., from which I had learned so much and drawn personal inspiration in former years. Their importance for the accomplishment of the present work was particularly emphasized in the Preface to Part One, where a number of these institutions, collections and experts in various countries were enumerated and their more or less valuable support through the supply of documentary and illustrative material gratefully acknowledged. It may thus not be necessary to repeat all their names again; but I take this opportunity of voicing once more my sincere thanks for the spirit of co-operation that I have met in many quarters, even during this latter stage of a long drawn out work, performed in part at a far distance from the sources. If these thanks are to be given any special address, I would direct them to the Board and Keepers of the former Palace Collection (the so-called Ku Kung) at Formosa and to the Freer Gallery in Washington, the two centres for study and research in the history of Chinese painting which, each in its way, have proved most useful and important to me.

During these last two years when I have been constantly tied to my writing-desk at Lidingö, Sweden, there have been few occasions to meet any experts or amateurs of Chinese painting, yet the isolation of the author has not been complete, because he has been in frequent correspondence with some highly esteemed collaborators who, each in his way, have contributed to prevent his feeling a

solitary hermit. Without entering into any further discussion of this psychological situation, I would like to mention once more one or two of the friends who have done most in making the author feel their co-operation and support, i.e. Professor Wilfrid H. Wells, now living at Bad Heilbrunn, Professor Chang Hsin-ch'ang of the University of Malaya, and Mr. James Cahill, the well-known expert on Chinese painting at the Freer Gallery.

Professor Wells has continued to act as an expert guide through the refinements of literary English, which has given me an inestimable feeling of linguistic support, but also as a loyal companion whose good advice and encouragement, based on sympathetic understanding of the subject, have often been a great help. It is difficult for me to find the right words to express my indebtedness to him, because sometimes it seems to me that this work would never have been finished, had it not been for his co-operation.

I should also like to renew here my expressions of thanks to Professor Chang Hsin-ch'ang, who has checked most of the translations from Chinese sources, in so far as these have been accessible to him, and owing to his familiarity with Chinese painting no less than the Chinese language, has saved me from many pitfalls of common translations.

The important help rendered by Mr. James Cahill of the Freer Gallery in amending, correcting and completing the Lists of paintings by artists of the Ming and Ch'ing periods would indeed merit a more detailed definition than can be given at this place, but specialists who may dig deeper into them will gradually realize the enormous work and wide knowledge of existing material which has been necessary for establishing such catalogues.

Words of thanks are also due to Dr. Roger Goepper, who acted as my assistant for a few weeks in Sweden last summer, and after his return to Munich continued to do work on the additional bibliographies necessary for volumes IV and VII and on the Index of Chinese names. But as he did

not have an opportunity to complete these tasks, the work on the Index was taken over by the publishers' editing department, in the person of Dr. Schindler, assisted by Dr. N. Whymant, and Professor Chang Hsin-ch'ang, to all of whom the author wishes to express his thanks.

Finally I should also like to mention in particular the help rendered by Mr. Huang Tzū-yü in reading the proofs of most of the Lists in volume VII, particularly with a view to the Chinese characters,

and also to Mr. John Ayres of the Victoria and Albert Museum, for his careful arrangement of the captions on the plates.

The assistance rendered by all these persons for special sections or details in this publication has been a help for which the author rests under permanent obligation.

Lidingö, Sweden

March 1958

The Yüan Period

The Historical Background

THE PERIOD in the history of China named after the Mongol or Yüan dynasty was relatively short, lasting hardly more than a century (c.1261-1368), but it marked a deep gulf between the preceding and the succeeding dynastic periods, because it constituted a break in some of the time-honoured political and cultural conditions of the country. The prelude to the tragedy leading to the political collapse of China was staged in the North, while the Sung still held their sway over the friendly South, as told in a previous chapter. In 1214 the armies of Jenghis Khan expelled the Chin Tartars from Yen-ching, the northern capital, later known as Peking, and looted the city thoroughly, but the Chin ruler escaped; he fled to K'ai-fêng (or Pien-liang) the former Sung capital, and there re-established a government for his shrinking state. This became possible because the main part of the Mongol forces were at the time occupied in more extensive operations in the far West even beyond the confines of Asia, and when Jenghis Khan again turned his attention towards the Far East he had first to wipe out certain border states such as the Hsi-hsia before he could attack China proper, and while the campaign against the Tanguts (or Chins) was still going on, the great khan or "Universal Emperor" passed away (1227). He was succeeded by his third son Ogodai, whose task it became to establish the Mongol domination over China.

Two Mongol armies, under Ogodai and his brother Tului, marched in 1231 along a northern and a southern route into China so as to encircle the Chin state, and when these operations became

known to the Chinese, they entered into the struggle as allies of the Mongols, enticed by the prospect of driving out the Tartars and of reconquering some of their old territories in the very heart of the country. The joint campaign did not prove as speedy as might have been expected; the Tartars put up a dogged defence and it was only after a siege of several months that their capital K'ai-fêng fell to the Mongol army (1235), while the Chin emperor escaped to the east, and the Tartar domination was finally wiped out (1234).

This seemed at the moment to contain great possibilities for the Chinese and to bring them the long-desired reward for their fight against the Tartars, but the expectations did not last very long. It became gradually evident to them that their nominal ally had no intentions of leaving them in undisputed possession of the recovered territories. On the contrary, the Mongols felt that since they had gained a firm foothold on the soil of China proper there was no inducement for them to withdraw; they stayed on, gradually preparing for further conquest, whereas the Chinese had to let the much coveted advantages of the victory to which they had contributed so effectively slip out of their hands. Once more their national pride was aroused and instead of seeking a peaceful settlement with their powerful ally, whose position in China was not too strong at the time, they decided to fight, and as the Mongol army, in spite of temporary rebuffs, slowly but steadily advanced southward, it became a struggle for life for the shrinking Sung empire. The tug-of-war lasted for more than thirty years, partly

owing to the fact that the Mongol leaders were occupied in other war-like enterprises further north, and partly owing to the valour of certain military leaders of the Chinese whose devotion to the national cause never failed. But when the imperial government in Hangchou began to weaken under the pressure of personal jealousies and intrigues, the resistance of the fighting forces could not be maintained.

A detailed account of the vicissitudes of the long struggle and the shifting fortunes that it involved for the slowly crumbling Chinese state would take us too far, but a few outstanding events in the dramatic development may here be noted so as to complete the historical background.

The decisive turn in the Mongol domination of China became evident when Kubilai Khan, the son of Jenghis Khan took over the supreme power and proclaimed himself the Universal Ruler (1260). He had grown up in the Far East and had a better knowledge of the extraordinary material and spiritual resources of China than any of his predecessors. Consequently he transferred the main centre of the Mongol government to the northern capital of China and allotted to the Middle Kingdom a dominant place in a world-wide empire. This attitude, which also found expression in the founding of a new capital called Khanbalic (which later became Peking) and a new imperial dynasty called Yüan (Original), implied very important new possibilities for China, which now became an integral part of a political organization which embraced practically the whole of northern Asia and some bits of Europe down to the Danube. In other words, China was lifted to a leading position within the society of nations and opened as such closer relations with the rest of the world than it had had for many centuries. The repercussion of this new orientation on the internal conditions in China was no doubt considerable, even though the main current of the social and cultural activities remained undisturbed.

In the political field the development was marked by a rather slow but steady advance of the Mongol

armies towards the South. The Sung defence offered at various points valiant resistance and scored some minor victories over the invaders, but they could not bring the avalanche to a stop. Finally the capital, beautiful Hangchou, was forced to capitulate (1279); the young emperor was carried away as a prisoner to Khanbalic, and the final scenes in the tragedy of the Sung house took place in the melodramatic way that was noted in a previous chapter.

Kubilai Khan and his successors on the Mongol throne in China were by no means inimical to Chinese civilization and its traditional institutions; on the contrary, they were quite willing to adopt them in so far as they could be combined with their principles of government and controlled by their trusted Mongol Saracen henchmen. But the Mongol rulers knew only too well that their authority was based on military power and that, in spite of all their efforts to exercise clemency and show their appreciation of Chinese traditions, they could never win the confidence of the black-haired race. This is illustrated in the records of prominent scholars and artists who uncompromisingly refused to acknowledge the foreign rulers even when it would have saved their lives, as for instance in the case of the indomitable patriot Wên T'ien-hsiang.¹ There was indeed a strong undercurrent of passive resistance particularly among the intellectuals, a fact which was well known to the Mongols, who consequently were wary of placing Chinese scholars in responsible positions. Marco Polo, who during his travels in China (c.1275-1292) enjoyed the personal favour of the Great Khan and thus had excellent opportunities of observing the actual state of things, was no doubt quite right when he wrote:

"And you should know that all the Cathayans hated the rule of the great Khan because he set over them Tartar, and for the most part Saracen, rulers and they were not able to submit to them, seeming to them to be like slaves. And then the great Khan had not the rule of the province of Cathay by right,

¹ Cf. Giles, *Biogr. Dict.*, 2306.

since he had taken it by force; and not trusting them he gave the rule of the province to Tartars, Saracens and Christians who were of his own family and loyal to him and were not of the province of Cathay."¹

The well-experienced Venetian recorder had certainly no intention to present the situation in too dark colours; he simply tells what he could see and learn during his travels through large sections of China. He could not but note the general atmosphere of discontent among the former officials and distrust on the part of the Mongol rulers. Yet it should also be remembered that there were important exceptions to this rule, *viz.* representatives of Chinese culture, art and learning who were willing to enter into the service of the foreign governors and made themselves highly esteemed. Best known among them are the great scholars Yeh-lü Ch'u-ts'ai (1190-1244) and his grandson Yeh-lü Hsi-liang (1241-1327) who, though they were descendants of the ruling house of the Liao state, were thoroughly Chinese by education and devotion to Confucian ideals. The former, who was prominent in mathematics and astronomy, regulated the calendar and controlled for a while the paper money, which was being used all through Asia, while the younger finally, after long travels, became president of the Board of Civil Office under Kubilai Khan.²

Another prominent Chinese scholar, who rendered Kubilai Khan important services and won his confidence, was Kuo Shou-ching (1231-1316), the engineer and mathematician who constructed scientific instruments and administered the Grand Canal which had been improved and repaired. Other Chinese specialists served the Khan with the construction of machines for his military enterprises or again were placed in charge of irrigation systems in the Euphrates and Tigris valley. But besides these men of practical ability there were scholars in high positions who won their fame as painters. We shall meet them in later chapters, but their names may be here recorded because of their official careers, e.g.

Kao K'o-kung (1248-1310) and Chao Meng-fu (1254-1322). The former rose to the position of president of the Board of Justice, the latter served as secretary in the Board of War and became finally president of the Han-lin college. The respect and admiration rendered Chao Meng-fu for his unsurpassed skill as a painter and calligraphist were only after his death conditioned by criticism of his subservience to the Mongol rulers, which was said to be traceable also in his perfectly smooth and even calligraphy.

Some of the Mongol rulers showed also special veneration for Confucius as the supreme teacher of learning and good conduct. Ogodai Khan re-established the central Confucian college known as *Kuo-tzu chien*. Kubilai Khan had a fine memorial temple erected to him in Khanbalic (1306), and new titles were bestowed on the Sage a few years later. All this must have pleased the old Confucian *literati*, but it did not improve their social status or restore to them their former privileges. They were employed in the government offices, but only in secondary positions, where their learning and administrative skill could be utilized, whereas the leading posts were entrusted to Mongols or other foreigners. Prominent among these were the Tibetan Lamas who were invited to the capital not only as missionaries of a religion that was sympathetic to the Mongols, but also to construct and furnish new monasteries and temples in Khanbalic. The Tibetan Lamas were particularly favoured by Kubilai Khan, but the gates were kept open for all religions, and there were emissaries of many faiths who at this time found their way to China.

Marco Polo returns in many passages to examples about the great Khan's unprejudiced attitudes towards various forms of worship and expresses the opinion that if the Pope had sent proper missionaries to China, "the great Khan (*i.e.* Kubilai Khan) would have been made a Christian, because it is known for certain that he had a great desire to be

¹ Translation by A. C. Moule, *See Christians in China*, p.137.

² Cf. Giles, *Biogr. Dict.*, 2446 and 2447.

so". There must have been at the time a certain number of Roman Catholics besides Nestorians, though the Moslems (mainly Arabs and Turks), Jews and "idolaters" (i.e. Lamaistic Buddhists) were far more numerous. And it seems that many adherents of these various religions had a strong leaning towards soothsaying of one kind or other, if we may believe the testimony of Ser Marco:

"There are in the city of Kambaluc, between Christians, Saracens and Cathayans, about five thousand astrologers and diviners whom the great Khan causes to be provided with food and clothes every year, like the poor people, and they are always exercising their art in the city."¹ They seem to have found a rather potent influence in the religious attitude of the Mongols independently of their doctrinal beliefs.

The old rivalry between the Buddhists and Taoists in China had also free play. The early Khans had shown more sympathy for the latter, allowing the Taoists to appropriate Buddhist temples and property, but as a consequence of a public debate between representatives of the two religions in 1258, the Buddhists were acknowledged as superior, a position confirmed by Kubilai Khan, who in 1281 issued an order to the effect that all Taoist scriptures, with the exception of *Tao Te Ching* and writings on medicine and pharmacy, should be burned. The official triumph of Buddhism was recorded in an essay composed by a committee of Han-lin scholars and engraved on stone tablets.

If we may draw some conclusions from still preserved works of art, it seems, however, that the kinds of Buddhism that flourished most abundantly in the northern provinces were either coloured by Lamaistic tantrism, or took the form of anthropomorphic Bodhisattva-worship, as illustrated by many paintings and sculptures of the time. In other words, the religious art of the popular kind that was used for the decoration of temples took on a more realistic aspect than before, which, however, did not prevent the current of mystical imagery from living on in the paintings made for the esoteric schools.

The special form of meditative Buddhism known as Ch'an, which had been one of the most potent sources of inspiration for the painters at the end of the Sung period, retained no doubt considerable importance in artistic circles, but it attracted apparently no attention in official quarters and was more or less isolated at the monastic centres in the South, where the artistic traditions inherited from the Sung period were kept alive also through the period of the Mongol domination.

The important changes which took place in the cultural and social conditions in China during the Yüan period, were all more or less dependent on the growing influx of people from other parts of the world into the Middle Kingdom. China was no longer isolated behind walls and difficult of access. The doors towards the western hemisphere had been opened and the road of communication vastly improved. The foreigners who came to China from western lands were of many kinds and races, there were merchants, tradesmen of various professions, artisans and musicians from Persia, Arabia, Russia and Venetia, but also political envoys bearing messages from foreign potentates and missionaries of the Roman church, whose efforts to spread the Christian doctrines brought slight results, but who nevertheless became active links in the chain that linked China closer to the Mediterranean countries.

The earliest among the religious emissaries was Giovanni da Pian Carpine, who visited China (1245-1247); he was followed by William de Rubrucke, who wandered through the Middle Kingdom, provided with a letter from the Pope, in 1254; then came the Franciscan brother Giovanni da Monte Corvino, who arrived in Khanbalic 1293 and remained there for thirty-five years, organizing a Christian community, building two churches and baptizing a great number of Chinese and Mongols. His unselfish and noble character earned for him the admiration of people of all classes, and he was effectively supported in his activities by the Italian merchant Pietro da Lucalongo, who followed him

¹ A. C. Moule, *Christians in China*, p. 138.

to the Orient, and by a number of Franciscan friars who were sent out to assist Frate Giovanni. The most famous of all Christian emissaries in China at this period was, however, Odorigo da Pordenone, who has left an interesting account of his long journey and the three years that he lived in Khanbalic (c.1325-1328), a period during which the Franciscans stood in special favour at the court of the emperor T'ai-ting (or Temur Khan).¹ On the other hand it should be remembered that there were Chinese and Mongol Christians of the Nestorian faith who started on the long journey across Asia in order to visit the Holy Land, and who were received with honours by ruling princes in Europe.

Yet, as pointed out above, the cultural interchange between the Far East and Europe was not furthered solely by men who travelled in the interest of their religion. A far greater number of the people who travelled in both directions were tradesmen or artisans seeking new markets, or adventurers who had heard alluring accounts about the land beyond the seas and the deserts and wanted to try their fortunes under new stars. Marco Polo mentions them in his description of Khanbalic: "the foreign merchants and travellers of whom there are always great numbers who have come to bring presents to the Emperor, or to sell articles at Court, or because the city affords so good a mart to attract traders"; and he tells how these people were lodged in hostels in accordance with their nationality, "as if we should say there is one for the Lombards, another for the Germans, and a third for the Frenchmen. And thus there are as many good houses in the suburbs as inside the city."

Few, if any, of these men had the same opportunities as Marco Polo of observing actual conditions in China and of recounting any of their experiences, yet they were all supporters of the newly awakened Eastern Current (*Drang nach Osten*) in the affairs of the Western world. And it may be noted in particular that they were all greatly impressed by the excellent conditions of the roads leading across the

Mongol state and the post-houses along the highways, which were all supported and controlled by the central government. Marco Polo, the indefatigable recorder, tells us that "at every twenty-five miles, or anyhow at any thirty miles, you find one of these stations on all the principal highways leading to different provincial governments. And the same is the case throughout all the chief provinces subject to the great Khan." It may be wondered whether any of the great Western powers in the thirteenth century had a better road service. Marco Polo, who had travelled widely, did not think so; he adds: "Never had emperor, king, or lord such wealth as this manifests; for it is a fact that on all these posts taken together there are more than 300,000 horses kept up specially for the use of the messengers. And the great buildings that I have mentioned are more than 10,000 in number, and all richly furnished."

The above lines may serve as an example of Marco Polo's picturesque and entertaining way of telling about conditions in the Cathay of Kubilai Khan. To quote more of his recollections "concerning the kingdoms and the marvels of the East" seems superfluous at this place, but anyone who wants to know something about the life of the Chinese and their institutions under the efficient control of the Mongol government will find much to entertain and instruct him in the vivid account of the Venetian. It has made Marco Polo's name famous all over the world and brought China of the Mongol period closer to us in a human way. On the other hand it must be regretted that the writer does not tell more about the artistic products of the Chinese people. He inserts a few remarks about the manufacture of porcelain and silks (products which at that time were imported to Europe in considerable quantities), but he offers no description of their decorative character and quality; other examples of the artistic culture of the Chinese, such as paintings,

¹ Cf. Yule-Cordier, *Cathay and the Way Thither* (1913-1916), I, II Odorigo, I, III Giovanni da Monte Corvino. Short reports by Grousset in *Histoire de Moyen Age, Les Empires*, 1941.

for instance, seem to have been non-existent to Marco Polo; there is not a word about them in his account. His observations were confined to matters of practical utility and personal experience, and though he came from Venice, which at the time was rich in golden mosaics, he made no approach to contemporary figurative art in China.

It is as a matter of fact very difficult, if not impossible, to give the art of painting which existed in China at the time its proper place in the historical milieu outlined above. The lines of connexion were very thin. The Mongol rulers had hardly any need for painting and even if some rare exceptions among the high officials took active part in the life and endeavour of the creative circles, they can hardly be said to have built any bridges between the Mongol court and the realm of art. In other words, the official support or encouragement which many of the leading painters had enjoyed during the reign of the Sung dynasty existed no more. There were no academies, no bureaux of art, except for such a form of religious iconography as that controlled by Tibetan Lamas, no particular demand at court for high-class works of art. There were some outstanding exceptions among the painters, as noted above, as well as in other sections of cultural workers who accepted official appointments, but they did not serve the Mongol rulers in their capacity as artists, but simply as meritorious officials. Most of the painters lived far from the arena of political strife and the hubbub of the market places in relative isolation. Their endeavour was to detach themselves from the actuality of existing political conditions, i.e. to ignore the loss of national independence and foreign occupation. There were old painters surviving from the Sung period such as Chao Mêng-chien and Chêng Ssü-hsiao, who went still further in this respect and tried by their mode of life and art to create a kind of atmosphere in which the romantic refinement or lassitude of the Sung court still seemed to prevail.

Such were extreme examples of the endeavour to keep up the connexion with the preceding epoch,

but the tendency may also be traced in the works and words of some of the painters active during the first half of the Yüan period. It would certainly not be correct to explain it simply as a phase or result of the well-known traditionalism of Chinese painting. It had at this time a definite national accent, expressing a kind of nostalgia, a romantic endeavour to preserve also in the art of painting memories of a great national epoch, still near in time and yet far removed from actuality in a cultural as well as political sense. The continuity of style and ideas was not only aesthetically natural but morally satisfying to some of the best painters at the time when the Mongol power was at its height in China, and it was also appreciated by discriminating critics such as T'ang Hou, who refers to it in his *Hua lin* (written about 1329) from which the following remarks may be quoted:

"Nowadays people, in looking at paintings, do not pay attention to the transmission from master to disciple, nor do they investigate the records. If a painting is in conformity with their opinions, they consider it beautiful; if it does not agree with their opinions, they regard it as bad. But if one asks them why they like it, then they are quite confused and do not know what to answer.

"I have been a keen student since the age of seventeen or eighteen. Whenever I saw a picture which I loved and enjoyed, I was reluctant to let it out of my hands. I visited connoisseurs and interrogated them politely about everything. I borrowed the literary records and learned them almost by heart, 'tasting their words' carefully. In this way, by looking at the old paintings continually and investigating the traditions about them, I acquired some knowledge. If you do not pay proper attention to these things, you will not be better than those who listen to sounds and follow shadows."

Connoisseurs of the kind that T'ang Hou had in mind when writing the above have no doubt existed at all times and in many countries, but they may have thrived particularly in epochs when art was not a vital current in the cultural temper of the

ruling class. This was to some extent the case in the Yüan period; yet there was no such break or gap in the general flow or development of painting as in the political course of the national events. The broad undercurrent of the art of painting remained the same as before, the principles and ideals change very little, though at times the current seemed to

flow below ground rather than in the open air. Nor did it lose by this in force or intensity; it was continuously nourished by new confluent, which made it grow and swell in bulk, thus reaching its full strength only at the very end of the period when the Mongol domination was losing its hold on the Middle Kingdom.

Religious Painting

I

Wall-paintings

A LARGE NUMBER of the religious paintings with Buddhist or Taoist motifs which are commonly classified as works of the Tang or Sung period were actually executed during the Mongol occupation, or shortly before, while the Chin or Jurchen Tartars held their sway over northern China. The traditional classification of these pictures may in most instances be explained by the fact that they represent more or less faithfully earlier designs and are often stylistically as well as iconographically closely dependent on the models of earlier periods. The continuity was in the field of religious painting unimpaired by the dynastic changes, though the output changed in volume according to the degree of religious fervour and attitude prevailing during the respective epochs.

In the light of this it may easily be understood that most of these paintings are more interesting from iconographic and historical viewpoints than as works of art. They form, so to say, a separate current or province within the field of Chinese art with only slight contacts with other kinds of contemporary painting. A closer discussion of the material would thus fall rather outside the limits of the present publication and it is hardly possible as long as systematic historical investigations of the wall-paintings still to be found in Buddhist and Taoist temples in China are missing. We can here add only a few remarks mainly based on the religious paintings which have found their way to Western museums.

From a technical point of view, the output of religious pictures may be divided into two main groups, one comprising the wall-paintings (whether

in situ, or transferred to Western museums), the other consisting of the great mass of movable pictures on silk or cloth made to illustrate the teachings or to serve as edifying decorations in the temples on appropriate occasions. The former group is represented by some very large so-called frescoes (actually painted on a dry plaster ground) detached from certain temples in the southern part of the Shansi province and now exhibited in the museums in Toronto, Philadelphia and Kansas City. They have been discussed by several specialists, most recently in particular by Ludwig Bachhofer, who has established their mutual stylistic affinity and an approximate date of execution around 1320.¹ The compositions are arranged in the traditional way around a central Buddha – i.e. Amitābha, Śakyamuni, or Maitreya – who is placed on a lotus-throne and elevated above the surrounding Bodhisattvas, devas and attendants. All these members of the hieratic assemblies are represented according to time-honoured patterns as symbols of divine inspiration and protection rather than as ordinary human beings (Pl. 1). But in addition to these supreme celestial guides there are at both ends of the large composition in Toronto minor groups formed by realistically characterized figures which, according to Bachhofer, represent the parents that will be chosen by Maitreya at the time of his future incarnation in the human world. In one of these

¹ Cf. Bachhofer, "Maitreya in Katumati", *India Antiqua*, 1949. The article contains all the essential information about the pictures in Toronto, quoted above, and completes and corrects W. C. White's book *Chinese Temple Frescoes, A Study of Three Wall-paintings of the Thirteenth Century*, Toronto 1940.

groups we may observe how Maitreya's future father – a stout old gentleman in ceremonial costume with a long beard – is being tonsured by a monk, while the kneeling servants at his sides seem to be rather troubled at his decision to retire from secular life (Pl.2). The scene was evidently popular; it is repeated in other wall-paintings, it offered an opportunity to the professional temple painters to display interest in dramatic scenery and human characterization besides their skill in repeating the hieratic compositions with all their "clustered lines" and curling folds on a monumental scale.

The picture in the Toronto Museum, which represents the Paradise of Maitreya, is accompanied by two other large compositions made up of long processions of dignitaries, which have been identified as representations of heavenly constellations, i.e. the Northern and Southern Dipper, in accordance with the Taoist cosmogony. All these wall-paintings were made for a large hall in Hsing-hua ssū, a temple near Chi-shan in southern Shansi, and in the same building was also found an inscription, according to which "the drawing and painting was done by the *tai-chao* Chu Hao-ku from Hsiang-ling hsien and his pupil Cheng Po-yüan". The information is interesting from an historical viewpoint as it gives the name of an otherwise unknown painter who here is classified as a *tai-chao*, which implies that he also was a member of the Hanlin college. A picture like this should consequently not be considered simply as the work of a craftsman, in spite of the fact that it is rather schematic in design and crude in execution. The painter who was responsible for the whole scheme of decoration was evidently a person of superior social and artistic standing and may have functioned as the head of a whole group or school of painters who co-operated in executing such a large work. The quality of these wall-paintings is certainly not very high – if compared with the pictures of the T'ang and earlier periods in the Tun-huang caves, they certainly fall much behind as works of art – but they are marked by a rather definite style which seems to have supplied

the general formulation or patterns for religious wall-paintings in the Yüan period. Other large wall-decorations of a somewhat similar kind may be seen in the University Museum in Philadelphia and the Nelson Gallery of Kansas City, while single figures detached from larger compositions exist in the Fogg Museum in Cambridge, Mass., not to mention the specimens of various dates which used to decorate la Maison C. T. Loo in Paris and which at least in part seem to have been produced by the repainting of earlier figures.

It may not be necessary to dwell in this connexion on several examples of the kind of traditional religious paintings mentioned above, but I would draw attention to the wall-paintings with profane motifs which decorate the Ming-ying wang tien (i.e. a special pavilion) of the Kuang-shêng ssū in the vicinity of Chao-chêng in Shansi. These pictures, which were described and illustrated in part by Lawrence Sickman¹, are particularly noteworthy because of their illustrative motifs and the fact that they are dated (1326). They are no longer in a faultless state of preservation, but one of them may here serve as representative of a large section of popular wall-paintings in the Yüan period. The pavilion and its decoration seem to have been erected in honour of the Ming-ying wang, the spirit of the local mountains and springs.

The motifs represented were evidently inspired by popular Taoist conceptions of nature which, so to speak, through the force of circumstances became realistically coloured and fused with scenes from the theatre. The pictures which represent scenes from the Chinese stage may have been made to commemorate the dedication of this building in honour of Ming-ying wang, the local spirit worshipped at this place, or some other festivals with a similar purport. And it is interesting to note the influence of the theatre on the art of painting, a connexion which is not known from earlier pictorial documents. The theatre picture is dated 1326 and should

¹ Lawrence Sickman, "Wall-paintings of the Yüan Period", *Revue des Arts Asiatiques*, 1927.

thus be remembered as an historical evidence of the popularity of the stage in the Yüan period. In the other pictures at the same place the Taoist dignitaries, such as the humanized spirit of Ming-ying wang, appear either against broadly sketched hills and trees or in homely interiors enthroned at the side of their consorts and served with food and flowers by youthful damsels (Pls. 3, 4).

The pictures in the Ming-ying wang tien can hardly be classified as individual works of art of outstanding quality. They are rather uneven, probably executed by several artists under the direction of one master, yet they represent the spirit and style of a definite group or school much in the same way as the large religious wall-decorations mentioned above represented the unified efforts of a school of professional temple-painters. But they are decidedly less schematic and traditional than the Buddhist paintings; in some of them the quasi-religious or legendary element is overshadowed or transfigured by the painter's interest in nature and actual human life which, indeed, endows these pictures with a new and different kind of artistic interest.

This kind of realistic illustrative painting on a large scale seems to have enjoyed a growing popularity in the Yüan period; it flourished not only on the walls of Taoist sanctuaries but also in profane surroundings, possibly in connexion with the rising interest in the art of the theatre. It is well known that story-telling and recitation, which have always been popular among the Chinese, gradually gave way to dramatic acting by which historical and legendary subjects were brought closer to the common people. To what extent this also had a repercussion on the art of painting is hardly known, but it may be of interest to quote here at least one example that might serve to illustrate the kind of realistic figure-painting that grew up in connexion with the development of drama.

I am thinking of the large but much trimmed and worn picture in the National Museum in Stockholm, which though executed mainly in ink with some addition of reddish and brownish pigments on

paper, appears more like a wall-painting than like an ordinary hanging-scroll. The colours have grown dark with age and dirt, but the powerful design and the plastic modelling of the figures are unimpaired (Pl. 5).

The motif is inspired by one of the stories included in the popular chronicle known as *Shui-hu chuan*; it refers to an episode from the adventurous life of the robber chief Lu Ta, while he stayed in a monastery disguised as a monk in order to escape the hand of justice. It happened then that he saw a man walking up to the monastery with two large jars of wine intended for some workmen. Lu Ta's unquenchable thirst for wine was aroused by this sight; but as the wine-carrier refused to part with his precious burden for money, Lu Ta gave him a violent kick that made him tumble over. Lu Ta grasped the jar and emptied it - as seen in the picture - and then, when the wine went into his head, he ran amok causing panic in the monastery, as further told in the novel.¹ Episodes from the *Shui-hu chuan* chronicle are said to have been circulated in the Yüan period not only by storytellers but also by actors, and one may indeed ask whether a picture like this was inspired by or done in connexion with some stage performance. It has the immediate appeal of such, and the painter could hardly have given such a perfect display of the intricate movements by which the two figures are interlocked and of the tension in their muscular limbs if he had not actually observed a similar scene.

The picture is certainly not an anatomical study from nature, being rather an artistic transposition or interpretation of nature with strong realistic accents, but it is carried out in a fashion which, in spite of some uncouthness, leads our thoughts away from Chinese paintings and makes us recall drawings by early Renaissance masters like Tura or Signorelli. Through this strongly marked character it acquires an historical importance by far exceeding its aesthetic

¹ The story may be read in English translation by Pearl Buck in *All Men are Brothers*, pp. 76, 77.

merits. The picture is not the work of an outstanding master but an interesting remainder of a trend of pictorial art that seems to have been unknown in earlier periods and rarely cultivated in later times. The want of comparative material makes it difficult to propose a definite date for this picture, but

stylistically it stands closer to some of the large wall-paintings and the quasi-religious pictures of Arhats and Taoist Sages mentioned below than to any other picture known to us. The conclusion to be drawn from these general stylistic considerations points definitely to the fourteenth century.

II

Some Lohan Paintings and Yen Hui's circle

If we may draw some conclusions from still existing examples of religious art created in China in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, it seems evident that the production of wall-paintings as well as of Buddhist sculptures on a large scale (mainly in wood) was more abundant in the northern than in the southern part of the country. The invading foreign dynasties which during these centuries occupied various sections of North China under the name of the Liao, the Chin, and the Hsi-Hsia, all showed a marked interest in Buddhism, which found expression in new temples and their decoration with paintings and sculptures. In the southern provinces which remained (particularly in a cultural sense) under Chinese domination almost to the end of the thirteenth century, the religious interest had a more philosophical bent and found expression in meditation and introverted thought with less need of imagery. The pictorial equivalent of this was, as we have seen, the individualistic Ch'an paintings which had very slight, if any, connexion with traditional forms of Buddhist art.

Besides such monochrome ink-paintings inspired by the meditative practices of the Ch'an Buddhists there survived, however, at some of the religious centres in southern China schools of Buddhist imagery which found expression in detached paintings of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas as well as in Arhats and other saintly beings. We have in a

preceding chapter illustrated a few characteristic specimens of this kind, existing mainly in Japanese temples, and pointed out that some of the painters who were responsible for them continued their activity even after the end of the South Sung period. The best known among them, such as Lu Hsin-chung and Chin Ta-shou, better known as Hsi-chin chü-shih, conducted schools or studios in the Ning-po region where large quantities of Buddhist paintings were produced according to traditional patterns which lived on into the Yüan period and later. Most of these later pictures are not signed, but their general characteristics derived from the predecessors of the South Sung, are easily recognizable. Among those which are preserved in Japanese temples may be recorded, for instance, the series of Sixteen Arhats, belonging to Ryuko-in at Daitokuji in Kyōto. These pictures are provided with an inscription by the priest Issan (Ichinei) who is said to have brought them with him when he came to Japan in 1299. They may be said to adhere in type to the Lu Hsin-chung tradition, though the compositions include more illustrative details, such as elements of landscape or furniture as well as acolytes and servants, which altogether serves to give them a more illustrative profane character. They may be said to carry over the South Sung school tradition of Arhat-painting into a more genre-like fashion (Pl.6).

But this was not the only type of Arhat painting existing at the time. There was also another current according to which the Arhats were represented in a more strange outlandish fashion like old men of Hindu or Indian type, isolated and sunk in meditation without any serving acolytes. These may be, at least in part, descendants of the grim and gnarled old men whom Kuan-hsiu of the ninth century introduced in the guise of Arhats. Their fantastic, not to say grotesque, types appealed particularly to painters of strong temperament and seemed to have fitted into the realistic trend which gradually became manifest in the religious painting of the Yüan period. There are many variations of this type, as may be observed if we compare for instance the highly dramatic and spirited Arhats from Seiryōji (Kyōto) with the rather quiet but strongly characterized Indians or Central Asians who fill the roles of the Arhats in the Tokaian collection in Kyōto. These seem to be the result of observations of actual living models and remind us as such of a statement by Chao Mêng-fu in the colophon to his famous scroll representing the Sixteen Arhats. Here he writes that he followed the manner of Lu Lêng-ch'ieh (the pupil of Wu Tao-tzū) and represented the Arhats not as Chinese monks, but with the likeness of men from the Western countries whom he had seen and befriended when serving as an official in the capital. The actual picture is lost, but there can be little doubt that it represented the holy men with a high degree of individual characterizations.

This trend of naturalistic Arhat painting became gradually an important current within the religious art of the Yüan period. It can be followed through a number of interesting pictures mostly in Japanese collections but also represented in the Boston Museum, for instance by the forceful picture of an Arhat seated in a root-chair and holding a reliquary on his raised hands, while an official kneels in adoration at his feet.

Among the examples in Japan should be remembered the series of sixteen Arhats formerly in

Hoshakuji (Yamazaki province) and now in the Maruyama collection in Ōsaka (Pl.7). They have sometimes been honoured with the name of Yen Hui, to whom we shall return presently, but they have no signature and there is no historical evidence for the attribution. Yet they are evidently works by a prominent master of the Yüan period. The designs have a monumental stamp; the figures are large and placed in rocky niches or caves, some of them being accompanied by a serving monk, others seated alone, motionless, in meditation. The types are clearly non-Chinese and strongly individualized. The economy of means and simplicity of arrangement which find expression in the structural stylization endow some of these Arhats with the quality of great sculptural creations. Their fame in Japan is testified by the existence of a series of old copies in Kenminji in Kyōto which are attributed to an artist of the fourteenth century.

A still more incisive individual characterization may be observed in the Arhat picture which is dated by inscription in the Chih-chêng era (1341-67). It is known to me only through the reproduction in *Kokka* 337, the picture itself being lost. Here the old man is seated in a contracted posture in a low arm-chair; his enormous hands are lifted and folded as if he were praying or evoking some invisible presence. The powerful head with its sunken face and high nose is framed by white hair and a short white beard and illumined by the expression of spiritual glow from deep-set eyes. Compared with the grim Arhats created by Kuan-hsiu, he looks almost like a friendly old prophet, but at the side of the smooth Chinese monks who hold the place of Arhats in late Sung paintings, he is a fanatic consumed by holy fire (Pl.8).

The stylistic correspondence between these strongly characterized Arhat paintings and certain Taoist figures traditionally classified as works by the painter Yen Hui, is so close that it seems fitting to add here a few words about this painter of Taoist and Buddhist subjects. His *tzū* was Ch'iu-yüeh and he came from Chiang-shan in Chekiang, but we

have no particulars concerning his life and activity except that he excelled in painting devils, which were most life-like, besides representing Buddhist and Taoist saints. But, to judge by the pictures preserved under his name in the Ku-kung collection, he also did landscapes and pictures of monkeys. The most prominent examples of Yen Hui's quasi-religious paintings are (or have been) in Japanese collections, and it is through some of these that his name has become widely known; their popular appeal depends on the almost dramatic characterization of the figures and an excellent rendering of the bodily forms and movements.

I am thinking in particular of the large pictures in Chionji in Kyōto representing the Taoist Immortals Li T'ieh-kuai and Liu Hai-hsien. The attribution to Yen Hui, which is based on the seal of the painter, is generally accepted as correct. The pictures are very impressive as illustrations and through their bold and masterly brushwork, qualities which, however, hardly suffice to conceal a touch of vulgarity attaching to a vivid representation of certain thaumaturgic mysteries of popular Taoism. Li T'ieh-kuai seems to be projecting his *anima*, or vaporous double, which is mounting on high in the shape of a small man in the clouds. He is evidently in a state of extraordinary nervous tension, as can be seen in the movements of his fingers and toes and the intensity of his facial expression (Pl.9). Liu Hai-hsien, whose image is still used in China as a protective and luck-bearing talisman, is represented with a very large three-legged toad (the moon-toad) on his shoulder. It is the animal that he pulled out from a well and which now is scratching his ruffled hair with its long claws and causing a somewhat painful enjoyment.¹

It should also be remembered that these pictures have served as models for several painters of the Kano school, as pointed out by Ōmura in his enthusiastic appreciation of them. To quote: "The brush is handled in a mighty and forceful manner and the work evinces abundant life, while the almost supernatural spirit makes us feel as if we were about

to be attacked by some incanny spirit(!) . . . Whenever those great artists Cho Densu, Motonobu, Tanyu and others of our country depicted these two hermits, they always took their models from these two pictures."² Whatever objections Ōmura's words of praise may evoke, it must be admitted that the two pictures have exercised a considerable influence in Japan, particularly through their bold and sweeping brushwork and their obvious illustrative merits.

Hardly less important from an artistic point of view are the two pictures in the National Museum in Tōkyō (formerly in the Kawasaki collection) which represent the rustic hermits of the T'ang period Han-shan and Shih-tê, well known to us from the works of some of the Ch'an painters. The unquenchable mirth and freedom from all material restraints characteristic of these youths appealed no doubt to the Taoists just as much as to the Ch'an philosophers, and they were welcome subjects to painters who gave realistic interpretations to religious ideas. The pictures are done mainly in ink, with slight touches of colour in the faces, but they are not written down as freely as the spontaneous interpretations of the Ch'an masters, but outlined with vigorous brush-strokes and shaded in places, which serves to bring out the full volume of the wide mantles. Shih-tê is leaning on his broom and Han-shan is bending forward, they are both laughing with wide-opened mouths and screwed up eyes as if acting to an audience. The characterization is strained, the striving for outward effect obvious and not in harmony with the best traditions of Ch'an painting.

Other figure paintings attributed to Yen Hui in Japanese collections are mostly inferior to and different from the above-named pictures; some of them may have been executed by Japanese rather

¹ The popularity of Liu Hai-hsien towards the end of the Yüan period is also proved by the decree of the emperor Shun-ti, who in 1340 conferred on him the posthumous title "The Loyal Prince whose bright intelligence penetrated the Great Doctrine". Cf. Duré, *Recherches sur les Superstitions en Chine*, t.IX, p.322.

² *Tōyō Bijutsu Taikan*, vol.IX, p.33.

than Chinese artists, or at least copied by the former. Yen Hui's quasi-religious paintings seem, indeed, to have been most popular in Japan, whereas the pictures which are ascribed to him in China are not so closely connected with the materials discussed in the present chapter. Yet two or three of them may well be remembered at this place because they illustrate the realistically humorous aspect of his art which to some extent also is prominent in his religious paintings.

This strain of grotesque humour is most essential in the long handscroll (belonging to C. T. Loo & Co. in New York) which represents Chung K'uei, the Demon Queller, returning from the hunt, followed by a number of quasi-human shapes and devils who are making up a fitting retinue for the truly gargantuan figure on the rickety donkey. The subject has lent itself to a motley display of humorous figures in more or less fantastic situations, an opportunity which the artist has utilized *con amore*.

Another picture which may be recalled here is the hanging-scroll in the Palace Museum representing Two Gibbons in a Loquat-tree,¹ which is painted with ink only like some of the minor Taoist figures mentioned above. The trunk and the leafy branch of the tree in which the monkeys are playing, are drawn and modelled with consummate skill and the same is true of the soft fur of the monkeys, while the painter in characterizing their round faces, has stressed their likeness with certain rustic human types such as he has depicted, for instance, in representing the laughing boys Han-shan and Shih-tê. The distance between them and the gibbons in the loquat-tree is not very great.

The current of style (so characteristic of Yen Hui's paintings) in which quasi-religious legendary motifs as well as profane subjects are represented with the same unconventional realism, may also be observed in certain anonymous paintings of approximately the same period.

An interesting example of this group is the large picture in the National Museum in Stockholm, which represents a kind of Taoist prophet in the

shape of a hoary old man of foreign type, with aquiline nose and a long beard, sitting on the ground with a small gilt casket on his raised hand. At his side is a large white glass bottle with a red coral branch; the rest of the picture is done simply in ink. The man is completely wrapped up in a wide mantle forming deep folds over his arm and legs by which the plastic volume and the structure of the figure are brought into strong relief. The picture has evidently been trimmed, which makes the figure appear somewhat cramped, but this has not lessened the almost dynamic concentration of the tense features and penetrating regard. One may hesitate as to the exact interpretation of the motif, but the figure is indeed a most impressive representative of that ageless race of mystics who had acquired some actual knowledge of Tao, including the art of indefinite prolongation of life. The golden casket on his hand may well contain the precious pills of longevity; they are, however, invisible while the monumental design and the plastic modelling of the contracted limbs and deeply folded drapery endow the figure with a high degree of artistic significance.

The pictures discussed in the preceding pages, whether of Taoist or Buddhist origin, all represent single figures which gain their main interest as works of art from the more or less marked individual characterization. But besides these many other pictures were produced for the temples, which illustrated religious or philosophical concepts in a more symbolic way, with a larger display of figures placed in landscapes or arranged in hieratic designs. Those referring to tenets of Mahayana Buddhism had generally a more ritualistic character, reminding us of Indian or Central Asian models, than the paintings made by the Taoists who had no

¹ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XXXV (4 ft 1 in. x 2 ft 1 in.) It is not signed but the attribution to the master is of long standing and seems convincing.

The other picture attributed to Yen Hui in the Palace Museum (*K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. IV), a winter landscape with figures, called "Yüan An Indifferent to Cold and Snow", represents a style more characteristic of the Ming than of the Yüan period.

such iconographic models to lean on, and consequently could illustrate their cosmological or thaumaturgical ideas in more naturalistic pictorial compositions.

Such Taoist paintings are, however, relatively seldom seen, though three excellent examples are preserved in the museum in Boston. They were formerly attributed to Wu Tao-tzu and are said to have formed part of the imperial collection. The connexion with Wu Tao-tzu is evidently not very close,¹ yet it may have been caused by the general conception of the unusual motifs. The pictures represent the Deities of Heaven, of Earth and of Water, accompanied by retinues of subordinate figures, and thus together illustrate the Taoist Pantheon. The rulers of these various regions of the

world are represented, so to speak, in their respective elements, the King of Heaven being seated cross-legged on a platform at his desk on circling clouds (Pl. 12A), and the King of the Waters is carried by a dragon over a stormy sea (Pl. 12B). The former is surrounded by heavenly maidens and celestial potentates, the latter by the violent spirits of the storm, all serving to emphasize the dignity and might of these rulers of the elements as they move with the winds and the clouds through their respective spheres. The artistic significance depends mainly on the suggestion of a kind of cosmic sweep, or life-breath, in the designs which indeed might have been originally composed for large wall-spaces, whereas the actual execution of the pictures is rather tight and finicky.

III

Buddhist Icons

Among the Buddhist pictures, which are far more numerous, might be mentioned various representations of Bodhisattvas with their more or less prominent attributes or surrounding elements, such as the lion of Mañjuśrī, the elephant of Samantabhadra, or Kuanyin's rocky seat by a willow on a river-bank. The latter in particular enjoyed great popularity in the Yüan period and later, and gave rise to some famous compositions such as the Kuanyin pictures in Daitokuji, formerly attributed to Wu Tao-tzu. In fact, many of the most impressive Buddhist pictures made in the Yüan period seem to retain elements of T'ang models in their designs.

The relation may be observed, for instance, in the beautiful picture (painted with colours on silk) in the museum in Kyōto, which is said to represent Mañjuśrī in the guise of an old white-haired man seated on a high chariot drawn by a white elephant, an interpretation which, however, may be ques-

tioned, since the elephant is the special seat of Samantabhadra, the Bodhisattva of learning and intelligence and not Mañjuśrī, who usually rides on a lion. The elephant is here introduced not only as a draught animal but also in a number of minor symbols enclosed within circles on a dark sky. The conception seems to have a cosmic or astral background, and by its formal design it reminds us of the previously mentioned picture from Tun-huang representing Tejaprabha Buddha as Subduer of the Five Planets (dated 897). The execution in colour and gold on dark purplish silk is of very fine quality, and enriched by an abundance of exquisite ornamental details (Pl. 13).

¹ According to a note by T'ang Hou in *Hua chien*, a pupil of Wu Tao-tzu, called Ts'ao Chung-yüan, painted the Three Sovereigns of Heaven, Earth and Water. Generally speaking, he followed Wu Tao-tzu, but did not grasp his style. At the end of his life he made paintings with a fine brush in order to distinguish himself and to make his own style.

There are other pictures of a related kind and origin though more strictly hieratic in design in the museum in Boston. For instance, the one (11.4001) which represents Śakyamuni Buddha seated on a chariot drawn by a bullock among stars and constellations. The design is in this case practically rectilinear, which may be said to emphasize the abstract beauty of the celestial hierarchies. No less far removed from the world of material illusion is the picture (11.6142) of Buddha Expounding the Law. The Śakyamuni-triad is here placed at the top, while rows of great Bodhisattvas and devas form an audience below. The rich ornamentation with gold on red and green colours adds a certain brilliancy to the decorative effect of this solemnly hieratic composition. It approximates in some degree to the type of strictly formal Buddhist painting which was produced at this time for the Lama

temples in the northern provinces and in Mongolia (Pl. 14).

It will be remembered that Kubilai Khan called in one of the learned High Lamas of Tibet to serve as head of the official Buddhist hierarchy and to supervise and encourage the erection of Lama temples with all their paraphernalia of ritual objects and paintings in the capital. A special inspector was appointed to control the execution of such "Indian" paintings, as they were called by the Chinese, which were at that time produced in great quantities. Few of the early ones have been preserved, but their decorative character and style have become known through later repetitions. And as this rather special type of painting enjoyed imperial support and recognition, it naturally exercised some influence on traditional forms of religious painting in China, though only for a relatively short period.

Traditionalists: Painters of Figures, Animals, Birds and Flowers

I

Chao Mêng-fu, some Pupils and Members of his Family

THE RELATIVELY short duration of the Yüan dynasty which, according to official reckoning, occupied the dragon throne only eighty-eight years, makes it inexpedient to adhere exclusively to a chronological presentation of the painters who were active during this period. One might perhaps distinguish two generations within this span of time, the first consisting of men who carried on the Sung traditions in their paintings, and the latter of painters whose orientation was more independent and who in several cases continued their activity into the early decades of the Ming dynasty. But there were also a number of less outstanding talents who were born around the middle of the thirteenth century and felt the impulse of the new age without expressing it so convincingly as the leaders of the movement.

The painters who may be classified as traditionalists such as Chao Mêng-fu and the members of his family, Ch'ien Hsüan, Jên Jên-fa and Liu Kuan-tao and others, won their fame mainly as painters of human figures and horses, while the later set or slightly younger generation, headed by the so-called "four great masters of the Yüan period", were responsible for the new type of landscape-painting which became of decisive importance for the succeeding development. This predominance of certain motifs within the successive generations was, however, not of an exclusive kind; the traditionalists did not paint only figures and animals, nor did the protagonists of the later movement do only landscapes. Besides these motifs favoured respectively by the traditionalists and the landscapists, there was one

kind of painting that both generations cultivated with the same keenness, *i.e.* bamboo-painting. This had always formed a criterion for mastery of the brush, but it reached now a wider popularity and more general importance than ever before. It was systematically studied and set forth not only in excellent paintings but also in a theoretical treatise, and it was used by the most prominent men of both generations as a favourite pictorial symbol for their individual concepts and mastery of the brush. We shall have occasion to return to this in connexion with the works of several of the leading masters of this period.



The first two or three decades of the Yüan period were thus in the field of painting dominated by the traditionalists, *i.e.* painters who continued stylistic traditions of the Sung period or earlier times, yet at the same time gave individual expression to the new spirit of the age. The foremost place among them was, indeed, held by Chao Mêng-fu and it seems thus natural to start with him, even though he was twenty years younger than Ch'ien Hsüan.

His life and activities are well recorded in history owing to his successful official career. He was born in 1254 at Hu-chou in Chekiang as the son of a noble family descending from the first Sung emperor, and educated at the imperial college in Hangchou. At the fall of the Sung dynasty he retired into private life, but a few years later (1286) he, like a score of other retired scholars, accepted an invitation to appear at the Mongol court, which was greatly "impressed by

his bright spirit and extraordinary refinement. The emperor Shih-tsu (Kublai Khan) called him 'One of the Immortals'.¹ He was appointed Secretary to the Board of War, and served under the emperors Ch'ang-tsung (1295-1308), Wu-tsung (1308-1312), Jên-tsung (1312-1321) and Ying-tsung (1321-1324) and was promoted several times, reaching finally the position of a director of the Han-lin College, and served also as governor of Kiangsi and Chekiang. He died 1322 and was honoured with the posthumous title Duke of Wei and the name Wên-min, i.e. Refined and Clever.

His paintings and writings are usually signed with his by-name Tzū-ang (The Dignified), but popularly he was known by the descriptive appellation Sung Hsüeh tao-jên, the Sage of Pines and Snow. The biographers quoted above² add the following remarks about his impressive manners and intellectual gifts: "He was by nature sharp-witted and conscientious and never indulged in foolish talk or laughing. After once reading through a piece he could recite it. His poems and writings were clear and lofty in the old style. He was a prominent connoisseur of antiques and pictures, and he painted landscapes, bamboos, rocks, human figures, flowers and birds, all in the most refined style. He was also an excellent calligraphist, as such the foremost of his time... His general ability and fame were hidden by his eminence in painting and calligraphy. He was widely known as a painter and calligraphist, but few people knew that he also was an excellent author and still fewer knew him as an administrator."

Chao Mêng-fu's great fame and prominent position in the history of the fine arts in China are, as a matter of fact, based on his mastery in calligraphy even more than on his painted works. In the former art he was, according to Chinese historians, a supreme master without an equal at the time, whereas some of the other Yüan painters could vie with him in certain branches of pictorial art, such as landscapes and bamboo-painting. He was able to use with equal success various styles of calligraphy, such

as seal characters, model style, running hand and the *hsiao-k'ai* (small model style), which aroused the greatest admiration among connoisseurs. "His writing was delicate, beautiful, well-balanced and harmonious like the character of the man", to quote Chang Ch'ou. These qualities, which bore witness to the supreme mastery and versatility of the writer, could however be explained and estimated differently, as intimated by Chang Ch'ou in the following passage:

"Tzū-ang's style of writing was gentle, elegant and harmonious. He was a distant follower of the true school of Wang Hsi-chih. But his style is too beautiful, seductive and delicate, it is lacking in the spirit of firm and compelling principles. It seems consequently not equal to Wên T'ien-hsiang's manner of writing, which was clear and penetrating, straight and inspired."³

The distinction drawn between Chao Mêng-fu, who went into the service of the conquerors and Wên T'ien-hsiang, the famous general, who preferred death to the honours offered him by Kubilai Khan if he would swear allegiance to the ruler, reflects the point of view of the Chinese patriots. Chao Mêng-fu may have been an admirable calligraphist and painter and a very able and upright official, yet he could never become the ideal of the true scholars or grow into the heart of the people like Su Shih or Mi Fei, because by yielding to the wishes of the conquerors he chose the path which led to fame and success, but not to the pure and shining glory of the unyielding patriots. This is also illustrated in some anecdotes referring to his way of writing and painting. We are told that he tried in vain to complete a damaged scroll by Mi Fei by filling in the missing lines in imitation of the Sung master. He did not succeed, as admitted by himself: "Modern men can never attain the level of the old masters"; there was something missing in Tzū-ang's attempt to imitate Mi Fei, probably something of

¹ From *Shu-chih hui-yao*, quoted in *Shu-hua fang*, vol. 10, pp. 39, 40.

² *Shu-hua fang*, vol. 10, p. 58.

the volitional energy or vigorous rhythm so characteristic of the proud Mi.

Through some of the descriptions of Tzū-ang's way of painting we learn that this too was done with the greatest ease without any apparent exertion of the will or preparatory concentration: "When he was sitting with guests he would take paper and ink, and amuse himself with making dots and splashes of ink. When he wanted to make a tree, it became a tree, and when he wanted to make a rock it became a rock."¹ He was, so to speak, a born "man of the brush" and this fundamental feature of his artistic personality was developed through never ceasing practice in perfect accordance with old Chinese traditions. Most informative in that respect is the often quoted colophon which he added in his old age on a picture of earlier years:

"Ever since my youth I have loved to paint. Whenever I obtained a bit of silk or paper I could not help asking for a brush to make a drawing. This picture was done in my early years. Though it does not show great strength of the brush, it has something of the spirit of antiquity (classical spirit).

"In the time that has passed since then my hair and beard have grown white and my manner of painting has developed, but I have also grown indifferent to multifarious matters. I could no longer succeed in making one or two such pictures, if I wished to do so. Yu-chih wanted me to write one more colophon, and so I have made this record."

The undertone of disappointment, or sadness, that runs through this note by the old man on a work from his early days, seems to indicate that in spite of all success and official promotion, he felt that he had not quite reached his goal as an artist. The very ease with which he could do everything, including painting, his faithfulness to the old models, and his occupations with "multifarious matters" may indeed have facilitated his career in many ways, but such exertions did not offer stimulus to a creative activity of a more independent and exclusive kind.

In some colophons Chao Mêng-fu has also given striking definitions of his principles and ideals as a

painter. The following may be said to contain the key to his artistic attitude:

"The most important (precious) quality in a painting is the spirit of antiquity (the ancient ideas). If this is not present, the work is not worth much, even though it is skilfully done. But nowadays, people who are able to paint with a fine brush in a delicate manner and to lay on strong and brilliant colours consider themselves skilful painters. They are absolutely ignorant of the fact that the works in which the spirit of antiquity is wanting are full of faults and not worth looking at.

"My paintings may seem to be quite simply and carelessly done, but true connoisseurs will realize that they are very close to the old models and may therefore be considered good. This is told for real connoisseurs and not for ignoramuses." (Dated 1301.)

Chao Mêng-fu's insistence on the spirit of antiquity as a *sine qua non* is indeed significant, but one may ask what this actually implied in way of imitation, how far back in time he sought his models, and which particular masters he chose as his guides in art. Judging by paintings still existing or described, his preferred models are painters of the T'ang period such as Wang Wei and Han Kan, whereas he considered himself quite equal to Li Lung-mien, the foremost representative of the "classic spirit" in the Sung period. It is well known that Chao Mêng-fu painted a free version in colour of Wang Wei's Wang-ch'uan scroll and also that he based himself on the T'ang master's works in other landscape-paintings, such as the one called "Ch'iao and Hua Mountains in Autumn Colours" and the "Village by the Water".² The comparison between Chao Mêng-fu and the horse-painters of old, including Li Lung-mien, has been repeated by various authors; Chao's own opinion about it is

¹ Quoted from *Hsi-ch'ien p'ai-yün i-kao* in *Shu-hua p'u*, vol. 53.

² The British Museum possesses a copy after Chao Mêng-fu's version of Wang Wei's Wang-ch'uan scroll. The picture of the Ch'iao and Hua Mountains, which is mentioned in *Shu-hua fang* (vol. 10, p. 47b), has been published in a scroll reproduction by the former Palace Museum in Peking.

expressed in a colophon quoted from *Ch'o-k'eng lu*,¹

"From my youth I liked to paint horses, and I thought that I knew their character completely. My friend Kuo Yu-chih once presented me with a poem in which he said: 'People always compare you with Lung-mien, not realizing that you have surpassed Ts'ao Pa and Han Kan'. This talk about Ts'ao and Han is an exaggeration, but as to the comparison with Lung-mien, I have no objection and may well be equal to him."

Horses formed no doubt favourite motifs for Chao Mêng-fu; he represented them either pasturing in fields or mounted or led by their grooms, and though he is said to have followed in the wake of Han Kan, the actual stylistic correspondence between the horse-paintings by the two masters is not very close. Chao Mêng-fu did not imitate Han Kan's fiery steeds or paint the inmates of the imperial stables, but represented horses of a more common and domesticated type, some of them broken in by Mongol riders. Nor are his horse-paintings as a rule isolated studies of single animals, but more complicated compositions in which the horses appear in groups or characteristic relations to each other, sometimes in landscapes enjoying their freedom in nature.

It should also be recalled that these horse pictures had generally a symbolic or metaphorical meaning as explained in a colophon by Wang Pin from Ch'ang-lo on a famous picture called *Horses on Pasture under Old Trees* (dated 1300). The horses were represented unrestrained by bridles or whip, pacing or frolicking under the trees and feeding on the fresh wild grass. "Maybe", says the writer, "that Chao Mêng-fu made this picture as a metaphorical illustration, because do not gentlemen of worth also like to enjoy their ease and freedom whenever they can rid themselves of the fetters of official duties?"

It seems, however, very uncertain whether any of the more or less attractive horse-paintings which have been preserved under the name of Chao Mêng-fu actually were executed by the master. He had skilful imitators among the members of his own

family as well as among other painters who specialized in horse-painting. He served as a model for them all and his signature was probably freely used to increase the value of the paintings. It is consequently far from easy to decide which of the many horse-paintings that carry his name should actually be accepted as his own works. Two or three examples may here be mentioned as illustrations; they are all continuous scroll compositions with a number of horses.

One of the most attractive is a picture in the collection of Prince Matsukata, Tokyō, known to me only through the reproduction in *Kokka* 435, where it is described as "undoubtedly genuine, though with many repairs". It represents eight horses, some of which are being watered and washed on a river-bank, while others are leaving the bath with riders on their back. The animals and the men are painted in bright colours against the neutral tone of the sandy shore, but to what extent this rather striking pictorial execution should be accepted as a support for the attribution of the signature may be questioned (Pl. 16).

Another scroll likewise representing eight horses, and also belonging to a Japanese collection, is known through a full size collotype reproduction. The animals are here represented in an entirely different manner; they have no trappings or bridles whatsoever and there are no men to take care of them or to interfere in their rather intricate movements and postures, which seem to have been chosen with a view to exhibiting their muscular strength and mobility. They are of a very sturdy, not to say heavy, type, reminding us of the kind of horses that usually are ascribed to Han Kan, but according to the signature they were painted by Chao Mêng-fu in the year 1309. As far as may be seen in this excellent reproduction, the execution in a kind of *kung-pi* manner is, however, too mechanical for an original work of the Yüan period or earlier; it seems more like the work of a conscientious copyist of the Ming period. But the picture is remarkable for its design

¹ *Sho-hua fang*, vol. 10, p. 55b.

and as an historical document illustrating the relation between Chao Mêng-fu and Han Kan (Pl.15).

Pictures such as these two scrolls and several others representing horses with riders, ascribed to Chao Mêng-fu (Pl.17), remind us of some remarks by the Japanese Zen-monk Osen Keishan of the fifteenth century, who in a colophon to a picture by the master offers the following information as to the frequency of then existing imitations after old masters, including Chao Mêng-fu:¹

"I have often heard people who travelled in the South (of China) state that most of the paintings which in that part of the country nowadays are called famous works of art are imitations and by no means old. They are given names and provided with the seals of ancient and more recent masters in order to bring more profit to the picture-dealers. Less than half of the pictures are genuine, and not of recent date, but the envoys (visitors) from Japan and Korea buy them and bring them home. To this I simply add, 'what is not in them is in this' (a genuine work). How could this be other than a divine work by Chao Mêng-fu, i.e. a rare and valuable thing?"

The confusion noted by the writer has certainly not become less with the years; it must be admitted that the limiting line between Chao Mêng-fu's own horse-paintings and those by his imitators is in some cases rather faint.

A third handscroll with Chao Mêng-fu's signature, representing horses, is in the Freer Gallery. It is executed with light colours in a very refined *kung-pi* technique and does not show much affinity in style or composition with either of the two preceding ones. There are fifteen horses conducted by three grooms across a river ford; some of them are pausing in the water to drink, the others are passing slowly onto the opposite shore. The rocky shores with leafy trees, of which only the lowest section can be seen, form a pleasant scene into which the horses merge most naturally. The brushwork has a subtle, not to say elegant, quality of which there was no trace in either of the preceding scrolls, and there can

be little doubt that the picture is a homogeneous original work of the Yüan period. But it may be admitted that it has not much of the "classic spirit" of antiquity (in any sense of these words) which formed the undercurrent in old Chao's creations, and one might thus wonder whether a picture like this was not done by his son rather than by himself (Pl.18).

It may not be necessary to dwell here on several of the horse-paintings which pass under the name of Chao Mêng-fu and mostly bear his signature, since none of them (to my knowledge) can serve as an authentic starting point for a closer appreciation of the master's individual genius. We may rather turn to the well-known picture in the Freer Gallery which represents a goat and a sheep and which may be considered as the most authentic testimony of the painter's excellent faculty of characterizing domestic animals and his mastery of the brush in a kind of combined pictorial and *kung-pi* style (Pl.19).

The two animals are placed on a neutral background; there is no suggestion of natural scenery or a horizontal plane, yet they are brought in relation to each other by their postures: the goat is lowering its horned head as if ready for a fight or an attack on the proud and wealthy ram which looks down upon the opponent with a somewhat disdainful expression in its narrow eyes. The situation takes place in the backyard of a country farm and the artist has watched it with keen interest not only in the physical appearances of the animals, but also in their intentional behaviour. This is also confirmed by his inscription on the picture in which he says: "I often painted horses, but very seldom sheep. When Chung-hsin asked me to paint I amused myself by making a picture from life, and though I could not equal the men of old, it contains the reverberation of the life-breath (*ch'i-yün*)."

The note is particularly interesting on account of its emphasis on the fact that the animals were painted from life and yet with the old masters in the

¹ The colophon is quoted from *Hsün Kyäko-hesshu* in an article by Tani Shinichi in *Bijutsu Kenkyū*, 46, p.458.

thoughts of the painter. They might be said to illustrate how the spirit of nature was no less important to Chao Mêng-fu as an artist than the spirit of antiquity; it was the combination of these two ideals or lines of endeavour which formed the guidance for his artistic activity. This is to some extent evident also in the horse-paintings which pass under his name; the best of them reveal certainly a close study of the living models, but at the same time the endeavour to transmit them in a style based on early models. One of the most interesting examples of Chao Mêng-fu's close study of early models is the short scroll in Hui-hua kuan in Peking, which is called Watering Horses in the Autumn Fields,¹ and according to the inscription executed in the year 1312. It is painted with rather heavy green and brownish colours in an archaistic style, probably after a model of the T'ang period.

Chao Mêng-fu's dependence on early models is still more obvious in a number of large coloured landscapes with illustrative *staffage*. They belong to the class of academic pictures which may be called *pompier* to use a modern term and, though provided with the signature of the master, one may wonder whether he did not leave the execution of these large decorative compositions to assistants. The motifs of these pictures are illustrations to ancient legends or history, such as The Emperor T'ang (of the Shang dynasty) Summoning Yin (dated 1309), the Abode of the Immortals (dated 1319) (Pl.20), A Literary Gathering in the Western Garden (*i.e.* the meeting in Wang Shên's famous garden) after Li Lung-mien's original and provided with an inscription by Yü Chü (1272-1368). These are all in the Ku-kung collection, but there are others of a similar kind in private possession, as for instance the large picture known as The Dragon King Paying Homage to Buddha, which forms part of the J. D. Chan collection in Hongkong. This is mentioned by An Lu-ts'un in *Mo-yüan hui-kuan* (vol.V) together with a very beautiful picture of Sakyamuni, represented in red mantle, seated on a

stone and holding in his hands a *ju-i* and a fan, "done in the manner of T'ang painters". An Lu-ts'un mentions furthermore a picture of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove which was painted partly in ink and partly in colours: "In doing the bamboos he followed Su Tung-p'o and in painting brightly coloured human figures he followed the T'ang masters", a description which confirms our appreciation of Chao Mêng-fu as a faithful traditionalist.

Besides these large hanging-scrolls with mountains rising through the clouds and figures gathering in the airy pavilions, there are a few minor landscapes with a more definite local character, such as the short handscroll in the Ku-kung collection known as the "Ch'iao and Hua Mountains in Autumn". It is an early work, dated 1295, said to have been painted for a friend called Chou Kung-chin, while Chao Mêng-fu was staying as an official in Shantung. The scenery includes the two mountains after which the picture is called and some groups of trees in open flat country, but these elements are rather freely adjusted according to conventional designs of earlier times. The historical fame of this picture, which is executed with light colours and ink in a somewhat dry manner, is hardly due to any extraordinary pictorial qualities or beauty, such as may be found in the ink paintings by Huang Kung-wang or Wu Chên, but seems rather based on the renown of the motif (the two hills) and the name and position of the artist. It confirms the impression that the traditionalist Chao Mêng-fu is far more in evidence in the coloured paintings than in his ink-sketches, which are done in a more spontaneous manner and possess, when at their best, a perfectly balanced rhythmic beauty that may be said to reflect the life-breath of the creative master.

The best among these minor landscape designs are composed of dry trees and garden rocks (Pl.21), or of young bamboos and tufts of epidendrum among mossy stones. They are essentially akin to

¹ A later version of this picture in the Metropolitan Museum contains the information that it was done after a work by P'ei K'uan of the T'ang period.

the ink-sketches by the gentleman painters of Sung, though rendered with even greater ease. Their artistic significance depends on the ductility of the brush-strokes. It is these which impart the sap of spring to the bamboo shoots and the silent yet singing rhythm of life to the slender epidendrum leaves issuing in long waves like sprinkling cascades from the hollow stones. It must be admitted that in painting these Chao Mêng-fu surpasses all his predecessors, including Chao Mêng-chien and Chêng Ssü-hsiao, as may be seen for instance in the beautiful scroll in the possession of C. T. Loo Successors or in New York (Pl.22).

Chao Mêng-fu has also painted some complete landscapes in ink representing open views over lonely waters, more or less reminding us of Ni Tsan's renderings of such motifs.¹ In one of these pictures there is a pavilion on the shore in which some poets are assembled, as told in the inscriptions by Yang Wei-chêng and Tung Ch'i-ch'ang; in the other there are no buildings, only two tall pine-trees and some brambles among the boulders on the near shore, while the rest of the picture is an open view over silent waters that merge with a low horizon in the far distance. This picture was once in the collection of An Lu-ts'un, who describes it as follows in *Mo-yüan hui-kuan*, vol.V:

"The landscape is painted in the style of Ho-yang (Kuo Hsi), the brushwork is pure and vigorous. The scenery is rendered in a simple and summary manner. There are two tall pine-trees, some strangely shaped stones, thorns and brambles, a sandy shore, and minor stones, all wonderfully painted. The opposite shore is composed of a mountain ridge and stretches of flat country, and far out on the river is a single boat with an angler, which produces an air of calmness and distance."

At the beginning of the scroll is the following inscription: "Tzū-ang did this picture of Two Pines in a far extending view to amuse himself", and at the opposite end the artist wrote: "In my early days, whenever I was at leisure from my studies, I used to play with a small brush, but I could never acquire

skill in painting landscapes. I have not had the opportunity of studying some of the extraordinary works by the Tang masters such as Wang Wei, the two Li and Chêng Kuang-wên, nor even the great masters of the Five Dynasties Ching Hao, Kuan T'ung, Tung Yüan and Fan K'uan, who were superior to painters of recent times. As to my own works, though I do not dare to compare them with those of the ancients, yet if I look at the pictures by men of today, I may claim to be a little different. Yeh-yün asked me to do a painting, and so I have written this at the end of it" (Pl.23).

Through a picture like this Chao may be said to have asserted his place in the front rank of the great landscape-painters of the Yüan period. It may appear more traditional than corresponding works of the younger generation, it does not possess the breadth and sweep of Huang Kung-wang's best works nor the spotless purity of Ni Tsan's simple ink-drawings, yet it is distinguished by great refinement and a degree of structural beauty that rarely, if ever, has been attained by the painters who specialized in landscape. Yet Chao Mêng-fu was no specialist; he did not repeat himself over and over again with the same kind of motifs or ideas; he was more of an all-round artist. And while he mastered many kinds of pictorial expression with the same ease, his technical skill along various lines and his attachment to the principles and ideals of the old masters did not prevent him from remaining an individual master of superior type. He formed a link with the past and became as such a guide for younger men, but also through his most spontaneous works opened new roads of approach towards such problems of expressionistic ink-painting as occupied most of the best painters during the latter part of the Yüan period. No one could with

¹ These landscape scrolls are both reproduced in *Chung-kuo ming-hua chi*; the present owner of the picture with the pavilion on the shore is unknown, whereas the latter picture is one of the treasures of the C. C. Wang collection in New York. Cf. No.26 in the catalogue of the exhibition of *Chinese Landscape Painting* in Cleveland, 1954. Another version of the same design is in the possession of C. T. Loo Successors, N.Y.

better reason be placed at the head of the pictorial development in the Yüan period.

* * *

We are told that Chao Mêng-fu used to say, not without pride: "Every member of my family is a skilful painter or calligrapher". This included his wife, Kuan Tao-shêng, and brother Chao Mêng-yü, as well as his son Chao Yung and his son's son Chao Lin. They have all won for themselves places in the history of Chinese painting, though of a secondary rank, and since they all worked in the shadow of the great master (partly as his pupils and assistants) it is not easy to arrive at a proper appreciation of their individual merits. But whatever their historical associations may have been, it is evident that each of them did some paintings of a definite type and style that merit to be remembered as individual variations on certain aspects of Chao Mêng-fu's art.

Kuan Tao-shêng, or Kuan Fu-jên, was eight years younger than the master (b. 1262, d. 1325); she started as his pupil and seems to have been highly appreciated by him as a painter of bamboo in particular, if we may draw some conclusions from the husband's inscriptions and the fact that he did some pictures jointly with his wife. The main subject of her painting was bamboo, but she also painted *lan-hua* and occasionally figures, such as the little ink-sketch of Kuanyin with the Fish-basket (in the Abe Collection, Ōsaka) which, according to an inscription (dated 1302), was made after a picture by Wu Tao-tzū. But nothing would be more difficult than to trace any kind of stylistic resemblance between this fugitive sketch that seems to be written down rather than painted and some figure of the kind that passes under the name of the great T'ang master. The drawing is, however, worth remembering as a genuine record of Kuan Fu-jên's quick and jerky brushwork.

The same kind of almost nervous vividness is characteristic of some of the small bamboo studies provided with the painter's seal and signature in the

Ku-kung collection. We find it in the very thin and slender bamboo plant growing by a deeply fissured garden stone, a picture which has the graceful charm of a woman's brush. Tung Ch'i-ch'ang has written an encomium at the top of the picture, praising it as a masterpiece of its kind (Pl. 24b).

Another minor painting by the artist in the same collection is mounted together with some other contemporary pictures on a handscroll called *Yüan-jên chi-chia*. It represents a bamboo grove along a river-bank enveloped in a light haze which is rendered with a very sensitive brush. According to the inscription it was painted in 1308. Similar pictorial qualities may also be observed in a small hanging-scroll in the collection of Dr. T. Moriya in Kyōto, which is known under the name *The Purple Bamboo Retreat*. It has two inscriptions by the painter, one of them being dated 1296. The picture is no longer in a pure condition, being somewhat worn and dirty, but it has preserved an intimate charm of its own; the little homestead in the bamboo grove at the foot of misty hills is painted with utmost care, the bamboos have an almost feathery appearance; it is very simple but has the genuine touch of a record of pleasant memories done with love. The other bamboo paintings with Kuan Fu-jên's signature, to be seen in several public and private collections and mentioned in the Lists, have not the same imprint of genuineness (Pl. 25).

Chao Yung, *tzū* Chung-mu, the son of Mêng-fu, was born 1289 and continued his activity until about or shortly after the middle of the fourteenth century. He served like his father in official positions, obtained the rank of *tai-chao* at the court of Kubilai Khan and was appointed governor of Hu-chou. As a painter he was active along similar lines to his father, doing figure and horse-painting no less than landscapes and birds. His dependence on Chao Mêng-fu's style and models is most obvious in the horse-paintings, which often impress us more as free versions of the father's designs than as individual creations, whereas his landscapes reveal a more definite personal character which shows that Chao

Yung absorbed something of the new spirit or artistic attitude which found expression in the works of the great landscape-painters during the latter half of the century.

Typical examples of his horse-paintings in the manner of the father may be seen in the Ku-kung collection, such as the picture of a man in a red coat on a white horse under leafy trees (inscribed by Tung Ch'i-ch'ang) and the picture of five variously coloured horses on pasture under large green trees on a river-bank. The landscape is here no less important than the horses and the Mongol groom, who is seated in the shadow of a tree. The picture is signed and dated 1352 and provided with two poems by Liu Yung of Ping-mên and Wang Kuoch'i of Wu-hsing (Pl.26).

Another characteristic example of the Chao Mêng-fu tradition transmitted by Chao Yung's brush, is the short handscroll reproduced in *Chung-kuo ming-hua chi* (vol.24) in which three beautiful horses are standing in front of some trees. The horses are of the same type as those described in the early part of this chapter, all placed in side-view and executed with utmost care. The picture is signed and dated 1345 (Pl.27A). In other pictures such as the short scroll in the Freer Gallery, a similar steed is held by a Mongol groom (Pl.27B). These animals are all of the same breed, i.e. perfect representatives of the imperial horse-breeding, but they offer very little of individual interest.

It should, however, be remembered that there are also pictures of wretched starved horses ascribed to Chao Mêng-fu and his son, but none of them has been identified with certainty. Yet here may be recalled in particular a large album-leaf in *Hikkōen* (pl.55) representing an old mare which is lying on the ground with folded legs, outstretched neck and half-closed eyes; while a monkey is clinging to the horse's back. The characterization of the two quite incongruent animals becomes very effective through the contrasts and must be based on a very keen study of nature. If Chao Yung actually has been responsible for this picture, as presupposed in

the traditional attribution, it may be said to add a new feature to his artistic profile.

His name has also been attached to some very decorative pictures of large white birds in Japanese collections,¹ but as there is no *hemule* or authority whatsoever for these attributions, we have no reason to discuss the paintings at this place. The only bird-paintings which actually bear his signature represent magpies and mynahs, executed in ink only and with no insistence on decorative effect; one is dated 1319² and the other 1349.³

The most significant items in the list of Chao Yung's individual works are no doubt the landscapes. There are at least half a dozen such pictures which may be accepted as authentic and about the same number of more doubtful attributions. The best known among these is probably the River landscape with Fishermen, now in Mr. Frank Caro's gallery in New York (formerly in the Chang Ts'ung-yü Collection). It must be a relatively late work, conceived and executed under the influence of Wu Chên's art. The old decaying trees on the rocks in the foreground form an impressive silhouette against the smooth grey water where two fishing-boats are faintly visible in the evening haze. The quiet mood is reflected in the grey tones of various depth laid on with a soft and yet firm brush (in a manner recalling Wu Chên, though a little heavier).

The same kind of brushwork may be observed in the fan-shaped picture belonging to the National Museum in Stockholm, in which the old writhing trees dominate the whole field and strike a dramatic note in the composition of rough boulders and rocks along a narrow stream. The expressionistic effect is increased by the condensing of the design (Pl.28).

The picture in the Honolulu Academy is a more traditional landscape in which again influences from

¹ The best examples of this kind of paintings are in Nishi Honganji, Kyōto, and in the Kawamitsu collection.

² Cf. *Shinu Kachō Gazan*, pl.33.

³ Cf. Ōmura, *Bunjin Gaden*, I, 12.

Wu Chên and Huang Kung-wang may be traced. The broad mountain stream constitutes a background for tall leafy trees and the man who sits in their shade. The upper half of this composition is occupied by a deeply fissured mountain cone. Every detail is rendered with distinction and clearness; the brushwork is remarkable for its combination of structural definition and softness of touch. In regard to technical execution the picture would hold its place at the side of the most famous works of the period.

Chao Yung was evidently a highly gifted but somewhat uneven painter; but it was only at exceptional moments that he felt free to give expression to his own ideas and *ch'i-yün*; then he did landscapes charged with life, like the little fan-painting in Stockholm. But much of what he painted was simply a restatement of his father's concepts and in this way he became the guardian of an overwhelming artistic inheritance.

* * *

The family tradition was continued by the sons of Chao Yung, though with gradually decreasing strength and success. According to the record in *T'u-hui pao-chien* one of Chao Yung's sons, called Fêng, *tsü Yün-wên*, painted epidendrum and bamboo just as well as the father, and as "the father usually signed his name on the pictures by the son (to make them more desirable for collectors) the name of the latter is not well known". No picture signed by Chao Fêng or attributable to him has, to my knowledge, been recorded.

The other son of Chao Yung, called Lin (with the *tsü Yen-chêng*) is better known as a painter through at least four signed pictures. The most interesting of these is the handscroll in the Freer Gallery which represents a cavalcade of Tartar horsemen (done in ink with gold ornaments) which is copied after an earlier model (now in the museum in Boston) probably by a Liao painter; the others are more or less modified versions of designs by the older Chao rendered without any noticeable individual accents.

According to the inscriptions on two of these pictures, dated 1360 and 1365, they were executed no less than one hundred and fifty years after the grandfather's activity.

* * *

Besides the members of Chao Mêng-fu's family, his wife, son and brother, there were a number of other artists who, according to the records, profited by the personal instruction of Chao Mêng-fu, though devoted themselves to various kinds of painting. Three of the best known among them may be mentioned here as examples of the master's influence, which remained a central current in Chinese painting until the middle of the fourteenth century.

Ch'ên Lin is said to have been a personal friend of Chao Mêng-fu and practically of the same age (c.1260-1310). He painted every kind of subject, such as landscapes, figures, birds and flowers, "and as he received instruction from Chao Mêng-fu, he made great progress, and his pictures were not common or vulgar". This may also have been the result of his incessant copying of the old masters; we are told that "whenever he saw an old picture he made a copy of it which looked exactly like the original". No painter of the South Sung or Yüan period proved more successful in painting such copies.¹

A painter of this type can hardly be expected to have created much of original importance, but it may be useful for the historian to know some of his works since they are easily mixed up with those of contemporaries or earlier painters. The three examples of his art in the Ku-kung collection, which have been reproduced, are quite different from each other; the first is a picture of Chung K'uei standing on a slope under some leafless trees, which might easily be attributed to Chao Mêng-fu, if it did not have Ch'ên Lin's signature and date (1300);² the

¹ *T'u-hui pao-chien*, vol.V.

² *K-k, shu-hua chi*, vol.XX.

second represents a large duck standing on a river-bank, and is dated 1301 and provided with inscriptions by such prominent colleagues of the artist as Chao Mêng-fu and K'o Chiu-ssü. This is a work of the Huang Ch'üan type,¹ whereas the third is a river-landscape with some old trees on the rocky shore, bearing three poetic inscriptions and the artist's seal; it is painted with rich ink in a manner which reminds us of Chao Yung's best landscapes.² It would be hard to say whether any of these represent Ch'ên Lin's own artistic ideas or whether they should simply be taken as proofs of his great versatility. Ch'ên Lin seems to have been a representative of the growing eclecticism among the traditionalists.*

The same must have been true of Ch'ên Chung-jên from Hangchow, a somewhat younger man who also received advice from Chao Mêng-fu. "When he lived in Hu-chou, as a director of the Anting college, he discussed methods of painting every day with Chao Mêng-fu", who, according to *T'u-hui pao-chien*, "did not equal him in all matters". To this Hsia Wên-yen adds the substantiating remark that "when Chao Mêng-fu on a later occasion saw his friend's pictures of flowers and birds, which were bristling with life and comparable to the works of the old masters, he said with a sigh: 'Even if Huang Ch'üan would come back to life, he could not possibly do better than this!' So high was his estimate of Ch'ên Chung-jên."

The painter is represented in the Ku-kung collection by a rather strange picture called The Hundred Sheep.³ A great number of diminutive sheep are represented in the company of children, and in the midst of them there is a fat boy dressed like a Mongol prince and his servant with a goat, both represented on a much larger scale than the rest. The composition is said to have symbolic reference to the new awakening of life in early spring.

Other works attributed to Ch'ên Chung-jên include a scroll painted, according to the inscription, after a model by Chü-jan,⁴ and a quite different sort of landscape which, if it were not provided with the painter's seal, probably would be attributed to a

follower of Kao K'o-kung.⁵ It represents a high, deeply creviced rock rising from a misty sea and a flute-player in a boat at its foot. With this romantic air it makes an interesting motif, expressively rendered. If the attribution is correct, it must be admitted that Ch'ên Chung-jên was a highly imaginative artist besides being an excellent imitator of the old masters.

Wang Yüan, *tsü* Jo-shui, *hao* Tan-hsien, also came from Hangchow. In his early years he studied painting with Chao Mêng-fu, who gave him good advice. "As a consequence his paintings were done after the manner of the old masters, and not in the (later) Academy style. In his landscapes he followed Kuo Hsi, in painting flowers and birds Huang Ch'üan, and in figure-paintings the T'ang masters. All his works were refined and wonderful, but most particularly so the ink-paintings representing flowers and birds, bamboos and stones. He reached the highest level of this period."⁶

Wang Yüan's activity as a painter must have spanned over a wide scale of motifs; according to the above record he did landscapes and figure-paintings as well as flowers and bamboos, which might constitute a reason to introduce him here instead of in

¹ *Ibid.*, vol. VI.

² *Ku-kung*, vol. XXXIX.

³ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XII.

⁴ *Sögen*, p. 41.

⁵ *Sögen*, p. 42.

⁶ *Hua-shih hui-yao* and *T'u-hui pao-chien*, vol. 5.

* The Plate (No. 29) on which Ch'ên Lin's river view is reproduced also includes another somewhat larger album-leaf (from the former Manchu Household collection) which is signed by Wei Chiu-ting and dated 1352. The two pictures have no direct stylistic connexion and are reproduced on the same plate for reasons of economy, yet they are both of remarkable quality and so such notable examples of the high standard of landscape-painting reached by lesser-known artists during the first half of the fourteenth century.

Wei Chiu-ting, whose *tsü* was Ming-hsien, is usually counted among the specialists of boundary-painting, but he was evidently also capable of doing landscapes in the more pictorial manner of Huang Kung-wang, not to say Wang Meng, who at the time of this picture had not as yet become a leading master. The picture, which represents a river landscape divided by a mountain ridge and some pavilions along the shore, is an interesting example of the kind of pictorial compositions that became most appreciated by the Four Wangs and Wu Li.

the chapter on bamboo-painting. But no authentic landscape or figure composition by Wang Yüan has to my knowledge been preserved; his name is nowadays attached only to pictures of flowers and birds, bamboos, stones, shrubs, and blossoming trees, motifs which he treated in colour as well as in monochrome ink. The coloured paintings are mostly of small size, i.e. album-leaves or fan-shaped, and as such more difficult to judge or attribute than the larger paintings which are based on ink-drawings and in which the actual brushwork can be followed more exactly.

The small coloured paintings are most common in Japan, where they have been particularly esteemed as fitting decorations for the tea-ceremony rooms. Some of them represent a single flower, others a branch of a blossoming fruit-tree, others again a large lotus-leaf with dragon-flies or with small birds in the same intimate manner as may be seen in pictures ascribed to Chao Ch'ang. Among the best examples of this group should be recalled: A Branch of Wild Camellia (formerly Magoshi collect.),¹ Wagtails on Lotus-leaves, and A Dragon-fly on a Pea-vine, two paintings in the *Hikkōen* album (now in the T. Nakamura Collection),² and the Hibiscus Flowers, formerly in the P'ang Yüan-chi Collection,³ but none of these is to my knowledge actually signed, though most of them are marked with the painter's seal. Their artistic distinction is a matter of the sensitive execution with colours, highly finished, yet suggestive of life in nature, but they can hardly be accepted as specimens of Wang Yüan's individual style.

The larger hanging-scrolls are as a rule executed in a very neat *kung-pi* manner, sometimes with slight addition of colour. The compositions are dominated by tall bamboos or blossoming shrubs in garden rockeries by a pond or a river. There are large birds on the ground or in the water and smaller ones fluttering among feathery bamboo-leaves. The following may here be mentioned in chronological order: Two Turkeys on a Rockery; A Swaying Bamboo and Branches of a Blossoming Shrub,

dated 1344 (Chou Hung-sun Collection);⁴ A Singing Thrush in a Blossoming Peach-tree and Tall Bamboos; Ducks Asleep, dated 1346 (*K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XXXV); Bamboos and a Blossoming Gardenia by a Garden Rock; Two Ducks in Water, dated 1347 (private collection, New York); Young Bamboos and a Flowering Rose-bush on a Rocky Shore; Small Birds on the Ground and in the Air, dated 1347 (in another private collection in New York). Closely related to the two last mentioned pictures is another in the Abe Collection in Ōsaka Museum which represents a Tuft of young Bamboos on a rocky Shore, two Quails and small Birds on the Ground.⁵ It is not dated but fully signed, like all those mentioned above, and said to be painted after a work by Huang Ch'üan, known as Bamboos and Small Birds. The picture may be the same as the one described by An Lu-ts'un in *Mo-yüan hui-kuan* in the following words: "A painting in ink on paper, representing butterflies, two quails, sparrows, young bamboo-shoots with loose scales and green skins, done in a vigorous and graceful manner. The bamboos in the painting are all rendered in outline and filled out with light ink. The rocks on the hillside, the water of the stream, the wild plants and herbs are all wonderfully painted. According to the inscription in *li-shu* (it was) painted by Wang Yüan, Jo-shui, in imitation of Huang Ch'üan's Bamboos and Small Birds."

It is interesting to note that An Lu-ts'un, the excellent connoisseur of the eighteenth century, praises in particular Wang Yüan's manner of painting the bamboos in outline and then filling out the leaves with shades of ink, a manner which required a very strict control of the brush as is also confirmed by Li K'ang in his description of this technique. Wang Yüan developed it to a degree of perfection not obtained by any other of the contemporary

¹ *Kokka* 173.

² *Hikkōen* 56, 57.

³ P'ang Yüan-chi catalogue.

⁴ *Sōgen*, p. 49.

⁵ *Sōritoku*, I, 21.

masters who specialized in bamboo painting. He used it not only in painting bamboos but also for reeds, willow-leaves and flower-petals and gave thus impressions of utmost lightness as if the flowers and leaves were touched by a breath of wind.

It may thus be said that Wang Yüan holds a place of his own among the bamboo painters; he has always been particularly admired by the Chinese experts as one of the greatest men of the brush, and

with good reason. But in addition to this technical perfection several of Wang Yüan's paintings have a special historical importance as substitutes for the famous works of Huang Ch'üan, his particular model, and other painters of the early Sung period whose original creations have been lost. He was a faithful traditionalist but at the same time had a very definite individual talent and was one of the most accomplished painters of the Yüan period.

II

Ch'ien Hsüan, Jên Jên-fa, Liu Kuan-tao, Wang O and Wang Chên-p'êng

CHAO MÈNG-FU and his son were not the only painters at the beginning of the Yüan period who excelled in horse-painting; there were other prominent masters who paid special attention to this motif; it was, indeed, growing very popular as a result of the Mongols' great predilection for and constant association with horses. Among the early painters who contributed to this vogue without being exclusively horse-painters should also be mentioned Ch'ien Hsüan and Jên Jên-fa, whose activities at least in part followed lines parallel to those of the Chao family.

Ch'ien Hsüan had, as is well known, spent the best part of his life under the old regime, and he remained faithful to its traditions in his personal sympathies as well as in his artistic ideals. He passed his *chin-shih* degree 1260 (or shortly after), and died presumably fifty years later. The main part of his activity was thus practically accomplished when Chao Mêng-fu became a recognized master.

Like a few others of the old Sung artists he became known under several more or less fanciful names such as Shun-chü, Yü-t'an (Jade Pool), Sun-fêng (Peaceful Peak), Ch'ing-ch'ü, Cha-ch'uan wêng (referring to his birthplace near Wu-hsing), etc. Together with Chao Mêng-fu and six other Sung-born men he was classed among the Eight Scholars

of Wu-hsing, but while Chao Mêng-fu and some of the others accepted the invitation to enter the service of the conquerors, Ch'ien Hsüan "clenched his teeth and did not join the crowd", to use the expression of *Hua-shih hui-yao*. He lived as a hermit in the South, "went on writing poetry and painting until the end of his life", and drowned his patriotic disappointments in wine. His artistic activity is said to have been dependent on this, but the enjoyment had to be regulated according to a certain measure: "When he had not taken wine, he could not paint; and when he was quite drunk, he could not do so either; only when a little tipsy was he in the right mood for painting, then his heart and hand were in harmony". And his works were in great demand: "When he had done a picture he had no leisure to pay any further attention to it, because there were always amateurs who took it away. There are people today who have pictures with very fine and clear records to which are added false poems and mixed writings. These are frauds, not done by himself, or not works which satisfied him (even though he may have done something on them)."¹

The last remark should be kept in mind as a

¹ Quoted from *Hsi-ch'ien pai-yün t'iao*, in *Shu-hua p'u*, vol. 33, p. 4.

warning when we are trying to pick out the authentic works of Ch'ien Hsüan among the great number of paintings – some with his signature and some with fine inscriptions or colophons – which pass under his name. If such a critical selection were difficult in the painter's own lifetime, or shortly after (when the above remark was made), it must be still more so today. We must here limit ourselves to a few examples which for stylistic reasons may be accepted as his work and more or less indicative of his genius.

The early writers emphasize particularly his skill in following certain old masters: "As a figure (and animal) painter, he imitated Li Kung-lin, as a painter of flowers and birds he continued the tradition from Chao Ch'ang . . . in painting green and blue landscapes he followed Chao Po-chü", but, as was said by another critic, "his landscapes are nowadays rarely seen in the world".¹ His skill in imitating the old masters without the least aberration is furthermore illustrated by the following anecdote:² "Once he borrowed from a collector a picture representing a white goose. This he copied during the night and mounted it. The next day he returned the copy instead of the original to the owner of the picture, who did not notice any difference. The people from Hu-chou (*i.e.* Wu-hsing) inherited the style of Shun-chü; they are all famous for their skill in painting."

It may be remembered that several of the great masters of the period, including Chao Meng-fu, Wang Meng, Wu Chên and others, came from the same district, and the first-named is said to have sought Ch'ien Hsüan's "advice in painting".

The motifs for Ch'ien Hsüan's figure-paintings are partly chosen from Buddhist legends, and partly from ancient history, and often treated with a touch of humour or imagination that makes them entertaining. That is true of his representations of the Sixteen Lohans, in a scroll in the former so-called National Museum in Peking, and of The Washing of the White Elephant, a motif of which he painted at least two versions, and also of such pictures as The Emperor Ming-huang Teaching Yang Kuei-fei to

Play the Flute, and the illustration of Yang Kuei-fei Mounting a Grey Horse in order to follow the Emperor (who sits on his white horse), not to mention the Emperor Sung T'ai-tsu playing Football, and the strange Tribute Bearers with their terrible Mastiff and its Puppy, paintings known either in originals or in copies which are more or less typical of the master.

The most delicate of the above-mentioned paintings is perhaps the little handscroll (formerly in the Tuan Fan collection) in which the Washing of the Elephant is represented in adherence to a T'ang model, yet with sufficient freedom to lift the motif out of the world of ordinary human events and envelop it in a legendary atmosphere (Pl.31). The scene is dominated by the huge white animal which is seen in front-view and is so large that it reaches to the very edge of the picture. Men with long brooms are trying in vain to reach the back of this enormous creature. The beauty of the picture is, however, not only a matter of the design, but also due to the exquisite brushwork, a *kung-pi* style, combined with light touches of colour, as for instance in the red cloak of the supervising monk. Ch'ien Hsüan was an accomplished master in bringing out delicate shades in the characterization of the figures by expression and movement. This can also be observed in the two small handscrolls, one representing the Tribute Bearers with their Mastiff, and the other the Flute Lesson of Yang Kuei-fei. The design of the former is probably borrowed from a picture by Yen Li-pên, but the characterization of the strange men, one of them with the puppy in his arms, is quite Gargantuan; they have an air of *terribilità*, but at the same time reveal a certain hesitation in advancing with their frightening tribute animals (Pl.32A).

The other picture receives its distinction from the central group formed by Yang Kuei-fei and the emperor, who is helping the young lady to keep the flute in proper position. The two figures stand in

¹ Shan Hu Wang, *ibid.*

² From Hu Ch'ang-ju's *Chü-chung chi*, quoted in *Shu-hua p'u*, vol. 53.

isolation in the centre of the picture, forming, so to speak, the tongue on a balance, which is continued towards both sides by secondary actors, i.e. courtiers who are listening to the air and beating time with their hands or wooden clappers, while a dwarf is dancing to the measure. The contrast between these various figures serves to emphasize the serene gracefulness of the central group (Pl. 32b).

The picture reminds us to some extent of Li Lung-mien's *Chi-jang t'u*, the handscroll with dancing and music-making figures, one of his most vivid studies of actual life. Recalling the former and comparing it in thought with Ch'ien Hsüan's painting, we realize the difference between a creative genius and a graceful traditionalist. Both painters were inspired by "the spirit of antiquity", but they interpreted it differently according to their natural gifts and temperaments.

Another episode in the romantic story of the emperor Ming-huang and his fateful beauty is illustrated in a handscroll formerly in the imperial collection, but now on the market in New York. It represents Yang Kuei-fei trying to mount a large dapple-grey horse in order to follow the emperor who sits on a white horse ready for a riding tour. (According to the inscription he has paid a visit to the lady and presented her with an ornamented harness and a carved saddle.) Two women servants are lifting the gorgeously dressed lady into the saddle, which is being fastened by a groom, while an older man is holding the horse. The emperor watches the procedure with rather supercilious attention while some servants with tall ceremonial fans and the emperor's bow are standing close by (Pl. 33). The illustration which seems to reflect a happy and care-free moment in the romantic adventure of Yang Kuei-fei and the emperor acquires, however, a rather different significance when we read the inscription by the painter, who asks (in substance): "Why was it that the august persons here seated on fine horses were obliged to travel on mule-back when flying to distant Shu from the devastated capital?" The tragic theme of national disaster was

a source of inspiration to more than one of the late Sung painters. The moral inference of their paintings commended them to the scholarly class. It may also be noted that Ch'ien Hsüan's composition has been repeated with slight variations in a later picture which forms part of the Berlin Museum collection.

The picture seems to possess the exquisite refinement and graceful stiffness (if the expression may be understood) of the painter's genuine works, but as I have not seen the original, I must reserve a final opinion. The general characteristics of the figures and the breed of the horses are quite different from the corresponding features in the Chao pictures. The figures are thin and ceremoniously stiff, the horses short and full-bodied riding mounts with very thin legs, such as were bred in the imperial stables but not on the pasturing grounds of the Mongols. We are here, so to speak, a generation behind in time. The artist has endeavoured to evoke an archaistic impression of bygone times without renouncing his own very sensitive brush-manner.

The archaistic tendency of Ch'ien Hsüan's art is also prominent in his landscape-paintings; they were done, according to the records quoted above, in the manner of Chao Po-chü, the South Sung master who became famous through his landscapes in the so-called "blue and green manner", sometimes with the addition of gold outlines. Chao Po-chü in this respect followed the traditions of T'ang times known through the works of the two Li, father and son, which he developed into a highly conventionalized decorative manner. This seems to have appealed to Ch'ien Hsüan in his search for the refined and the old-fashioned; he tried to follow along similar lines, sacrificing something of his intimate feeling for the living beauty of nature to the stylization of the forms into a pattern of unified decorative effect.

Various stages or degrees in this development may be observed in his small landscapes; thus the scroll in the Metropolitan Museum which illustrates a passage from Tao Yüan-ming's "Returning Home", is painted in a somewhat freer and more fluent manner than the picture in Mr. C. C. Wang's

possession, which represents Wang Hsi-chih (the great calligrapher) admiring the long-necked white geese in the water, and this again is not so firmly or strictly conventionalized as the scroll formerly in the Manchu Household collection (?) representing a river view with some large trees on the rocky banks and boats on the water.¹ In this picture the stylization in line and colour is carried further than in the two other examples. The picture has thus, in spite of its very modest dimensions, obtained a kind of structural grandeur, producing (at least in a photograph) the effect of a large mural decoration. Ch'ien Hsüan must have seen excellent examples of early landscape painting and absorbed their principles of design without copying them in detail (Pl.34).

It seems rather surprising that the archaism of Ch'ien Hsüan, which is obvious in his landscapes and to a less extent in some of his figure-paintings, is hardly traceable in the pictures of flowers, birds, insects, fruits, vegetables, squirrels and rats, which form the major part of the *œuvre* nowadays ascribed to the master; their artistic merits are rather dependent on their intimate naturalism than on any kind of conventional stylization. It is not possible to enumerate them all at this place; we must limit our observations to two or three examples and refer the student to the List for the rest. A favourite composition recurring in several of the pictures consists of turtle-doves (or similar birds) on branches of blossoming fruit-trees (Pl.30). This is the motif of the very charming, though somewhat damaged handscroll in the Cincinnati Museum and in the picture in the Nezu collection in Tōkyō which was included in the London exhibition of 1935. They are both executed with very light colours and hardly perceptible outlines on paper and may be described as somewhat belated products of the kind of flower and bird-painting which was cultivated at the beginning of the Sung period by Chao Ch'ang and also to some extent by academicians of later date. The connexion between these pictures by Ch'ien Hsüan and earlier products of academic flower-painting may be

realized if they are compared with the well-known picture of Two Doves on the Branch of a Blossoming Peach-tree in the Freer Gallery (No.16.523), which with its charming design and soft harmony of greyish and reddish brown tones is a noble specimen of late Sung art. It belongs to the same kind of nature studies as Ch'ien Hsüan's best works, though executed in an easier, less finical manner (Pl.35).

Several other minor pictures of birds in blossoming trees, or in combination with fruits, are ascribed to Ch'ien Hsüan in Japanese collections and reproduced in standard publications,² but their individual characteristics are not very pronounced; some of them look more like imitations after works by Sung academicians. More definite individual features of style may be observed in the pictures representing Rats eating through a Melon (in the Hikkōen album),³ A Crab and a Radish (Murayama collection),⁴ Mice and Fruits (Shêng P'ing-ch'ên collection, Hongkong), and A Squirrel on the Branch of a Peach-tree (in the Ku-kung collection)⁵ (Pl.36). All these small animals engaged in more or less stealthy occupations are vividly characterized, sometimes with a grain of humour that makes the pictures entertaining as illustrations.

Other intimate studies from nature which may be accepted as Ch'ien Hsüan's works, represent vegetables, flowers and insects. The painter must have taken the same delight in strolling through the gardens as Chao Ch'ang, his predecessor of the tenth century, is said to have done. His pictures of Egg-plants, Melons, Pumpkins, Cabbages, etc. are not only exact in every stalk and every nerve of the leaves, but evocative of the savour of the fruits and the fragrance of the flowers.

The most brilliant illustration of life among rushes and weeds, where grasshoppers and beetles and

¹ Cf. Naito, *Shina Kaiga Shi*, pl.67.

² Examples: Bird on the Branch of a Plum-tree (Sakai), *Tōyō* IX, pl.100. Birds on the Branch of a Pomegranate (Kuroda), *Tōyō* IX, pl.101. A Sparrow and some Peaches (Asano), *Kokka* 390.

³ *Hikkōen*, pl.6.

⁴ *Kokka* 238.

⁵ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol.26.

dragon-flies swarm, is however the handscroll in the Detroit Institute of Fine Arts, nowadays known under the title *Early Autumn* (Pl.37). The happy life of insects and frogs among the plants on a muddy shore is here very entertainingly displayed with a brush that seems to have moved lightly as a morning breeze, leaving traces of light colours and thin ink which suggest the transparent haze and pale colour-harmony of an autumn morning in the south. No one who is sensitive to pictorial beauty will deny that this is a rare masterpiece of its kind, but how many would attribute it to Ch'ien Hsüan if it did not bear his seal and signature and were not accompanied by important colophons? It is quite different in style and execution from the pictures which form the nucleus of Ch'ien Hsüan's pictorial production; it has nothing of the somewhat restraining traditionalism or finicalness that we have observed in the other pictures here ascribed to him, but is painted in a freer, more suggestive pictorial manner. Consequently it seems to me more logical (from a stylistic point of view) not to include it among Ch'ien Hsüan's own pictures. It is altogether a more advanced product, more detached from the Sung tradition than anything done by Ch'ien Hsüan, who after all was one of the most faithful traditionalists in the history of Chinese painting.¹

* * *

Jên Jên-fa attained his artistic fame mainly as a horse-painter, but he also did landscapes though of a rather traditional type. He cannot be placed on a level with Chao Meng-fu or Ch'ien Hsüan, yet he holds a prominent place in the first generation of Yüan painters and is a no less outspoken traditionalist than the two older masters. The date is not known, but his birth may have occurred during the third quarter of the thirteenth century; his main activity seems to have belonged to the first half of the fourteenth century. Like Chao Meng-fu, he served as an official in the Mongol government and was made Assistant Controller of Irrigation (*i.e.* the River Conservancy Bureau) and wrote a treatise (in

ten *chüan*) called *Shui-li shu*. His *tsü* was Tzū-ming, but he became generally known under the sobriquet Yüeh-shan or Moon Mountain.

Most of the numerous horse-paintings which pass under the name of Jên Jên-fa are of a relatively simple type, representing one or several horses placed in side or front view, standing quite still, held by a groom, or walking leisurely. The pictures are thus a kind of horse photographs, skilfully coloured and finished, intended to give a proper idea of the beauty of these fashionable animals, which are of the same breed as the horses in Ch'ien Hsüan's paintings. There are a number of minor examples of this kind in Japanese collections, as also more extensive compositions, such as the scroll in the former Lo Chên-yü collection, which shows five horses and four grooms.² The picture is dated 1304 and is thus a relatively early work, but the painter has repeated the same design with some minor modifications in another scroll dated ten years later, which is in the Fogg Museum, Cambridge, Mass. Both pictures are remarkable for their technical perfection, the horses are distinguished by their colours, which vary from black to dapple-grey, but are otherwise all of the same noble type (Pl.38).

An interesting exception from this rather unified kind of horse-portraits may be observed in a scroll, *The Lean and the Fat Horse*,³ which was exhibited in Hui hua-kuan in Peking 1954. According to the explanatory inscription by the painter, the two horses contrasted have a symbolic significance: the starved and exhausted mare staggering on rickety legs with hanging head is a picture of the poor who are forced to work without surcease to the very limit of their capacity, whereas the well-nourished horse, glossy and proud, is a symbol of the kind of

¹ If this negative verdict is accepted, Ch'ien Hsüan's signature as well as the colophons attached to the picture must be explained as later fabrications. But this is not the opinion of Prof. Richard Edwards, whose beautiful article on this picture in *Archives of the Chinese Art Society in America*, 1953, should be studied by all who are interested in the problem.

² Cf. *Kokkei* 323, 403, 412, 636.

³ *Tsü*, p.136.

people who have no need to exhaust themselves with hard labour. It may be remembered that the playing and frolicking horses in Chao Mêng-fu's pictures also had their symbolic significance (suggesting carefree officials), but the social compassion which forms the undercurrent in Jên Jên-fa's picture is not known to us from any earlier pictures of the kind (Pl. 39).

The most elaborate horse-painting by Jên Jên-fa known to me is the large handscroll in Mr. Hochstadter's collection, which represents five Princes returning on Horseback from a Feast, followed by four Grooms. A few years have passed since I saw this remarkable specimen of his work, but it made a deep impression on me with its vivid rendering of the energy in the horses' movements. The picture was in this respect rather different from and superior to the average horse-paintings ascribed to Jên Jên-fa. The sturdy animals seemed to be galloping with irresistible speed, completely dominating the situation, while the noble human beings in more or less undignified postures on their backs looked like helpless appendages to them. Here an exuberance of *ch'i-yün* had been set free just as irresistible to the attentive beholder as it was to the swaying riders on the horses' backs.

Jên Jên-fa's main efforts as a painter were certainly directed towards horses, yet he also occasionally did landscapes and figure-paintings. The former are, to judge by traditional attributions, rather conventional and need not detain us, the latter are sometimes remarkable as illustrations, as may be realized from a large scroll formerly in Japanese possession but now forming part of the collection in Hui-hua kuan in Peking. It represents the famous Taoist Chang Kuo-lao performing the miracle of producing a small horse speeding in the air before the emperor Hsüan-tsung (847-859) of T'ang times. The effect of the picture is mainly dependent on the psychological opposition between emperor and thaumaturge; the former, who is more than twice as large as the latter, sits like a heavy sack of inert flesh incapable of understanding what

is going on, while the latter, a thin and nervy little fellow with a white goatee, has his mouth open in a conjuration and his eagle eyes fixed on his corpulent lord. The courtiers taking part in the séance give more eloquent expression to their astonishment than the emperor, who seems to be under the conjurer's spell. The picture is as a whole a very rare, if not unique, illustration of the kind of Taoist practices which were appreciated in high quarters, not only in the late T'ang period but also by some of the Mongol emperors, and were quite familiar also in artistic circles. But they have very seldom found their way into representative figure-paintings (Pls. 40, 41).

* * *

The more or less elaborate landscapes (mostly with figures) which traditionally pass under the name of Jên Jên-fa, such as the two large pictures in the Tōkyō Art Academy which illustrate Music and Calligraphy, Chess and Painting, inspire more doubt as to the painter.¹ They belong to the same class as some of the landscapes in Japanese collections which are ascribed to a painter called Sun Chün-tse, who is practically unknown in China. The notice about him in *T'u-hui pao-chien* is limited to the statement that he painted landscapes and figures and followed Ma and Hsia. This is also born out by the two pictures in the Seikadō (Iwasaki) collection² representing, respectively, a man seated under a jerky pine-tree on a mountain terrace overlooking a misty valley; and (the other) two men in a pavilion on a rocky ledge by a mountain stream under pine-trees rising through the mist; they are both composed according to the unilateral design well known from Ma Yüan's paintings. It should also be observed that the sharp-edged angular rocks are painted in the jerky manner, with a squeezed brush, that we observed in Hsia Kuei's and Ma Yüan's paintings. In other words, they are typical products of the academic tradition. The same is true of the very attractive little picture in Yotoku-in of Daitokuji,

¹ Cf. Tōyō, IX, pls. 101, 102 and Kokurō 121.

² Tōyō, IX, pls. 112, 113.

whereas the two landscapes with the highly ornamented pavilions in the Nezu collection reveal a more artificial manner.

There were no doubt a number of painters during the early part of the Yüan period who continued the stylistic traditions of the Sung academicians just as faithfully as Ch'ien Hsiian, Jên Jên-fa or Sun Chün-tsê, but most of their works have not been identified and their names are not recorded in the literature. Only two or three of the most eminent can here be mentioned.

Liu Kuan-tao seems to have been a prominent member of this generation, though not exactly a follower of the academic current. He came from Chung-shan in Hopei and called himself Chung-hsien; his main activity belonged to the last quarter of the thirteenth century. In 1279 he was summoned to the court to paint Kubilai Khan,¹ and a possible result of this visit may here be mentioned—a picture in the Ku-kung collection representing the emperor with a number of retainers on a hunting expedition on the plains beyond the Great Wall. There are ten members in the party and they are all mounted on fiery Mongolian steeds impatient to speed out in flying gallop over the sandy hills. Further away beyond the sand-dunes camel-caravans emerge into sight, adding a touch of local life and atmosphere to the drab coloured wide expanse that fills most of the spacious picture. It is signed by Liu Kuan-tao and dated 1280 and may well be the famous painting which pleased the Mongol emperor so much that he conferred on the painter the title of an Overseer of the Imperial Wardrobe (Pl.42).

Liu Kuan-tao was particularly appreciated; in his work he managed to combine the most wonderful points of a number of old masters, and did this with so much ease and virtuosity that it is difficult to recognize the same artist in the various pictures ascribed to him. The broadly painted large snow landscape in the Ku-kung collection, which bears his name, is thus quite distinct in concept and execution from the figure-paintings, among which Kubilai Khan's Hunting Party holds the most important

place. Beside this may also be mentioned a short handscroll in the Nelson Gallery in Kansas City, called A Poet Taking his Ease. The man is reclining on a couch placed in front of a large screen, which is decorated with a picture of a similar scene, while a table and some plants and musical instruments stand at the head end of the couch, and two women (the one with a large fan) are approaching from the opposite end. They seem to have attracted the attention of the man, who is moving his feet restlessly and holding in his hands a fly-whisk and a bamboo-stick (Pl.43).

The illustrative contents of the picture are all displayed with great accuracy and contribute to create that atmosphere of summer ease among books and plants so dear to the Chinese scholar. The composition is probably, at least to some extent, traditional; we find it repeated, with some minor differences, in a picture in the Freer Gallery (11.232), which is considered, I believe, a repetition after a Sung original. To what extent that may be true also of the picture in the Nelson Gallery, is difficult to tell, but the execution of it bears the imprint of the Yüan period. Its former attribution to Liu Sung-nien, which is reported by Kao Shih-ch'i (at the beginning of the eighteenth century) in *Chiang-ts'un shu-hua lu*, has in later times been ousted by the more probable attribution to Liu Kuan-tao, which seems to be confirmed by the two small characters *kuan* and *tao* at the very end of the scroll.*

¹ Cf. *Hua-shih hui-yao*.

* Here may also be mentioned in passing two long handscrolls, belonging to the Freer Gallery, the one composed of twenty-one and the other of twenty-four pictures, which illustrate respectively rice-culture and sericulture. Each picture is accompanied by a poem written in seal characters; the poems as well as the pictures are copied after earlier originals by Lou Ch'ih of the Kao-tsung reign. At the beginning is an inscription by Ch'ien-lung and at the end colophons signed by Chao Tsü-chün, i.e. Chao Mêng-yü, the brother of Chao Mêng-fu, by Yao Shih, a critic of the same period and some other writers. The two series are identically composed and complete each other; they were both reproduced in stone engravings by order of the emperor Ch'ien-lung in 1769 under the common title: *K'ing-chih t'u*. Their historical interest is greater than their artistic importance; they are not individual conceptions but modified repetitions of similar earlier paintings intended to offer descriptive information about China's two mother cultures.

Chang Wu, with the *tsü* Shu-hou, and the *hao* Chên hien-shêng or Chên ch'i-shêng, was a somewhat younger traditionalist, active in Hangchou about the middle of the fourteenth century. He painted figures in the *pai-miao* technique, following in this respect quite closely in the footsteps of Li Lung-mien. Several of his works are, as a matter of fact, free transcriptions of compositions by the Sung master. This may be said of the handscroll in the former National Museum in Peking, dated 1366, which represents the Eighteen Arhats, and also of another scroll in private possession in Peking, dated 1360, which illustrates the story about the Dragon King who came out of his cave to pay homage to Kuan-yin, and still more of his excellent illustrations to the Nine Songs of Ch'ü Yüan which he made (in 1346) after the model of Li Lung-mien's ink-drawings. These form the ten sections of a scroll, each accompanied by a poem, while an imaginary portrait of the poet Ch'ü Yüan forms an introductory picture to the whole scroll. An Lu-ts'ün has left a short record (in *Mo-yüan hui-kuan*) about this very remarkable specimen (now in private possession in New York) of a Yüan version of Li Lung-mien's famous painting. It may indeed serve better than many of the pictures attributed to Li Lung-mien to give an idea of the great Sung master's style. Yet it is not a copy but a free transcription in which the painter has introduced figures drawn from life to play the roles of fourth-century characters. Like most of the figure-painters of the Yüan period, Chang Wu combined his admiration for the old masters with a realistic interest in actual life, and he possessed the strength to recharge with his own sentiments and observations the formal patterns which he borrowed from masters of the Sung period (Pls. 44, 45).

Wang Chên-p'êng followed somewhat similar lines in his artistic activity. He came from Yungchia in Chekiang and was active at the beginning of the fourteenth century. His *tsü* was P'êng-mei, but he became known under the appellation Ku-yün Ch'ü-shih, The Hermit of Lonely Clouds, which was bestowed on him by the emperor Jên-tsung

(1312-1320).¹ He was occupied with various kinds of landscape and figure-painting of the kind that flourished in Hangchou during the South Sung period and also with religious figures in an earlier style and so-called boundary or measured painting (first developed in the tenth century); for which he earned particular fame.

Among Wang Chên-p'êng's landscapes may be recalled a large album-leaf (formerly in the Manchu Household collection) which represents a Man Seated on a Mountain Ledge overlooking a misty gorge, a typical composition in the best academic style which probably would be ascribed to Lou Kuan or Liu Sung-nien, if it did not bear the signature and seal of the artist.²

The well-known handscroll in the Boston Museum which represents Hariti nursing a baby in the presence of five female attendants, is a good example of his quasi-religious figure-painting. The strictly centralized design, the types of the figures and the calligraphic stylization of their garments in regular wavy folds, bespeak a guiding influence possibly of the T'ang period, which we also noticed in some of the previously mentioned wall-paintings. But Wang Chên-p'êng has translated the elements of style which he appropriated from religious paintings of the T'ang period into a kind of *pai-miao* manner which he developed through a close study of Li Kung-lin's works. This is obvious from pictures such as the one mentioned above, and it is also pointed out by the critics of the Ming period and later who have written colophons to the picture. It may be said to confirm the stylistic relation between the religious painting of the T'ang and the Yüan periods and as such possess considerable historical interest without being a work of art of outstanding importance (Pl. 46).

In connexion with this picture in Boston may also be recalled a larger scroll in the Lily collection in Indianapolis which illustrates a popular motif from Hariti legend; i.e. Demons attacking the glass

¹ The biographical data from *T'u-hui pao-chien*, vol. 5.

² *Cü'ing Kung T'ang*, pl. 10.

Bowl in which Buddha had enclosed Hariti's Son. The composition contains a medley of small figures in violent movement, running and fighting, which require very close attention to be fully appreciated; they are all done in a fine *pai-miao* manner. The mass of fighting figures, fantastic animals and fluttering banners etc., are all drawn with minute exactness, though at the same time kept together in surging waves which illustrate shifting stages in the dramatic story.

An entirely different kind of figure-painting with the painter's signature and the date 1310, was formerly in the Ti P'ing-tzu collection and is reproduced in *Chung-kuo ming-hua chi*. It represents A Toy-pedlar and two Elderly People with their Child. The figures are drawn on a fairly large scale and the rest of the composition is filled with a rich display of toys and utensils such as lanterns and balls, flags and banners, boxes and bottles and all sorts of trinkets of paper and bamboo in bright colours. Wang Chên-p'êng must have been familiar with Su Han-ch'ên's popular representations of similar motifs, but he has recast the usual composition rather freely, spreading it over a wider stage with more details, created more space, and characterized the figures – the old man in particular – with a sympathy and realistic incisiveness that goes beyond the art of Su Han-ch'ên (PL47).

Each one of the above-mentioned pictures reveals a different aspect of Wang Chên-p'êng's pictorial *œuvre*; they are all interesting of their kind, yet none of them may be said to give the key to the painter's historical fame. This is mainly dependent on his unsurpassed skill in so-called *chieh-hua*, or boundary-painting, i.e. pictures executed with the help of a ruler and a pointed brush, which gives them likeness to line-drawings. It was a technique developed by Kuo Chung-shu in the tenth century (as told in an earlier chapter) for the representation of architectural motifs and the like. Wang Chên-p'êng adopted similar principles, but mostly on a small scale. His pictures of this kind are, as far as I know, all in the size of large album-leaves, though the buildings are

highly ornate and rich in detail. Their historical character is a matter of the names (i.e. the Palace of Prince T'ang and the A-fang Palace of Ch'in Shih-huang-ti) but not supported by the architectural forms or types. They have been copied not only in ink-drawings of later periods but also in silk-embroideries (as stated in an inscription by the printer Hsia Ming-yüan on a picture in Boston), a technique that corresponded to their ornate character.

Besides such paintings of elaborate pavilions on high terraces Wang Chên-p'êng, however, also did pictures of ornate ships and dragon-boats in the same technique. There are two such pictures in the Ku-kung collection quite similar in design, as they both represent the so-called Dragon-boat Festival on the Chin-ming Lake at the Summer Palace of the Han emperors. The first, which is now somewhat damaged and dirty, is dated 1310 and the second twelve years later, a date explained in an inscription according to which the original picture was presented to the emperor in 1310; but when the elder sister of the emperor saw it, she was so impressed by it that she asked for a similar one. The painter did the second picture in compliance with her orders, but at the same time apologized in writing for the poor execution which he said was due to his old age. This second picture is still in a state of perfect preservation and shows no traces of inferior technical execution. It is signed and dated 1323.

The high appreciation bestowed in China on such examples of boundary-painting may seem rather exaggerated to Western students, but it is to some extent explained by Chao Mêng-fu in the following advice to his son Chao Yung: "In most kinds of painting it is possible to dazzle the eyes of the people even if one neglects the rules, but in boundary-painting it is not possible; here one is obliged to keep strictly to the rules." Boundary-painting seems indeed to have placed the painter under more strict rules than other kinds of ink-painting and may in this respect have been more closely akin to certain forms of archaic writing which were considered most difficult and a test for real scholars.

Bamboo-painting

I

Li K'an and Li Shih-hsing

SEVERAL OF THE leading masters of the early part of the Yüan period, whose works have occupied us in the preceding chapters, painted bamboo besides other subjects, but they did not specialize in this; it formed only a minor current in the general flow of their creative activity.

But there were other painters active about the same time who devoted most or all of their artistic efforts to this noble motif and whose fame with posterity is the result of their specialization. Through their activity bamboo-painting was again placed in the foremost rank of pictorial art – as in the time of the gentleman painters of the twelfth century – and gained an historical and aesthetic importance that has never been surpassed. This was not only a matter of artistic preference but also a result of the symbolic significance traditionally attached to the bamboo motifs. As often explained by the artists, it implied an allusion to the *chün-tzu*, the gentleman scholar or representative of all that was best and noblest in the cultural traditions of the Chinese. Bamboo-painting thus expressed ideas similar to those attached to paintings of plum-blossoms and orchids (*lan hua*) which (as we have seen) became particularly dear to the Chinese in periods of foreign domination. In addition to this the bamboo held a particular place as a test-motif in the technical training of the Chinese painter and thus also became a criterion of the painter's quality not only as a man of the brush but also as a character. Bamboo-painting formed a close parallel to Chinese script and as such mirrored the most intimate reflexes of the artist's genius.

The early masters of the Yüan period who devoted some attention to bamboo-painting were survivors from the South Sung period. This has already been noted with regard to Ch'ien Hsüan and Chao Meng-fu and his wife, but it was equally true of Kao K'o-kung and Li K'an. All these painters had their roots in the previous period. The second generation was represented by several excellent bamboo specialists such as Ku An, K'o Chiu-ssü, Wu Chên and Ni Tsan, who were active to the very end of the Yüan period, or even later. In addition to the above should be remembered a third generation, consisting of men like Sung K'o, Wang Fu and Hsia Ch'ang and others, who continued the same tradition of bamboo-painting during the early years of the Ming dynasty.

Each of these painters may be said to have represented a style of his own, yet they all followed the same general trend, the same method and principles of artistic transmutation, and it may thus be said that from an historical viewpoint their importance in some cases depends more on their participation in the prevailing vogue of bamboo-painting than on original or outstanding individual creations. Their paintings are to no small extent unpretentious "ink-plays", fugitive and charming like short poems, and more difficult to describe than to enjoy. In view of this, we shall direct attention to the general characteristics of the bamboo-painters rather than to special individual features, a mode of procedure facilitated by the excellent treatise by one of the leading masters in which the essentials of bamboo-painting are set forth in great detail.

The author of this treatise was Li K'an, and the title of his book *Chu-p'u hsiang-lu*, A Systematic (or Detailed) Treatise on Bamboo, usually called simply *Chu-p'u*, A Bamboo Treatise.

Li K'an, known under his *tsü* Chung-pin, and his *hao* Hsi-chai tao-jên, was born in Chi-ch'iu, near Peking 1245 and died 1320. At an early period he entered the service of the Mongol government and had a brilliant official career, well recorded in the historical chronicles, but of no particular interest to us, since it had only slight connexion with his artistic activity. He rose finally to the presidency of the Board of Civil Service and became a member of the Privy Council of the emperor Jên-tsung (1312-1320), who only reluctantly consented to his application for retirement. With the passing of years Li K'an's main interest, however, was more and more directed towards the study and painting of bamboo, which finally resulted in the composition of the Bamboo Treatise (*Chu-p'u*),¹ a work that has secured him a more permanent place in the cultural history of China than all his meritorious actions as an official.

The text, which exists in two or three slightly varying editions of the Ming period (besides later ones), contains not only an historical account of the development of bamboo-painting before the Yüan period and methodical advice for students of this special kind of painting, but also descriptions and classifications of the many kinds of bamboo-plants which grow in various parts of China. This is preceded by introductory chapters written by K'o Chien and Li K'an himself, which have a more intimate personal tone. The author here tells about his gradual development into an insatiable enthusiast of bamboo-painting and bamboo lore. He spared no efforts to get hold of the best specimens of bamboo-painting and travelled widely to improve his knowledge of the many species of this wonderful plant. Li K'an's introduction is not only an exceptionally vivid document of self-characterization, it also transmits something of the traditionalism and boundless appreciation of the great Sung masters

that prevailed in official artistic circles in the Yüan period. The main portion of it is here quoted in translation.

*The Author's Introduction to the Bamboo Treatise**

"In former times when I saw people painting bamboos I often watched their manner of using the brush. Their works seemed to me, to begin with, quite good, but I soon found that they did not contain likeness. I turned away from these paintings with a sigh and did not want to look at them any more, though there were dozens of them. Then I obtained some pictures by Mr. Tan-yü which were of a different kind and gave me new impulses for study. Examining into the origin of these paintings, I found that Tan-yü studied with his father, the old Huang-hua,² who had learned from Wên Hu-chou (Wên T'ung). It was the first time I heard the name of Wên Hu-chou, and I had not seen any pictures by the two old masters.

"Later on, in the company of Secretary Ch'iao Chung-shan, I saw a handscroll by Huang-hua representing a branch with a few leaves resting against a stone in greenish colour. I wondered whether Tan-yü could reach the same level. It was my desire to follow it as a model but I was not able to do so. Someone told me that, though Huang-hua belonged to the school of Wên T'ung, he used to place the bamboo-branches in lamp-light so that he could trace their shadows in his paintings. Hi-

¹ An excellent German translation of the main portions of Li K'an's *Chu-p'u*, carefully commented and studied in connexion with contemporary and later writings on bamboo-painting, was published in a series of articles by Ernst Aschwin Prinz zu Lippe-Biesterfeld, under the title "Li K'an und seine Ausführliche Beschreibung des Bambus", *Oriental. Zeitschrift*, 1942-1943. A somewhat freer English translation of Li K'an's Introduction to this treatise is included in *An Album of Chinese Bamboos* by William Charles White, Toronto 1939.

² Tan-yü was the *hao* of Wang Man-ch'ing, a painter active in the thirteenth century. He was the son of Wang T'ing-yün, whose *hao* was Huang-hua shan-jên (1151-1202). Works of his were mentioned in our discussion of painters active under the Chin dynasty and it was also pointed out that he was the nephew of Mi Fei.

* According to the edit. in *Mei-shu ts'ung-shu*, Part II, sect. V, 3.

methods were different from those of ordinary men. Tan-yu simply followed his father's manner of painting and did not find it necessary to study with anyone else. This seemed to me quite right.

"As I recalled that Tung-p'o and Shan-ku (Huang T'ing-chien) and all the famous masters of the Sung and Chin dynasties had praised Wên Hu-chou's brushwork as equal to the Creator's work, I felt sorry that I could not see his work at once. But when I came to Chien-t'ang in the *I-yu* year of the Chih-yüan era (1285) and saw more than ten copies of his work, they were not enough to arouse my admiration. I jumped to the conclusion that Su's and Huang's (high) estimate was caused by their friendship with Wên, and that connoisseurs of later times simply tried to keep in harmony with them in discussing the strong and weak points of Huang-hua and Chan-yu.

"Then I happened to meet my friend Wang Tzū-ch'ing and discussed the matter with him. Tzū-ch'ing said: 'You have probably not seen any genuine works. Our predecessors did not easily indulge in praise.' I answered: 'I have seen such works many times. How could all those large inscriptions be false?' Tzū-ch'ing said: 'How could they be anything but false?' I felt quite confused and, doubting Tzū-ch'ing's opinion, I asked rudely: 'Did you yourself ever see a real work by Huang-hua?' Tzū-ch'ing answered: 'I have certainly not seen paintings by Huang-hua, and you have never seen works by Hu-chou. How are we then to decide who is right and who is wrong? But there is an official in the palace who has a genuine picture in his collection; shall we borrow it tomorrow in order to decide for ourselves as to the proper standard?'

"The next day Tzū-ch'ing came to me with something in his hand. It was a scroll-painting representing five stalks, done with thick and thin strokes, balancing each other; the branches and leaves, which were bending and turning in various directions, were wonderfully life-like and natural; they made you feel as if you were sitting by the Wei or Ch'i River. I realized that the opinions of our

predecessors were by no means erroneous and that Huang-hua really had learned from this, and that the statement regarding his shadow-paintings was lacking in foundation. I felt ashamed that all that I had heard and seen was so limited in comparison with Tzū-ch'ing's vast knowledge; I asked him to offer a good price for the picture, so as to secure it, and made a tracing of it on oil-paper. It was then taken back to Wei-yang (to the owner). When I came again next year, in the fourth month, the picture was offered for sale, and I paid for it with twenty-five bank-notes (*i.e.* 1000 cash). This gave me much satisfaction for the rest of my life.

"Since that time I have acquired three more scrolls, and they made me drop my previous manner of working and follow them as my master. Days and months passed and I finally thought that I had reached some knowledge. Amateurs came in increasing number to ask for my pictures, consequently they were widely scattered and (wrongly) appreciated. Only Hsien-yü Po-chi said: 'Bamboos drawn in ink are refined, but it is still better to paint them in their natural colour; then they will be not only refined but also true to nature.' He encouraged me to add green and blue colours to my ink-bamboos. The pictures thus completed looked all right (in a general way) but they were not entirely good.

"I started searching for the right method again, but the common artists' works were not worth (a close) examination. As I was investigating pictures by old and modern masters I obtained a stone-engraving after Wang Yu-ch'êng (Wang Wei) of the K'ai-yüan era (713-742) which had lost its original lines through repeated rubbing. I also obtained Hsiao Hsieh-lü's picture of bamboo-shoots, but the silk of it was damaged and the brush-strokes indistinct. When I was about to make a copy of it my old friend Lin Po-ch'ang dropped in and said: 'For a long time I have had in my possession (two) pictures of a bamboo-grove by Li P'o which you no doubt would like; consequently I will present them to you.' These two pictures were both

old pieces from the Hsüan-ho collection and so beautiful that no later paintings could equal them. Through these I again learned the right method of painting bamboos (i.e. in colour)."

[The following paragraphs in which the author tries to reconstruct a genealogy of bamboo-painting through the T'ang and the Five dynasties contributes very little, if anything, to a better understanding of this art; they are based on hearsay rather than on actual observations. He winds up his account with the not unexpected conclusion that the painting of bamboo in ink as well as in colour started with Wu Tao-tzū.] Then he continues: "In the Sung period the painters of bamboo became gradually very numerous, and when Wên Hu-chou finally appeared he was like a bright sun in the vault of heaven that outshone the torchlights, or like the sound of a big bronze bell by which the tinkling of clay kettles was drowned. Even a man as bold and noble as Master Su (Su Tung-p'o) venerated him during his whole life (as his master).

"It may be that there are people today who would like to gladden their hearts in this wonderful garden of art but do not know the rules and standards. In painting coloured-bamboos I have followed Li P'o, but for ink-bamboos I followed Wên Tung. Yet, when I was carving a swan, it became more like a duck. I know that I should be ashamed (as an unworthy follower of the great masters).

"Fortunately I am living as an official in the capital under this glorious dynasty when cultural refinement flourishes richly, and as a petty official I have made several journeys which have given me the honour of meeting able and worthy men at many places and of learning special points (concerning bamboos) through conversations with them. And I had also done my best in collecting pictures for several years, before ink-bamboos came under my observation through the old Huang-hua; then ten years passed before I saw a Wên Hu-chou, and three years more before I saw bamboo-paintings in colour by Hsiao Yüeh and Li P'o. As it was so difficult for me to get as far as this, how much more

(difficult) must it not be for poor scholars who live and study in retirement?

"My love of bamboos developed still more after I retired from official service, and it has been increasing all the time. Heaven fulfils men's wishes! I travelled ten thousand li; I ascended K'uei-chi (in Chekiang), passed through Wu and Chin (Kiangsu and Hupei), crossed over the Min mountains (in Fukien) and wandered over many mountains and rivers and through forests in the south and in the east. And wherever I travelled I looked only for 'these gentlemen' (the bamboos) and examined all their species most carefully with a view to their shapes and colour, their conditions of growth, their flourishing, age and quality.

"A few years ago, through the far-reaching power of the Court, I was sent to Chiao-chih (Cochin-China). There I penetrated deeply into the bamboo country, examined strange species, and classified a great number by analysing their resemblances and differentiating their special features. As I did not quite trust what had been written about them, I took great pains in comparing and deciding, until I forgot the distinction between myself and the bamboo. I may indeed say with regard to bamboo-painting, that I have detected the wonderful skill and intention of the men of old. But it is not easy to ascertain the essence of an art.

"He who composes poems in carved seal (script) is not a full-grown man. In the Commentary to *Erh-ya* it is said: 'How could insects and fishes be important things?' Those who devote themselves to petty subjects in painting [such as bamboos] may be laughed at by men of fame. Yet I love bamboos and feel happy with them; indeed, my interest in them has grown into a passion. I fear that there are also other people in the world who are suffering from the same disease and who, since they are far removed from antiquity, have no opportunity to gain some knowledge about its traditions (with regard to bamboo-painting). Therefore I have here given complete descriptions of the two perfect methods of Li P'o and Wên Hu-chou, respectively, and written

down with great care what I have learned in former years. I have thus given an account of what I have learned about ideas, composition, and brushwork and also about things that should be avoided in painting. Nothing has been hidden. I hope that men of future days who may pay some attention to this book will not regret it."

* * *

This general, mainly biographical introduction is followed by a discussion or analysis of various kinds and elements of bamboo-painting intended to serve as guidance for painters. It is divided into two main parts, the first devoted to Bamboo-painting in Colour, the second to Bamboo-painting in Ink, and these main sections are sub-divided into chapters in which the writer discusses first Composition, Sketching and Colouring, and then, in the second section, how the Trunk, the Joints, the Branches and the Leaves should be rendered in paintings executed in ink only. These latter chapters are illustrated with drawings which greatly facilitate the understanding of some technical points in the author's dissertations.

The interest of these various chapters to Western students is somewhat unequal. They contain, as will be seen, a certain amount of theoretical and historical information besides more specialized technical advice regarding the methodical procedure, the proper way of planning the compositions and of rendering the main elements such as the stems, the branches, and the leaves, *i.e.* by proper use of the brush, the ink and the colours. In all these matters Li K'an has very little of essential importance to add to the store of knowledge inherited from the great masters of T'ang and North Sung dynasties. He bases himself particularly on Wên Tung and Su Shih, quoting their words about the secrets of bamboo-painting over and over again, but whereas their pronouncements were mostly in the form of poetic interpretations or spontaneous impressions, Li K'an elaborates the ideas into systematic descriptions of the various stages and elements of bamboo-painting. The fundamental problems are the same as

before, and also their solutions, but the approach to them is modified in accordance with the changes in the spiritual climate of the respective periods. It may well be admitted that his way of discussing and illustrating these matters brings them closer to the understanding of common practitioners than the hints and glimpses of aesthetic exaltation offered by the poet-painters of the Sung period; he is less inspiring though more explicit. His treatise was composed with a practical end in view; it was to serve as a guide for painters as well as a source of information for amateurs of bamboo. His main concern is for the proper method, the knowledge and skill to be acquired through systematic practice: "He who is able to follow the rules and principles will not cause any defects by himself . . . whereas he who is hasty and reckless will never, I fear, be able to grasp the rules and principles, or accomplish anything (worth while). Consequently, the student must start from the rules, only so can he reach the goal (grasp the art)." This deliberate insistence on formal training as the road to success in painting is certainly characteristic of the great vogue of bamboo-painting in the Yüan period when it had become more than ever a counterpart to calligraphy.

* * *

The *Hua-chu p'ü* (Essay on Bamboo-painting) opens as follows:

"Wên Hu-chou revealed the secret of bamboo-painting to Tung-p'o when he said: 'When the bamboo starts to grow it is only a shoot of one inch, yet the joints and the sheets (cuticle) are already there; everything from the cicada's belly (the root) and the serpent's scales (the sheets) to the bamboos that may grow eighty feet tall and stand straight like men with drawn swords, is there *in nuce*, from the very beginning. Bamboo-painters of today add joint after joint, leaf after leaf; how could such things become bamboo?

"To paint bamboos it is necessary to carry the whole thing first in the mind. Then, seize the brush,

concentrate your attention and fix your eyes on the thing you want to paint, and follow it up quickly. Move the brush, go straight ahead and follow what you see (as quickly) as the buzzard swoops when the hare jumps out. If you hesitate for a single moment, it is gone!

"Su Tung-p'o said: 'This is the way Yü-k'o taught me, but I could not do it. If the heart knows the right way, but one is unable to act accordingly, it is because the inner and the outer are not as one, the heart and the hand do not correspond. It is the fault of insufficient study.'

"When Su Tung-p'o thought that he could not do it, because he had not studied enough, how could later people succeed? They may know that bamboo-painting does not consist in making joint after joint and piling up leaves, but if they have not conceived the whole bamboo in their mind, from where could it then come? They covet the high and far away and try to skip over the preparatory stages by giving free play to their feelings. They rub and smear in every direction and feel quite unfettered. But there is no other short cut in the painting of bamboos than to grasp what is natural (or, self-evident=*tzu-jan*). Consequently one must do every joint and every leaf according to the (proper) method and keep on practising without ever growing tired. One must gather one's strength for a long while, rely on oneself and hold the bamboo completely in the mind, then only should one grasp the brush and go ahead, tracing what one sees (through the mind). If one does not act in this way, it is vain to grasp the brush and gaze at the thing in front; one will see nothing to trace. But he who is able to follow the (proper) rules and principles will not cause any defects of his own. Why should one be afraid of not accomplishing this? Even if one sticks too closely to the rules and precepts, one will after a time pass beyond them. Whereas he who is hasty and reckless will never, I fear, be able to grasp the rules and principles, or accomplish anything. Consequently the student must start from the rules; only so can he reach his goal."

The author then mentions the principal stages or elements of bamboo-painting in colour. The first and foremost is Composition. In discussing this he offers the following information about preparatory sketches for coloured paintings:

"One must start by making a sketch with charcoal and then scrutinize it to see whether there is anything unsatisfactory in it. The brush should not be used too soon. Only after a second examination of the charcoal sketch, and when it has been carefully corrected, can one start painting without regretting it afterwards. Painters have always regarded the composition as the most difficult thing. For all men have different affections, likings, talents, and characteristics, and even a father cannot transmit such dispositions to his own son, though the two are the closest relatives. How much less can the tongue transmit this to the brush! One cannot transmit everything.

"But there are certain points to be avoided which should be known. They are called: to bump against the sky; to fall down on the earth; to be too heavy, or too light, on the one side; joints placed regularly opposite each other; stems in straight rows; 'a bell-frame', 'a large eye'; the branches towards the front; the leaves towards the back. These are the ten faults which must not be committed. For the rest everyone may follow his own ideas."

The author then proceeds to discuss other elements of coloured bamboo-painting, but these passages are of a more technical nature and contain less of general interest. We leave them out and pass on to the chapter on Ink-bamboos called *Mo-chu p'u*, which also is linked up with the preceding remarks concerning the Composition:

"In paintings of ink-bamboos the (principles of) composition are the same as in pictures with coloured bamboos. But if one does not render the stems, the joints, the branches and leaves according to the rules, one is simply wasting one's labour, and the picture will not become perfect. There are dark and light shades of ink, and heavy or light ways of handling the brush; in moving the brush to and fro

one must know the right directions. Luxuriant growth and aridity may be expressed with dark and light (ink) or with coarse and fine (brush-strokes). In this way leaf after leaf is placed on the branches, and branch after branch on the joints. Shan-ku (Huang T'ing-chien) said: 'If the living branches do not correspond to the joints, the leaves will be topsy-turvy and not at the places where they belong'. Each brush-stroke must express an idea of life, every side must be absolutely natural and the four sides must fit together into something complete. Branches and leaves must have the movement of life. Only then is the bamboo perfect."

The author then indulges in the usual criticism of inferior bamboo-painters who make their pictures either too sketchy or too detailed and who are vulgar and coarse, because they do not know the rules; and finally returns again to Wên T'ung who as "a Sage born with knowledge" worked "in harmony with Nature . . . He kept within the rules and yet roamed beyond the dusty world. He could indulge in all the desires of his heart without transgressing the rules." Wên T'ung's method is then further particularized and illustrated with regard to different portions of bamboo-paintings, such as the stems, the joints, the branches and the leaves. A few short extracts from these parts may be added to complete our presentation of Li K'an's *Mo-chu p'u*:

"If you paint only one or two stems, you can use whatever shade of ink (colour) you like; but if there are three stems or more, those in front must be painted with darker ink and those towards the back with light ink. If you paint them all in one shade of colour, it will be impossible to distinguish between the foreground and the background. While the stem must be painted joint after joint, from the top towards the root, the idea (impetus) of the brush (*pi-i*) must go through (continue) unimpeded. At the top of the stem the joints are short; then they become gradually longer, but near the root they become shorter again."

The leaves of the bamboo may be said to offer the

final test for the brushwork of the artist; they are all fundamentally of the same shape, but must be rendered with variety and suppleness:

"The brush must be applied with strength and sharpness. It must be well filled (with ink) when brought down on the paper, and emptied (squeezed out) when lifted up again. If one pauses a single moment, the leaf becomes thick and blunt, not pointed and sharp. It is the most difficult thing in bamboo-painting; if one cannot master it, one will never do real ink-bamboos."

According to this method there are certain things to be avoided that the student should know: "If the leaves are thick, they must not look like those of a peach-tree; if they are thin, they must not look like willow-leaves. First, they should never grow alone; second, never grow in parallel pairs; third, never grow like the character *i* (乚); fourth, never grow like the character *ching* (井); fifth, never grow like the fingers of a hand, or resemble (the wings of) a dragon-fly. Every leaf, whether curved or straight, turned outward or inward, slanting down or pointing up, beaten by the rain, or fluttering in the wind, has its own appearance. If they are all made according to the same pattern, one is simply blackening the silk."

* * *

Li K'an's paintings are nowadays not very often seen, but those which have come under my observation are excellent proofs of his skill in applying his theories in practice and following closely in the footsteps of the old masters. Foremost among these should be remembered the large handscroll which has been divided into two almost equal parts (possibly already in the Ming period), of which one is in the Hui-hua kuan in Peking and the other in the Nelson Gallery in Kansas City. It represents tufts or clumps of wide-spreading bamboos which are cut at the foot and the top so as to fit into the horizontal format. To the section now in Peking is attached a colophon written in large characters by the painter and dated 1307, whereas the section in Kansas City has an inscription according to which it was painted

for a friend called Hsüan-ch'ing, who recited a poem on the beauty of bamboos. The poem is copied in the first colophon written by Chao Mêng-fu in 1308, and after this follows a second colophon written the following year by Yüan Ming-shan, who also was a prominent official and sometime served as President of the Board of Rites.

It is a pure ink-painting, and the artistic significance of it depends mainly on the brushwork and the gradation of tone. The general principles of the pictorial treatment are much the same as in the bamboo-paintings ascribed to Wên T'ung. The branches with their twigs and leaves are spread out widely towards both sides in successive vertical layers, marked by gradual increase in tone, so that the front layer becomes the darkest and the most remote layer (in the background) the lightest. This was also the method of Wên T'ung, but it has become more accentuated in an exceedingly intricate network of branches and leaves. The same model apparently was also of importance for the painting of the leaves, though the individual differences here become more noticeable; the touch of Li K'an's brush is rather stronger or sharper than the ductus of Wên T'ung's brush. By insistence on the formal perfection he loses something of the spontaneous freshness which endows the earlier bamboos with irresistible charm.

The long lanceolate leaves, sometimes pointed and stiff like spearheads, sometimes more like tattered wing-feathers, are painted with quick decisive touches of a well-soaked brush. They stream out in every direction, some rising, some falling, others bending and twisting or crossing over each other, but in spite of the astounding skill, not to say virtuosity in the handling of the brush, it must be admitted that the general impression of these luxuriant bamboos is not entirely free from the kind of technical monotony that betrays the theorist rather than the painter (Pls. 48, 49).

This kind of relative stiffness or formality is still more noticeable in some of Li K'an's hanging-scrolls with bamboos. There were two of them in the

exhibition in Hui-hua kuan (one mainly in ink, the other with addition of greenish colour), both representing two or three slim stalks of bamboo growing from chinks between boulders or in fissures of the rocks. A third picture of a similar type (belonging to the Shanghai Museum) is reproduced in *Gems of Chinese Painting* (vol. I, pl. 9). It is dated the year before his death (1319) and may be said to confirm the impression of his supreme skill in transmitting the formal beauty of the bamboos in a carefully finished natural script.

Li K'an was no doubt the most thorough and highly specialized bamboo painter in China before the Ming period, yet he occasionally also did other things, such as old pine-trees on rocks, as may be seen in the Ku-kung collection and the Lily collection in Indianapolis. These too are painted in adherence to earlier renderings of the same motif, known from the works of Li Ch'êng, Hsü Tao-ning, Kuo Hsi and other painters at the beginning of the Sung period, but if we compare Li K'an's old pine-trees with those of his predecessors, we must admit that he represented them less dramatically, but with a degree of formal exactness that was unknown to the painters of the eleventh century. Li K'an was just as much of a naturalist in doing these pine-trees as in his bamboo-paintings. He gives us a clear and convincing account not only of what he had seen with his searching eye, but also of what he had experienced in his creative mind in contemplating such hoary guardians of decaying forests.

This becomes most evident if one compares Li K'an's old trees (Pl. 50) with those painted by his son Li Shih-hsing (1282-1328). Some of the pictures by the younger Li are free versions of the father's compositions, as witnessed by examples in the Fogg Museum in Cambridge, Mass. and in the Ku-kung collection. They are still faithful to the old patterns in their designs, but the somewhat spiritless manner in which they are painted makes us realize that the artistic significance of all these bamboos and pines is something more essential than the formal patterns or naturalistic accuracy.

II

Wu Chên, Ku An, K'o Chiu-ssü and other Painters of Bamboo

We have in a previous chapter given a short account of the bamboo-paintings by some of the contemporaries of Li K'an – Chao Mêng-fu, Kuan Tao-shêng and Wang Yüan – who all treated the subject with marked success without specializing in this kind of painting as much as Li K'an. In their pictures the bamboos are usually combined with tufts of grass or epidendrum, or serve as a setting for a figure composition as in a famous picture by Chao Mêng-fu (now lost) which represented the seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove. Chao Mêng-fu's high standing as a calligraphist made him eminently fitted to be a master of bamboo-painting too; in fact, as far as we know, he did such things preferably in the form of horizontal scrolls, developing the motifs in a continuous sense like the verses of a poem or a musical composition. The most beautiful examples of such a painting by the master mentioned in a preceding chapter is the scroll in the C. T. Loo collection, representing Bamboo and Epidendrum, which was painted for a friend called Chou-fu and later accompanied by no less than twenty-nine colophons.

Kao K'o-kung (1248-1310), the oldest of the landscape-painters to whom we shall revert presently, became also known as a painter of bamboo, though no such picture of his has to my knowledge survived. We are, however, told by contemporary critics that "he liked to paint bamboos in ink, and the best of these were not inferior to Wên T'ung's painting"¹ – an appreciation which probably seemed well merited to himself, because he wrote on a picture of his own as follows:

"The bamboos painted by (Chao) Tzû-ang are divine (spirited) but not true to nature; Chung-pin's (Wu Chên?) bamboos are true to nature but not divine. These bamboos (of mine) are both divine and true to nature, because I have combined the two gentlemen"² – an estimate which, even if it contains

only half the truth, makes us anxious to find a bamboo-painting by Kao K'o-kung.

The following generation included several prominent painters who devoted much study to the bamboo motif, either in combination with other elements of landscape, as with Ni Tsan (whose works will be studied in a later chapter), or as an independent symbolic means for expressing their reactions to the rhythm of nature. This was the case with Wu Chên as well as with the bamboo specialists K'o Chiu-ssü and Ku An.

Wu Chên, or Mei-hua tao-jên, had the same love for bamboo as for the plum-blossoms after which he was named, and he expressed this love or devotion to budding and young bamboos in poems as well as in paintings. Seldom have the two arts been more intimately conjoined than in Wu Chên's bamboo-studies with their accompaniment of lyric improvisations, and never has the significance of this particular motif been revealed more attractively than in Wu Chên's *hsi-mo*, i.e. ink-plays, said to be done "as an overspill of the scholar's poetic writings". They may, indeed, be called writings in pictorial symbols rather than paintings, yet they possess qualities which after all have their appeal to Westerners also who are not able to interpret the accompanying poems, which are written in freely individualized running script.

The album in the Ku-kung collection known as *Mo-chu p'u* is an excellent collection of such bamboo studies. It contains twenty-four double leaves, many of them with inscriptions and some dated 1350. The pictures are done with a well-soaked brush and the ink has been applied richly in the long elliptic leaves, whereas the tender twigs are drawn so lightly that they seem to disappear in the paper. The curving and bending of the stems and the

¹ From *T'ung Wên-pian Po-hü chi*, quoted in *Shu-hua p'u*, vol. 53.

² From *Wu-ch'i chi*, quoted in *Shu-hua p'u*, vol. 53.

branches, the swaying of the leaves, the locking strength of the joints, and the fresh vigour of the new shoots are all reflected in the movements of the brush which seem to follow the actual pulsation of the life-giving sap (Pl. 52).

The inscriptions on these pictures are noted down with great speed in a running style akin to the prevailing rhythm of the designs. Some of them are copies of poems by Su Tung-p'o or lyric improvisations; others are free interpretations of classic stories referring to bamboos, for instance the note according to which Confucius, on the occasion of a visit to Ch'i-chou, in the state of Wei, became so absorbed in the melodious sighing of the bamboos, that he forgot to taste meat for three months and then said to Kung-sun Ch'ing: "Human beings will grow thin without meat and vulgar without bamboos". To which the painter adds: "When Mei tao-jên painted this, he did it in order to rid himself of vulgarity".

A number of Wu Chên's short poems, written on bamboo-studies as well as on other pictures, have been made accessible in a collection published under the title *I-mo* (Ink Remains) about the middle of the seventeenth century by the painter Ch'ien Fên, called Pa-huan tao-jên. They form a rather mixed lot of lyric jottings some of which, however, contain interesting clues to the painter's ideas, his interpretations of the bamboo motif and his manner of handling the brush.¹

Wu Chên had evidently absorbed the essentials of the Taoist view of nature, as is also confirmed by the name under which he became best known - Mei-hua tao-jên, the Plum-blossom Taoist. He was not content to seek inspiration merely from an intimate study of the living shapes and patterns of bamboos and plum-blossoms; he strove for communion with the very souls of these tender products of nature.

The following lines with their references to Chuang-tzu's stories about the cook and the wheelwright who were guided by their knowledge of Tao, are in this respect significant:

"When starting to paint, I myself do not know -
I suddenly forget the brush in my hand;

but wouldn't the cook and the wheelwright
have worked just like this?"

Wu Chên had little patience with pretending connoisseurs and worldly men; he lived in retirement and found company with trees and plants. To him they became like personal friends with whom he could converse, and who responded better than any human beings to the dreams and longings of this poor and lonely poet. Apostrophizing the wild bamboos, he calls them the most lovable of all . . . because they show the proper spirit (demeanour); they hold aloof from thorny shrubs (i.e. coarse and rough things) and grow by mountain walls and overhanging cliffs. Their hearts are swept (of pride), and their joints (i.e. moral principles), are strong, and so on. Or, more shortly and poetically expressed:

"Standing firm and upright in the frost - lonely in the moonlit night: if you realize the principle of humility, what could give the heart more ease?"

He watches the bamboos in his own garden day and night, in spring and autumn. The reactions in his heart are sometimes hopeful, sometimes sad. When he sees the bamboos under the moon, their shadows forming living patterns on the ground - and on the paper windows - he hums a ditty:

"The moon is rising over eastern mountains
and spreads her light on bamboos in my yard.
The clear tune (that I) the Tao-man is whistling
is but for them, my only loves."

Another time he writes: "Tender are the flowers of spring, willows swaying softly in the wind, but these gentlemen alone (i.e. bamboos) will remain the friends of winter's cold."

Bamboos were an inexhaustible source of inspiration to the man of the brush; but to the old sage and follower of Tao they became symbols also of moral integrity, purity and humbleness of spirit, the so-called "emptiness of the heart". He was attached to them with every fibre of his soul and found in them (and in the lore about them) a strange encouragement for heart and mind. It is confirmed by

¹ Cf. *Mei-shu ts'ung-shu*, Part III, 1. Chapt. 4.

many allusions, as for instance in the following lines:

"Their leaves are trembling in a gentle wind,
their twigs extending in the clear rain.
He who can grasp and fill his heart with them
is like the mountain-hermits Hsü and Ch'ao.¹

The linking of bamboos with old sages who have become symbols for the utmost purity and humility is significant for Wu Chên as a painter. There was nothing that he despised more than vulgarity, outward show or ostentatiousness; he had learned by observation that the most gripping effects of nature could be discovered in the simplest things and that a single twig of bamboo could serve as an instrument for an artist's thought just as well as a whole landscape.

We shall have occasion to return to Wu Chên's landscapes in a later chapter, but here may still be added a word or two about bamboo-paintings whose artistic significance has been attained by the kind of aesthetic economy or exquisiteness that was the secret of Wu Chên. One of these pictures is in the Ku-kung collection; it represents two slender stems with a few drooping leaves, growing by a mossy stone. The extreme simplicity, not to say poverty, of the design would perhaps give rise to an impression of emptiness if it were not balanced by the prominent inscription in five parallel lines (more difficult to read than to enjoy as an ornament) which is dated 1347 (Pl. 57A). The mutual support or balance between the pictorial design and the inscription is still more obvious in the picture in the Freer Gallery which represents on a very tall and narrow scroll a wind-shaken slender bamboo branch together with three long lines of writing. The bamboo spray is so lightly painted that it seems almost to be blowing out of the picture; the long leaves flutter beyond it on the right, indeed the curving spray occupies only a minor portion of the picture field. It might flow away altogether if it were not held in place, so to speak, by the three long lines of the inscription, which function as a kind of backbone to the whole composition. Their importance is also

increased by the historical information regarding the picture (Pl. 51B).

The painter tells that he did this picture in the spring of 1350 (at the age of 71) when he was strolling with a friend in the neighbourhood of Hu-chou. When they came to a place called Chia Yün-lao they found a broken stone tablet there which contained the engraving of a wind-blown bamboo-branch which Su Tung-p'o had painted at this place (some 250 years before) when he was prefect of Hu-chou. Though the tablet was broken Wu Chên was deeply impressed by the drawing and "quickly made a copy and achieved a likeness".

The simple picture may thus be said to possess the double interest of an historical and aesthetic document, as it transmits a design by Su Tung-p'o in a faithful rendering of Wu Chên.

* * *

Ku An and K'o Chiu-ssü were both excellent bamboo-painters and highly specialized in this art, but their approach to the motif was different from that of Wu Chên; they were not poets but merely men of the brush and they reached a degree of technical skill and dexterity that has hardly been surpassed by any later men in this field.

Ku An, whose *tsü* was Tung-chü, came from Yang-chou in Kiangsu. He may have been born at the end of the thirteenth century, because he was appointed a judge in Ch'üan-chou in the Yüan-t'ung era (1333-1335). His principal models for bamboo-painting are said to have been Hsiao Yüeh (of T'ang) and Wên Tung, but if we may draw some conclusions from his still preserved works, he

¹ The two sages referred to in the last line are probably the most exquisite examples of purity and humbleness recorded in history or legend. When the emperor Yao offered the throne to Ch'ao, he declined and went and washed his ears to free them from the defilement of such worldly contamination; and Hsü is said to have acted similarly when offered the throne. He used to drink from the brook in the hollow of his hand, and when a charitable person offered him a gourd, he hung it up on a tree near his hut. But the wind whistling through the gourd produced a sound which was pleasing to his senses, and to escape from this contamination he threw the gourd away. Cf. Giles, *Biographical Dict.*, 200 and 797.

transposed what he learned from the old masters quite freely into a style of his own. His most outstanding pictures in the Ku-kung collection represent tufts of bamboo on a stony slope shaken by sudden gales.¹ The branches with their long leaves are all fluttering in one direction, but the slender stems seem to be resisting the assault of the hurricane. Seldom has the violence of wind been more suggestively rendered, or the combat between the elements of nature been brought out more clearly in a pictorial symbol (Pl. 53).

In some minor paintings (in the Cincinnati Museum and in private collections in China)² the motif is reduced to one or two detached branches or the top section of a bamboo-plant, but nevertheless still has the resilient strength that is so impressive in the above-mentioned bamboos in the wind. The brush-strokes are firm and quick, imparting a quality of decision to the painting, which consequently seems more like a piece of excellent calligraphy than like a pictorial rendering in tonal values.

K'ò Chiu-ssü, with the *tzü* Ching-chung and the *hao* Tan-ch'iu, was born 1312 in Tai-chou in Chekiang, and died 1365. He was a gentleman-painter of the old scholarly type and a prominent connoisseur of antiquities and writings who in the T'ien-li era was entrusted with the task of examining the imperial collections of writings and pictures housed in the K'uei-chang ko. He was esteemed for his literary culture no less than for his expressive brushwork. "Some people thought that he was the only great bamboo-painter after Wên T'ung." He seldom represented the bamboos alone or detached, more often combined with stones and old trees into compositions of remarkable pictorial effect. His ink flows very freely and his brushwork has a richer pictorial quality than is to be found in the works of any other bamboo-painter. His best works are not written down like the bamboos by Wu Chên or even Ku An, but conceived and painted in an atmosphere of light and shade.

One of the most impressive examples of K'ò

Chiu-ssü's mastery as a bamboo-painter is the large picture in Hui-hua kuan which is signed and dated 1338. The composition, which consists of two tall bamboos growing by a garden rock, is the same as in several of his pictures, but it is developed on a larger scale than usual, which serves to emphasize the pictorial beauty. We are reminded of An Lu-ts'un's description of a similar picture dated the same year: "Two stems of bamboo, done with shades of dark and light ink according to the (right) method. K'ò Chiu-ssü followed Wên T'ung. Yet he created a manner of his own which was dense (close knit) and firm. Below he painted with abundant life-breath a stone in the manner of Tung Pei-yüan. At the left side of the picture is an inscription, according to which it was done in the year 1338, when the artist was staying in Ching Pi Ko."

It may be of interest for a proper appreciation of K'ò Chiu-ssü as a bamboo-painter to note that he also signed a smaller and quite different picture in the same year as the one described above. It represents only the top section of a so-called phoenix-tailed bamboo and forms part of General Chang Chün's collection in Tai-peh. Nothing could be simpler than this very narrow scroll of a slender stem and a few leaves which hover like large butterflies on almost invisible twigs, yet it is enough to make us feel the youthful grace and freshness that belong to the young bamboo on a spring morning.

K'ò Chiu-ssü's bamboo-paintings have all something of the same charm and vital breath; it seems so natural and inherent and in the motif. Yet it is only by the response in the artist's soul and through the touch of his brush that this *ch'i-yün* can be made discernible in a picture. To describe several of these bamboo-paintings in the Ku-kung collection and in private possession, seems hardly necessary because they are mostly of the same type, even though each reflects a different mood. Besides bamboos K'ò

¹ K.-L. *shu-hua chi*, vols. I and XXXVI. The former picture is dated 1350.

² Cf. *Chung-hua*, I, p. 113 (Ti P'ing-tzû coll.) dated 1345 and *Shên-chou ta-kuan*, vol. 4, dated 1349. The earliest dated picture is a bamboo in the Voretzsch collection from 1342.

Chiu-ssü also painted plum-blossoms and landscapes (Cf. *Ku-kung shu-hua chi*, vols. XXV and XXXVIII), but they are not of the same superior quality as his paintings of bamboo (Pl. 54).

* * *

Among the lesser known men who followed in the wake of the leading masters mentioned above and formed, so to speak, the aftermath of bamboo-painting in the Yüan period, were several prominent men of talent who also are represented in the Ku-kung collection. Some of them were little-known monks or hermits, others government officials who practised the art as gentlemen painters.

Chang Yen-fu and Fang-ya belonged to the former class. Chang Yen-fu, known as Chang Liu-i, was a Taoist who lived in Peking about the middle of the fourteenth century and is said to have painted landscapes and horses. He has, however, also signed a charming picture with some slender bamboos and jujube brambles by a stone (belonging to the Nelson Gallery in Kansas City). The brushwork is very elegant, perfectly controlled and refined. Through some of the numerous inscriptions on the picture it appears that it was painted as a record or a souvenir of a meeting of a group of artists in 1343 and presented to the painter Shêng Mou (Pl. 55).

Fang-ya, who lived at the very end of the Yüan period in Su-chou, is said to have been ordained as a priest and to have been a close friend of Ni Tzan. He is not recorded in the usual books, but is mentioned by Li Jih-hua, who says that he imitated Su Tung-p'o as a bamboo-painter. The picture by him in the Palace Museum dated 1382,¹ which represents a few slender bamboos and a garden rock, is a rather subtle work distinguished by a quality of lightness, like a short lyrical poem, but to what extent it is reminiscent of Su Tung-p'o's bamboo-painting is, alas, a query to which we have no answer.

T'an Chih-jui may also have been a priest or a monk; he is not mentioned in any of the Chinese records, only in *Kindaikan Sayūchoki*, and as furthermore all his known pictures (seven or eight pieces)

are in Japanese collections,² the supposition that he passed part of his life in Japan is tempting. The pictures are not like most Chinese bamboo-paintings reduced to a few stems, but developed into more important landscape compositions in which bamboos grow in tufts on slopes between boulders and rushing streams. The atmosphere is filled with moisture, condensed into a misty veil around the bamboos, which are painted with a rather soft brush and rich ink that give them the appearance of dark plumes waving in the grey air. The pictorial, not to say colouristic, effect is here further developed than in most of the above-mentioned specimens of bamboo-painting, which sometimes seem more like masterpieces of calligraphy than like paintings.

Sung K'o and Chang Shên were both gentlemen painters esteemed for their literary talents no less than for their artistic achievements. Sung K'o, whose *tsü* was Chung-wên and *hao* Nan-kung, was born in Suchou 1327 and served in the Hung-wu era as a governor of Fêng-hsiang in Shensi. He died 1387. He was at the time considered as one of the "Ten Men of Talent" and particularly famous as a calligraphist, but also distinguished as a bamboo-painter: "On a foot square of silk he could paint thousands of stems . . . as dense as showers of rain or clouds of smoke", yet distinctly with all their sprays and leaves, as may be seen in the handscroll in the Freer Gallery (dated 1369) (Pl. 56). The composition is somewhat similar to some of T'an Chih-jui's paintings, but the bamboos are rendered in a more refined and sprightly manner, suggestive of the wavy rhythm of the individual plants. In a colophon on a bamboo-painting by Sung K'o a man called Lu Hsüeh-shih characterized the painter as follows:³

"The world knows that Sung K'o was a good writer, but it does not know that he painted bamboos as wonderfully as in this picture. I have read his own writings on ink-bamboos in which he says: 'The stems should be painted like seal characters (*chuan*

¹ *Ka-kung*, IV.

² *Kokka* 468, *Tōyō*, vol. IX, *Tōmō*, p. 208, etc.

³ *Shu-hua p'u*, vol. 86.

and *chou*), the leaves like *fên* and *li-shu* (official style), the branches like formal and grass characters (*chên* and *ts'ao*), the flowers and seeds as lightly as drafts for writing. If one observes this very closely one will find that the manners of handling the brush all have their origin in the different styles of writing; able men do not confine themselves to one single manner¹; which is true."

The Chinese appreciation of bamboo-painting as a close parallel to calligraphy could hardly be more definitely expressed.

Chang Shên, *tzû* Shih-hsing and *hao* Yün-mên shan-ch'iao, was also an official (he served as a governor of Chekiang) and a well-known amateur of painting and calligraphy, who enjoyed the company of artistic friends such as Ni Tsan and Ku An. A small picture (two feet square) in the Ku-kung collection has been published as a record of the friendship of these men who are said to be responsible

for various portions of the composition; namely, an old decaying trunk (said to be by Chang Shên), a few sprays of bamboo (by Ku An), and a stone (ascribed to Ni Tsan, though of later date).¹ A large inscription in bold grass-characters by Yang Wei-chêng adds a very effective note to this loosely knit composition, which has a certain historical interest even if it is not altogether an authentic specimen by the three friends.

The painters who carried on the tradition of bamboo-painting from the Yüan into the Ming period were more than can be enumerated at this place, because this speciality had at the time grown into an important current within the general flow of ink-painting. It flourished abundantly and was taken up again by some of the best masters of the younger generation, such as Wang Fu and Hsia Ch'ang, to whom we shall return in a later chapter.

¹ Cf. *K-ê, shu-hua chi*, vol. V.

Landscape-painting

I

The New Attitude

THE MOST important contributions to the development of pictorial expression made in the Yüan period were due to the landscape-painters. The works of the leading masters in this field reveal a search for new pictorial interpretations of the motifs, a more intimate penetration into the soul of nature and a more sensitive rendering of its shifting moods than we find in the paintings of the South Sung masters. Landscape-painting became more than ever an instrument for the individual temperament, and to some extent detached from time-honoured schools and manners of brushwork.

Many of the painters lived in relative seclusion, far from the market places of the world, devoting themselves almost exclusively to their studies of nature, their meditations and their work with brush and ink, whether in painting or in writing. It is told of some of them that they spent months and years roaming about in the mountains, or travelling along rivers and lakes, in order to observe the ever-shifting movements of clouds, listening to the messages of woods and waters. Their art was ultimately a reflection of their lives and characters, simple and unconventional, sensitive, yet firm, unconcerned with any appeal to the public, inspired by the eternal quest for the soul of nature. They were indeed painters and poets of what we would call a romantic type, with a pantheistic comprehension of nature; and one may wonder whether they would not have expressed themselves more exclusively in poetry if they had lived in the Western world, for their paintings are to an unusual degree creative writing in symbols of visual shapes transformed by brush and ink.

In many of their paintings the poetic inscriptions are hardly less significant than the pictorial designs. The two elements served the same purpose; both were means of expressing an inspiring thought or a vision, and sometimes they completed each other also in a formal sense. The inscriptions thus begin to gain an importance that they never had in the Sung period: they may contain information about the motif, records of its associations and memories, or poetic transcriptions of inspiring thoughts, yet at the same time function as supporting elements in the decorative design. This is most obvious in minor ink-paintings such as sketches of bamboos and landscapes in which the rhythm of the painting is, so to speak, continued in the writing, or *vice versa*, and where the conjunction of the two elements is the life-nerve of the work. Such paintings are not to be looked upon simply as pictorial patterns; they must be read as poems written in conventional symbols. This increasing importance of the inscriptions, from a formal as well as a literary viewpoint, opened the door for a parallel development of writing and painting which was carried on with individual variations during the Ming period and later.

On the other hand, it may be noticed that the human figures which had gained a prominent place in the landscapes of the South Sung period, disappear or become relatively insignificant in the compositions of the leading Yüan masters. They seem to have lost their function as intermediaries or representatives of the human point of view, which they maintained so successfully in the landscapes by Ma Yüan and Hsia Kuei. The great landscape-painters of the Yüan period had no use for such

illustrative additions, because their identification with nature was more complete, their endeavour was not to concentrate the beholder's attention on the human element or to make him see with the eyes of an extraneous actor, but to take him right into the actual life of nature and make him feel its pulse. This becomes perhaps more noticeable through the absence of all distracting elements than through the introduction of any new ideas or decorative formulas. The general tendency was towards simplification without loss of the essentials of the motif, as may be seen for instance in the landscapes by Huang Kung-wang and Ni Tsan, which sometimes have the character of ink-sketches rather than of finished paintings.

This striving for immediacy and spontaneity of execution is, however, balanced by a marked increase in the optical realism of the studies. They are not written down like abstract specimens of calligraphy or rendered as seen from above, but more or less constructed from the ground in such a way that we get an impression of rising and receding planes. This does not mean that the painters of the Yüan period were trying to introduce a geometrically constructed perspective or a fixed point of view for their landscape designs, simply that the most advanced among them felt the need of increasing the optical illusion by representing the scenery as seen from the level of the beholder and consequently with a lower horizon than was common in earlier epochs. It was an approximation of spatial relations or limits rather than a definite new accomplishment, or in other words, a gradual change from the abstract conception of imaginative (unlimited) space, as in the landscapes of preceding centuries, to a more realistic approach to this problem; and the impetus given in this direction by the Yüan painters was taken up and further developed by the leading masters in the Ming period.

This development, which was inspired by an ever closer study of nature, an increasing desire to bring out the actual meaning and reality of the motif in a convincing form, may also be observed in the

painters' use of brush and ink. In spite of the great differences or diversities in the brushwork of the various masters, it must be admitted that it reveals in most cases a tendency towards pictorial expressionism. The best among these painters knew how to interpret the motifs in values of tone, of atmosphere and light. Some of the most progressive among them used the ink in a manner which reminds us of the colouristic methods of so-called impressionist painters of modern times, i.e. distributing it in spots and dots to suggest light and space, forms dissolving in an atmosphere rather than solid shapes or definitions by line. Generally speaking, the development of the technical methods served pictorial ends, but it was stimulated by the painters' intimacy with nature, and their endeavour to transmit in their landscapes not only an approximate semblance of the motifs but also their individual features and life-breath.

All these landscape-painters were in later times classified as followers of the "Southern School". They were said to continue the traditions of Tung Yüan, Chü-jan and Mi Fei, but the connotation refers more to the brushwork and technical methods than to aesthetic ideals, a fact which is usually expressed in the Chinese accounts by the often recurring phrase: "He followed the manner of Tung Yüan and Chü-jan but later, when growing older, he formed a school (or manner) of his own". As a matter of fact, each of the leading masters formed a manner of his own. They may all be classified as "romantics" from an aesthetic point of view, and as "expressionists" or "idea-writers" from a technical viewpoint; but their individual temperaments are reflected in their handling of the brush and the ink.

Ni Tsan, who himself was one of the greatest of these painters, made the following note about the masters whom he considered most important (he enumerates four, though not exactly the traditionally accepted "Four Great Masters"):

"Among the painters of mountains, forests, water and rocks, active in the present dynasty, there is president Kao (K'o-kung), in whose works the

resonance of the life-breath (*ch'i-yün*) is restful and easy. Chao Jung-lu (*Mêng-fu*), whose brushwork is lofty and distinct, Huang Tzū-chiu (*Kung-wang*), whose manner is astonishingly free, and Wang Shu-ming (*Mêng*), whose style is luxuriantly rich

and refined. Each one of them is of his own class and different (from the others), but I admire them all and have no criticism to offer. I know no one who would be their superior."¹

¹ Quoted in *Shu-hua p'u*, vol. 54.

II

Kao K'o-kung and some of his Followers

The oldest and, according to some critics, foremost among these great landscape-painters was Kao K'o-kung (b. 1248, d. 1310, or later). His original name was Shib-an, his *tzü* Yen-ching, and his *hao* Fang-shan (commonly called Fang-shan lao-jên). He was, strictly speaking, not a Chinese by birth, but of foreign descent; the family had immigrated from Eastern Turkestan, but lived at the time of his birth in Ta-t'ung (Shansi). He received a classical education and had a quick and brilliant official career (like so many foreigners). At the age of 26 he entered the service of the Board of Works and rose gradually in the degrees until, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, he became President of the Board of Justice; but these high government positions did not prevent him from keeping up personal relations with artists of less distinguished social grade. Ni Tsan, who had a boundless admiration for this nestor among the landscape-painters, characterizes him as "a pure man, surpassing the common type and outshining the vulgar world". He tells, furthermore, how Kao K'o-kung rented a house in Hangchow, where he could stay as an artist: "Whenever he was at leisure he took his stick, a bottle of wine, and a book of poetry and sat down on the bank of the Ch'ien-t'ang river, looking out over the mountains and wavy hills of Chekiang, observing the appearing and disappearing (rising and sinking) of the clouds and mist as if trying to grasp them. When not occupied with official

business or literary writing, he used the brush in painting, thus expressing the lofty concepts of his heart."²

According to other recorders, Fang-shan lao-jên did not paint easily. But when he was elated through the influence of wine, or felt happy in the company of some good friends, he would take silk or paper and ink, grasp the brush and move it freely, carried away by inspiration. It was like the work of a ghost or a spirit; it could not be explained.³

The old president must have been a man of an impressive character and tremendous energy who could wield the brush with more strength and abandon than ordinary painters. He did not spare the ink in unrolling the clouds and in spreading the rainy atmosphere of an autumn eve around the mountains. This may be observed in some of his still preserved works and felt in the descriptions of paintings lost today, as for instance, the Autumn Mountains in Evening Mist (dated 1299), about which Ni Tsan made the following note:⁴ "White clouds; a solitary crane. Evening is drawing near. A boat at anchor on the Ch'ien-t'ang river. Mountains of Yüeh in the distance. A most precious thing of the present age. When unrolling it anew at the northern window I chant poems and compose verses."

The appreciation of Kao K'o-kung's landscapes

² Quoted in *Shu-hua fang*, vol. XI.

³ Quoted from *Lia Kuan Tai Chih Chi* in *Shu-hua p'u*, vol. 53.

⁴ Quoted in *Shu-hua fang*, vol. XI.

increased steadily after his death and reached a high-water mark at the end of the Ming period, particularly through the enthusiastic encomiums of Chang Ch'ou and Tung Ch'i-ch'ang, who admired his rich and vaporous manner as a perfect expression for the ideals of the "Southern School". He was to them a faithful continuator of Tung Yüan's and Mi Fei's principles and as such of great historical importance. Some critics claim that he first followed the two Mi and then turned to Tung Yüan, while others say that he started by imitating Tung Yüan, and then perfected his style through a closer study of the two Mi, father and son. Whichever sequence he may have followed in his studies, it is obvious, even at a hasty glance, that the above-mentioned masters had a decisive influence on his artistic formation.

The general character of Kao K'o-kung's pictorial manner is fairly well known through a number of pictures ascribed to him by critics of the Yüan and Ming period, but to delimit his individual works more definitely is not easy, because he has evidently served as a model for many later adherents of the same stylistic current and been successfully imitated in the Yüan as well as in the Ming period.

There are at least five large landscapes in the Ku-kung collection ascribed to the master and half a dozen minor paintings in Far Eastern private collections with the same attribution, but they are of rather varied quality and evidently not the works of one single master. One might, for the sake of convenience, distinguish in the former group two kinds of stylistic tendencies, one characterized by excessive softness and a fluffy brushwork by which the forms are dissolved in blotchy spots, whereas the other reveals more of the structural character of mountains and rocks in contradistinction to the vaporous mist by which they are encircled. The former manner, which is more akin to what is usually called the Mi Fei style, may be observed in the two pictures representing heavy mist and rain-clouds in the mountains, both of which were exhibited in London 1935-1936,¹ and the latter in two pictures called respectively Mountains Rising through

Spring Clouds and Morning Mist and Cloud-encircled Luxuriant Mountains² (Pl. 57). A third picture, which is called Clearing after a Spring Rain over the Mountains and provided with a colophon by Li K'an, dated 1299, may also be joined to this group, though it also has points of contact with the two pictures of the previous group³ (Pl. 58).

None of these pictures can be definitely ascertained or proved to be an authentic work by Kao K'o-kung, but the preponderance of stylistic and historical evidence is certainly in favour of the more structural paintings, which stylistically are more akin to the works of Tung Yüan than to the so-called Mi Fei paintings. My observations on the two landscapes seen in the London exhibition and also at Tai-chung led me to the conclusion that they are imitations of a somewhat later period. The first-named is painted with slight additions of bluish and reddish colours, the other is a pure ink-painting though now rather dull in tone. The splashy brushwork which is characteristic of both produces an impression of shadowy flimsiness which is not of very early date.

The foremost representative of the other group is the picture known as Cloud-encircled Luxuriant Mountains. It has four inscriptions, two of which were written by well-known men at the beginning of the fourteenth century, i.e. T'eng Wên-yüan and Li K'an (dated 1309), who must have been close friends of Kao K'o-kung. The picture is remarkable for its combination of structural design and effective pictorial modelling. The composition is dominated by a broad mountain cone rising from a ground of flat rocks through layers of eddying white mist. Two clumps of dark leafy trees indicate the foreground plane, but the stream that is winding between them

¹ Ku-kung, vol. IX; and K.-k. *shu-hua chi*, vol. XXXIII. The latter picture is signed with the artist's name and the date 1333, which seems too late for Kao K'o-kung, who was born 1248, though a definite year for his death is not known.

² K.-k. *shu-hua chi*, vol. XIII, dated 1300; and Ku-kung, vol. XI. Colophons by T'eng Wên-yüan (1258-1328) and Li K'an (1245-1320).

³ Cf. K.-k. *shu-hua chi*, vol. XXXVII. Colophon by Li K'an, 1299.

through the creviced rocks accentuates the depth dimension in contrast to the towering mountain cone. One may trace here some resemblance to compositions by Tung Yüan, but while the elements are traditional they are rendered in a new spirit, in a more developed pictorial manner and with a more intimate characterization of their significance as integral parts of a living organism of nature. It is a picture in which much of the old tradition of landscape-painting from the beginning of the Sung period has been absorbed and recast in forms of fresh pictorial beauty.

The remarkable qualities of this picture may be more clearly appreciated if it is compared with the other landscape in the same collection which is called Mountains Rising through Spring Clouds and Morning Mist. The general resemblance of the compositions is quite obvious to anyone who compares the reproductions,¹ and is emphasized by the mountain cones rising through the mist. But the mountain in this latter picture is exaggerated into a kind of bulging hump that threatens to tumble over, an impression which has been emphasized by the retouching of the upper portion of the picture. Still, in spite of this lack of proper balance in the design, the picture has a definitely marked individual character, and as the signature and the date, i.e. 1300, seem to be quite correct, it may be accepted as a somewhat damaged work by Kao K'o-kung (PL 59).

In addition to the two pictures mentioned above, which in spite of some inequalities represent the same style, a third one in the same collection, known as Clearing after Spring Rain over the Mountains, well deserves to be remembered; it is ascribed to the master by Li K'an and dated 1299. The composition is not quite the same as in the two other landscapes; the mountain that rises through the mist is of a more ordinary type and the trees on the rocks in the foreground more conventional, yet the actual painting of the deeply furrowed grassy mountain and of the vaporous mist is similar to the corresponding parts in the preceding examples. Li K'an, who

seems to have been a good friend of Kao K'o-kung, would hardly have added his testimony to the picture if he had not been convinced of its authenticity. But it represents a less individualized and somewhat earlier type than the two others and is, as such, more closely related to certain paintings by Tung Yüan.

Among the minor paintings in private collections which with more or less reason are attributed to Kao K'o-kung, may be mentioned the handscroll in the possession of Mr. Hsü Hsiao-p'u in Taipei, which represents spring clouds over a mountain stream bordered by trees. It is done in a very fluent *p'o-mo* style with slight addition of blue colour, on fine silk, and bears the signature and the date 1313. The movement of the clouds along the grassy mountain slopes and the low mist that forms a background to the trees along the road in the foreground are rendered with a soft brush and easily flowing ink, yet forms such as trees, buildings and boats and even the small figures, are more distinctly indicated than is common in so-called Mi paintings (PL 60).

The same influence is still more marked in the picture in the Saitō collection representing a mountain landscape with eddying mist in the valley and a man in a pavilion. This, however, as far as can be seen in the reproduction in *Tōanzō*,² is less convincing as a work by Kao K'o-kung (in spite of the signature). Not knowing the picture in the original, I prefer not to dwell on it further at this place; it seems to have more interest as a close imitation after the older Mi than as an original creation by a great Yüan master.

All through the Yüan and Ming period Kao K'o-kung was considered one of the foremost representatives of the Southern School, which reached its greatest vogue through the writings of Chang Ch'ou and Tung Ch'i-ch'ang. Nothing could be more eloquent than Chang Chou's appreciation of Kao K'o-kung in the following words: "Among

¹ Cf. *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XIII.

² *Tōanzō*, i.e. Catalogue of the Saitō collection, p. 18. The inscription on the picture seems doubtful.

the thousands of landscapes by old and modern men still existing, only those by the two Mi, Kao K'o-kung and Ni Tsan are painted with untrammelled ease and freedom, so that they cannot be copied. They are entirely unconventional and original."

The encomium seems indeed significant, as it comes from a well-informed critic who was familiar with the works of all the great Yüan masters. It makes us realize that Kao K'o-kung was considered as one of the most influential personalities in the development of Chinese landscape-painting.

This influence seems also to have reached outside the confines of China; Sesshu reported it in Japan when writing: "When travelling in the South I saw works of the most famous painters of our time, many of whom consider Yen-ching (i.e. Kao K'o-kung) as their teacher".¹

The great fame of the master became naturally also a cause for close imitations by contemporary or later artists, which to some extent has blurred the lines of Kao K'o-kung's artistic personality. Most significant in this respect are the landscapes in Japanese collections ascribed to a painter called Kao Jan-hui, who is mentioned by Japanese authors of the Ashikaga period and listed in *Kundakan Sayūchoki* but completely unknown in China. The paintings which on historical grounds may be considered as works by Kao Jan-hui have certainly stylistic affinity with the landscapes by Kao K'o-kung, as may be observed particularly in the famous Summer and Winter landscapes from the Konchi-in temple in Kyōto. These pictures, which are executed in a very unhampered *p'o-mo* fashion, have, together with the resemblance of the names, given rise to the formerly current opinion that Kao Jan-hui was simply another name for Kao K'o-kung. But since modern Japanese art-historians no longer find it possible to support this somewhat antiquated theory, we do not need to dwell on it further at this place. Judging by pictures ascribed to Kao Jan-hui, he was hardly an immediate follower of Kao K'o-kung, and it seems indeed quite probable, as supposed by Japanese authorities like Dr. Shimada, that

he was a somewhat later Korean painter rather than a Chinese.²

Kao K'o-kung's influence on the development of landscape-painting was, as said above, of a lasting kind; it became, as a matter of fact, more evident after his death than during his life-time, and it may be said to have lasted through the Ming period and later as a kind of main support for the Mi-current within the "Southern School" of landscape-painting. The best known among the followers whose activity belonged to the fourteenth century were Kuo Pi and Fang Ts'ung-i.

Kuo Pi, *tzü T'ien-hsi, hao Pei-shan*, who came from Ching-k'ou in Kiangsu, is said to have been born 1301 and died 1355, but was probably older. He executed wall-paintings in a Taoist temple in his home town, and became known particularly through his landscapes and bamboos painted according to the Mi Fei-Kao K'o-kung manner, i.e. in a soft *p'o-mo* technique but with relatively vague individual accents (Pl.63A). One of his best pictures is the Mountain Landscape in Mist in the Sumitomo collection in Ōiso, which, however, has suffered some damage and thus lost its original beauty. (Cf. *Tāsō*, p.198.) The two most important works by the painter in the Ku-kung collection are Mountains in Mist (his favourite motif) and A Bamboo Grove in Snow; the former, which is hanging scroll, is signed and dated 1339,³ the latter a short handscroll, is rather superior from a pictorial viewpoint owing to the refinement of the brushwork and the sensitive gradation of grey and white tones.⁴ Kuo Pi was not one of the great painters, but possessed a genuine talent and was a painstaking adherent to the stylistic ideals so successfully revived by Kao K'o-kung.

¹ Quoted in the article by Wakimoto Sakuro, "The Paintings by Kao Jan-hui" in *Bijutsu Kenkyū*, vol.XIII.

² The documentary information regarding this problem and the reasons for the combination of the two painters are discussed by Wakimoto Sakuro in his article on Kao Jan-hui in *Bijutsu Kenkyū*, XIII, January 1933. He distinguishes quite definitely between the two painters. Dr. Shimada's contribution to the problem is shortly indicated in *Sekai Bijutsu Zenshū*, vol.XIV, p.65.

³ Cf. *K'o-lu shu-hua chi*, vol.V.

⁴ *K'o-k. ming-jin hua-chi chi*.

Fang Ts'ung-i, with the *tsü* Wu-yü and *hao* Fang-hu, was a more gifted and important follower of Kao K'o-kung. He entered a Taoist order at an early age and passed most of his life in the Shang-ch'ing-kung monastery on Lung-hu shan in Kiangsi. He gradually became recognized as one of the most original masters of the time, praised in particular for his light and easy brushwork, and ranked with Tung Yüan, Chü-jan and the two Mi as a representative of the untrammelled (i) class. One of the later Ming critics offers the following somewhat mysterious characterization of this Taoist painter:

"Fang Fang-hu reached the utmost limit in studying the art of the Immortals. He gave shape to things which have no shape and returned things which have shape to the shapeless. As he was able to do this in his paintings, he must have reached the utmost limit. How could he have done it without being an Immortal?"¹

The implication seems to be that Fang Fang-hu had an extraordinary faculty of suggesting or evoking the impression of things without actually representing or depicting them. In this respect he was akin to the Ch'an painters at the end of the Sung period, though his landscapes have not quite the same quality of fleeting visions or reflections in the mirror of the mind as Mu-ch'i's or Yü-chien's paintings. Fang Fang-hu himself is reported to have said: "T'ai-hang and Chü-jung are dangerous peaks; their grand and strange beauty is that of famous old pictures. As I have seen them, I feel satisfied and at ease. I am not one of the vulgar men who reach out for small things."²

The tone of the statement is much the same as in some of the pronouncements by Shih-t'ao, the famous monk-painter of the seventeenth century who also kept aloof, quite uncontaminated by the vulgar crowd. Fang Tsung-i was in this respect far more exclusive than Kao K'o-kung, though he followed the master rather closely as a man of the brush. The best proof of this dependence is the picture in the Ku-kung collection which, according to the painter's inscription, represents "Clouds and

Snow on the Shang-yin Mountain after Kao K'o-kung". The mountain is, as usual, enveloped in a veil of mist from which the top emerges and some trees in the front, but it has been worn down and lost much of its original beauty.³

The four paintings by Fang Ts'ung-i in the Ku-kung collection are all characteristic products of his individual genius and pictorial style, though varying in size and importance. One of them is simply a large album-leaf, though with a touch of fantastic grandeur in the transformation of the rocks of the river-bank into huge dragon-like shapes emerging above a mist which leaves the little sailing-boat on the water only faintly visible. The picture is signed and dated 1348 and inscribed with a poem by Chang Yü.⁴

Another minor picture (in the shape of a vertical scroll) represents, according to the inscription, the so-called Kao-kao pavilion on a rocky ledge that rises out of the mist.⁵ It is painted, or rather dashed off, with a broad brush and rich ink in the most unhampered *p'o-mo* fashion, superseding in this respect even the landscapes of Yü-chien. The artistic significance of this picture is mainly a result of the pictorial atmosphere produced by opposites of light and shade and the life-giving touches of a spontaneous brush. It is as such a rather exceptional product of expressionistic brushwork (Pl.62).

The two larger landscapes by Fang Ts'ung-i in the Ku-kung collection are more finished paintings, not done in pure *p'o-mo* technique, but with defining brushstrokes. The composition is in both cases dominated by steep topped hills or rocks overgrown with shrubs and grass, while larger trees form dark clumps in the foreground in front of a curtain of mist. The one (Pl.61) is called A Sacred Mountain with wonderful Trees and dated 1365;⁶ the other,

¹ *Sai in chi*, quoted in *Shu-hua p'u*, vol. 54, p. 29.

² *Ch'ing Yang Chi*, quoted *ibidem*.

³ Cf. *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. V.

⁴ This album-leaf is reproduced in *Chung-kuo ming-hua chi*, vol. I.

⁵ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XIV.

⁶ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vols. VIII and XLIV.

which may be described as Rugged Mountains rising above a Mist, with a small pavilion below, is likewise signed and dated (though with an unidentifiable year name). They are stylistically closely related and may be said to represent variations on the same motif of luxuriant growth in mist-enveloped wilderness.

Fang Ts'ung-i was not a master of the same rank as Kao K'o-kung; his larger works are to some extent lacking in structure, but they possess an atmospheric, not to say colouristic beauty of their own. This quality in connexion with the very light spontaneous brushwork makes his minor sketchy paintings very attractive (Pl. 63B).

III

Huang Kung-wang, Ts'ao Chih-po, Ma Wên-pi, T'ang Ti and Lu Kuang

Huang Kung-wang was twenty years younger than Kao K'o-kung and a far more advanced representative of the new trend in Chinese landscape-painting than the older master. His renown gradually surpassed that of all the other painters in the field, and lasted longer; he was regarded all through the Ming and for the better part of the Ch'ing dynasty as the greatest leader and best model among the landscape-painters.

According to the records reported in *Shu-hua p'u*, vol. 54, and *Hua-shih hui-yao*, he was born as a son of the Liu family, which at the time (1259) lived at P'ing-chiang near Suchou, and his personal name was Chien. But while still of tender age he was adopted by the Huang family of Yung-chia. The adoptive father was at the time ninety years old and is said to have exclaimed with joy on this occasion: "Old Huang has been expecting a son for a long time!" or in Chinese: Huang-kung wang-tzū chiu-i — an exclamation which was adopted as the name and the soubriquet of the boy; in later years he was more commonly called by one of his other by-names: I-fêng, Ta-ch'ih, Ching-hsi tao-jên, etc.

His natural gifts were very unusual, and he is said to have acquired remarkable knowledge in history and philosophy at an early age. Later in life he established the so-called San-chiao t'ang (the Hall of the Three Religions) behind the Wên-tê bridge in

Suchou, where philosophical instruction was given to boys (according to *Hua-shih hui-yao*).

In the Chih-yüan era (1264-1293) he served for some time as a clerk in the office of a provincial judge in Chekiang, but his interest in Taoism prevailed and he abandoned office work, passing most of his life as a recluse at Shao-chi-chüan near Hangchow, or wandering all over the Wu district. The last seven or eight years of his life he spent mainly in the Fu-ch'un mountain, which inspired him to his most famous pictures. He died in the fourteenth year of Chih-chêng, i.e. 1354.

This outline of Huang Kung-wang's life is further elaborated by writers of the Ming period with anecdotal material mostly borrowed from *Ch'ing-ho shu-hua fang* (vol. XI). During his rambles he often stayed in temples and made friends with Buddhist and Taoist monks and with the painter Ts'ao Chih-po, who also led a hermit's life, and when not occupied with painting spent his time in the study of *I-ching*. "Sometimes he mounted high buildings in order to observe the movements and the colours of clouds, seeking to grasp their effect. He stood quite alone as a painter, like an Immortal. The poet Tai Piao-yüan wrote on a portrait of Huang Kung-wang: 'His body had to sustain great hardships; in his home there was often lack of food, because he was as generous as the *chên-k'ô* (itinerant knights) of

Yen and Chao (districts in Hopei). His mind was as penetrating as that of the great wine-bibbers in Chin and Sung times.' He lived in a cottage which did not shut out the rain and the cold winds, but there he sat cross-legged, humming poetry. When he grasped the brush and wrote down something, it was in accordance with the traditions of Ch'i and Lu (i.e. Confucianism). He could not be called a common painter."

The painter's deep penetration into the life of nature from which he drew his inspiration and his mode of working has been beautifully described by Li Jih-hua, the contemporary of Tung Ch'i-ch'ang, who wrote: "The prefect Ch'en used to tell me how Ta-ch'ih spent days among wild mountains and rugged cliffs seated in a thicket of trees or in bamboo groves, lost in meditations. Nobody could guess what he was after. At other times he went to the estuary of the Mao river and sat in contemplation of the rapid current and the roaring waves. Even when storms were raging and sea monsters wailed and cried he remained undisturbed. Such was the profound and melancholy manner of Ta-ch'ih, whose extraordinary spirit competed with the creative power of nature.

"He wandered about with paper and brush in his sleeve, and when he came to some beautiful scenery he instantly took down a record of it . . . He examined the actual effects of morning and evening on mountains very closely and the light and shade of the four seasons, storing them all in his mind and expressing them with his brush. And so he painted the thousand hills and ten thousand valleys, more and more wonderful the longer he continued; peaks upon peaks, cliffs upon cliffs, ever deeper, ever more wonderful. He used more of a light purplish colour than of green and blue, and watery ink. He learned from Tung Yüan but by far surpassed his model."

The works ascribed to Huang Kung-wang in Far Eastern collections and which have been made known in reproductions, are evidently insufficient to serve as a basis for a thorough understanding of the

master's genius and dominating influence on the development of Chinese landscape-painting. Most of these pictures are rather free, more or less indifferent later versions of compositions by Huang Kung-wang, but there are also a few of earlier date, superior in quality and purer in style, which seem to be more closely inspired by the master's art, and finally one or two pictures which on historical as well as stylistic grounds are generally accepted as genuine creations by the master.

The most famous among his recorded works has always been the long handscroll entitled *Fu-ch'un t'u* or *Fu-ch'un shan-chü t'u* (Dwelling in the Fu-chun Mountains), in which he recorded impressions gathered during his lengthy sojourning in the region of the Fu-ch'un mountain. His descriptive note on the picture, as well as writings by later men attached to it, increase its interest as a standard document of Chinese art-history, but tend also to complicate the problems regarding the different versions of the picture and their changing fortunes.

The two versions of the *Fu-ch'un shan-chü t'u* which exist today in the Ku-kung collection, have both been completely reproduced, one in an album published 1935 by the former Palace Museum, the other in a scroll published by the Shuraku-sha in Tōkyō and also in *Nanga Taisetsu*; they are thus fairly well known by students of Chinese-painting. The former version was furthermore shown in the London exhibition 1935-1936. This version will here be called version A and the other version B in order to facilitate the discussion of the two pictures.

Version A is somewhat shorter than version B; the last section of the picture has been cut off and this portion may also have contained a signature which now is wanting. The picture has thus no signature, but there is an inscription containing a dedication (to a man called Tzū-ming) with the artist's name and the date 1338. If we accept this inscription as correct, we are led to the conclusion that version A is earlier than version B, but such a supposition is not supported by the stylistic characteristics of the two versions, and it has also been

observed that the seal under the artist's name in the inscription is not the same as the one he used elsewhere together with his signatures (Pls. 64-66).

After the picture follow four colophons by writers of the Ming and early Ch'ing periods which, however, seem to be somewhat abbreviated versions of writings which accompanied the original scroll.¹ These somewhat dubious points did not, however, disturb the emperor Ch'ien-lung, who had a profound admiration for this picture and expressed this in a great number of encomiums with which he has literally covered up every empty space on this scroll.

Version B (Pls. 67-72) is somewhat longer because it includes the last section also and it is historically the more important as it contains the following authentic inscription written by the master: "In the seventh year of Chih-ch'eng (1347) I went back to the Fu-ch'un mountain and stayed there with Master Wu-yung. In the days of leisure, while living in the South Pavilion, I played with the brush and painted this scroll whenever I felt inspired. I did not weary myself; (yet) the composition grew gradually. I worked (leisurely) as if filling in documents. In this way three or four years passed but the picture was not finished, because I left it in the mountains when I went rambling about like a floating cloud. Then I brought it back in my bag, and whenever I could spare some time in the morning or in the evening I worked on it, though without any anxiety. If someone gets hold of it by fraud or violence, he should first examine the end of it (where I have written my signature), which would make him understand how difficult it is to accomplish such a picture. Written in the tenth year of the Blue Dragon (1350) . . . by the scholar Ta-ch'ih."

The inscription is interesting not only because it contains the indication that the picture was done at the very end of Huang Kung-wang's life - by an octogenarian - but also because it throws some light on the way in which such extensive works were sometimes executed, *viz.* in sections, during successive periods, whenever the painter felt inspired and well disposed, working with ease and not against the

grain. The air of spontaneity and a free flow of creative ideas were thus preserved.

The other inscription on the picture, written by the well-known scholar of the Ch'ien-lung period, Liang Shih-ch'eng, contains the information that the scroll was acquired together with a number of other paintings in 1746 for the imperial collection, and it had then the various colophons quoted by Kao Chih-ch'i, as mentioned in the footnote on the preceding page. The emperor submitted it to a careful examination and comparison with the other version in his possession and came to the conclusion that the newly acquired scroll was an imitation, but nevertheless worth acquiring, as is explained in the following words by Liang Shih-ch'eng: "The manner of painting is here so elegant and rich that it causes pleasure and the design is like a duplicate of the real work. There is no reason why we should not keep both." Consequently this picture was incorporated in the Ch'ien-lung collection, but it was not entered in *Shih-chü pao-chi* until the Chia-ching era by Hu Ching, who thus confirmed its acceptance as an authentic work by Huang Kung-wang.

A few additional records regarding the history of this much discussed painting may here be mentioned shortly, before we revert to a closer analysis of the artistic characteristics of the two scrolls.

At the beginning of the Ming period it belonged to Shên Chou, the leading master of the time, who provided it with a long colophon from which the following may be quoted: "At the time of the conquest of the empire (by the Mongols) the crazy old Huang was greatly appreciated in the south-east for his landscapes. Unfortunately his wide learning was obscured by his great skill in painting. The people who came to his 'Hall of the Three Religions'

¹ The various colophons attached to the original picture are recorded by Kao Shih-ch'i in *Chiang-ts'un hsiao-hsü ho* (1693). He quotes in full the writings by Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (dated 1596), Shên Chou (1488), Wên Ping (1570), Wang Chih-tung (1571), Chou T'ien-chin and Tsou Chih-lin. Some of these will be quoted in the following, in so far as they contain some information about the history of the picture.

used to ask him all kinds of difficult questions and old Huang discussed these with the inquirers in the most respectful and open manner. His words were forceful and abundant like a long river.

"If we look at this painting of his, we may realize what an excellent man he was. By the manner in which he used brush and ink he reveals that he fully grasped the wonderful art of Tung Yüan and Chü-jan. This scroll comes directly out of the style of the last named." . . . Shên Chou seems to have felt that Huang Kung-wang's manner was here most closely akin to that of Chü-jan.

Tung Ch'i-ch'ang stressed the same point in his colophon when writing: "This scroll is painted in the style of Tung Yuan and Chü-jan. It is true to nature, quite brilliant and moreover extremely refined. Its total length is more than 30 ft. [sic.] One has never enough time to really penetrate into it from the beginning to the end. It is the best picture that Huang Tzū-chiu ever did. I remember when I stayed at Ch'ang-an how I wore out my friend Chou, the T'ai-mu, by incessant and long visits, during which I asked him for this scroll. One glance at it gave me the feeling of entering into a treasure-house; I came quite empty handed, but I returned home richly endowed . . ."

The writer then tells how he was able to buy the picture and to take it home to his library, where "it shed its radiance together with Wang Wei's scroll *Clearing after Snowfall on the River*"; and he winds up by exclaiming: "These two pictures have ever since been my masters!"

Tung Ch'i-ch'ang's colophon was no doubt considered as the most weighty, because he was after all the most influential among the Huang Kung-wang admirers. The other colophons written by Wên Pêng, Wang Ch'ih-têng, Chou T'ien-ch'iu and Tsou Chih-lin, contain no information of particular interest and do not need to be repeated here. But it may be useful to recall at least two of the informative records about this scroll written by leading masters at the beginning of the Ch'ing period, *viz.* Wang Shih-min and Wu Li.

The former tells¹ that Huang Kung-wang's famous scroll was at the end of the Ming period in the possession of a collector called Wu Ch'ung-ch'ing, who was fervently attached to the picture and decided to take it (as well as a previous specimen of calligraphy) with him into the grave. When he felt death approaching he lit a fire, burned the calligraphic masterpiece by Chih Yung and then placed the Fu-ch'ün scroll on the fire in order to free its spirit. But at the moment when the outermost portion of the scroll was touched by the flame, the nephew of the collector became aware of the danger and snatched the scroll from the fire. Only about five feet of it had been scorched before it was saved.

Wu Li refers to the same incident in his remarks on the Fu-ch'ün scroll written in one of his colophons, which also may serve as a testimony to the high esteem in which this picture was held by the great masters at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Wang Hui as well as Wu Li and Yün Shou-p'ing copied it and considered it as the very acme of the art of landscape-painting. Wu Li wrote as follows:

"In his old age Ta-ch'ih returned to Fu-yang and there painted the Fu-ch'ün mountain scroll. The brushwork was free and easy (playful) like grass or seal (?) writing. According to tradition, there were two versions (of the scroll). One of them I never knew; the other was highly treasured by a collector who seldom left it out of his hands. When he was approaching death he placed it in a fire, but the scroll was rescued by people standing nearby; only a little more than a foot-length of its beginning had been destroyed by the fire. This was the picture of which I made a copy when I was in Kuang-lin (near Yang-chou). When I had returned home I sent this copy as a present to Mr. Fêng Ch'ang in T'ai-yüan, who had a copy of the same picture by Shên Shih-t'ien. In comparing the two copies we found that no portions of the mountains, the streams,

¹ Cf. Wang Nün yün-ch'ü lu and Tanaka, Toyozō's article on the painter in *Tōyō Bihutsu Tan-sō*.

the trees or the stones had been left out (in Shih-t'ien's copy) and that its colouring was exactly like that of the original."

In the colophon he said: "The original by Chih-wêng used to be in my collection. I asked a certain man to write an inscription on it but (when he died) his son did not return it (to me), and later on he sold it, as he was very poor and could not return home. In looking at this (my) copy I must sigh."

If we accept the verdict of Wu Li there must have been two versions of the Fu-ch'un scroll in the eighteenth century though he had seen only one of them, the picture which had been in the collections of Shên Chou and Wu Ching-an and which was partly damaged by fire. This he copied for his friend Fêng Ch'ang in T'ai-yüan. In the continuation of the same colophon he mentions, however, another picture by Huang Kung-wang called *Fou-lan nuan-t'sui* (Floating Mist over Soft Green), which was painted with colours on silk and of which he likewise made a copy before it was lost and "buried in a grave".

It would take us too far from the main road of our investigation to dwell on several of the copies of our records about the Fu-ch'un scroll. The historical information reported above may be sufficient; it tends to support the opinion nowadays held by the majority of students that the version B is most probably the picture which in the Ming period was owned successively by Shên Chou, Wu Ching-an and Tung Ch'i-ch'ang and later on by Kao Shih-ch'i. In this picture the opening section (to a length of about 2½ feet) is missing, as may be seen if it is compared with version A, yet it reaches almost the same total length because it is continued at the opposite end with a steep hill and a long spit of land, i.e. an end-portion which is missing in version A. And after this, at the very end of the scroll, is the painter's own inscription (which was reported above). It seems probable indeed that something of a similar kind originally existed also at the end of version A, from which a piece has been cut off, but as no information regarding this has been trans-

mitted, it seems useless to speculate about its contents. It may have contained an inscription or a signature, as often surmised, but in view of the circumstances this could hardly have been written by Huang Kung-wang.

Art-historians who, like the writer of these lines, have had an opportunity of examining the two versions side by side, will no doubt agree that the two pictures could not have been painted by the same master. The differences in quality and in brushwork are too great; the designs are practically the same, though with minor variations, but the execution is far more spontaneous and expressionistic in version B than in version A. This is in some respects more detailed and exact, the contours of the objects are more emphasized, the tones are darker, the whole thing seems heavier and more condensed, an impression emphasized by the present condition of this scroll, which is more worn and dirty than the other version. It is painted with great care and firmness, but without much feeling for the pictorial beauty of the changing views (Pls. 64-66).

The pictorial values are more obvious in version B; with a supple brush and richly flowing deep ink, the painter has here contrived a unifying atmosphere in which all the details of the continuous motif are enveloped. There are touches of white colour at places which seem to reflect the light, and wide stretches of empty sky and shoreless waters between the grassy hills and the mountain ridges (Pls. 67-72).

It seems useless to attempt a description of a picture like this, because the same elements of mountain and water, trees and stones, cottages and boats are repeated over and over again, though in various combinations. One cannot but recall a few words from *T'u-hui pao-chien* where it is said that "when Huang Kung-wang was living in the Fu-ch'un mountain he enjoyed all the various aspects of the rivers, the mountains and the places for fishing . . . He used to carry paper and brushes in his sleeve, and when he met with beautiful scenes he recorded them right away. Later on when living at

Ch'ang-shu he paid close attention to the changing aspects of morning and evening in the Yü mountains, and to the atmosphere of the four seasons, their clouds and their brightness, gathering them in his heart and expressing them with his brush; and as he painted the thousand hills and the ten thousand valleys they became more and more extraordinary: there were peaks beyond peaks and cliffs upon cliffs, the deeper the more marvellous."

Even though this description is not expressly intended for the Fu-ch'un scroll, it gives some idea about how this was produced, its sources of inspiration, its main elements and the painter's way of absorbing their essence and transforming it into pictorial values.

The quietly flowing water in various formations serves as the binding or cohesive element all through this scroll of nearly twenty-four feet. It winds in narrow streams between hills and rocks, it forms shallow inlets or quiet bays, where fishermen are angling in small boats; and it blends with the low spits of shore that jut out from the rocks and stretches beyond sight towards a horizon marked only by a faint line. The spaciousness of these far-reaching views is suggested by the absence of forms rather than by any descriptive elements, something that no earlier master employed to the same extent. Some of these sections, where the motif is reduced to a few trees of flat rocks, low ground and shoreless water, remind us of Dutch drawings of the seventeenth century: they are just as close to nature, just as vibrant with light or with the life-breath of the painter's brush (Pls. 68, 69).

In contrast to these there are the grassy hills with clumps of trees, the creviced rocks and the mountain ranges on the opposite side of the river. They are painted with a sweeping brush that reveals the bulging and billowing of the soft hillsides, the cubic structure of the stones and the rich leafage of the blotchy trees. Some of the valleys are narrow, crowded with buildings and trees, others are more like inlets of water nourished by mountain streams. It may be said that the water forms the foothold for

the hills and mountains which dominate the upper part of the design. They are at some places brought so close to the beholder that their tops are no longer within the field of vision but cut off by the edge of the scroll, at other places they are diagonally oriented along streams which lead into the distance and out of it again. The continuous combinations of rocks and water form the warp of this long pattern, while the clumps and rows of leafy trees and low buildings tucked away between the slopes serve as elements of the woof in a pictorial tissue. The human figures are here few and insignificant; they are absorbed in this imposing display of nature's primordial forces, in the expanse of mountains and water. The grandeur of the design is indeed impressive, but the fascination of the picture is primarily the result of the brushwork which with its spontaneous flow and grip reveals the creative strength and impetus of a great master.

By our acceptance of this version of the Fu-ch'un scroll as an authentic work by Huang Kung-wang, the other version (A) is automatically discarded from the class of his original paintings, because, as said above, the two versions are obviously not executed by the same painter.

The subsequent questions as to when and by whom the version A was executed are more difficult to answer. The fact that it includes an introductory section not existing in version B, but has lost its tail or last section, proves that it was executed according to a model after a picture different from our version B, and most probably at a time when the original had been damaged by fire (as told already), which happened towards the end of the Ming period. According to the statement by Wu Li quoted above, there were two authentic versions of the Fu-ch'un scroll at the end of the seventeenth century; one of them may have been our version B, which at that time was still in private hands, and the other may have been a picture more closely corresponding to version A. To find answers to these and related questions can hardly be given without a more extensive examination of all existing

copies or transpositions of the Fu-ch'ün motif than can be attempted at this place.

No other work by Huang Kung-wang comparable with the Fu-ch'ün scroll in artistic and historical importance has been recorded, though several other paintings are mentioned with much praise by the old critics. Among these should be noted the picture known as *The Heavenly Lake in the High Mountains*, a title which has been affixed to several existing pictures of which, however, no one seems convincingly to be a work by the master. Most prominent among these is the large hanging scroll in the Ku-kung collection, which according to the signature would have been painted in 1341 when the artist was 73 years old.¹ The design, which is dominated by a central mountain cone, is built up in a series of deeply folded or creviced hillocks, terraces and precipices. At both sides are deep gullies with narrow paths and streams where water is rushing down from unseen sources higher up in the mountains. By its general type and rhythm the composition reminds us of some of Tung Yüan's and Chü-jan's landscapes, though it is more complicated and richer in detail. The general effect is heightened by the addition of thin washes of colour in combination with the ink, yet the picture is marked by the dryness of an early copy, and to what extent it actually represents the master's original in all details is more than we can tell (Pl. 73).

Another version of this picture – *The Heavenly Lake in the High Mountain* – is in the Chang Ta-ch'ien collection (Catalogue, vol. I, pl. 11). It is much larger in size though cut off at the top and the bottom and now quite dark and dirty, which makes it difficult to obtain a clear idea about the age and quality of the picture. As far as I have been able to ascertain, it is most likely a picture of the Yüan period, though hardly painted by the same man who did the Fu-ch'ün scroll.²

Two famous landscapes by Huang Kung-wang mentioned by early critics were called *Floating Mist over Green Hills in Spring*, and *Autumn Mountains*, but since neither of these have become known

through copies, we may pass them and direct attention to the picture known as *The Nine Peaks after Snowfall*, which exists in two almost identical versions, one of which was exhibited in Hui-hua kuan in Peking 1954. According to the inscription by the master he painted it at the age of 81 (i.e. 1349). The very pale misty tone of the picture makes it difficult to appreciate the complicated design of flat shadowy peaks, terraced rocks, and sparse naked trees in all its details, but the general impression is one of remarkable distinction and refinement due to the suggestion of a misty veil by which all the contrasts are toned down. It is an alluring picture, hiding a secret, difficult to grasp or penetrate, and as such quite likely a work by the master himself³ (Pl. 74).

A minor picture in the same collection (formerly in the P'ang Yüan-chi collection) which offers a more complete pictorial representation of the motif (as a portion of a scroll) is called *Clearing after Snowfall on the River*. It is a very attractive picture distinguished by its rocks, dry trees and pavilion on a terrace in a misty atmosphere, but stylistically quite distinct from Huang Kung-wang's better documented works. It forms a pendant to Hsü Pen's picture *Rocks in Mist after Snowfall*; they are mounted on the same scroll together with a writing by Chao Mêng-fu.

Another very attractive minor painting with Huang Kung-wang's signature, which likewise formed part of the P'ang Yüan-chi collection, is the large album-leaf (often reproduced) which represents a section of softly rounded grassy hills with leafy trees in the folds and a small village below near the water. The light seems to be fading over the

¹ *Ku-kung shu-hua chi*, vol. XVII.

² Among posterior versions of this same design, or parts of it, may be mentioned a picture which was in the J. D. Chên collection in Hongkong 1937 and two less complete pictures in the Freer Gallery, i.e. No. 11, 308 and No. 16, 366. A handscroll in the Ueno collection, which is also called *The Heavenly Lake in the High Mountains*, is reproduced in *Nanshu Itham*, vol. III and in *Bukkyō Bijutsu*, No. 17. It is signed and dated 1348, but obviously was executed at a later period.

³ Reproduced in *I-shu ch'uan-s'ung*, Part VIII, pl. VI.

hills; there is a suggestion of slight evening mist; the trees are more like shadows than composed of trunks and branches. The shore slips imperceptibly into the inlet of shallow water. The whole thing is done with a sweeping brush with no such structural accents as in the Fu-ch'un scroll. It is a brilliant piece of brushwork, almost too fleeting to be by Huang Kung-wang; it is more likely the work of a later man, a true virtuoso who has tried to surpass the master in the play with brush and ink. It does not fall in line with the better documented pictures, but it may be remembered that Ming critics like Chang Ch'ou point out that the master worked in different manners, sometimes drawing the peaks and rocky ledges with a bold and strong brush, but on other occasions "used diluted ink and sketched the mountains very freely without any folds or wrinkles"¹ (Pl. 75).

It is not possible here to pass in review all the more or less seductive imitations after Huang Kung-wang or in his manner which have become known through reproductions. Most informative and historically interesting among them are some of Tung Ch'i-ch'ang's album-leaves, particularly those of large size in the so-called *Hsiao Chung Hsien Ta* in the Ku-kung collection. The pictures in this album are not free transcriptions as are so many other of Tung Ch'i-ch'ang's studies after old masters, but executed with great care and faithfulness to the style of the respective old masters. In these copies after Huang Kung-wang Tung reproduces two distinct types or stylistic patterns both of which were evidently considered characteristic of the great Yüan master. One of them shows a deep gulley between steep overgrown hills and a stream winding between low promontories at the lower edge. It is a variation on a Chü-jan design with "hemp-fibre wrinkles" rendered with floating brush-strokes, while the distant trees are indicated as usual in Huang's pictures with horizontal and vertical touches. The other represents a mountain cone truncated in a series of stepwise rising terraces or horizontal planes. It is enveloped by mist but in front of it is a

rocky ledge with spare trees rising out of the water. This type of landscape is not known in larger paintings ascribed to Huang but, according to some descriptive remarks by Ming critics, Huang was fond of painting such squarely-cut terraced mountains. Tung Ch'i-ch'ang's intention was no doubt to reproduce two distinct landscape types by the master.

In order to obtain a convincing impression of Huang Kung-wang's individual style and brushwork we can do no better than direct attention to the large album-leaf (26.5 by 41 cm.) and its accompanying inscription known as *Chih-lan shih* (The Orchid Studio). The picture, which formed part of the Manchu Household collection, has been repeatedly reproduced² and exists in what seems to be a full-size photograph (made by the Yen-kuan Co. in Peking some forty years ago), but I have not been able to find out its present hiding place. It is not in any of the public collections in Peking, Shanghai, Nanking or Taiwan.

The sheet attached to the picture contains the following inscription by the painter referring to the title of this picture:

"To live with a good friend is like staying in a room with *chih-lan* flowers, when one has stayed there for a while one no longer notices their perfume; one has absorbed it so completely and become one with it." After further poetic references to the mysterious scent of these orchids (or epiden-drums), the painter adds: "Now and here is the place for friendship" and quotes "The Song of the Purple Fungus", which also contains references to the *chih-lan* (the Plant of Friendship). The name of the friend for whom it was done was Chien, and it was painted in 1342 by "The Big Fool, the Taoist Huang Kung-wang, when he was staying in the Hsüan-chên Tao-hall at Yün-chien".

The picture may thus be called a document of friendship, poetically explained in the inscription,

¹ Cf. *Shu-hua fang*, vol. XI.

² Complete reproductions of picture and inscription in Omura, *Bunjin Gassen*, II, 4.

but the motif of it has no visible reference to a *chih-lan* room or hall of friendship mentioned in the inscription. It consists of a wooded hill or range of hills furrowed by streams and surrounded at its foot, close to the river-bank, by a number of low cottages or pavilions. At the one end the river is spanned by a narrow bridge on poles, while at the opposite end a stepped path leads away into the hills, suggesting a continuation that may have been cut off (if it ever existed) (Pl. 76).

The beauty and significance of this picture is entirely a matter of the brushwork, difficult to describe but evident to a close observer. The design is firmly built, yet the forms are not strictly outlined but rather dissolved in a play of lights and shades suggested by a rich scale of tonal values. The ground tone of the grassy hills is a light grey indicated by thin washes and subtle touches of a tenuous brush. It is not uniform, but modulated so as to follow the shapes and over this is spread a rich scale of darker tones varying from deep grey to jet black and mostly applied with short horizontal and vertical strokes. They represent the trees and the shrubs as growing in the folds of the ground and have a distinct structural quality which contributes to the tectonic effect of the whole thing. The interplay of tones is thus accentuated by the brush-strokes in a way which leads our thoughts to certain drawings by Van Gogh, though the Chinese painting has a more unified atmosphere. The comparison may serve to emphasize its surprisingly modern character, though it does not touch the essentials in Huang Kung-wang's little picture, which ranks in truth among the noblest of all the Chinese ink-paintings that have been preserved. Seeing it we can understand to some extent why Huang Kung-wang was for generations hailed as the foremost among the masters of monochrome landscape-painting. There must indeed have been some good reasons why the great critics at the end of the Ming period such as Tung Ch'i-ch'ang and Mo Shih-lung considered him as "the first who used painting as a means of expression and at the same time for his pleasure, thus opening up a new path".

This little picture reveals the driving force of a master spirit in every stroke and makes such a pronouncement comprehensible. There may indeed have been several works of the same kind among his paintings but that unfortunately must remain a conjecture.

* * *

Huang Kung-wang was not only a man of the brush; he was also a thinker and a theorist who has formulated in words the principles that he applied in his work as a painter. Though essentially a solitary who preferred the company of nature to crowds of men, he evidently was considered already in his lifetime as a leader in art to whom younger men turned for guidance and advice. This may have been the main reason why he formulated some of his practical observations and guiding thoughts in notes, though without ever arranging them in a systematized form. His notes were, however, collected and published by a friend of his, the painter T'ao Tsung-i, who included them in the so-called *Cho-k'eng lu* from which they have been reproduced by later compilers, for instance in *Pei-wên chai shu-hua p'u*. The contents are to a large extent of a more technical than aesthetic or theoretical nature and have as such less interest from an historical or philosophical viewpoint. We shall consequently report here only a selection of these notes.

"Painters of the present time generally follow the styles of Tung Yüan and Li Ch'êng. In these two schools the trees and stones are not alike. The student should pay careful attention to this." (Then follow details about trees and stones.)

"Tung Yüan painted many broken stones at the foot of the hills, but made the mountain itself solid and strong. Tung's stones are painted with the (so-called) hemp-fibre wrinkles; he always started at the foot of the hill and painted the wrinkles at its sides, and then he used light ink to 'break' the hollow parts (of the mountains). He also used colours in a similar way.

"The manner of using the brush in painting

landscapes is called connecting the muscle and bones. There is a difference between 'using the brush' and 'using the ink' (predominantly); when the brush-work is blurred at some places this is called 'having ink', whereas the manner of not drawing with a soaked brush is called 'having brush'. These are important points for the painter; mountains, stones, and trees are all painted in this way.

"You should always carry some drawing-brushes in your leather bag, so that when you perceive some extraordinary trees at a beautiful spot you can at once make sketches of them as records. They will add life to some pictures . . .

"You should climb up on towers and contemplate the *ch'i-yin* of the wide empty space; you should look at the variegated colours of the clouds. Such views can be seen from the tops of mountains. Li Ch'êng as well as Kuo Hsi used this method; Kuo Hsi painted rocks like clouds. These are what the ancients called pictures opening to heaven.

"The most difficult thing in landscapes is to paint the outlet of (running) water. Far off waters show no windings (waves), far away figures have no eyes . . . On the mountain slopes one can place some buildings, on the water small boats; this gives a breath of life.

"Water at the foot of a mountain forms shallows; this increases the impression of life. Trees should be placed all around it.

"A hollow rock should be painted in the unrestrained spontaneous fashion, as in pictures by scholars (gentlemen painters). If one elaborates it in too great detail it becomes like artisan's work.

"If one is to paint a landscape one must first fix the scenery motif, then one can start with the brush; if the scenery is not properly fixed the final result will be deficient.

"One should pay attention to the (different) sceneries of spring, summer, autumn and winter. In the spring all the ten thousand things come to life; in summer the trees are luxuriant; in autumn the ten thousand forms begin to decay; in winter the clouds and mist are dark and dull, the colour of the sky is

blurred. A man who can paint this is incomparable.

"Mountains in summer, when rain is approaching, should be painted with a well-soaked brush. The small rocks on their tops are to be called (like) alum heads. Their contours should first be drawn with a well-soaked brush and then gone over with 'shell-blue' (*lo-ch'ing*) colour. This makes them beautiful and rich . . . The picture will thus correspond to the idea.

"In winter landscapes snow is painted on the ground (with ink), but one should use a light shade of white colour on the top of mountains.

"The method of painting landscapes must be modified according to the needs of the moment. The first things that require attention are the wrinkles (*ts'un-fu*); do not make them confused. In the composition the near and the far must be in proper balance. The same holds true here as in writing; practice makes perfect.

"To paint on paper is most difficult. If the silk is properly prepared with alum it will take the brush-strokes more easily, and if colours are used they will enter the eye easily . . .

"The ancients expressed universal (all-embracing) feelings through their pictures and spread out their views in accordance with nature. If you adapt yourself to the ideas of the ancients, all the rules of painting will be fulfilled."

The final words make us realize that Huang Kung-wang, in spite of his original spontaneity as a painter, had no ambition to overstep the great masters of antiquity or to discard their principles. He too remained fundamentally a traditionalist, though he infused new life into the old concepts and transmitted them with a brilliant mastery of the pictorial means. And just as "his spirit competed with the creative power of nature", to use the words of Li Jih-hua, his paintings revealed the everlasting significance of great works of art.

* * *

Huang Kung-wang's influence on the development of Chinese landscape-painting was probably

more essential and far-reaching than that of any other painter after Tung Yüan. The leading Ming critics such as Chang Ch'ou, Mo Shih-lung and Tung Ch'i-ch'ang never tired of praising him as the last great patriarch of the "Southern School"; he may be called the prophet at the end of the evolution, balancing so to speak Tung Yüan, the prophet and reformer of three hundred years earlier, and there was no landscape-painter after him who reached the same level of creative art. But his influence was apparently more strongly felt by later generations than by his contemporaries, perhaps owing to the fact that so many men of talent in the Yüan period were still working under the spell of the South Sung revival of landscape-painting and did not grasp the full importance of Huang Kung-wang's individual genius. Only a few of the best-known younger contemporaries of the master can here be recorded whose works reveal a more or less palpable influence from his art; they may be said to belong to his following even though they had no personal contact with him. Our presentation of these followers must, however, be made as succinctly as possible owing to the limits of the present publication.

* * *

Huang Kung-wang's closest friend and companion among contemporary painters is said to have been Ts'ao Chih-po, known under his *zhi* Yu-yüan and *hao* Yün-hsi. He came from Hua-t'ing in Kiangsu and was practically of the same age as Huang, i.e. b.1272, d.1355. He served for a while in a government college, but soon chose the same path as Huang Kung-wang, resigning from all official duties and devoting himself entirely to Taoist studies and painting. But he does not seem to have won much recognition during his life; it was only the connoisseurs of later times who placed him almost on a level with the Four Great Masters. His creative genius was fostered by the same Taoist ideas as Huang Kung-wang's; it was only natural that they should keep company during some periods of their hermit lives.

A writer from the same place as Ts'ao Chih-po characterized the artist as follows: "Among the painters from my home district no one of the present dynasty surpasses Ts'ao Chih-po. In painting quiet and far-reaching views he followed Li Ch'eng, but for his paintings of mountains and water he took Kuo Hsi as his master (who also originally learned from Li Ch'eng). His brush and ink work was pure and rich, quite free from the vulgar spirit."¹

Other critics find his brushwork somewhat deficient, but praise his life-breath (*ch'i*) as "pure and lovely".

The pictures by Ts'ao Chih-po preserved in the Ku-kung and some private collections in the Far East illustrate more or less clearly his dependence on Li Ch'eng and Kuo Hsi. The principal motif in most of them is composed of two or three rugged pines or cedar-trees growing among boulders on a river-bank, while overgrown hills or mountain slopes appear through mist in the background. When at their best, the trees have something of the same fantastic expressiveness as we know from the pictures of the above-named old masters. Their trunks are tall and wriggly, their branches bare, or with a few dry needles, curved at the tip in wiry hooks as if prepared to defend themselves against unseen enemies, yet conquered from within by age and drought. Ts'ao Chih-po represents old trees with the same humanizing touch as Li Ch'eng did, though with less energy and dramatic emphasis than the great Sung master.

The best representative of this type of painting is the so-called Hermitage among Pine-trees by a River which is provided with no less than six poetic inscriptions, one of them by the plum-blossom painter Wang Mien and one by Ch'ien-lung.² The general lines of the composition are those indicated above, but the colouristic effect is in this case particularly strong owing to the luminosity of the deep black patches in the mountains, which are partly enveloped in a light, transparent mist (Pl.77).

¹ From *Sai-yu ch'ü t'ung-shuo*, quoted in *Shu-hua p'u*, vol.54.

² *K'-k, shu-hua chi*, vol.XLII.

This picture may well be called Ts'ao Chih-po's masterpiece, but beside it two or three other characteristic works by the master should be remembered in the same collection. The earliest of them is dated 1329 and has a colophon by Sung Lien, a younger contemporary of the master. It represents two pine-trees and some dry shrubs on a rocky shore, i.e. a variation on the same motif as in the above-mentioned picture, but represented with less atmosphere and life-breath.¹ Another representative painting of the same type was formerly in the Ch'ên Pao-ch'ên collection in Peking. The trees are much the same as before, but the river appears more clearly between them and there is a man in a boat. The inscriptions are by Huang Chien and the painter.²

A rather famous, quite different kind of landscape in the Ku-kung collection represents Snow-covered Hills rising in successive stages above a river with small pavilions on the shore at their foot. It is signed and dated 1350 and has an authentic colophon by the old Huang Kung-wang.³

Besides these large hanging-scrolls two large album-leaves in the same collection should be mentioned; one representing A Man angling under an old Tree by a River (not signed), and the other Rugged Trees growing from some fissured Rocks over a River. It forms part of the album *Mo-lin pa-ts'ui* and is said to be dated 1362, which, however is late for the artist (Pl.78).

In studying the landscape-painters who were active during the second and third quarters of the fourteenth century, we are time and again led to the conclusion that they were somewhat eclectic and influenced from various sources. This makes it difficult, not to say impossible, to give a properly balanced consistent characterization of their pictorial style and its derivation. Most of them may be included in the "Southern School" current; they start from Tung Yüan, imitate Mi Fei, and do their mountains according to the patterns of Huang Kung-wang, but this does not prevent them from utilizing elements from Li Ch'êng's or from Kuo Hsi's grand compositions. This was more or less true

of Ma Yüan and T'ang Ti, two of the most gifted younger painters whose works can only be recorded here in passing.

Ma Yüan, better known under his *zhi* Wên-pi and his *hao* Lu-ch'ün, is usually and with good reasons classified as a follower of Huang Kung-wang, but he passed through various stages, imitating particularly Tung Yüan and Mi Fei. His earliest picture in the Ku-kung collection, which is dated 1328, is an imposing composition of the Tung Yüan type, dominated by a central mountain which rises over a grove of large trees.⁴ It does not reveal any distinct individual features, and it is hardly possible to tell from the reproduction whether it should be accepted as a work by the painter. The second picture in the same collection, dated 1349, is a more interesting work. It represents steep terraced Mountains in Snow and is painted in a rather peculiar style derived from certain works of Huang, but here still more accentuated. The massed rocks which compose the mountain are cut in sharply accentuated horizontal and vertical planes leading step-wise towards the top.⁵ The snow on these steps in contrast to the deep crevices along their sides brings out the structural character of this towering mountain and gives it an air of visionary loftiness. It is an unusual picture not only in Ma Yüan's production, but also within the whole mass of Yüan landscapes (Pl.79).

Most of his works known to me in original or reproduction have a more intimate character, as may be seen in a third picture in the Ku-kung collection, which represents an angler in a boat off a shore in autumn⁶ (Pl.80) and also in the handscroll dated 1360, which represents river scenery with boats ready for departure by the shore and friends taking farewell.⁷ The picture in the Cincinnati Art

¹ Ibid. vol.VII.

² *T'ien*, p.161.

³ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol.XV.

⁴ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol.XXXVIII.

⁵ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol.X.

⁶ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol.I.

⁷ *Shên-chou ta-kuoan*, vol.10.

Museum (formerly in the Chang Ts'ung-yü collection) which represents a quiet River at the Foot of misty Mountains is a simpler thing but certified by Tung Ch'i-ch'ang as a work by Ma Yüan in the manner of Huang Kung-wang. The same descriptive classification might be attached to several of the landscapes with Ma Yüan's signature. He was no doubt one of the closest followers of Huang Kung-wang and highly admired by the protagonists of the Southern School in the Ming period and consequently also imitated by later painters.

T'ang Ti's stylistic connexion with Huang Kung-wang was not so close; he mainly followed earlier models of the North Sung period, such as Li Ch'eng and Kuo Hsi, but he may be mentioned at this place because of his points of contact with Ts'ao Chih-po.

He was a man from Wu-hsing in Chekiang, b. 1296 and d. c. 1364; known under the sobriquet Tzū-hua. Prepared by a scholarly education, he entered government service when still only a *hsiu-tsai* and became an official in Wu-chiang, but pursued at the same time his career as a painter, starting under the guidance and protection of Chao Mêng-fu. It may have been due to this influential connexion that he was entrusted with official commissions such as the execution of wall-paintings in the Chia-hsi palace, "which were appreciated by the emperor".¹ As an official and a traditionalist in painting he was thoroughly versed in the Confucian attitude and the academic ideals of bygone days.

The most important of T'ang Ti's large landscapes with figures is the picture of the year 1338 in the Ku-kung collection which represents Fishermen with their Nets walking along a rocky River-bank under big Trees.² The figures as well as the various kinds of trees are executed with the utmost care in a very neat manner, the design is impressive and through the combination of the two elements the picture becomes an interesting link between the classic Sung landscape style and the kind of illustrative figure compositions that became popular in the Ming period (Pl. 81). Occasionally in minor pictures by T'ang Ti such as the handscroll of 1341, called

Cliffs and Streams in Autumn with Travellers on Donkeys,³ one may find elements of a freer pictorial manner which prove that he too was in touch with the new currents within the broad flow of landscape-painting about the middle of the fourteenth century.

There seem to have been quite a number of talented painters who worked in a somewhat eclectic manner along lines similar to those that may be observed in T'ang Ti's works. They are nowadays little known because their works are rare, but two or three may here be recalled in passing.

Chang Shun-tzū, also called Chang I-shang, *tzū* Shih-k'uei, *hao* Chi-li-tzū, was a man from Hang-chou, active c. 1330-1350. There are two of his pictures, both representing old trees and rocks, in the Ku-kung collection, one of them dated 1347, the other 1349.⁴ They are painted with a well-soaked brush in a style that recalls Chao Yung's best works.

Chuang Lin, *tzū* Wên-chao, was a native of Chiang-tung, but lived in Peking and was active towards the end of the period. He is represented in the Ku-kung collection by a short handscroll representing an old man crossing a bridge leading over a stream to a small cottage.⁵ According to the colophon by Tung Ch'i-ch'ang this is the only still existing work by the artist. It is painted in a soft fluent manner (Pl. 84b).

Po-yen Pu-hua, *tzū* Ts'ang-yen, was a Mongol nobleman who distinguished himself as a military

¹ From *Yü-shan ts'ao-t'ang ya-chi*, quoted in *Shu-hua p'u*, vol. 55.

Several large compositions by T'ang Ti, dated between 1323 and 1364, are preserved in the Ku-kung collection and also in private possession in China. Most of them may be said to represent an aftermath of the Northern Sung landscape style. The tall pines with the far-outstretched wreathing and bending branches are done after the models of Kuo Hsi, and when they are silhouetted against a background of desolate plains and rocky ledges, the general effect becomes almost dramatic even though the execution is somewhat dull. Traditional figures such as *ch'in* players, fishermen and the like serve to increase the illustrative attraction of the compositions (Pl. 82).

² K.-k. *shu-hua chi*, vol. III.

³ Cf. Omura, *Bunjin Gassen*, II, 2, 3, 5.

⁴ Cf. *Ku-kung*, vol. XIV and K.-k. *shu-hua chi*, vol. VII.

⁵ Cf. *Nanking Exhibition catalogue*, p. 79. The picture forms part of a composite scroll known as *Yün-fu chi chü*.

commander in fighting the rebel Ch'ên Yu-liang, but also became known as a painter of landscapes and dragons. His landscape in the Ku-kung collection is done in a vaporous *p'o-mo* technique¹ – possibly under the influence of Kao K'o-kung – whereas the handscroll representing clumps of trees on a rocky bay shore (in the collection of Ma Shou-hua at Taipei) which is dated 1308, is an interesting example of the transformation of the South Sung academic style into the broader, more effective pictorial manner which was developed by the leading Yüan masters (Pl. 84A).

Lu Kuang, *tzü* Chi-hung, *hao* T'ien-yü, was a man from Suchou who is generally classified among the followers of Huang Kung-wang, but he evidently absorbed influences also from other contemporaries such as Wu Chên. The exact dates of his life are not known, and only one of his pictures is dated, i.e., the so-called Mountain of the Immortals in the Ku-kung collection which, according to his inscription, was painted in the T'ien-li era (1323–1330). To judge by this he belonged to the same generation as Ma Wên-pi and Tang Ti, but was a more advanced artistic personality than either of these two men.

According to the characterization of the master in *Hua-shih hui-yao* his brushwork was noble and strong (*ts'ang-ku*) and his use of ink was not like that of common men. It was said of him that he painted the branches of his trees like "dancing phoenixes and startled snakes", a picturesque simile intended to convey the impression of overwhelming pulsating life (i.e. *ch'i-yün*). Yet it must be admitted that this is more characteristic of Ts'ao Chih-po's than of Lu Kuang's painting. The trees in Lu Kuang's pictures are, as a matter of fact, relatively thin and scanty, whereas his rocks are remarkable for their strength and solidity.

Lu Kuang's paintings are nowadays quite rare. The best known and most frequently reproduced² are the two rather similar versions of a narrow gorge with temple buildings in the Tan-t'ai mountains. The one which was formerly in the Manchu Household

collection has a colophon by Tung Ch'i-chang besides poems by the artist and the emperor Ch'ien-lung; it has been called Enjoying Spring in the Tan-t'ai Mountains (probably because there are two men in a boat at the foot of the mountains). The other picture is smaller and has no colophon, simply a poem by the painter; it was formerly in the Yamamoto collection in Tōkyō and is now in the C. C. Wang collection in New York; the motif is the same as in the other (with the exception of the boat) and the picture is usually called Dawn over the Tan-t'ai Mountain. This is the better preserved of the two kindred views; the design has a firm structural quality and the brushwork is truly "*ts'ang-ku*" (strong and noble). It has a definite individual touch in spite of some points of contact with Huang Kung-wang's manner of painting (Pl. 83B).

The most famous of Lu Kuang's preserved works is the large landscape in the Ku-kung collection representing Towers and Pavilions on the Mountains of the Immortals.³ The composition is here more pictorial, revealing influences from Wang Meng rather than from Huang Kung-wang. The undulating hills are partly enveloped in light mist; in the deep fold between them are lofty pavilions and tall trees, all executed with great care, but we miss here something of the structural cohesion and unity which endow the minor paintings with a more definite individual character. Still the picture has been greatly admired by a number of prominent connoisseurs such as Li K'an, Li Jih-hua, Tung Ch'i-ch'ang and Cha Shih-piao. It makes us realize the truth of a remark quoted in *Shu-hua p'u* from Tz'u-t'ao-hsüan *tsa-shui*: "Lu Kuang stood halfway between Ts'ao Chih-po and Hsü Pên; in his paintings he expressed feelings of loneliness and desolation".

¹ K.-k., *shu-hua chi*, vol. IV.

² Both pictures are reproduced in *Chung-hua ming-hua chi* and in *Chügaku Meigashû*. The former also in Liu Hai-su's repertory of famous pictures, and the latter in Omura's *Bargain Gains*, 1, 2.

³ K.-k., *shu-hua chi*, vol. VIII.

IV

Wu Chên and Some Contemporaries

Wu Chên and Ni Tsan are as a rule both placed among The Four Great Masters of the Yüan period, i.e. in the uppermost class, established by systematizing critics at the end of the Ming dynasty. Their artistic temperaments and styles were shortly indicated in the chapter on bamboo-painting, for which both of them had a special liking, but as they were no less prominent as landscape-painters some additional information regarding their lives and work may here be introduced.

Wu Chên, better known under his *tsü* Chung-kuei and his descriptive *hao* Mei-hua tao-jên, was born in 1280 in Chia-hsing, Chekiang, where he passed most of his life, and died 1354 (the same year as Huang Kung-wang). Like Ni Tsan's his nature was "lonely and pure", but he could also be "impetuous and obstinate" (like many of the Taoist recluses), and he wielded the brush with extraordinary speed and concentration. Like all the best of these masters he painted not for gain or fame, but simply to express himself, and he distributed his works freely to those who did not ask for them. He did not meet with much appreciation from the collectors or pretending connoisseurs of the time, in fact we are told that they did not come to him with their gifts, but went to his next-door neighbour, the painter Shêng Mou. His wife laughed at him for his lack of success, but he answered confidently: "It will not be so after twenty years". The chronicler adds: "His words came true; Shêng Mou may have known the short-cuts in art (the quick road), but he did not possess the fresh exuberance of the air of woods, which reverberates as life-breath in Wu Chên's art."

The comparison between the two painters is well taken and essentially true even though perhaps a trifle exaggerated. Shêng Mou, Wu Chên's next-door neighbour in Chia-hsing, was not an inferior painter, but a very able traditionalist who followed

rather closely in the footsteps of Tung Yüan and Chü-jan (when not imitating Chao Mêng-fu or Wu Chên). Some of his large compositions are of noble effect and might almost pass as works of the Sung period, because in transmitting the pictorial patterns and ideas of the old masters he added very little of his own and made no great efforts to enliven the pictures with a breath of fresh individual life (*ch'i*). He was one of the not uncommon Chinese painters whose fidelity to the models of old was stronger than his own ideas or needs for pictorial expression. And as he was able to transmit the old models without a flaw, it should not surprise us that his works became appreciated by the connoisseurs of the time. Hsia Wên-yen, who was only slightly younger than Shêng Mou, says practically the same thing in his note about the painter in *T'u-hui pao-chien* when writing: "As a painter he possessed great refinement, but was carried away by technical skill" (i.e. his attachment to the formal element in painting).¹

It should, however, be recalled that Wu Chên likewise started as a very close student of certain Sung masters whose style he imitated with marked success. But this kind of imitative painting was never an aim in itself for him. He absorbed what he had learned and utilized it freely as a means for expressing his own ideas. The painter who apparently meant most to him as a guide, particularly in matters of form and technique, was Chü-jan. This may be observed in some of Wu Chên's landscapes in the Ku-kung collection.

As an example may be mentioned the hanging-scroll representing a View over a broad River between hilly Banks, which is dated 1342 and marked as in the manner of Chü-jan.² If actually an

¹ Shêng Mou's popularity is also illustrated by some ten pictures in the former imperial collection; excellent examples are reproduced in *K-4, shu-hua chi*, vols. X, XIV, XLIV, etc.

² *Ibid.* vol. XLI.

original of the same type by the old master existed, it still must have been more compact and without the tone of soft evening light and silent harmony which is so characteristic of Wu Chên – the poet-painter.

The stylistic relation between Wu Chên and Chü-jan is perfectly illustrated by one or two other pictures in the same collection, for instance the River view with a lonely Fisherman in his Boat below a tall Cliff, which has a poem by the painter but no date.¹ Here one may notice the so-called *fan-f'ou-ts'un*, i.e. "the alum lump wrinkles", or rather, structure, consisting of rounded humps, generally considered as particularly characteristic of Chü-jan. They are not so definite as in the old master's pictures but nevertheless fully recognizable. And in addition to this it may be noted that the main features of the composition are the same as in a somewhat larger landscape in the same collection, attributed to Chü-jan. A closer description of the two pictures may not be necessary, since their general resemblance will appear even at a glance at the reproductions, nor do we need to enter into a discussion of the traditional attribution of the latter picture (to Chü-jan), because the picture obviously represents Chü-jan's style but reveals at the same time points of contact with Wu Chên's above-mentioned landscape (Pl.88).

The most important of Wu Chên's landscapes in the Ku-kung collection is, however, the large picture of Two old Cedar-trees on a stony Beach² (Pl.85). It is dated 1328, and consequently a work that may give us the key to an early stage in the evolution of Wu Chên's style. The two trees which form the main motif of the picture, may indeed be inspired by some of Kuo Hsi's paintings of similar motifs. They rise from stony ground almost to the upper edge of the scroll, their tall trunks are gnarled and naked with no branches except at the top, where they intertwine and stretch far out against the sky like writhing dragons. The contrasting horizontals and verticals are thus brought out in the trees as well as in the general design, in which the far-extending

view over the hilly ground forms an effective contrast to the tall trees. The whole thing is carefully calculated, indicating that Wu Chên was no less able to give a perfectly balanced composition of a "classic" type than to render fugitive impressions in spontaneous ink-sketches. It may also be observed that the emphasis on the monumental design has not prevented him from working out every detail in the trees and the ground with the utmost care and sensitiveness. Yet this relatively restrained mode of painting in adherence to traditional principles was not in correspondence with his genius to the same extent as the more spontaneous manner which he adopted with increasing success in his later works.

Many of these are like records jotted down with a few touches of the brush, even though they may be united in continuous series, as for instance on the long scroll in the Freer Gallery called Fishermen's Pleasure, which is dated 1352 (Pls.86, 87). Each little sketch of a man with fishing-rod in a boat is accompanied by a short poem, no less spontaneously jotted down than the figures, and altogether they create an unforgettable atmosphere of fishermen's pleasure – the solitude, peace and remoteness from the hustle and bustle of the world, the whole tinged with humour and the painter's joy in recording it. These and a few other small pictures of a similar kind are apparently the most intimate expressions of Wu Chên's strange and solitary nature, which is well characterized in the introduction to the collection of poems edited by Ch'ien Fên about the middle of the seventeenth century.

It opens with a description of hermits of ancient times who withdrew into solitude because of the threatening condition of the world: "as birds fly into woods and fishes dive into depths, not simply through their natural dispositions but in order to escape from arrows and traps.

"As for Wu Chên, he had no veneration for the crooked and the common, nor did he strive for fame; he lived tranquil and contented. Yet his fame

¹ K.-k. *shu-hua chi*, vol. XXIII.

² *Ibid.* vol. IX.

spread very far and will remain fragrant for a thousand years. This would not be possible if he had not grasped the meaning of Tao. Such indeed was Wu Chên. He lived towards the end of the Yüan dynasty and was deeply grieved at the decline and corruptness of the age. He led the life of a hermit and devoted himself to the study of divination (according to I-ching), which enabled him to make a living by telling people's fortunes. But sometimes the noble spirit of this solitary man found expression in landscapes or paintings of bamboos and stones, which in old as well as in modern times have been sought for and esteemed as precious things. His manner of writing, i.e. his colophons and poems, were done as the eagle soars and the lion speeds. They are all overflowing with life. He stood above all the other masters at the end of the Yüan dynasty.

"When the Yüan dynasty was drawing towards its close there were many talented men who started on long journeys, travelling along the lakes and among the mountains. Most of these people led lives of unrestrained self-indulgence... they spent their time drinking and writing poetry... Wu Chên alone 'hid his shadow among the reeds' and kept company only with some Taoist or Buddhist monks. The pictures which he did on pieces of silk or scraps of paper he signed 'The Master of the Plum-blossom Temple', and he never allowed anybody else to add a single character to them. He was by nature solitary and independent and disliked leaning on the fence of other people. When he felt death approaching he wrote on a tablet for his own tomb: 'The Pagoda of the Plum-blossom Monk'."

Wu Chên was a confirmed Taoist in his art as well as in life. He enjoyed his freedom and painted merely to relieve his heart or to transmit a fugitive impression of nature. The majority of his pictures are ink-plays done in a highly concentrated and abbreviated manner just as he himself has described this kind of painting: "Ink-plays (*hsi-mo*) are done in excess of the scholar's poetical and literary writings. They express the pleasure of the moment and are,

according to connoisseurs, entirely unconventional. I have read Ch'ên Chien-chai's poem on the ink-painting of plum-blossoms in which he says: 'The (indication of the) meaning is enough, seek not for resemblance of colours'."

Some of them, as we have seen, represent single branches or sections of bamboo, in others the motif is a few old trees or small fishing-boats on quiet water, bare hills or rugged stones, isolated or as successive portions of a scroll, but seldom subject to any strictly formal arrangement. The water and the background are simply the bare white paper with no lines of waves, no tones of clouds or mist; yet all these things exist or move in space, they emerge out of an emptiness which itself is full of life. It seems sometimes as if ink and paper were no longer material means, but akin to the living substances from which things take shape or growth as in nature. Everything is done in a firm and definite way, there is a great variety of tone-values, of light and shade, which serve to model the forms, but no diffuseness. Nevertheless, the impression of space is irresistible; it forms the unifying element in which everything is reflected as in the consciousness of the painter; it all lives with the rhythm of his pulse transmitted by a very sensitive brush (Pl. 89).

Wu Chên was, as we have seen, just as much a poet as a painter, a strongly individual genius who did not seek recognition or success and was hardly the figure to be the leader of a definite school or style of painting. Yet there were painters of his own time as well as after his death who imitated his works, not without success, even though none of them could reach the expressionistic quality of his brushwork. There are as a matter of fact some interesting pictures ascribed to Wu Chên where one rather hesitates about the master's individual part in them. Such is my impression of the large picture in the Ku-kung collection, known as *Spring Morning on the Ching River*,¹ and still more of the picture, formerly in the Ti P'ing-tzū collection, which represents *Rapids in the Mountains* with luxuriant

¹ Cf. Nanking Exhibition catalogue, pl. 58.

Pine-trees and low Building on the rocky Banks.¹ This is a more pretentious baroque picture than anything known to me by the master himself.

The only painter among Wu Chên's contemporaries who may be said to have absorbed something of the master's individual style was Shêng Mou (whose *tzü* was Tzû-chao); he was also a Chekiang man and for many years Wu Chên's next door neighbour in Chia-hsing. He received his first artistic instruction from his father but studied later under the guidance of the painter Ch'ên Lin, the friend of Chao Mêng-fu. Through him Shêng Mou may have been brought in contact with the venerated protagonist of "the spirit of antiquity", a contact which has left some traces in his art. He became a constant and assiduous student of the old masters and as such somewhat eclectic from a stylistic viewpoint, as witnessed by some of his pictures.

We have a remarkable document indicating the eclectic spirit and extensive studies of Shêng Mou in the shape of a large album-leaf, formerly in the Manchu Household collection, executed according to the painter's inscription in 1313 (i.e. very early) in imitation of a picture by Chang Sêng-yü of the sixth century. It represents a landscape composed of strongly outlined rocks and leafless trees; the old model was no doubt a coloured picture, but it is here successfully transposed into a very effective structural ink-design.

Most of Shêng Mou's paintings are, however, quite large compositions built up of rocky river-banks with pavilions and trees and beyond these powerfully drawn mountains rising through clouds and mist or river views, as in Wu Chên's works. They are faultless products of a highly finished technique executed with colours on silk, which in connexion with the very effective decorative designs makes them more akin to landscapes of the early Sung period than to works by leading Yüan masters. It is easy to understand why a painter who could produce such attractive records of summer retreats in the mountains and of ramblings in pine-groves

with an air of legendary grandeur, became particularly appreciated by old-fashioned scholars and men who enjoyed nature through the eyes of the poets and the painters.

This type of highly decorative, carefully coloured landscape based on models of pre-Sung date is represented by several large pictures in the Ku-kung collection and usually named after the dominating figure motif, such as Travellers in Summer Mountains,² or A Scholar and his Servant in a Pine-grove,³ or Boating in Moonlight,⁴ not to mention the more idyllic representation of a Scholar enjoying Mountain Air on a Summer Day in an elegant Pavilion, which can be seen in the Nelson Gallery in Kansas City. This kind of quasi-academic painting is of the same class as some of Chao Mêng-fu's large landscapes (Pl. 90).

Besides these somewhat archaizing landscapes, in which elements of legendary illustrations are combined with close observations of nature, Shêng Mou also painted minor landscapes of a more modern type. They are mostly done on paper with ink only or a slight addition of colour, and their artistic significance depends mainly on the actual brushwork. In the best among these pictures, such as the Mountain Landscape with a River, where a ferry-boat is being paddled across, the structural definition of the deeply folded mountains and leafy trees is more or less comparable to corresponding elements in pictures by Chao Mêng-fu or Chao Yung.

The range of his artistic concepts was, however, strictly limited; he repeated certain favourite motifs with slight modifications over and over again, though the pictures were called by different names, such as: A Hermit seated under Autumn Trees⁵ (Pl. 91) (Ku-kung collection), or Waiting for the Ferry on a River Bank in Autumn (Freer Gallery

¹ Cf. T'ü, p. 185.

² K.-k. shu-hua chi, vol. XIV.

³ Ibid. vol. XLIV.

⁴ Ku-kung, vol. V.

⁵ K.-k. shu-hua chi, vol. X.

and also in Yumikan, Kyōto), or a Solitary Fisherman in an Autumn Grove (in the Chang Ta-ch'ien collection), etc. The pictures are all arranged in the same way; the clumps of autumn trees stand out in dark silhouette against a misty sky or an open river view; the artistic significance is in these pictures mainly dependent on the realization of space. In other pictures the composition is more crowded and elaborated with additional groves and buildings on the river-banks and fishing-boats on the water. Shêng Mou did his paintings largely for the public; he knew the taste of the amateurs and did his best to satisfy them. His professional skill was perfect and he followed the safest traditions of style with marked success, but can hardly be said to have contributed much to the general development of painting in the Yüan period.

Chu Tê-jun was certainly a more important artistic personality than Shêng Mou, yet one may observe points of contact or correspondence in their works due to the fact that they followed parallel roads of study and artistic education. The impressions that they received from Chao Mêng-fu's traditional (not to say "classicistic") art seem to have been equally important to both of them, though they are certainly more obvious in Shêng Mou's decorative paintings than in Chu Tê-jun's works, because they are there integrated in a style with more definite individual accents. The difficulty of attaining a proper estimate of Chu Tê-jun's artistic importance is furthermore increased by the fact that the paintings attributed to him are relatively few and mostly not very well documented.

Chu Tê-jun, whose *teü* was Tsê-min, was born 1294 in Sui-yang in Honan and was thus somewhat younger than Wu Chên and Shêng Mou. He settled later in Su-chou, and became known as a man of extraordinary refinement, as such surpassing all his contemporaries.¹ He died 1365, two years before the final debacle of the Yüan dynasty. Highly trained, as a literary writer and poet he followed "the banished Immortal" (i.e. Li Po), and as a calligrapher Wang Hsi-chih. According to the same source, he took Li

Ssü-hsün and Li Chao-tao, father and son, as his models in painting, but other chroniclers emphasize his dependence on Kuo Hsi, or state simply that "his landscapes and human figures were in the manner of the ancient masters". His influential position in the cultural life of the period was at least in part due to the special protection of Chao Mêng-fu who "introduced him to the military commander Ma, Duke of Shên, who made Chu Tê-jun the chief expounder of the Confucian teaching in the central chancellery" (*Chung-shu chêng*). This involved no doubt a great moral responsibility and was more important for establishing his fame among contemporaries than his accomplishments as a calligrapher and a painter.

It should also be remembered that Tung Ch'ich'ang in classifying the Yüan painters in two different camps or stylistic currents – one derived from Tung Yüan and Chü-jan, the other from Li Ch'êng and Kuo Hsi – places Chu Tê-jun, together with T'ang Ti and Yao Yen-ch'ing, in the latter group and makes the remark that the painters of this group could not establish their own "house" (school). They were, according to the great Ming critic, more dependent on formal rules and academic traditions than the spontaneous and individualistic painters of the "Southern School" to whom painting was a freer form of creative activity. It may be said of Shêng Mou that he stood with one foot in the "northern" and one in the "southern" camp, whereas Chu Tê-jun as a painter belonged altogether to the former. He was a man of great learning and refinement who did his best to honour the classic ideals of landscape-painting. Such is the general impression made by his works, though some of them may also be said to reveal influences from contemporary painters.

If we may accept the attributions of a certain number of paintings to Chu Tê-jun (i.e. on the basis of signatures and inscriptions by leading critics), his

¹ The biographical sources for the life of Chu Tê-jun are quoted in *P'ei-wei chü Shu-hua p'u*, vol. 54, the most important being *Chou Po-ch'ü Chu-fu-chün nu-chü ming*.

anvte might be divided into two groups, the first consisting of pictures in the manner of early Sung masters such as Li Ch'êng and Kuo Hsi, and the second of pictures which are more akin to works by contemporaries such as Wu Chên and Ts'ao Chih-po. The best representatives of the first group are the winter landscapes with snow-covered mountains and frosty trees growing on rocky ledges in a misty atmosphere. They look like diluted versions of Li Ch'êng's dramatic winter scenes, as witnessed by the large picture in the Ku-kung collection and a somewhat smaller and more convincing winter scene in private possession in China, dated 1339.¹ The handscroll, formerly in the Manchu Household collection, belongs to the same group; it represents an extensive view over a wide bay framed by boulders and bulging rocks along the shores. The influence from Li Ch'êng is here predominant, particularly in the composition, but the general tone is more idyllic owing to the elegant pavilion and the presence of some human figures.² The same influence may also be traced in the hanging scroll representing Mountains and Water in Autumn Mist, which is praised by Tung Ch'î-ch'ang in a colophon at the top, though here absorbed in a more intricate composition.³

The paintings that might be placed in the second group are perhaps more exceptional, but two or three characteristic examples might be mentioned. The best known among these is the River Landscape in Haze (and three men seated under tall pines) in the Ku-kung collection. It is a picture whose sensitive tone and far-reaching view over the winding river are impressive and equally so the excellent drawing of the cedar-trees, which are of the same type as the trees in Ts'ao Chih-po's pictures. The picture is fully signed and provided with a poem by Wang Fêng (Pl.92).

This kind of twisted or writhing conifer is the main motif of a small painting mounted on the same

scroll with Wang Mien's Plum-blossoms and Chao Yung's Fishermen on a Mountain Stream, now in Hui-hua kuan in Peking. It here stretches out horizontally from a rock towards a boat on the river, as if the dragon-like knotty branches were trying to catch hold of the small human beings in the boat (Pl.93).

The handscroll known as The Pavilion of Flowering Fields, which exists in two almost identical versions – one in Hui-hua kuan in Peking and the other in the Freer Gallery – may be said to occupy an intermediary place between the two groups mentioned above. The composition is fundamentally of a type that was used by the later Sung academicians, but the brushwork has a pictorial quality of the strong and masterly kind that we have found in paintings by Huang Kung-wang or Wu Chên. It was painted in 1364, the year before the death of the master, and shows him at the last stage of his artistic development. According to the lengthy colophon in which Chu Tê-jun's Taoistic ideas about Heaven and Man find expression, the motif is taken from the neighbourhood of Yü-hang-shan (at Hangchow) where a friend of his had a summer retreat. The pavilion is built on a low river-bank in the foreground and the mountain ridge forms a series of sloping silhouettes on the opposite side of the water. Yet the picture may be said to convey something more than faithfulness to nature, it also suggests the friendly atmosphere of the pavilion where the two men are seated in conversation, and reaches far beyond over the verdant hills where their thoughts may have dwelt in bygone days.

¹ Cf. *Ku-kung*, vol.VII and Omura, *Bijing Gakun*, I, 12. There is a similar Winter Landscape, signed by Yao Yen-ch'ing, who followed the same current of style as Chu Tê-jun, in the Boston Museum.

² Cf. *Sijon*, pl.37.

³ *Ku-kung*, vol.IV.

V

Ni Tsan

None of the great painters who contributed to the creation of the new kind of landscape-painting that became prevalent in the Yüan period is more difficult to grasp and characterize in terms of intellectual definitions than Ni Tsan. He stands more isolated than any of his contemporaries, more independent as an artist and a character, and does not, as such, fit in exactly as a link in the chain of the stylistic evolution.

Ni Tsan did not lean on the models of early Sung times to the same extent as most of his contemporaries, nor did he become the head of a school or a local group. Yet, with the passing of time his highly individualistic art came to have a considerable influence on later generations of landscape-painters. The leading critics at the end of the Ming and the beginning of the Ch'ing periods never tired of extolling him as *primus inter pares*, i.e. the most exquisite and refined of all the Yüan masters. The secret or significance of his art was, according to these expounders, something that could not be adequately described in words or rendered in copies, however skilfully made, because it was, so to speak, hidden in forms which became alluring through their apparent simplicity and freedom from all traditional elements of decorative beauty or elaboration. Somehow they seemed to reveal a singularly attractive, yet unattainable spirit of aloofness or detachedness, a genius for whom the stones and the trees and the mountain ranges beyond the quiet waters were simply symbols for his meditative moods and deepest thoughts.

Nothing could be more unassuming, more restful and quiet than Ni Tsan's river views with a few leafless trees or bamboo stalks on a rocky bank or islet, yet they transmitted a state of meditative repose and comprehension of the soul of nature that no one else could evoke with such simple means. It exercised a singular attraction on kindred talents among later painters of kindred disposition, who did their utmost to imitate Ni Tsan's seemingly

plain and artless works but hardly ever succeeded in transmitting their inmost beauty or spiritual reverberation.

Such imitations became quite abundant in the days of Tung Ch'i-ch'ang and Wang Shih-min, when the demand for Ni Tsan's paintings was rapidly growing and the supply of the master's original works very scarce. Some of these paintings in the well-recognizable Ni Tsan manner were the works of very able painters and acceptable to collectors and amateurs, particularly when provided with poems and signatures purporting to be by the master. These productions undoubtedly exceeded the original works in number and as the imitations became mixed up with the real paintings, the popular idea of Ni Tsan's art became somewhat blurred, to say the least. It was the result of a vogue or fashion that reached its culmination at the beginning of the Ch'ing period, through the activities of the Four Wangs and their acolytes, and thus remained all through the eighteenth century a special current in the evolution of Chinese landscape-painting.

These conditions have left their mark on the rather extensive group of so-called Ni Tsan paintings in the former imperial collection, of which a certain number have been reproduced in the well-known Ku-kung publications. These, together with some of the unpublished pictures which I had an opportunity of seeing at the Taichung depot, left no hesitation in my mind as to the mixed character of this standard collection of Ni Tsan works. But there were many cases in which definite conclusions as to the date and authenticity of the paintings had to be deferred; and the same may be said of a number of somewhat similar paintings in public and private collections in the East as well as in the West. The larger number are no doubt of later origin, yet even among these are some which may serve to illustrate typical features of Ni Tsan's style and consequently possess historical interest.

Of the sixty or more pictures listed in our adjoining catalogue hardly more than a dozen can be unhesitatingly accepted as works by the master; the rest are more like imitations of various degrees even though provided with fine inscriptions and signatures, and it should not be forgotten that some of them have served during four or five hundred years as examples of Ni Tsan's art. A thorough study of all these different classes of pictures which pass under the master's name, is not possible at this place, we must limit the discussion to a few outstanding specimens and concentrate attention on their fundamental features, such as may be observed in the compositions and the brushwork. But before we enter into a study of a few single specimens, it may be well to insert some historical information about Ni Tsan's life and personality, as this may serve to throw further light on the correspondence between the character of the man and the significance of his artistic creations.

Ni Tsan really never considered himself as a painter by profession comparable to Huang Kung-wang or Wu Chên. He started as an amateur of painting, a wealthy collector and lover of antiquity, and if with the years he devoted more and more time to this art, he did it because he found pleasure in playing with brush and ink and not with any personal ambition of creating important works of art.

He was born in 1301 as a member of a wealthy family in Wu-hsi, Kiangsu, and continued his activity until 1374. He thus witnessed the restoration of the national Ming dynasty, but the changes in the political fortunes of the country did not leave any marks on his artistic activity; he remained singularly untouched by temporal or material conditions and lived in a world of his own close to the heart of nature.

He became generally known under his by-name (*tzü*) Yüan-chên (The Very Quiet One), or still better under one or other of the various descriptive sobriquets (*hao*) by which he called himself, for instance Yün-lin-tzû, The Child of Clouds and Forests, or Chung-nung Chû-shih, The Spotless Scholar, or Ni Yü, The Unapproachable Ni, to

quote three of the eight or more names that he used from time to time.

While still a man of means and social standing, he was very active as a collector of antiquities and specimens of painting and calligraphy, which were kept in a special pavilion called *Ch'ing-pi ko*, where a circle of scholars often united to enjoy poetry and wine.¹ The most distinguishing feature of this place and of its host seems to have been an extraordinary cleanliness. We are told that if a dirty man had entered the pavilion, the place where he had been seated was at once washed, and the host used to keep a basin of clean water at his side, so that he could wash his face and hands whenever he was going to paint. And "this cleanliness was also evident in his conduct" – that is, in his purity of mind and heart.

Ni Tsan is further characterized in *Wu-shêng shih-shih* as follows: "He enjoyed humming poetry and loved to paint old trees, bamboos and stones, as well as landscapes on small scrolls. The reverberation of his life-breath was far reaching and melancholy. Those who knew him said: 'In Ni Yün-lin's bosom the ice, the snow, the mist and the clouds were continuously rising and sinking and were most naturally brought out by his brush', which indeed is true. At the beginning of the Ming dynasty he was summoned to the imperial palace, but did not go. People considered him a great scholar; he was the foremost Sage of Wu-hsi."

From other records, we learn that when he had passed middle age (shortly before the fall of the Yüan dynasty), he distributed all his wealth among his relatives and started travelling in a house-boat along the rivers and lakes in Wu. He no longer found any pleasure in the company of the nobles and the rich, but put up at small country temples where he was satisfied with a wooden bench and a bamboo lamp. His pictures he gave away freely to the common people just as Wu Chên did, but if collectors offered him money, he refused to accede. Thus it happened that when a rich man sent him silk and

¹ Biographical data regarding Ni Tsan are reported in *Shu-hsi fang*, Vol. 11; in *Wu-shêng shih-shih* and in *Ming shih*, ch. 298.

money requesting a picture in return, he tore up the silk and returned the money with the reply: "I have never during my whole life painted for the vulgar and ostentatious". After his death his pictures became so highly appreciated that the Kiangnan families were divided into two classes, i.e. such as possessed and such as did not possess pictures by Ni Tsan.

As may be discovered by a glance at our list of Ni Tsan's works, there are at least eight paintings with dates between 1341 and 1352, but I hardly think that more than one or two of these can possibly be accepted as authentic works by the artist. The best documented among them is a picture formerly in the P'ang Yüan-chi collection, known as *The Six Gentlemen*, which is dated 1345 and distinguished by four poems, one by Huang Kung-wang, the others by lesser known men, besides the artist's inscription (Pl.94). The composition consists of six tall trees forming a thin transparent silhouette against the far extending quiet water, which is bounded at the upper edge of the picture by a low mountain ridge, a typical design which returns in a number of so-called Ni Tsan landscapes. Sometimes the trees are bare, in other paintings they have still some leaves, but it makes no great difference because the prevailing effect is always one of desolation and stillness – the cool atmosphere of a grey autumn eve. This particular example may not be one of the best of its kind because the brushwork in the folds of the rocks and the leafy trees is rather soft and lacking in vigour, yet the picture which as said above has inscriptions by Ni Tsan as well as Huang Kung-wang is commonly accepted as an early work by the master. It is furthermore interesting as an example of type and may as such be compared with a somewhat similar painting (formerly in the Chang Ts'ung-yü collection) which represents five lanky trees on the sloping rocks of a river-bank (Pl.95). A close comparison between the trees as well as the rocks in these two paintings should reveal to the student a considerable difference in quality, the brushwork in the latter picture being more vigorous and structural through the use of short and firm horizontal and

vertical touches. These reveal the inimitable master brush which produces an atmosphere and a very sensitive play of light and shade which may be said to shed a gleam of freshness over the picture. This in fact is good enough to serve as a pictorial touchstone in the study of so-called Ni Tsan paintings of varying quality.

If we keep to the chronological sequence of the dated pictures it seems fitting to take note of the large album-leaf (formerly in the Manchu Household collection) which represents two Cottages on a Hill-slope at the Foot of a Mountain by a River. It has a fine inscription by the painter, dated 1352, and a poem by Hsü Pên. The whole thing is more like an ink-drawing than a complete painting, yet the mountain appears impressively grand and massive, modelled as it is in distinctly marked broad planes divided by deep folds. It reminds us to some extent of Huang Kung-wang's way of solving similar problems, though it must be admitted that Ni Tsan's drawing has a very rare structural beauty (Pl.96).

The above-established compositional type, in which the vertical lines of a few tall trees placed in the foreground dominate against the horizontals of a distant shore-line, is further developed by the addition of a low pavilion or a large upright stone on the foreground shore and, in other pictures, still more through the increase in the size and accumulation of mountains beyond the water. The latter kind of development may be observed to some extent in the rather charming picture formerly in the P'ang Yüan-chi collection and now in Hui-hua kuan, Peking, in which the distant mountains rise in sharply drawn silhouettes against the sky and a small open pavilion is placed at the foot of the trees together with a clump of bamboo. The picture has a long inscription by the master and a poem by a friend added at the top (Pl.97A).

Another variation of this motif may be observed in a somewhat larger picture in the Ku-kung collection on which there are poems by the painter (dated 1363) and two other men. The mountains are here brought closer to the foreground and they

rise steeply right out of the water. With their height and massivity they dominate the composition far more than is usual in Ni Tsan's river landscapes (Pl.97b). One may ask whether this is the same picture as An I-chou describes in *Mo-yüan hui-kuan* in the following words:

"Ni Yün-lin used to paint the mountains and rocks with horizontal wrinkles, but in this picture the piled up mountains have 'alum tops' (*fan-t'ou*) and are all done with 'hemp-fibre wrinkles' which run straight downward. Ni Tsan here imitated altogether the manner of Chü-jan. It is one of his best works and it really shows a change of style." The observation is well taken and applies to some extent also to this picture in the Ku-kung collection.

In addition to the two last-named pictures a third may still be mentioned in which the same kind of compositional development is carried still further in a surprisingly modern way. This is in the collection of Dr. Lo Chia-lun in Taipei and shows a low pavilion at the foot of trees on a rocky ledge and not very far from this foreground shore, in the middle of the river, a mountainous island rising into a peak, and other mountains further away, which accentuates the horizontal extension of the view. The mode of composition is practically the same as that used 300 years later by Wang Yüan-ch'ü and is certainly not less suggestive of atmospheric beauty and boundless space than the famous landscapes by this classic master of the eighteenth century. The master's inscription is dated 1365, and in addition to this there is an inscription by Sun Ta-ya dated 1382 (Pl.98).

The other compositional type mentioned above, which includes besides the trees and a pavilion an upright garden stone and some bamboo plants, may be observed in at least two pictures in the Ku-kung collection and two in private possession in New York. They are all very interesting as illustrations of Ni Tsan's habit of returning over and over again to certain favourite motifs, though each time he did so in a somewhat different mood, so that we get modifications. The most charming of these pictures is the so-called Pavilion of the Purple

Fungus in the Ku-kung collection.¹ Here the foreground group, consisting of the trees, the upright stone, the pavilion and the bamboos, forms a complete picture which is balanced by the sloping rocks at the upper edge. This work has no date, but a poem by the painter, and it is remarkable for its rich and deep ink tones laid on with a vigorous brush (Pl.99a).

In the slightly different version of the same motif, which belongs to Mr. C. C. Wang in New York, the foreground group is somewhat differently arranged though it consists of the same elements as in the preceding picture, with the mountain ridge in the upper section somewhat simplified and painted in a rather pale greyish tone. The picture may not possess the same degree of freshness and brilliancy as the one mentioned above, but it is painted with a charmingly light brush and has altogether a very delicate appeal (Pl.99b). This seems also to have been realized by Tung Ch'ü-ch'ang, who has made a very close copy of it, as may be seen in the famous album (in the Ku-kung collection) called *Hsiao Chung Hsien Fa*, commonly ascribed to Tung Ch'ü-ch'ang.

In two other pictures in the Ku-kung collection the motif is reduced to a garden stone, two tender bamboo plants and a dry tree, a composition which also recurs in a picture in the former C. T. Loo collection in New York (Pl.100). The two first-named pictures are dated 1363 and 1371 respectively,² and they are both charmingly fresh and bold ink sketches which fascinate by the supreme freedom of the brushwork and particularly the use of the significant horizontal strokes or touches. The most important painting of this kind is, however, the fairly large hanging scroll, formerly in the P'ang Yüan-chü collection and now in Hui-hua kuan in Peking, which represents young Bamboo-plants and a Wootung-tree by a Garden Rock. It is a work of supreme pictorial beauty done with a well-soaked brush in quasi *p'o-mo* fashion, yet with insistence on the structural character of the tree and the stone. It is one of those rare pictures which never fade on the

¹ *Ku-kung*, vol. XXXV.

² Reproduced in *Ku-kung*, vol. XXV and *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XL.

film of the memory after they have once been really seen. It seems quite useless to try to analyse or describe a picture like this without access to an adequate reproduction, but I must confess that I seldom have been more impressed than by this picture of a Chinese wootung-tree by a garden rock and some bamboos, exhibited in one of the poorly lighted halls of Hui-hua kuan in Peking. It must have been this work which An-I-chou praises for its exuberantly rich brushwork in the *p'o-nu* fashion – of a kind (rich to a degree?) seldom seen even among the bamboos and stones by master Ni Tsan. Consequently (says this well-informed connoisseur) the brushwork may be praised as "divine freedom". To me it revealed a rare combination of virile strength and pictorial sensitiveness.

Ni Tsan occasionally did coloured landscapes also, but the only one of these which has survived, a picture in the Ku-kung collection dated 1368, can hardly be said to increase our admiration for the master. According to the title it represents scattered Trees on a Rocky Shore after Rain. It is a remarkable composition of mountains enclosing a deep bay and some buildings among bare trees on the foreground shore, quite different from the traditional patterns of similar motifs. It may well be inspired by a definite site and the painter has rendered it with obvious care and intimacy. It must once have been a very beautiful picture, but it has unfortunately lost much of its original beauty, the colours are blurred and the whole thing has taken on a somewhat dirty grey tone. But even so it is a very interesting testimony to Ni Tsan's consummate art as an interpreter of definite aspects of nature (Pl. 101).

According to a tradition reported by Chang Ch'ou of the Ming period, Ni Tsan's style of writing was in his early days very firm and vigorous, but became in the course of time more refined, whereas his manner of painting was, to begin with, rather fine and detailed, and became with increasing age bolder and more vigorous. The critic adds that most people only know the broad and sketchy style of Ni Tsan's later years, but have no idea of the refined

manner which he used when he was in his prime. Other critics, quoted by Chang Ch'ou, point out the same thing, emphasizing the evolution of Ni Tsan's style from a relatively delicate and slender manner towards a broader and more pictorial way of handling the brush and ink.

The short handscroll representing bits of the Shih-tzū-lin garden in Suchou, which is dated 1373, is an interesting example of this later stage in the evolution of Ni Tsan's brushwork. As an actual view of certain sections of the garden it may seem somewhat confused, but as a specimen of pure ink-painting it is brilliant. It is an uncommonly fresh and pictorially effective rendering of fantastic rockeries, leafy trees and simple small buildings shaded by shrubs and bamboos, all rendered with a very sensitive brush and boldly applied accents of light and shade (Pl. 102).

According to Ni Tsan's inscription, this painting was done for the monk (?) Yu-hai Yin-kung, who at the time was the master of Shih-tzū-lin, and it seems to have been the result of some preparatory deliberations or discussions between Ni Tsan and his friend the painter Chao Yüan (*tsū* Shan-ch'ang). He wrote as follows:

"I discussed with master Chao Shan-ch'ang the idea (plan) of making a true picture of Shih-tzū-lin. It is really done according to the ideas of Ching Hao and Kuan T'ung; Wang Mêng could not have conceived such a thing even in his dreams. May Tu-hai Yin-kung treasure it. Written by the lazy Tsan."¹

¹ The colophon, signed by five experts in the service of the emperor Ch'ien-lung, which is attached to the picture, contains some information about the history of Shih-tzū-lin (the Lin Grove) during the early part of the Yüan period, when it had been arranged as a dwelling place for a prominent Buddhist teacher, and also in later times. The original buildings must, however, have been of a very brittle kind and perished at an early date, whereas parts of the fantastic rock garden remained, constituting then, as in more recent times, the main attraction of the place.

Several painters in the Yüan period tried to render the characteristic beauty of Shih-tzū-lin in pictures, Ni Tsan was not the only one. Chü T'ü-jun also did a picture of the place, but this had perished already before the Ch'ien-lung period. Hsü P'ên repainted various portions of the garden in an album of twelve leaves, which until recently was in the Manchus Household collection and was published by Yen Kuang Co. in Peking in 1928, but to what extent these pictures actually were done from nature is nowadays difficult to tell.

The statement that the picture was done in accordance with the manners of two of the most prominent old landscape-painters can hardly be taken in a literal sense, because it would be difficult to trace a stylistic connexion between Ni Tsan's painting and those of the above-mentioned old masters. The reference may rather be taken as a kind of assurance on the part of Ni Tsan that he had done the Shih-tzū-lin picture according to the highest, not to say "classic", standards of early landscape-painting. He was evidently proud of his work and considered it as a kind of final masterpiece in his long production which at the time was approaching its end. This rather self-confident verdict by the artist is quoted by later critics who accord a very prominent place to this picture in the individual *œuvre* of the master. It was to them one of the most convincing proofs of Ni Tsan's prominent position among the protagonists of the "Southern School".

Tung Ch'i-ch'ang was quite explicit in this respect; after quoting Ni Tsan's inscription he adds the following remarks: "If we want to classify him (Ni Tsan), he should be placed in the *i* (unrestrained) class. He was of the same class as Mi Fei and Chao Ta-nien. Yet it may be truly said that there is not much difference between him and Huang Kung-wang or Wang Meng."

Tung Ch'i-ch'ang felt that the master who did the Shih-tzū-lin picture had to be placed in the class of the "unrestrained" painters who worked in the broad and fluent manner of Mi Fei, yet he was also obliged to admit that Ni Tsan had certain points of contact with the other great landscape-painters of his time. There were differences of technique and temperament between these men, yet they were all representatives of a new kind of landscape-painting springing from their deep comprehension of nature.

They were all strongly individualistic and independent painters; Ni Tsan perhaps more so than all the others. And the longer he lived, the more his subtle genius manifested itself in light and spontaneous use of the brush, a fact repeatedly noted by critics of the Ming and Ch'ing periods. "Old Yü" became with the years simple, pure and natural; "the only one after the mad Mi" (according to Tung Ch'i-ch'ang, as quoted in *Shu-hua p'u*).

Shên Hao, who wrote his *Hua-chü* at the beginning of the Ch'ing period, quotes also Ni Tsan's colophon on the Shih-tzū-lin picture and adds to it the following comment: "He could not entirely avoid depending on his predecessors; yet in his old age he followed his own ideas, rubbed and brushed and was like an old lion walking alone without a single companion. One day he painted some bamboos and trees in lamplight and felt quite proud of them. When he rose next morning and unrolled the picture, he found that it did not quite correspond to the appearance of the bamboos; whereupon he laughed and said: 'There are parts in this picture which do not contain the outward likeness of the bamboos, but such parts are most difficult to do'." The remark may seem rather vague, but it implies a distinction between outward likeness and inner reality or artistic significance. Of all the great Yüan painters, Ni Tsan was probably the one who realized this distinction most keenly; he was not primarily interested in formal accuracy or descriptive representation, but rather in the aesthetic principle of things. Consequently, as has been often stated, his works were extremely difficult to copy. His essential qualities were beyond imitation (and thus also evade description). But he remained nevertheless an inspiring ideal all through the history of Chinese painting.

VI

Wang Mêng

The youngest of the Four Great Masters was Wang Mêng. The year of his birth is not definitely known, but it may have been about 1309, or shortly after; when he passed away (while in prison) in 1385 he was a man in the seventies. He was consequently active during the first two decades of the new national dynasty and had a considerable influence on some younger painters at that juncture, though the importance of his art as a model and a source of inspiration became still more potent two centuries later in the period of "the Four Wang".

He was born at Wu-hsing, Chekiang, as a nephew of Chao Mêng-fu; his *tsü* was Shu-ming, but as an artist he became best known under his *hao* Huang-ho shan ch'iao (The Fuel-gatherer of the Yellow Crane Mountain) and other variations on the same sobriquet. His heart may well have been that of a recluse and nature-worshipper; yet he did not become a hermit to the same extent as Wu Chên or Ni Tsan, but entered on an official career, serving for a while as a "law-secretary" in the capital and then, in the reign of Hung-wu, as a magistrate of the Tai-an country district in Shantung. His end was tragic; he died in prison, where he had been confined as a sympathiser of Hu Wei-yung, the treacherous minister of the emperor Hung-wu.

He received the first guidance in the art of painting from no less a person than Chao Mêng-fu, the father of his mother, but like most of the Yüan landscape-painters he chose Tung Yüan and Chü-jan as his standard models, but is also said to have been influenced by the art of Li Shêng, the great master from Shu who, according to the chroniclers, was the most important transmitter of Wang Wei's style.

Wang Mêng's greatness as a painter and his influence on later generations of landscapists can hardly be exaggerated, but it was based on qualities

different from those which constituted the importance of Wu Chên or Ni Tsan. He was not a romantic or a visionary in the same sense as these men, but nevertheless a great interpreter of the grandeur and innate life of nature. Highly accomplished as a man of the brush, he mastered all the technicalities of painting and was particularly admired for his manner of rendering the "wrinkles" of mountains, the moss on the stones, the rugged pine-trees and the hidden depths of the gullies. His large compositions are rich in pictorial details, yet at the same time clearly organized and perfectly unified through the rhythmic flow of leading lines and the balance of the masses. They may not be painted with the spontaneous ease of some of Wu Chên's charming works; they are no "ink-plays" in the traditional sense of the term, but real paintings often highly elaborated and finished in every detail.

Yet it would certainly be a mistake to base our appreciation of Wang Mêng's artistic production simply on his technical brilliancy. Painting was to him a more serious, not to say exhausting, occupation than a "play with the brush". In contemplating some of his most dramatic compositions it may seem as if the painter had been struggling or competing with the creative forces of nature and tried to wrest from them the secret of their organic growth. One may indeed be impressed by the moral quality of some of his great landscapes, which bear witness to a tremendous concentration of the creative will as well as a consummate mastery of the means of expression. They reveal an extraordinary grasp of the phenomena of nature brought into the service of a real painter's genius.

Wang Mêng's artistic importance may not have been fully recognized by the people of his time, except by a few of the most advanced critics and painters, but when the final classification and grouping of the Yüan painters were systematized by Chang

Ch'ou and Tung Ch'i-ch'ang towards the end of the Ming period, he was placed in the very front rank, i.e. in the same class as Chao Mêng-fu and Huang Kung-wang, above all the rest. This is best expressed by Chang Ch'ou in his writings on and about Wang Mêng's famous picture called *The South Cottage of the True Hermit* (i.e. his friend T'ao Tsung-i), from which a few paragraphs may be quoted:¹

"The classification of pictures was much developed in the Yüan period. Among the painters of the Yüan period Chao Tzū-ang, Huang Tzū-chiu, and Wang Shu-ming reached the divine (were divinely inspired). As to Kao K'o-kung, Ni Tsan and Wu Chên, large sums are paid for their works at the present time, but after a thorough and careful study of their pictures, I think that they were specialists and not men of all-round ability. The works by Chao Tzū-ang and Huang Tzū-chiu which have been transmitted are, however, very few; those which I have seen can be counted on the fingers, whereas I have seen more than twenty pictures by Wang Mêng. They are all very impressive (moving), but with regard to refined and delicate brushwork, wonderful composition, noble and elegant use of colours and strikingly vivid effect, none is superior to his picture of *The South Cottage of the True Hermit*."

This encomium of Wang Mêng is further developed and qualified in the colophon written by Chang Ch'ou on the above-mentioned picture. Here he says in part:

"Wang Mêng was a good painter. He inherited the style of Chao Mêng-fu, who was his grandfather on the maternal side, but surpassed him by working in a more unrestrained manner. He did not seek to please the people of his time but cared only for the brush-idea (*pi-i*, viz. the significance of the brush-work), by which he expressed the promptings of his genius. Therefore Ni Tsan wrote in a colophon, on one of his pictures: 'His brush is refined and his ink wonderful like those of Wang Hsi-chih. His heart is pure like that of Tsung Ping. His strength is

sufficient to carry a tripod. There has been no one equal to him for a hundred years.' If Ni Tsan could speak of him in this way, the quality of his painting merits to be known.

"Whenever he visited his retired friend T'ao Tsung-i he would prolong his stay for days and months, and when he became excited with wine, he would take up the brush and paint. This picture of the South Cottage is his masterpiece; it is deep and harmonious. Here he has completely freed himself from old habits of painting in colour. It is a work far superior to (not to be compared with) common paintings..."

In trying to understand Wang Mêng's greatness as a painter, we should also recall the negative side or limitations of his genius connected with the fact that he was not a man of literary accomplishments, not a poet, nor a calligrapher like Wu Chên or Ni Tsan, not to mention Chao Mêng-fu, but exclusively a painter. Chang Ch'ou's remark, "that his literary writings were not in accordance with the classic rules, though he could write several thousand words within a short moment", is more or less substantiated by the inscriptions on his pictures, which neither from a literary nor from a calligraphic point of view bear comparison with the inscriptions by the other great masters of the period. This may be regarded as a limitation, but it serves at the same time to emphasize his exclusiveness as a painter.

According to the characterizations quoted above and some others of no less authoritative nature, Wang Mêng was pre-eminently a follower of Tung Yüan and Chü-jan, and as such one of the most prominent representatives of the Southern School. Yet, the same critics also tell that Wang Mêng was an assiduous student of the old masters and that his art, so to speak, transcended the limits of the Southern School. Tung Ch'i-ch'ang writes that though Wang Mêng's style was derived from Chao Mêng-fu, he learned from all the famous masters of the T'ang and Sung dynasties, but Tung Yüan and Wang Wei were his favourite models. The same

¹ Cf. *Shu-hua fang*, vol. 11, pp. 13, 14 and 19.

writer returns in various passages to the inclusiveness of Wang Meng's art or manner of painting and makes finally the sweeping remark that he "combined all the earlier masters".

In writing about the relation between Wang Meng and his predecessors of T'ang and Sung times Chang Ch'ou enters into further details and points out in particular (as previously mentioned) the importance of Li Shêng, the great painter from Shu, who was active from the T'ang into the Sung period. He wrote: "As a painter Wang Meng followed the style of Li Shêng. His works rank between those of Chao Tzû-ang and Huang Tzû-chiu" (an opinion which he bases on a picture representing "Hsüan Wu cultivating purity", i.e. seated in meditation).

In the further comparison between the relative importance of certain leading painters of the Sung and the Yüan period, the writer makes the following statement with reference to Wang Meng.

"Nowadays, in discussing painting, people often place the works of the Yüan masters in the first class; they do not realize that the Yüan painters all learned their art from the famous masters of the T'ang and Sung periods, who were the true originators. But genuine works by T'ang and Sung masters are very rare. The collectors have as a rule seen only copies and consequently they have no high opinions (about T'ang and Sung paintings). The real connoisseur who has respect and love for paintings does not do this (draw such conclusions). For example: In Wang Meng's landscapes the human figures, the grass, the trees, the mist and clouds and so on are all imitated after Li Shêng. Only the manner of making the wrinkles is somewhat different. Mr. Hsiang preserves Li Shêng's picture *The Great Sages*, and if you study it carefully and look at it in detail, you will find that I am right. But nowadays people are hasty and do not go into the matter thoroughly."

To what extent Wang Meng's dependence on Li Shêng was supported by the actual characteristics of their paintings, is nowadays impossible to tell since

no examples of the older master's works have survived, but Chang Ch'ou would hardly have advanced the opinion if there had not been some reasons for it. Li Shêng, according to the best informed old chroniclers,¹ was a great romantic landscape-painter (also esteemed for his Buddhist wall-paintings) who started as a follower of Wang Wei and Chang Tsao, but gradually freed himself from dependence on the old models and turned to nature as the only real master; then, as "his heart learned from Creation itself, his ideas advanced beyond those of the ancient worthies", to quote Kuo Jo-hsü. Something of the same might also be said of Wang Meng, because he too must have learned more from Creation than from any of the accepted old models, and his approach to Li Shêng may well have been caused by a natural sympathy for a kindred temperament.

A general survey of the paintings ascribed to Wang Meng in various collections and publications would carry us too far; the pictures are very numerous and they offer problems of a peculiar kind, being on the one hand fairly homogeneous, yet including on the other hand variations and distinctions in the brushwork which hardly can be fully appreciated or defined except before the originals or in very large reproductions. As these conditions cannot be fulfilled in this preparatory study, we must limit ourselves to some general remarks, referring to typical features of composition and pictorial execution, i.e. the artistic script of the painter. The former may be found well developed also in copies and imitations, whereas the actual tracks of the brush are like the fingerprints of the artist by which his own works might be recognized. But, such fingerprints easily get blurred in minor reproductions.

Most of Wang Meng's pictures are large hanging-rolls, sometimes reaching a height of five to six feet; the handscrolls are relatively few. They are all painted on paper, mainly with ink, sometimes toned

¹ *I-chou ming-hua lu* and Kuo Jo-hsi's *T'u-hua chien-wên chü*, where Li Shêng is highly praised. Cf. Soper's edition, p. 32 and notes.

with colour that also has been used to accentuate certain details. The pictorial beauty or atmosphere of these pictures is, however, mainly the result of the brushwork, the gradation and transparency of the ink, the tonal modulations.

The compositions often appear rather compact as they fill the whole surface from the very top to the bottom of the picture; any empty space at the top is relatively small and insignificant, by no means comparable to the open space in Wu Chên's or Ni Tsan's pictures. They may thus appear overcrowded at first sight. The main elements of the designs are the deeply folded and creviced rocks, boulders or humps, sometimes rising straight and precipitously but at other times piled up one on top of the other, forming masses that seem to be winding and crawling in vain efforts to reach the sky.

In some of these pictures the tops consist of an agglomeration of minor humps, called by the Chinese "alum-heads", but in other examples they are cut in the shape of flat terraces. There is abundant mossy growth along the edges and in the crevices, but the larger trees are found only lower down on the stony banks of the creeks or mountain streams, where they shade scholars' pavilions. When there is no room for a building, the scholar may be seated on a stone contemplating the silent grandeur of the landscape, or walking along a brook. The human element is seldom missing; it indicates, so to speak, the *point de départ* of the whole view or the relation with certain places or persons as explained in such titles as *The Ya-i Study of Ch'en Wei-yün*, *A Hermit's Abode in the Ch'ing-pien Mountain*, *The Homestead of Mr. Su-an under Pine-trees*, *Fishing in the Ching-i River*, *The Tung-shan Homestead at the Foot of high Mountains*, etc. Judging by these and other picture titles of a similar kind, a certain number of Wang Mêng's landscapes may have been inspired by familiar sites or painted as records of visits to the summer resorts of scholarly friends. But they are more or less freely adjusted in accordance with the compositional types indicated above.

A very good example of such compositions is the picture now in the Art Institute in Chicago called *A Quiet Life in a Wooded Glen* (Pls. 103, 104). It represents a scholarly gentleman seated on the porch of a very neat summer pavilion under large shady trees occupied in playing the *ch'in*. He is attended by two servant-boys; everything is nicely adjusted around the house; it is framed by curving and intertwining trees and backed by deeply fissured pointed rocks which reach almost to the upper edge of the picture, thus accentuating the vertical rhythm of the design, though partly cut in a series of gradual steps or ledges which are painted as seen from above.

The structural formations of the rocks and boulders are here, as in most of Wang Mêng's paintings, dependent on the so-called "hemp-fibre wrinkles" (*p'i-ma-ts'un*), at some places combined with longer wrinkles or striations said to be like "loosened ropes", and they are all spontaneous imprints of the master's brush. The importance of these elements for the pictorial effect of Wang Mêng's landscapes is easier to observe than to describe, yet they enrich the beauty of the whole composition like overtones on an instrument, evoking the atmosphere or life-breath of each scene. This has been recognized not only by critics, but also by some imitators, who consequently have tried to reproduce the master's *ts'un-fa* (method of making the wrinkles), though seldom with complete success. They have as a rule given either too much or too little, thus producing pictures which in spite of some likeness with Wang Mêng's works do not bear the stamp of his individual creations.

This may be illustrated by one or two examples. The disastrous effect of exaggerated wrinkles can be observed for instance in the well-known picture in the Ku-kung collection, also included in the London Exhibition of 1935-1936 (Cat. No. 1632), which according to the title represents the *Tung-shan Homestead*.¹ The composition is structurally impressive (as may be seen in the reproductions), but pictorially somewhat muddled owing to the

¹ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XXVII.

accumulation of too many insignificant wrinkles. A comparison with the picture in the Chicago Art Institute may serve to make the student aware of the difference between a skilful imitation and a well thought-out individual work by the master.

The monumental mountain landscape, *A Deep Gulley and Rushing Water*, formerly in the Ti P'ing-tzu collection in Shanghai, and reproduced in various Chinese and Japanese publications, is a different, though not less important imitation¹ (Pl. 105). The compositional design is here, too, impressively bold and lofty, the landscape throbs with the rush and roar of falling water; everything is subordinate to the central theme. Yet at closer sight, it becomes evident that the rocks which are piled up in a succession of deep folds, are lacking in structure, which is accentuated by the rather coarse brushwork, as in some of the large compositions by Hsieh Shih-chên (sixteenth century).

Wang Meng's own way of using the hemp-fibre wrinkles may be observed in a short handscroll dated 1351, which represents *A Waterfall between steep Cliffs and two Pavilions by the River below*² (Pl. 106). The picture is small, but the rocks and mountains have an air of rough grandeur. They are divided into two groups. On the one side a mountain wall, rising quite bare and precipitous, except for the grassy cover on the top, which is painted with rich inks and short strokes, while the front is shaded only with some slight traces of a rather dry brush like rills of water after rain. The rocks on the other side of the cascade are more deeply folded and furrowed in wavy lines marked by abundant growth of grass. There is an effective play of light and shade suggesting a surging, wavy movement, but the mountain tops are cut off in the same kind of terraces or broad steps as we have observed in other pictures by Wang Meng. The pictorial effect of a picture like this depends to a large extent on the use of the so-called wrinkles by which the painter renders the life-veins in natural objects.

There is, however, great variety in his use of these subtle pictorial means. In a picture like that

called *Spring Mountains with Study Pavilions under Pine-trees* (formerly in the Chou Hung-sun collection, now in the Shanghai Museum)³ (Pl. 108) the long and not too dense wrinkles are successfully used to emphasize the soft texture of the grassy slopes which rise rather steeply above tall pine-trees in the foreground and are painted in a dotted manner with rich ink. The undulating hemp-fibre wrinkles which seem to be rippling down over the hillsides remind us to some extent of corresponding elements in Tung Yüan's and Chü-jan's paintings, though Wang Meng uses them in a more naturalistic way than the old masters did. In their works such wrinkles were rather conventional elements of stylization, serving to unify or keep together in a harmonious design sections or bits of landscape intended to express the ideas of the painters, whereas Wang Meng uses them pre-eminently for the pictorial characterization of definite views or the kind of scenery that he is recording. His attitude towards nature is on the whole more realistic than that of the old masters; he is recording what he has seen and experienced, and not a few of his pictures represent definite sites, as indicated by their titles: *Spring Ploughing in the Valley at the Foot of the Mountains*,⁴ *Enjoying the Summer Day in a Pavilion in the Mountains*,⁵ *Fishing in the Ching-i River*,⁶ *The Su-an Homestead under Pine-trees at the Foot of high Mountains*,⁷ *The Thatched Cottages of Ts'ui Yen-hui*.⁸ All these pictures and several others of Wang Meng's landscapes take us to places where the painter had lived or which he had visited on certain occasions. He had climbed the mountains that he painted, listened to the torrents, and enjoyed

¹ *Chung-kuo ming-hua chi*, I, 87 and *Tōsō*, p. 173.

² Cf. *Shina Nanga*, vol. I, pl. 3.

³ Cf. *Tōsō*, p. 179.

⁴ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XIV.

⁵ Formerly in the P'ang Lai-chên collection, now in Hui-hua kuan.

^{6, 7} Both pictures in the collection of Mr. C. C. Wang, New York; the former is reproduced in the catalogue of the Cleveland Exhibition.

⁸ Cf. *Chügoku*, vol. II.

the evening coolness in the pavilions of his scholarly friends. The motifs had an objective existence as well as a subjective reality to him, and he approached them as a painter with the idea of recording them convincingly in a manner of his own, one which was quite definite and well unified, yet rich in variations of tone and texture. His attitude towards nature was different from that of the other great Yüan masters; he was not a philosopher like Huang Kung-wang, nor a poet (like Wu Chên), nor a scholarly amateur as Ni Tsan professed to be, but above all a real painter who found his inspiration in what he saw with his eyes and experienced through his senses. No two painters could be more unlike each other in their temperaments and in their technical methods than Ni Tsan and Wang Mêng. It is true, even they had some points of contact in their common intimacy with nature, but whereas Ni Tsan saw in it mainly symbols for his own thoughts and moods, Wang Mêng's attention was centred on the beauty and grandeur of mountains and rivers in themselves. Ni Tsan's landscapes very seldom had any attachment to actual sites or recognizable scenery, whereas Wang Mêng's pictures to no small extent had.

Yet it would be misleading to characterize these landscapes as illustrative, even though they are certainly not free imaginative compositions. If we look, for instance, at the first-named picture (in the Ku-kung collection) we find that though the deep gulley between the steep and craggy cliffs fills most of the picture, the chequered field with the tiny man at the plough attracts no less attention, standing out as it does against the dark mountain in a lighter tone. The decorative structure of the picture is grand, but the human motif cannot be overlooked or neglected.

The beautiful picture, now in the Hui-lua kuan (formerly in the P'ang Lai-chên collection), which is called *Enjoying a Summer Day in a Cottage in the Mountains*, was according to the inscription painted by Wang Mêng for his friend T'ung-hsüan in 1368 (Pl. 109B). It has furthermore a poem by

another friend called Lin Han and an inscription by Ch'ien-lung. The picture seems to me one of the most harmonious compositions among Wang Mêng's mountain landscapes of the kind. The winding river which follows the footline of the mountains from the very bottom of the picture up to the middle section leads far into the background and makes us feel the fresh air that sweeps around the curiously twisted and deeply fissured mountain cone. The rather firm and serried brush-strokes serve to strengthen the structural quality of the mountain and the picture and to emphasize their noble character.

A step further in the development of the dominating mountain motif in connexion with a scholar's pavilion or some similar place for enjoyment is illustrated in the picture in Mr. C. C. Wang's collection in New York which is known as the *Su-an Homestead* (Pl. 110B). The scholar's low dwelling is built by a mountain brook in the shade of large pine-trees which bend protectively over the roofs; but one can detect the scholar at his low table and a servant-boy in the courtyard. The human motif is quite distinct, yet almost swallowed up by the huge mountain which rises behind and fills the main part of the picture with its crawling and curving forms. Its extraordinary shape evokes the impression of some huge antediluvian creature, now petrified and deeply furrowed by brooks and ravines, but still in some way filled with instinctive life. The painter may or may not have had in mind such fantastic gigantic creatures of a legendary age, yet he sensed that there is life in rocks and mountains too, even though they do not move and grow like animate beings. The folds and fissures are thus utilized to enhance and enliven the forms, they become "dragon-veins" or arteries pulsating with a cosmic force.

No painter has to the same extent as Wang Mêng been able to utilize and for painting purposes transform such gigantic formations, no one has interpreted the inspiration of the mountains in a more monumental fashion. His heart was attuned to

them; he felt the cosmic pulse and made it comprehensible in pictorial form. When other painters tried to do the same thing, they exaggerated the windings and bulgings to the detriment of the nerves and the "dragon-veins", and created soft and structureless masses in place of petrified but still living grandeur.

In the majority of Wang Meng's paintings the mountains form the dominating motif, the very backbone of the composition, yet he has also painted landscapes in which the water, the views over a winding river or a still bay are dominant. The picture in Hui-hua kuan known as *A Straw-covered Cottage in the Western Field* (*Hsi-chiao ts'ao-t'ang t'u*) is a beautiful example of this type of landscape (Pl. 110A). Here the scholar's pavilion is placed at the bottom edge of the picture in a grove of large trees which seem to be budding, though still without leaves, as in early spring. Their branches form a transparent network through which water gleams. The view extends far into the distance over the windings of a broad river divided into three successive stages by the rocky ledges which stretch out from the margins of the picture. In this compositional arrangement the picture reminds us of certain landscapes by Wu Chên or even by Ni Tsan, though it is conceived and rendered from a different point of view with more insistence on naturalistic detail and a less developed poetic atmosphere.

Wang Meng's production was very large and comprised many variations on the principal theme of mountains and water; to describe them all and illustrate them with characteristic examples is not possible at this place. But it may be fitting to illustrate here as a final example the famous picture in the Ku-kung collection which is called *A Fisherman on a Mountain Stream under Blossoming Trees in Spring*, because here the most significant qualities of his art are integrated in a beautifully unified pictorial form (Pl. 111). The broad bay and the windings of the river are here enclosed and set off by ridges of craggy mountains and rows of verdant hills closer to the shore. There is the usual straw-

covered pavilion with the scholar and, furthermore, the fisherman in his boat close to the shore where blossoming trees bend down low over the water. A breath of spring sweeps through the whole composition; it gleams on the mirroring water and radiates from the fresh verdure of the hill-slopes and the ripples of the brook. The painter makes us feel it because he has himself felt it, observed it with his own eyes and absorbed it deep within him. Wang Meng evidently learned more from nature than from any human teacher or predecessor. He was indefatigable in studying the effects of the seasons and the ever-changing aspects of mountains and rivers. He was probably the most thorough of all the landscape-painters of the Yüan period, enjoying the work itself and the effort to approach actual nature as closely as possible. This fundamental guiding principle of his artistic activity is illustrated by some anecdotes of which the following may here be quoted. It is told by various authors with slight differences, but the main contents are the same:¹

"At the beginning of the Hung-wu period (1368-99) Wang Meng lived as a magistrate in T'ai-an (Shantung). At the back of his office was a high building with three rooms facing T'ai Shan. Here he spread white silk on the wall and started to paint the beautiful scenery of T'ai Shan. But as he only painted when he felt inspired, it took three years before the picture was finished (with colours). A friend of Wang Shu-ming called Ch'ên Ju-yen (Wei-yün) was serving at that time as a military official in Tsinan, and he was also a good painter.

"One day when he came to see Wang Shu-ming in T'ai-an the snow was falling heavily. The mountain view seemed then most wonderful. Shu-ming asked his friend: 'Could this picture of mine be changed into a snow-scene?' Ju-yen answered: 'Since it is coloured; how could it be done?' To which Shu-ming said: 'I shall try to do it'. Then he rubbed some white powder on the picture with the brush,

¹ Quoted from *Tu Yüan-ching t'an-t's'uan* in *Shu-hua fang*, vol. 11; another version in *Wu-sheng shih-shih*.

but the colour did not seem alive. Ch'ên Ju-yen thought for a while about this and then exclaimed: 'Now I have got it!' He took a small bow and tied a white powdered ink-brush on the string. The bow being elastic, it sprinkled white dots on the silk when he let it go. They looked just like flying and dancing snow-flakes. The two men were greatly surprised when they saw how wonderful the picture looked. Shu-ming wrote on it the title T'ai Shan in Dense Snow. He took great pride in the picture because, as he said, it was entirely free from vulgarity."

The picture was, however, finally lost in a fire, and we can thus no longer obtain an impression of its merits, but the story about the way it was done may give us a better idea about Wang Mêng's artistic attitude, his habit of working with long intervals at the same picture and his efforts to transmit as faithfully as possible the pictorial effect and atmosphere of actual landscapes in his paintings. None of the other great Yüan painters could possibly have produced a picture in a similar fashion, working on it repeatedly and finally accepting the co-operation of a friend. They were not painters in the same sense as Wang Mêng, even though creative artists of no less importance, a difference of kind that the Ming painter Li Jih-hua may have had in mind when he wrote: "Huang Kung-wang was broad and generous, Ni Tsan was simple and easy-going, each extremely good in his way, but both of them must yield to Wang Mêng as a painter."

To describe more of Wang Mêng's works is impossible at this place; the examples of type quoted above must be sufficient. They have all served as guidance or models not only for some immediate followers, but also for the later men who developed the so-called literary men's painting (*Wên-jên hua*). His pictures opened other roads for landscape-painting than those which had been followed heretofore.

The fresh enthusiasm for the landscape-painters of

the Yüan period which became so marked at the beginning of the eighteenth century, has been eloquently expressed by critics of that time and has ever since remained a fundamental note in Chinese art-history. The following appreciation offered by Wang Yüan-ch'i in his essay *Yü-ch'uang man-pi* is very characteristic in this respect:

"At the end of the Yüan period appeared the Four Masters... i.e. Wang Mêng, who used 'dragon veins' abundantly,¹ making them like winding snakes, and Wu Chên, who painted them like straight lines. These two artists did them quite differently, and one has to search for their points of correspondence. Huang Kung-wang painted them (the 'dragon veins') neither continuous nor disconnected; in using them he did not use, and in not using he used them (i.e. the 'dragon veins'). If one compares him with the two masters mentioned before, one may observe how different he was. Finally Ni Tsan, who was not stained by a single speck of dust; there was vigour in his ease and quietness; refinement and beauty in his simple and abridged manner. He went beyond the common rules and manners of brushwork, and he alone may be placed in the *i* class."

Such glowing appreciations of the Yüan masters by painters and critics of the Ch'ing dynasty could easily be multiplied. The admiration for their art did not abate with the years, but increased with the distance in time. Later critics became more and more aware of the fact that their paintings contained the purest and noblest expressions for the ideals which had inspired the leading masters of the Southern School all through the ages. They meant something more than simply formal models or guides, they were transmitters of a spiritual tradition rooted in the fundamental Chinese attitude towards art and life.

¹ The *lung-mo*, dragon veins or life-giving arteries, were evidently rhythmically arranged lines or brush-strokes giving movement and structure to the pictures.

VII

Ch'ên Ju-yen, Hsü Pên, Chao Yüan and Wang Li

Besides the Four Great Masters whose established fame has grown with the centuries, there were during the latter part of the Yüan period a number of lesser talents who followed in the footsteps of the great ones and also did their part in establishing the new style of landscape-painting. Some of these have already been mentioned among the followers of Kao K'o-kung, Huang Kung-wang and Wu Chên, and others will be introduced among the Ming painters, but a few words may here be added about two painters who belonged to Wang Meng's circle of friends.

Ch'ên Ju-yen, *tzü* Wei-yün, *hao* Ch'iu-shui, was a man from Suchou who in his early years served as a military adviser to Chang Shih-ch'êng, the rival of the emperor Hung-wu, but later was entrusted with a post in the provincial government of Tsinan and finally beheaded.¹ His friendship and co-operation with Wang Meng were noted above; the two painters had both started as pupils or students of Chao Meng-fu but turned gradually to the works by early masters of the Southern School who became the guides and models for their pictorial activity. This was to them not simply an agreeable pastime but a sustaining moral force: we are told that Ch'ên Ju-yen painted and sang until the last moment, when his head fell.

His stylistic dependence on Tung Yüan and Chü-jan is evident in several of his preserved paintings, as may be observed in the landscape dated 1341 (formerly in the Yamamoto collection) which represents precipitous rocks rising over a watery plain,² and also the large picture dated 1367 in the C. T. Loo Galleries in New York which represents an agglomeration of humpy hills and mountain ranges forming a kind of wavy table-land overgrown with grass and shrubs (Pl. 112). The slopes are creviced and folded in the typical fashion with long hemp-fibre wrinkles used here with monoto-

nous abundance in close adherence to the Chü-jan style.³ A rather different work by Ch'ên Ju-yen represents a View of the Chin River;⁴ the whole scene is here spread out as a far-extending view seen from above, the picture is thus quite unlike other landscapes of the period and apparently based on earlier models.

Hsü Pên, or Fên, whose *tzü* was Yu-wên and *hao* Pei-kuo-shêng, was born at Ch'êng-tu, probably around 1320, but spent the best part of his life at Suchou and became known as one of the Four Worthies of this flourishing centre of learning and art. Like Ch'ên Ju-yen he was for some time a supporter of Chang Shih-ch'êng, but was summoned by the emperor Hung-wu in 1374 and appointed governor first of Kuangtung and later of Honan. It seems, however, that he did not fulfil his official responsibilities with the same zeal as he devoted to literature and art; he is said to have failed to furnish sufficient provisions for the imperial armies when marching through his province, and as a consequence he suffered the same fate as Wang Meng and died in prison. In his lifetime he was best known as a poet, but has been greatly appreciated also as a painter by later historians and classified as one of the "Ten Talents" at the beginning of the Ming period.

Stylistically he is hardly more advanced than Wang Meng, though his work expresses a different temperament. Like his friends he followed the early Sung masters, yet the remark of a Ming critic that he especially studied Wang Chin-ch'ing and Mi

¹ The historical records in *Wu-shêng shih-shih*, I, 7, and *Ming-hua lu*, II. As he was active still during the first decade of the Ming dynasty, the List of his works is attached to the Ming section.

² *Tôzô*, p. 221 and *Bunjin Gasen*, I, 3.

³ Formerly in the Chang Tsung-yü collection and reproduced in the catalogue.

⁴ Cf. *K'-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XIV.

Yüan-chang¹ appears rather surprising; the influence from these painters is certainly not as evident as his dependence on Tung Yüan and Chü-jan (in particular). It must, however, be admitted that Hsü Pên's artistic personality and individual manner have been somewhat blurred by the fact that in later times, when his name became famous, he was made responsible for a number of paintings in quite disparate styles. To realize this one may compare, for instance, the handscrolls attributed to the painter in the Freer Gallery and the Boston Museum with the picture in the Ku-kung collection representing *A Mountain in Szechuan* (Pl. 113).

Accepting the last-named, which is dated 1371 and provided with a poetic inscription by Hsü Pên's friend, the bamboo-painter of Sung K'o, as an authentic starting-point, we are led to exclude most of the pictures which pass under his name (including the two above-mentioned scrolls) from the list of his authentic works. The above-mentioned picture in the Ku-kung collection has a very definite character owing to the swelling and bulging humps and rocks, which are brought together into a sort of rolling mass by some half-subdued interior forces. Some of the humps are overhanging, others are deeply folded or hollowed out by streams. In spite of their weight and structural significance, the forms writhe and the lines twist. The same is true of a landscape in W. Hochstadter's collection in New York which is signed and dated 1372. The mountain that fills the whole picture rises quite steeply but, just as in the previous example, it is composed of a wallowing mass of humps making the impression of an eruptive movement suddenly arrested and then camouflaged, so to speak, by a thick growth of herbs and shrubs, a soft carpet woven of innumerable hemp-fibre wrinkles sliding along or sweeping around the rolling shapes. There are many variations in the turn and flow of the lines, but they are dominated by a unifying rhythm which endows the picture with decorative structure.²

The painter of these two pictures must have been a somewhat original and very subtle follower of

Chü-jan. He has transformed the old master's way of building up the mountains with masses of soft humps into a more expressionistic manner of transmitting the pulse-beat of the cosmic life which to him was inherent in mountains as well as in trees and running waters. He was indeed a poet, but also a painter; "he made poems without sound", as said by an old critic who adds: "His paintings were done as ink-plays, or when he had enjoyed wine, and people could hardly suspect his skill in art". Yet later generations have accorded him a prominent place among the landscape-painters of the transition period.

Chao Yüan, whose *tsü* was Shan-ch'ang and *hao* Tan-lin, was another of the transition men who started their activity at the end of the Yüan period and continued it during the Hung-wu reign. He seems to have been exactly contemporary with Hsü Pên and their personal fate was rather similar; they both met a premature death at the order of the emperor, who was not satisfied with their services. Hsü Pên died in prison, as told above, but Chao Yüan lost his head right away when the emperor found that his paintings of ancient heroes in one of the palace halls in Nanking was wanting in respectful veneration.

His artistic reputation with posterity is, however, based on his landscape-paintings said to be "of deep and mysterious effect" and based mainly on studies of Wang Wei as well as Tung Yüan and Chü-jan. His works are nowadays rare; only half a dozen are noted in our list, but they form together a fairly homogeneous individual *œuvre* of old-fashioned type in which the influence from the Tung Yüan tradition may be traced. The most remarkable among these landscapes is the short handscroll in the Ku-kung collection entitled *Lu*

¹ Quoted from *Lan-chên ts'ao-t'ang chi* in *Shu-hua p'u*, vol. 86.

² The same kind of stylistic tradition may be traced in the picture attributed to the master in the former Abe collection (*Sānikan*, II, 43) and in a landscape reproduced in *Shên-chou ta-kuan*, vol. 6, though both may be imitations. The same is true of the beautiful landscape reproduced under the painter's name in *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. VIII.

Yü preparing Tea (so-called from the man who is enjoying his tea in a pavilion on the shore). The artistic significance of the picture depends mainly on the wide sweep of water between rocky promontories and the very tall pillar-like trees by the pavilion at the opposite end of the picture which form a contrast to the horizontal extension (P.1148). The brushwork has a firm structural quality which emphasizes the relative stiffness of the forms but also endows the composition with a steady rhythm. This may also be observed in the beautiful picture in the Honolulu Art Academy which is called Reading in the Summer Mountains (the scholar is here seated with his book under some tall trees on a projecting rock by the water). According to the inscription, it was painted after a model by Tung Yüan.

The somewhat larger composition known as Saying Farewell to a Guest at Ch'ing-ch'uan, which was shown at the Cleveland Exhibition 1955,¹ reveals a more obvious influence from Wang Meng in the treatment of the successive mountain terraces and the luxuriant pine-trees, but the human motif, which is depicted with refinement, gives it a more romantic personal appeal than is common in Wang Meng's mountain views. It is known in more than one version, but none of them is in a very good state of preservation.

* * *

The generation of painters which formed the bridge between the Yüan and the Ming dynasties included not only such followers of the Yüan masters as Ch'ên Ju-yen and Hsü Pên and Chao Yüan, but also men of more independent type who worked according to different traditions of style. One of them may be remembered at this place, because he was of the same generation as the above-mentioned men though less known as a painter. His name was Wang Li, tzu An-tao, hao Ch'i-wêng and Ch'i-sou; born c.1332 in Kun-shan, Kiangsu, he may have been active through most of the Hung-wu period. He is recorded in the *Ming-shih* as a doctor of medicine and a poet, but he became also famous as a traveller

and a painter, as witnessed by a series of forty album-leaves representing Views of Hua-shan with accompanying text. Through these pictures (and the very telling text) Wang Li has secured for himself a place in the history of Chinese painting; and as four of the pictures lately have been made known in good reproductions and the text is reported in *Pei-wên chai shu-hua p'u*, vol.XVI, they offer an opportunity to make the acquaintance of an interesting personality² (Pl.114A).

The pictures represent various aspects of grand mountain scenery, ridges of deeply split and folded rocks which form gorges and valleys with dark groups of leafy trees and rise into a region of transparent mist where their forms are absorbed in the diffuse light. The atmospheric effects and the sensitive variations in the ink-tones are supported by slight additions of colour, and the unifying design is well brought out by the firm and bold use of the brush. The definition of form is firm and structural in the rocks as well as in the delicate leafage of the knotty trees. Every element is clearly characterized; the main endeavour of the painter seems to have been to represent nature as closely as possible. He has not followed a ready manner or pattern but worked according to actual observations of nature. His style shows no affinity with the works of the still surviving Yüan painters, but reminds us rather of the kind of landscape-painting that existed in the time of Kuo Hsi and his followers, though the connexion is not very close. Wang Li was certainly not an epigone of the academicians; he stood on his own feet as a painter, a fact emphasized by himself in the text composed to the Hua-shan paintings. There he touches on some of the fundamental problems of landscape-painting and tells how a sudden unrelated

¹ No.33 in the *Cleveland Exhibition Catalogue*.

² The four reproductions are included in *Gems of Chinese Painting*, vol.III, a publication based on materials in the new museum in Nanking and Shanghai. The number of still preserved pictures is indicated in the text as follows: "only eleven of the (originally forty) leaves now remain. Lu Chih of the Ming dynasty made a copy of the whole album, but it is no longer extant."

experience may set free the creative impetus of the painter. The text becomes thus an interesting contribution to the ever-renewed discussion of the principles of landscape-painting and the proper attitude of the painter towards nature and the customary school-traditions; the main sections of it have not lost their significance during the intervening 500 years. Wang Li wrote:

"Although painting is representation of form, the main thing in it is the idea. If the idea is not sufficiently expressed, it may be (said) that there is no form either. Since the idea is in the form, where should one look for it if the form is neglected? When the form is (properly) grasped it is full of the idea, but if the form is neglected, how can anything be expressed?

"If one wants to represent the likeness of a thing in a picture, how can one do it without knowing the appearance of the thing? Did the old masters win their fame by groping in darkness? Those who devote themselves to copying know really only the paper and the silk; and the further the copies are removed from the originals the poorer they become. The forms are gradually lost and still more so the ideas.

"How could I represent the Hua Mountain in a picture as long as I did not know the form of it? But even then, after I had made a picture of it, the idea was not fully expressed.

"Subsequently I brooded upon it in the quietness of my room, keeping my mind on it while I was walking about or resting, while eating or occupied with worldly matters, when listening to music or when engaged in social duties or literary work. Then one day when I was at ease I heard some drums and trumpets passing my house. I jumped to my feet and said: 'I have got it!' I threw away the old pictures and did them all anew. At this moment the only method (for me) was in the Hua Mountain itself, and I did not pay any attention to the rules of the various schools. The rules have been established by men; their fame depends on the men. Am I not also a man? What are these rules? The traces of the past

are called schools (*tsung*) and the word *tsung* means to follow, etc. . . .

"I could not but abandon the old and follow the new, yet this had no reference to anything beyond outward likeness. The spirit and the supreme beauty can never be rendered with the tools of the scholar's study.

"But from that moment I advanced very quickly. I have gradually become conscious of my own rules and do not fix my regard on the dust of my predecessors. Whenever I sit down in an empty hall with a peaceful mind contemplating pictures in silence, the idea rises again in a way that cannot be explained in words.

"How do I dare to turn my back on my predecessors? Yet how could I but stand outside the traditions of my predecessors? It is common to rejoice in things which are like to one's own (creations) and not to rejoice in those which are different.

"I kept the pictures in my home and someone who happened to see them thought that they were contrary to every kind of style. Much surprised, he asked who my master was? To which I answered: 'I learned from my heart, my heart learned from my eye, and my eye learned from the Hua Mountain.'

* * *

Chinese critics who in later times extolled and appreciated the painters of the Yüan period (and earlier times) often insist on the correspondence between the personal character or temperament of the artists and their manner of painting. This may seem strange to western art-historians, but it is worth remembering as a leading idea of the Chinese historians and also as a help for a better understanding of the intimate connexion between the principles and the personalities. The following remarks by Chang Keng in *P'u-shan lun-lua* (c.1750) may here be quoted because of their references to the Yüan painters:

"Yang Tzū-yün¹ said: 'Writing is painting of the

¹ Yang Hsiung (53 B.C.-A.D.18), a well-known philosopher and writer who served in high offices, published commentaries on the Classics and poems.

mind (heart); the mind paints the forms (in writing) in which the vices and virtues of men may be distinguished. Painting has the same origin as writing and is therefore also mind-painting. Those who use the brush should remember this. In looking at the paintings by old masters I sometimes felt hesitation in regard to their age (origin), but when I studied the lives of the masters, I realized that it must be so, and that the words of Yang Tzu-yü were not misleading. This may be further discussed with reference to the painters of the Yüan period:

"Huang Ta-chih was an open and easy-going nature, free from every trammel, consequently his manner of painting was tranquil and light, but also dashing and soaking. He was the most generous among all these painters. Mei-hua tao-jên was a great solitary, pure and resolute; consequently his paintings were bold, lofty and beautifully refined.

Ni Yün-lin was entirely free from the vulgar; consequently his paintings express loneliness (detachedness), and stern emotions. He cut out everything ornamental. Wang Shu-ming could not entirely abstain from coveting honours or free himself from feelings of anxiety; consequently his pictures approach a state of agitation. Chao Mêng-fu did not hold to the great principles (of loyalty); consequently his writings and paintings are graceful and attractive, but have something of a vulgar spirit. Hsü Pen (Yu-wên) was honest, pure and very refined, while Lu Kuang (T'ien-yü) and Fang Fang-hu stepped outside the objective world; they were consequently detached from the dust of the world and not enclosed by common boundaries. In the *Li-chi* it is said, 'that which is done by virtue is superior and that which is done by art inferior'. That is true."

Painters of Vegetables, Grape-vine, Orchids and Plum-blossoms

THE WIDESPREAD interest in plants and animals which became manifest among the painters of the Yüan period has been noted in preceding chapters; but a few words should be added regarding some of the men who specialized in grape-vine, plum-blossoms, epidendrums, water-lilies and vegetables, so as to complete our presentation of painting during the period of the Mongol rule. Several interesting pictures of these kinds have been handed down to our time, but the names of the artists who painted and signed them are not always among those which have been recorded.

As an example may be mentioned the beautiful picture of A Branch of Grape-vine swayed by the wind, in the Freer Gallery. The design is very graceful and of a kind that has been repeated in later pictures of the same subject; the execution bespeaks a very competent man of the brush who, however, to judge by the style, may have been active at a later period than the Yüan dynasty. The signature on the picture which reads "Yen-hsia chu-jên Wêng Liang-ch'ên" offers no support for a more definite dating or classification of the picture, because the name has not been found in any of the records of painters accessible to us. It may, however, be noted that the two first characters of the above quoted *hao*, or by-name of the artist, i.e. Yen-hsia, also occur in the seal on another picture in the same gallery. This picture, which has no written signature, represents a large plant of green cabbage painted in a somewhat broader manner. It has likewise been hypothetically placed in the Yüan period, but the two pictures do not correspond in style and must consequently be

classified as the works of two different painters who seem to have used the same sobriquet, viz. Yen-hsia, i.e. vaporous clouds.

The same vegetable motif, tufts of green cabbage, has been represented in several pictures datable to the end of the Yüan or early Ming period. One of the best examples known to us is a picture in a private Japanese collection signed by the Buddhist priest Pên-ch'êng, *tzü* Tao-yüan, *hao* Chüeh-yin, who came from Szechuan and was active c.1356. It represents the luxuriant cabbage plant in a pictorial combination with a sparrow and swarming insects.¹

Other picturesque motifs in favour among the painters of the time were formed by stumps of decaying trees or shrubs in combination with climbing plants or with flowers and insects, as may be observed in an often reproduced picture in a private collection in China which is signed Li Heng (*cf. Bunjin Gasen*, I, 11) (Pl.115). The artist is not mentioned in any of the Chinese books accessible to us, but it bears an inscription by the well-known painter Ch'ien Ku (1508-1572), according to which Li Heng was a follower of Wang Yüan and active in the Chih-yüan epoch (1335-40). It must, however, be admitted that the picture shows no connexion with Wang Yüan's rather careful academic style, but is a product of a very free and splashy *p'o-mo* technique. As such it may remind us of some of the Ch'ian paintings from the end of the Sung period, though characterized by a closer study of naturalistic details, such as dragonflies, grasshoppers and frogs.

¹ Another picture of a cabbage plant, attributed to a painter of the Yüan period called Ku Ying, is reproduced in *Nanga Taipei*.

Po (or Pai) Tzū-t'ing, who was a Buddhist priest from Chia-ting (in Kiangsu) active about the same time, painted similar motifs, as may be seen in two pictures in the Mutō collection, which represent withering old trunks and sprays of bamboo, but he gave his best in paintings of orchids and water-plants, such as the little picture in the Asano collection which consists simply of two or three very long curving epidendrum leaves which grow out of the crevice of a stone. No picture could be simpler or apparently less finished than this, yet it conveys the fragrance of a spring flower and has the concentrated charm of a short lyric poem.

P'u-ming, whose family name was Ts'ao and hao Hsüeh-ch'uang, also specialized in painting epidendrum and water-lilies. He lived as a Ch'an monk in the Ch'eng-t'ien monastery in Suchou about the middle of the fourteenth century; the dates of his works range from 1341 to 1345, and as all these pictures are (or have been) in Japanese collections, the supposition seems plausible that he spent some time in Japan or at least had close relations with the island country. Most important among these pictures are four fair-sized hanging-scrolls forming a set, now in the collection of the imperial household in Tōkyō (Pl. 116). They all represent bits of rocks projecting from one corner, or side, of the picture combined with shoots of bamboo and large epidendrum which grow out of crevices, swaying in the wind and filling the air with their fragrance. The gliding rhythms of the long leaves and the springiness of the bamboo stems are transmitted with intimate feeling for the characteristic of the plants.

The above-mentioned pictures, which were mostly done by priests or amateurs, form a continuation to the school of impressionistic ink-painting which, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, flourished abundantly at the end of the Sung period, particularly in some of the Ch'an monasteries in the Hangchow region. From there it radiated not only to various parts of China, but also to Japan, where this kind of painting became much in vogue in Buddhist circles and was cultivated by visiting monks from

China as well as by their Japanese pupils. Some of these monk-painters who were active from the end of Sung into the Yüan period, were mentioned in our chapter on the Ch'an painters; for instance, Tsu-weng, Yin-t'o-lo and Chang Fang-ju. Their works were mostly illustrative, containing references to Ch'an practices, but there were others who chose their motifs mainly from the vegetable kingdom, as is illustrated by the works of Po Tzū-t'ing and P'u-ming. To these may be added the pictures marked by the seals of Sung-t'ien and Yung-t'ien, two names which do not appear in any historical publication or document except *Kundaihan Sayūchoki*, where they are entered together in the last class of Yüan painters as alternative appellations of one man (Pl. 117).^{1, 2, 3}

This is by no means surprising because the pictures marked by these two seals respectively are much alike. There are at least seven or eight of them in private collections in Japan and they all represent squirrels, playing either on bamboo stems or on the branches of pine-trees or chestnut-trees. The differences in the compositions of these pictures are not very important because the artistic significance of all of them is a matter of spacing: the stems or the tree-branches are used to frame or accentuate the picture-field and the exceedingly lithe and lively small animals serve to make us feel the vibrations or life-breath of the empty space. This strict economy of means and significant balance of the design are qualities by which these pictures are also related to the school of ink-painting mentioned above, even though the actual brushwork is here more smooth and finished than in the Ch'an paintings.

Whatever the importance that may be attached to the works by the artists mentioned above, it is evident that they cannot be compared in beauty and significance with the creations by the best plum-blossom painters. We have had occasion to say something about the particular love and culture that the

¹ *Kokka* 540.

² *Kokka* 497.

³ *Kokka* 483, 484.

Chinese ever since the beginning of the Sung dynasty devoted to this motif and how it was developed and used in painting not only as a symbol of the poetry of spring but also with reference to Taoist conceptions of nature, and political adventures in times of unrest. It was also pointed out that as a consequence of such concepts, plum-blossom painting achieved great popularity at the end of the Sung dynasty, when the nation succumbed to foreign invaders, and was at the time cultivated by very prominent men of talent such as Wang Yen-sou and Tsou Fu-lei. The latter in particular is memorable as the master of one of the most beautiful plum-blossom paintings ever made in China, i.e. the long scroll in the Freer Gallery, dated 1360 and known under the inimitable title *The Breath of Spring*. Tsou Fu-lei was not a professional painter; he spent most of his time playing the *ch'in* and writing poetry, and when he painted the flowers of spring he also added a poem.

The same was true of Wang Mien, *tzü Yüan-chang* (b. 1335, d. c. 1415), his somewhat younger contemporary, who also used plum-blossom painting as a means of poetic expression and seldom left a painting without completing it with some writing referring to the flowers. His life is extensively told in the Ming history and the *Wu Shêng shih-shih* (and also in later records), from which certain parts may be quoted here. Wang Mien's fame as a personality was by no means less than his name as a painter; he was the born artist who never followed any other inducements than the call of his genius.

He was the son of a poor peasant in K'uai-chi (Chekiang) and had to serve as a herd-boy when others were going to school. But instead of watching the water-buffalo which was entrusted to him, he went to listen at the windows of the village school to the other boys reciting their lessons. The buffalo was lost and he was subjected to the inevitable scoldings, but all efforts to make a herd-boy of him were in vain. Wang Mien fled to a temple, where he studied at the knees of a large Buddha statue in front of which there was a small lamp burning day and

night. He acquired great learning and became highly esteemed by his fellow pupils in the temple, but when he tried to pass the higher state examination he did not succeed. "He burned his essays; studied the ancient military arts and became quite able to lead an army. He used to wear a high broad-brimmed hat, a green grass coat, and high wooden clogs. One of his pastimes was to practise with a wooden sword; at other times he walked about singing loudly even in the market place, or was seen riding on a yellow ox with the History of the Han Dynasty in his hands. Some people thought that he was quite crazy."

We are then told about the efforts of a friend of his to induce Wang Mien to seek some official employment. But it led to no immediate result; the painter preferred to live in the porch of an old temple and support himself by teaching boys. He refused to accept gifts of food and the like. When a newly-appointed provincial judge came to pay him a visit, he refused to receive the man and said angrily to the insisting servant: "I am a recluse and do not want to have anything to do with officials. Don't disturb your old master." The provincial leaders managed, however, to get him appointed to the position of a school inspector. Wang Mien tried for a year to fulfil the duties of the office, but resigned as he was shown disrespect by some other officials. The fame of his skill as a painter must, however, have spread widely:

"Crowds of scholars and officials came to see him, all bringing silk with them (to get him to paint), it piled up in heaps. And there he stood wielding his brush, finishing in a moment thousands of flowers and ten thousand petals. When he had painted a scroll, he wrote an inscription on it expressing his ideas in words as well as in paintings, and all his poems were bristling with life. He considered himself an ancient hero (created by Hung-wu). When he went again to Nanking (i.e. in the Hung-wu period), he was received there with respect and admiration by the new nobles.

"He travelled North to Yen and Chi (Hopei),

visiting the fortresses at Chiü-yung kuan and Ku-pei kou, and stayed for some time in the house of T'ai Chien-shan, a government secretary. The prominent men of the time were all anxious to meet him. Here he did a picture of plum-blossoms which he showed to the people, and on it he wrote the following inscription: 'The flowers are clustered like ice and jade, even the Mongols' flute cannot blow them down'. The people who saw it were deeply struck.¹

"Then he went back to the South and told the men of Wu: 'The Yellow River will soon flow towards the North and the world will be in a turmoil. I have come to find shelter in the South, where I may follow my own inclinations'.

"He bought some land at the Chiu-li Mountain (near K'uai-chi), planted a thousand plum-trees and five hundred willows and apricots, and called himself The Master of the Plum-blossom Cottage (*Mei-hua un-chu*)", according to *Ming-shih*. In the *Wu-shêng shih-shih* we are furthermore told that he made himself a small boat called "The Floating Duck-weed Hut" in which he used to paddle on the lake in the company of some friends who brought wine along with them. And in order to make a living, he exchanged his pictures for food according to their size.

"When Hung-wu was fighting in Chekiang, Wang Mien met general Hu Ta-hai and proposed to him a plan for conquering the city of Shao-hsing. He was introduced to the emperor, who was very satisfied with his advice and appointed him a military adviser."

All the pictures by Wang Mien which have been preserved or recorded, represent, as far as I know, blossoming plum-trees. He kept consistently to the same motif, but I do not think that he ever repeated himself as a painter. Each tree was to him a separate friend revealing its individuality in its rhythm and growth. The blossoming branches appeared to him with ever varying expression, according to the light of the day and the state of the season. They are all messengers or harbingers of spring while the air is

still cold and the ground is frosty, but some are sad and drooping, some joyful and rising proudly. They all reflect some sentiment of the artist, a passing mood, a hope, or a resignation, which furthermore is often expressed in a poem written on the picture. The branches of the blossoming plum-trees became to him a species of large pictorial characters, highly synthesized – as they sometimes contain a whole poem – but symbolically expressive and comprehensible, always carrying a fundamental meaning or suggestion referring to virtue, fortune, or resistance.

In one of Wang Mien's last and most wonderful pictures (formerly in the possession of Mr. Shao Fu-ying in Peking), there are two inscriptions which evidently were written before the long drooping branch was drawn in. In the first he describes a legendary ancestry of plum-trees which is carried back to the Mei family of the Shang dynasty and how the *Mei-hua* then was loved and praised by the superior men of successive dynasties, such as Tu Fu of the T'ang and Su Tung-p'o of the Sung. It became a symbol of manliness and virtue. The other inscription is a poem of a more intimate personal character which ends as follows (Pl. 118):

"Now I am old and of no use. I live in poverty painting plum-trees, of which I have planted thousands. When there is frost and the moon is bright during the long nights I often go singing like a madman and cannot return to my dwelling. There is no more a chance for me in life; my beard is white as frost and all the confusing desires of the world

¹ The various events are evidently not told in strictly chronological succession. The visit to the North and the stay in Peking must have taken place before the fall of the Mongol power, whereas his stay in Nanking evidently occurred after the new Ming government had been established. The inscription on the picture, which aroused so much astonishment in Peking, refers, no doubt, to the painter himself, who could not be "blown down" or won over by the Mongols. During his travels he had observed that a national revolt was seething also along the Yellow River, and he brought the news to his friends in Wu. He is commonly supposed to have lived there until 1407, but on a picture of his is an inscription dated the *i-wei* year, which corresponds to 1415, when he still must have been alive, if the date is correct.

have no hold on me. My sight grows dim, but I am still reading and writing. My white hair is falling like fainting flowers. When I look back to the hills and streams (of former days), they all seem hidden by dust.

"The light of a silver moon is streaming down; a pair of cranes are dancing in the night. The sound of a flute which is coming from the southern pavilion could move a heart of stone or iron to tears. I wish I could be like Ch'ên Yüan-lung,¹ who filled his boat with pink crystals (flowers), singing aloud at the top of his voice, drunk as he was, and beating time to the winds of spring, thereby scaring the old man from Chiang-nan, who fell flat on the ground.

"The *i-wei* year (1415), eighth month, the day before full moon (the harvest festival). The mountain farmer from K'uai-chi, Wang Mien."

The importance of the inscriptions appears from the fact, already noticed, that they were written prior to the long blossoming branch which bends down between them as if it were framing or carrying the poetic thoughts of the artist. There is a wonderful sweep and elastic movement in the strokes of the brush suggesting the waving of the twigs, the fluttering of the blossoms. The knots and knobs of the main branch are made with deep and rich ink, while the buds and petals at the top of the finest sprays are painted so lightly that they almost dissolve in the air.

The lyrical inspiration of Wang Mien's art is perfectly reflected in the rhythm and flow of his brush: it does not describe or depict the characteristics of the blossoming branches, it sings their beauty and reveals their life in rising and falling rhythms. The ruggedness of the knotty old trunks, the strength of the rising branches, the quivering lightness of the flower-petals on the bare twigs are felt at the tip of the brush. One may, indeed, agree with the thoughts of the painter expressed in a short poem on a picture formerly in the collection of Mr. Lien Ch'üan in Shanghai, which runs as follows:

"To the South and the North (flowers are

clustering) thickly as snow. Who knows the creative power which is in the tip of the brush? It brings out as by magic the hoary old trees without any shadow. Looking at them in quietness, you will feel the beauty of spring" (Pl. 119).

Wang Mien's noble art aroused unstinted admiration among the painters of a younger generation who devoted themselves to plum-blossoms, and many of them received decisive impulses from his works even though they never knew him personally. They belonged to a later age, and their works will thus be discussed in a subsequent chapter on the flower-painters active in Suchou and in Chekiang at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The only plum-blossom painter who may have been old enough to profit by a personal contact with Wang Mien was Ch'ên Lu, better known under his *tsü*, Hsien-chang. He came from the same town as Wang Mien, i.e. K'uai-chi in Chekiang, his *hao* was Ju-yin chü-shih. The years of his birth and death are not known, but as his picture in the Ku-kung collection bears the date 1437, it may be assumed that he was born before the end of the fourteenth century. No particulars of his life are recorded except that "his brush-ideas were scholarly (*ju*) and beautiful", which seems to indicate that he was a "gentleman painter".²

The picture in the Ku-kung collection³ is an uncommonly rich, not to say exuberant, representation of the first beauty of spring: a large branch of a plum-tree is bending down from the upper left corner, spreading out into innumerable minor branches and twigs, and this network of branches is strewn over with such a mass of small white blossoms that it looks like a heavy fall of whirling snowflakes. They fill practically every corner of the picture.

In another picture of his, in the former East-Asiatic Museum collection in Berlin the motif has

¹ A famous and boisterous military leader of the Three Kingdoms period.

² *T'u-hui pao-chien*; a short note on the artist is also included in *Wu-cheng shih-shih*.

³ *K-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XXXIV.

been extended over a horizontal scroll. Sections of long bending and twisting branches are here interlaced, the tender shoots with buds and blossoms stretch from the branches like huge tentacles, all rising slightly at the end, as if they were trying to reach towards the golden moon glimmering in the light blue sky. The design of the scroll (nearly 8 metres long) is quite intricate, but at the same time spacious and free, carrying a suggestion of the cool and pale atmosphere of a moonlight spring night, when the old trees suddenly burst into blossom. The brushwork is distinguished by the same combination of elegance and strength that we

have found in the works of Wang Mien. The picture is signed by the artist's *hao* and provided with two of his seals, one of which contains the significant characters: Ku Shan Yüeh Sê—the Colour of the Moon over Ku-shan, an island in the West Lake at Hangchow.¹

¹ It may be noted that there was another painter called Ch'ên Hsien-chang, b. 1428, d. c. 1500, who also specialized in plum-blossoms. His *tsü* was Kung-fu, and his *hao* Shih-chai. He came from Kuangtung and lived at Pai-sha. In the Hsien Tsung period he was recommended to service in the *li-pu* but refused, preferring to live in retirement. It is said that he was light-hearted like flying birds and jumping fishes, and he was called "a living Mencius". Later on he was promoted to the position of a *Han-lin chien-t'ao*. None of his plum-blossom paintings is known to us.

The Ming Period

The Historical Background

THE RULE of the Mongols was never very firmly rooted south of the Yangtse. The last scions of the Sung dynasty had found places of refuge on the south-west coast until the end of the thirteenth century, and the Sung rule with all that it involved of cultural traditions had left its deepest traces on the people and the political conditions in that part of the country. Hatred of the foreign conquerors from the North had never died out or been forgotten in the South; it lived on there for generations as an uneasy undercurrent preparing the ground for a national revolt.

It thus became relatively easy for Chu Yüan-chang, the ruthless and cunning one time monk, who had acquired some experience in guerilla warfare, to co-ordinate the scattered groups of passive resistance and secret societies into an army of liberation. He was the most capable of a number of competing chiefs and within a few years succeeded in establishing an independent government over some of the southern provinces and proclaimed himself Prince of Wu in 1364.¹ Three years later, when his position in the South had been more firmly established, he sent an army under the command of general Hsü Ta to deal with the Mongols in the North. The expedition was successful; Peking was captured and the Mongol emperor Shun-ti fled to the old stronghold of the Mongols at Karakorum. When Chu Yüan-chang mounted the dragon throne in 1368 he adopted the reign name Hung-wu, while the new national dynasty was called Ming – the Luminous.

For several years, however, these initial successes had to be sustained by continued fighting against the

border raids of the Mongols. It was only in 1372 that Hsü Ta could lead an army across the Gobi desert and destroy their old capital at Karakorum, thus reaching places further away to the north-west than any preceding Chinese military expedition. The dreaded power of the Mongol rulers, who for more than a hundred years had held large parts of Asia in subjection, was thus broken by the Chinese, though by no means reduced to nothing. Scattered remnants of the Mongol forces lingered along the north-western frontiers and time and again used every opportunity to extend their raids into China proper, and as the defence grew weaker in consequence of the discords within the home government, the Mongol aggressions became increasingly dangerous. This led finally, in 1450, to the disastrous defeat at Huai-lai where the Chinese army, then under the command of the ill-fated eunuch Wang Chien, was completely routed by the Mongols. It revealed the lack of proper military organization and leadership within the Ming government, which at the time had already passed its initial period of conquest and expansion.

The political activities of the great emperors at the beginning of the dynasty, best known under their reign names as Hung-wu (1368–1398) and Yung-lo (1402–1424), were mainly centred on the consolidation and reconstruction of the Middle Kingdom in accordance with the general scheme and

¹ The founder of the Ming dynasty was born 1328 at Chung-li in Anhui as the son of a poor peasant family. He spent his early years tending cattle; when his parents died in a famine, he entered a Buddhist monastery as novice, but left it a few years later to join the forces of general Kuo Tzu-hung. After the death of Kuo, Chu Yüan-chang became gradually the most influential leader in the national movement.

principles which had been tried in the T'ang period, when China was the leading power in Asia. But as this work on the political and social organization of the new empire had very little, if any, connexion with the main subject of our study, it may not be necessary to dwell on it here; it should only be noted that China now reached a territorial extension which brought it into close contact not only with Manchuria, Korea and the Liu-ch'iu islands (and Japan, on an equal footing), but also with some of the oases along the desert route to Central Asia (such as Hami) and, what seems still more important, with the various seafaring nations along the coast of the Indian Ocean all the way from Indo-China to the Persian Gulf. At least seven successive naval expeditions (some with over sixty ships) were despatched between 1405 and 1431 to these southern countries, opening up possibilities of far-reaching cultural, commercial and political relations which might have placed the Chinese in a new international position, if they had been allowed to develop. Instead of this they were brusquely broken off in consequence of rivalries in the home government of the Ming dynasty.¹

The leader of these expeditions was the eunuch Chêng Ho, probably a Mohammedan Arab, who previously had distinguished himself in suppressing a dangerous revolt in Yünnan. This man, who became known as "the tranquillizer of the sea", left a record of his exploits in which he said: "From the 3rd year of Yung-lo till now we have seven times received the Commission of Ambassadors to the countries of the Western ocean. The barbarian countries which we have visited are Champa, Java, Palembang and Siam, from which place we crossed straight over to Ceylon in South India, and thence to Calicut and Cochim. We have gone to the western regions Hormuz, Aden, Mogadisho, all together more than thirty countries large and small...² When we arrived in the distant countries we captured alive those of the native kings who were not respectful and exterminated those barbarian robbers who were engaged in piracy, so in this

manner the sea-route has been cleared and pacified and the natives put their trust in it..."

The things and persons brought home to China from these distant lands were indeed of many kinds; they included foreign potentates, taken to China as hostages, merchants and ambassadors with tributes to the emperor, gifts of rare animals and birds, for example giraffes (called *ch'i-lin*), zebras, lions, oryxes and ostriches, or precious objects in wood, metal and stone, all of which, and equally the strange costumes and manners of the envoys, aroused the curiosity of the Chinese. And besides these material tributes the expeditions gathered a large amount of practical information regarding the navigation routes and the products and customs of the lands beyond the western seas.

Yet it seems that the main cause of these very long and costly oversea-journeys was not the desire for material advantages, such as the increase of trade with foreign nations, but the ambition to make them realize the growing power of the new Chinese empire which was preparing to reassume its place as the leading power in Asia. The emperor must have been deeply interested in these adventures and he followed a policy of his own which did not prove equally attractive to succeeding rulers on the Dragon throne. Only twelve years after the end of the Yung-lo reign, *i.e.* at the very beginning of the Chêng-t'ung period (1436) an imperial decree was issued according to which Chinese citizens were forbidden to travel beyond the coastal waters of their home country and to establish commercial relations with foreigners. This was not only a definite command against all further attempts to make China a leading naval power, but also a decisive step in the policy of isolation and cultural self-sufficiency which henceforth became a characteristic signum of official leadership in the Ming

¹ For a closer study of these naval expeditions see J. J. L. Duyvendak's article "The True Dates of the Chinese Maritime Expeditions", etc., in *T'ung Pao*, 1938, vol. XXXIV.

² The names are in the original document given in Chinese transcriptions but here quoted as translated by Duyvendak. Cf. *T'ung Pao*, vol. XXXIV, 1938.

period. This sudden and complete reversal of policy had indeed, a far-reaching effect; "it left China open to raids from the nearest naval power, Japan, it lost the command of the Indian Ocean to the Arabs, and the Portuguese seventy-five years later, it halted commerce and cut down the income of the imperial customs. Worst of all, however, it isolated China just when Europeans were about to penetrate every corner of the earth."¹

The search for an explanation of this fateful reversal of policy has led to the conclusion that it was the result of personal antagonisms within the government rather than of carefully deliberated principles of foreign policy. The government was divided into two main factions, the one under the leadership of the Confucian scholars, the other dominated by the eunuchs, who were ruthless men of action with the greatest influence on military affairs. The scholars who were in charge of the highest civil offices harboured a deep-rooted contempt for the eunuchs and did everything possible to counteract their influence and obliterate the traces of their actions. Thus it also happened that the official records relating to the naval expeditions under the command of Cheng Ho and other eunuchs were concealed or destroyed in order to deprive the hated rivals of any future glory. The conclusion reached by Duyvendak is no doubt correct: "The real reason why the memory of Cheng Ho's expeditions almost vanished from the records is to be sought in the fact that they were the deeds of a eunuch . . . This aversion helps to explain why in later times such expeditions have never been repeated."

Whatever importance may be attached to this explanation and the historical conditions on which it is based, it seems evident that an important change was brought about in the general attitude or mentality of the Ming government about the middle of the fifteenth century. It coincided with the growing influence of the Confucian scholars which created an atmosphere of self-sufficiency at home and led to a disregard of relations with neighbours and de-

pendencies outside China proper which proved dangerous. From this time onwards we hear of no more conquests or successful curbing of aggressive neighbours by the Ming armies, but rather the contrary: Annam secured its independence in 1431 (Tibet had obtained its own already a few years earlier); the Mongol tribes along the northern frontier became more enterprising and dealt a crushing blow to the Chinese in 1450 (as noted above); the Japanese intensified their raids along the coasts of Shantung and Fukien, burning and sacking ports like Ning-po (1555) and Ch'ang-chou (1563), and occupied Formosa for a while. No less dangerous warlike situations had to be met elsewhere too, in Korea (with varying success), and in Manchuria, where the Jurchen Tartars had begun to consolidate their power and, from the end of the sixteenth century, to become a serious menace to the tottering Ming realm.

The situation grew still more complicated and dangerous to the Chinese through the arrival on the political stage of some hitherto entirely unknown truculent actors. They came from far away western lands by sea; they were well armed and commissioned to serve political ambitions as well as commercial interests and missionary zeal. The first to arrive on the scene were the Portuguese, who came as early as 1511, but were driven away a few years later after earning a reputation as cruel and undesirable barbarians. They returned, however, twenty years later in a less truculent mood and better prepared, and succeeded in obtaining a firm foothold at Macao in 1537 and gradually also at Amoy and other ports on the southern coast. The trade that gradually grew up at these places between the Chinese and the Portuguese proved lucrative to both parties and attracted the envious attention of other seafaring nations. The Spaniards made an attempt to establish trade centres on the south coast in 1543 but with little success and chose instead, when returning in 1565, to occupy the Philippines, which left them more freedom of action. From

¹ Goodrich, *A Short History of the Chinese People*, p. 191.

there an important commercial intercourse was carried on with the mainland, which "brought millions of pesos to the Chinese and quantities of silk, porcelain and other Chinese goods to Mexico, Chile and other Spanish dependencies", to quote Goodrich. The so-called Mexican silver dollar became henceforth a current coin in China. It should be added that the Dutch settled at Formosa at the beginning of the seventeenth century and remained there until the end of the Ming period, while two English ships forced their way to Canton in 1637 but were obliged to leave again after they had discharged their cargo. None of these European naval expeditions succeeded in penetrating beyond the narrow confines of a few trading ports or in establishing diplomatic relations with the government in Peking. Yet they may be said to have set some backdoors ajar not only for commercial intercourse between Europe and the Far East, but also for a cultural exchange in the fields of decorative arts and practical knowledge which gradually bore rich fruit. The initial steps had been taken by the merchant-explorers, the Jesuit missionaries followed after, and as some of these men were more or less trained in western sciences, they proved useful in practical matters and exercised, independently of their religious propaganda, a cultural influence which reached its culmination at the very end of the Ming period, when Matteo Ricci spent part of the last decade of his life (1606-1610) as a venerated teacher of Christian piety and practical sciences in the Chinese capital.

It would lead us too far to give here an account of all the useful improvements in domestic policy and social reconstruction introduced during the Ming period, though these to no small degree remained in force until the very end of the Manchu period, thus perpetuating the cultural ground-work of the Ming reign, and producing the impression of something permanent and immutable which was considered most characteristic of Chinese civilization.

In establishing these conditions the learned statesmen of the time were guided by their desire to

make them conform not only with the traditions and customs of the T'ang and Sung dynasties but also with the fundamental principles of government and social order surviving from earlier times and expounded in the classic books. The leading principle of organization was, indeed, the hierarchical system based on the laws and functions of Universal Nature, according to which the Son of Heaven, who formed the peak of the structure, functioned as the supreme authority in spiritual as well as worldly matters in the Middle Kingdom. He exercised this authority through the great yearly sacrifices to Heaven and Earth, to the Sun and the Moon, the spirits of harvests and rain, and other nature divinities whose support was considered essential for the welfare of the whole nation. The system was deeply rooted in the religious consciousness of the people and was thus a bulwark against all changes and innovations, perpetuating the ritual forms long after the individuals who were supposed to fill them with spiritual significance had lost the capacity to feel or inspire even the faintest flush of their moral import. And it must not be forgotten that the well-established system of state examinations, based on the Confucian principles of moral relationships, formed the best support for the all-inclusive hierarchical structure of the government. This system, which during the Sung period had been somewhat modified to meet practical requirements, was now again enforced in a strictly conservative form and became a *sine qua non* for all civil servants in every department of official life. It became as such an important element in the national restoration and contributed effectively to the political and social formalism which gradually gained the upper hand.

The above-noted desire for practical knowledge and the endeavour to revive and perpetuate the ancient national traditions may also be observed in the fields of literature, philosophy and the fine arts. The output of printed books was very large and most of it was typographically of high standard, but relatively few of these publications were of recent origin or had any immediate connexion with actual

conditions. They were mainly reprints of earlier books, often combined in so-called *ts'ung-shu*, i.e. collective editions of books (of various dates) dealing with more or less kindred subjects. Through such reprints many old books were saved which otherwise might have been lost.

The largest and most famous among them was the so-called *Yung-lo Ta-tien*, an enormous encyclopaedic composition supposed to contain all the accumulated knowledge of the ages worth preserving. It was ordered in the year 1403; more than two thousand scholars were engaged in the selection and transcription of the contents. The manuscript which was delivered in 1407, contained 11,095 volumes divided into 22,877 chapters exclusive of the table of contents. It has been properly described by a western writer as "a universal compendium of all existing Chinese history, ethics, science, industry, art, geography, administration, religion, divination, etc., in a word, all human knowledge among the Chinese up to the year 1400 A.D."¹ Owing to its enormous size it could, however, never be printed in its entirety; only fragments of the manuscript have been published (and those in later times). The original manuscript together with a copy (prepared in 1567) perished in the raid of Nanking at the end of Ming, while another copy which was kept in Peking, was to a large extent destroyed at the time of the T'ai-ping rebellion, so that only three or four hundred volumes exist today scattered in various libraries.

The *Yung-lo Ta-tien* was no doubt the most imposing testimony to the spirit of national reconstruction in the field of learning and scholarship, but it was by no means the only one of its kind; there were other *ts'ung-shu* of a more limited scope.

Besides these should be remembered publications of less traditional and more practical type which became the vogue towards the end of the period after the Chinese had established a closer contact with the European traders and some scholarly missionaries, who opened up to them new fields of practical science, for instance in mathematics,

astronomy, geography, agriculture and medicine. It was the beginning of a closer co-operation with the peripatetic teachers of western learning which reached its full development only under the great Manchu emperors to be mentioned in a later chapter.

The veneration for Confucius and his interpreters of the Sung period which was inculcated by the state examinations, made it difficult, if not hazardous, for any writer or philosopher to express an independent individual trend of thought. New interpretations or speculations regarding the meaning of the Classics were not encouraged. They had to be accepted and applied in strict accordance with the commentaries by the famous Sung philosopher Chu Hsi. He was hailed as the supreme expounder of the ancient wisdom because, as was explained by a contemporary writer, "Ever since the time of the philosopher Chu the truth has been made manifest to the world. No more writing is needed; what is left to us is practice" – a declaration which leaves no doubt as to the fact that the letter of the teaching was considered more important than the spirit.

The opposition against this firmly built traditionalism had little chance to make itself heard, yet there were philosophers who ventured to express different views about the nature of man and the proper way of obtaining knowledge and moral guidance. The best known among these dissenters was the philosopher Wang Yang-ming (1472–1528) who, though educated in the Confucian tradition, discarded the analytical method of Chu Hsi and came to the conclusion that the way to a deeper knowledge leads through the inner nature of man himself, i.e. is an intuitive way to be found through self-discipline, proper action and meditation. Wang Yang-ming is traditionally placed among Confucian philosophers, yet he expressed ideas quite different from those of Chu Hsi, and the general trend of these make it probable that he was familiar with the tenets of Ch'an Buddhism, the introspective current of thought which continued as

¹ *Report of Librarian of Congress*, 1923, quoted by Goodrich, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

an undercurrent below the frozen surface of Confucian orthodoxy. Some of Wang Yang-ming's statements about the intuitive faculty as the main source of spiritual understanding and moral guidance might well have been made by one or other of the best artists of the period, who were philosophers and poets as well as painters. The following words about the intuitive faculty are in this respect significant:¹

The Teacher said: "Rest at night is a period of building up. When night comes heaven and earth are confused and hard to distinguish, form and colour are obliterated, and man's eyes see nothing and his ears hear nothing, and all the channels of the mind are closed. This is the time when the intuitive faculty is renewed. When day returns and multitudinous things are disclosed, and man's eyes can see and his ears can hear and all the channels of his mind are open, the wonderful use of intuition is renewed . . . The people of this day do not know how to repose . . . In the day one's intuitive knowledge is (should be) free, graceful and devoid of obscurity, in the night collected and consolidated."

The above quotation is symptomatic for Wang Yang-ming's approach to the fundamental problems regarding man's nature and his means of acquiring knowledge; it could easily be multiplied by other statements of a similar turn from his notes, though the writer was a rare exception among the philosophers of the time. No one else among the Confucian scholars and officials would have dared to express similar views.

Yet certain schools of Buddhism survived and enjoyed more sympathy and protection from the government than, for instance, the Taoist institutions. This may have been connected with the aforementioned fact that the founder of the dynasty had lived for a number of years as an ordained monk in a Buddhist monastery; and it should also be recalled that his grandson (Hui-ti), designated to become the second emperor but dethroned after four years of fighting by his uncle (Yung-lo), passed the rest of his life in a monastery. The emperor Yung-lo may,

indeed, for reasons of state have shown more interest in the propagation of the Confucian Classics than in the Buddhist way of life, yet his attitude must have been benevolent towards the Indian religion, if we may draw some conclusions from the very large number of Buddhist (and also Lamaist) temples that were either newly constructed or restored in Northern China during the Yung-lo reign.

It, as a matter of fact, formed an important section of the very extensive general building activity which followed in the wake of the transfer of the capital from Nanking to Peking, a change, and a new orientation, that seems to have been caused by a combination of personal and political reasons. Ever since his early days, when he was Prince of Yen, the emperor had had his strongest foothold in the northern part of the country, and the defensive situation was, no doubt, also more exacting along the northern border than in the south. Yung-lo was after all more of a military organizer and state-builder than a propagator of the romantic type of Chinese culture that thrived in the south, and consequently he laid the chief stress on the reconstruction and defensive endowment of the north. A large number of the buildings erected in this part of the country in the Yung-lo reign were crenulated city-walls, fortified gateways, drum and bell-towers and other somewhat similar structures made in adherence to traditional types for utilitarian or quasi-military purposes. Travellers in China of former years, when the old towns were still untouched by modern improvements, could not but feel impressed by the monumental structures which endowed so many of these northern cities, for instance Ta-tung, Tai-yüan, Si-an and Peking, with an aspect of severe grandeur and permanence that seemed embodiments of the proud and defiant spirit of the early Ming emperors. Many of them had no doubt been repaired and partially rebuilt in later periods, but always in strict accordance with their

¹ Cf. *The Philosophy of Wang Yang-ming*. Translated from the Chinese by F. G. Henke, Chicago 1916, p. 166.

original types and the fundamental features which made them so evocative of a glorious past.

The same may also be said of some of the most important of the temples and monasteries, and of the imperial palaces in and outside Peking. The building of large sections of these was started in the Ming period when the whole palace city of the Yüan emperors was renewed from the ground up. The general layout was then fixed and the forms and types of the main pavilions. Very few of the present structures can be safely dated to the Ming period, yet the differences between them and the buildings made over in the reign of K'ang-hsi (or later) depends more on the details than on the typical forms, proportions and constructive features. They are all products of the same creative vision. The impression of unity and grandeur is balanced by the rhythmic divisions of the plan, while the

magnificent play of bright colours – red lacquer, yellow glaze and white marble – are a shining glory to behold. Nowhere was the impression of imperial China – and this was still true forty years ago – more overwhelming than in front of these vast architectural monuments inaugurated in the early part of the Ming period and preserved and completed by the great Manchu rulers, who were no less devoted to the artistic traditions of the Middle Kingdom than their predecessors. In no other domain of art was the continuity of style and the spirit of national reconstruction better and more obviously preserved than in the great temple-halls and palaces for ceremonial purposes of the Ming emperors (and their subsequent repetitions), which still remain, in part, as glorious landmarks of an imperial China clouded but not crushed by the dust and turmoil of later political and social revolutions.

Imperial Painters and Early Academicians

WITH THE accession of the Ming dynasty the social position of painters and the general status of the fine arts again became modified. The early rulers of the new national dynasty realized the potential importance of the figurative arts for the reassertion of the glory of the State and made special efforts to engage prominent artists in their service. In this respect they followed some of their famous predecessors, but the encouragement which the early Ming emperors now offered to artists was often coupled with a demand for absolute submission to the personal taste and whims of the rulers.

The revival of official protection in the field of art can thus hardly be said to have had a beneficial influence on the evolution of painting. The painters who enjoyed it were supposed to serve their imperial patrons rather than pursue their own ideals. The longer they stayed at court the more they became subject to certain modes and traditions of style inherited from the imperial academies of former times.

Most of these artists were now, as in the Sung period, honoured with the title of *tai-chan*, i.e. painter-in-waiting, or appointed officers in the imperial guard, functions which, no doubt, brought them social and economic advantages without involving any particular responsibilities beyond their artistic occupation. Special rooms or halls were set apart for their work, first in the pavilion known as *Wên-yüan kô* in Nanking, then in *Wu-ying tien* (the Hall of Military Valour) in the Peking palace, and finally in the *Jên-chih tien* (Hall of Virtue and Knowledge), a special building erected for this pur-

pose in Peking. They worked there to imperial command, sometimes under the emperor's personal supervision; their paintings were exhibited and scrutinized by the emperors and their trusted advisers in matters of art. Whether this organization of the painters' activities in the palace actually should be called an Academy of Painting depends on the significance that we attach to this traditional term, but as the Chinese historians often speak of *Hua-yüan* (i.e. Academy of Painting), it seems most natural to adopt this term of appellation.

We have, however, searched in vain for any more definite information as to this so-called Academy of Painting; nothing is related which seems to imply that it was organized like the emperor Hui-tsung's Academy, i.e. on an equal footing with the Han-lin College, nor do the painters seem to have had the social rank and prestige of the Han-lin scholars as was the case in the Sung dynasty. Their status was rather that of secondary court officials, and their activities, particularly during the early years of the dynasty, were to no small extent devoted to decoration of the new buildings, the painting of imperial portraits, or other things for the pleasure and benefit of the rulers. But even if the "Academy" was not so far developed in the formal sense as during the Sung dynasty, one may well speak of an academic style, accepted and transmitted with individual variations by the painters at court, who found their guidance in works by academicians of earlier periods.

The founder of the dynasty, T'ai-tsu or Hung-wu, was himself a painter and calligraphist of considerable skill with strong convictions on questions of art

as well as in other matters; and he never hesitated to make his will known even at the expense of the artists' lives. There are records about certain landscapes executed by the emperor and also about his personal criticism of the artists' works. Thus, for instance, when Chou Wei was painting on the walls of one of the palace halls in Nanking, he was told to do a picture of "all the rivers and mountains in the country". The artist, however, asked the emperor first to draw a general outline of the picture; only then would he dare to execute it in colours. T'ai-tsu grasped the brush and waved it with great strength and freedom, making a rough sketch of the whole thing. Chou Wei bowed deeply and said: "Your Majesty has already fixed all the rivers and mountains; I can add nothing to it" – an answer which pleased the emperor very much. But later on, when some slanderous reports were circulated about this same artist, he was put to death by imperial command.

The same fate befell several other painters: Chao Yüan, who had been ordered to paint representations of ancient heroes and worthies in one of the palaces, was beheaded, because his pictures did not please the emperor. Shêng Chu, a nephew of the well-known Yüan painter Shêng Mou, and for some time a *kung-feng* (adviser) in the palace, was also beheaded, because in one of his wall-paintings in the T'ien-chieh temple in Nanking he had represented a sea goddess riding on the back of the dragon, which was interpreted as an insult to the emperor.

Shên Hsi-yüan and Ch'ên Yüan, who both painted portraits of Hung-wu, were more successful in meeting the wishes of their imperial patron. The former was promoted to the position of a government secretary, the latter became a *tai-chao* in Wên-yüan ko. Their representations of the imperial countenance were by no means flattering, if we may judge by the large full-size portrait signed by Ch'ên Yüan which exists in several replicas, of which one used to be in the Peking palace and one in a private collection in Paris. Hung-wu is here characterized

with almost repulsive realism; the pock-marked face with its enormous and somewhat contorted chin, large mouth and fierce eyes has an expression of *terribilità*, reminding us of medieval *condottieri* rather than of a quondam monk.

Neither artistic fame nor high official position constituted a protection when the emperor's suspicion or displeasure was aroused. It may be recalled that Wang Mêng died in prison and his friend Ch'ên Ju-yen was beheaded. Of the "Four Great Poets" (or "Four Worthies") three lost their lives and the fourth was shamefully degraded, in spite of the fact that they had all served as high officials: Chang Yü, who had served for some time as guardian of the imperial ancestral temple, was forced to commit suicide by drowning himself (otherwise he would have been beheaded). Kao Ch'i, vice-president of the Board of Revenue and most famous as a poet, was chopped in half, because he made some satirical allusions to the emperor in a poem. Yang Chi, who was a successful bamboo-painter as well as a poet and also a high official, was degraded to the state of a transport coolie and died of exhaustion, while Hsü Pên, highly gifted as a poet as well as a painter, suffered the same fate as Wang Mêng and died in prison.

The emperor Ch'êng-tsu, better known by his reign name Yung-lo, caused the construction of large numbers of new buildings, as stated before, including new residential quarters in Peking, and many of these were to be decorated with paintings. Artists were called to the capital from all over the country to paint in the palace halls, but there was evidently considerable activity also in some of the provincial towns and their newly-erected temples. According to the records, such buildings as Fêng-tien tien and Wên-hua tien were provided with wall-paintings, but none of these halls has survived. The only remains of wall-paintings of the period known to us are in some Buddhist temples in Shansi and Hopei, such as Fa-hai ssü in the neighbourhood of Peking, which were executed in the Hsüan-tê period (1426-1435). But as the Buddhist

wall-paintings form a special section of strictly traditional type with only a very slight connexion with other kinds of painting, it seems hardly necessary to dwell on them here.¹

Among the painters who enjoyed the favour of the emperor Yung-lo may be mentioned Kuo Ch'un (originally called Kuo Wên-t'ung) hao P'u-an, who served as *kung-feng* in the palace and painted landscapes in the manner of Shêng Mou. Once, when the emperor ordered him to paint, he refused, and when this caused the anger of the emperor, he answered: "When I am sorrowful I write, when joyful I paint, I would rather be killed than do it carelessly." We are told that Kuo Ch'un never painted for anybody but his imperial patron, but no works of his are known.

Shang-kuan Po-ta, who was summoned by the emperor to Jên-chih tien, was best known as a painter of landscapes and birds, but he also did portraits in a highly refined manner. Ch'ên Hui, tzu Chung-chien, had the privilege of painting the emperor's own countenance. He was furthermore a great calligrapher.

Chiang Tzû-ch'êng, who started as a landscape-painter but later on devoted himself largely to figure-painting with religious subjects, was also much admired at court and became known as one of the three geniuses of the Academy, the two others being Chao Lien and Pien Wên-chin, tzu Ching-chao. They had been summoned to service in Wu-ying tien at the end of the Yung-lo period, but their main activity belonged to the following epoch, i.e. the Hsüan-tê era (1427-1435), which marked the acme of artistic attainment within the academic current of Ming painting.

This was no doubt largely due to the personal ambition and efforts of the young emperor Hsüan-tung who did not, like his predecessors, limit himself to directing and organizing the activities of the academicians but vied with them as a painter, taking part in their exhibitions and deliberations.

His own paintings represent mainly animals in combination with simplified landscapes, sprays of

bamboo or flowering plants, mostly domestic animals such as cats and dogs, but also goats and monkeys. The models are very closely observed and sometimes characterized with a touch of humour. The execution is in light colours and ink and is remarkable for an unusual degree of refinement which is noticeable particularly in the painting of the silky hair of cats and kids and the velvety fur of the monkeys. They are as such remarkable examples of the high standard of technical skill characteristic of academic painting at this epoch and are in this respect comparable to the animal and bird-paintings produced during the reign of the emperor Hui-tung in the Academy at K'ai-feng, but they do not reach the same level as works of art. The underlying conceptions are more trivial and their artistic transposition is more superficial or formal in a naturalistic sense (Pl. 121).

It may be observed that of the ten paintings with the emperor's signature noted in our List, nine are dated between 1426 and 1429 and one 1432 (besides two undated and less convincing works). His main activity as a painter seems thus to have fallen within the first few years of his reign when he was only twenty-eight to thirty-one years old. Judging by their characteristics of style and technique, it seems evident that they are all the works of one definite personality who could hardly be anybody but the emperor, even though the signature which reads: "The Imperial Brush Playfully Painted", in some instances may have been added later at the emperor's order. The special interest of these paintings to us does not depend on any outstanding artistic merits in them but rather on the fact that they illustrate the revival of a tradition of academic art which flourished most abundantly under imperial protection during the Northern Sung period and now once

¹ The very extensive wall-paintings in Ts'ê-sü in Chêng-ting, which still existed in part in 1929, but are now practically destroyed, may also have been painted in the Ming period, though after earlier patterns, and the same applies to the large Bodhisattva figures from the Eumorfopoulos collection in the British Museum, which may have been executed about 1424. Cf. P. Pelliot's article on these paintings in *Revue des Arts Asiatiques*, 1928.

more gained added impetus and official protection through a monarch devoted to the fine arts.

There must have been several members of Hsüan-tsung's "Academy" who followed more or less closely the same stylistic tradition, but they are nowadays little known (since no works of theirs have been identified) with the exception of one, the above-mentioned famous bird-painter Pien Wên-chin. He is represented by half-a-dozen paintings in the Ku-kung collection, all provided with his signature, though hardly more than two of them may be accepted as his own works, while the rest seem to be posterior repetitions of his compositions. The most attractive among these paintings are some of the minor works, such as the short handscroll representing a Magpie on the Branch of a Chestnut-tree. The design is remarkable for its spacing and the perfect balance between the bird and the branch, both elements being rendered with very intimate observation of nature and great refinement, as may be seen in the worm-eaten leaves on the branch and the plumage of the bird (Pl. 122A). The large and brightly coloured picture of "The Hundred Birds", which is provided with the signature of the painter and the date 1413, was obviously executed at a later date but represents an important composition, whereas the very elegant picture of Two Cranes in a Bamboo Grove is the result of a remarkable co-operation between two of the greatest masters of the time, i.e. Pien Wên-chin and Wang Fu, the former being responsible for the birds and the latter for the bamboos.

In addition to these pictures in the Ku-kung collection may also be recalled two or three examples in private possession which seem to be the master's own works, such as the section of a large handscroll in the K. Sumitomo collection in Ōiso, which represents Three Turtle Doves on the Branch of an old Tree (Pl. 122B), and the picture of a group of quails picking up grains under some tall corn-stalks (belonging to Chao Shu-ju and reproduced in *Tōsō*, p. 236). The former is now darkened and worn by time, yet it has preserved its original

qualities of soft and sensitive modelling in the birds and flowers and shows as such how closely and successfully Pien Wên-chin carried on the kind of bird and flower-painting which was started by Huang Ch'üan at the very beginning of the Sung period and further developed in a more formal sense by the painters attached to the emperor Hui-tsung's artistic circle. He may indeed be characterized as a late-born Sung academician – and as such an ideal member of the emperor Hsüan-tsung's retrospective institution, an artist who actually had absorbed "the spirit of antiquity" to such a degree that it seems like a fundamental part of his temperament and pictorial style.

None of his contemporaries in the Academy reached the same degree of lasting fame as artists, though they were very highly talented and honoured by the emperor (in conformity with Sung tradition) with high degrees in the ranks of the imperial guards. Hsieh Huan, *zū* T'ing-hsün, a learned man and traditional landscape-painter, served as the emperor's adviser in matters of art and had as such great influence on the academic activities. He had a fine collection of paintings and writings by masters of the T'ang and Sung periods which was "enough to dazzle the eyes of his visitors". And he could evidently afford to be liberal; we are told that "if somebody wanted to take away a picture, he could do so freely, the host raised no objections. He accorded with the old saying, to find pleasure in objects but not to be tied by them, which added to the esteem in which he was held by everybody." In his paintings he is said to have followed some of the early Sung and pre-Sung masters, but to what extent he succeeded in transmitting their style is impossible to tell, since no authentic work of his has been identified.

Shang Hsi, *zū* Wei-chi, was another prominent member of the Academy in the Hsüan-tê and Chêng-t'ung epochs. His earliest dated picture is of the year 1427, the latest of the year 1441. Only about half a dozen of his works are known in reproduction (most of them in the Ku-kung

collection) and since they do not reveal any stronger individual features, it is difficult to identify any other works of his. He became famous particularly for his paintings of tigers – a motif that no doubt constituted a prerogative of a court-painter – but the pictures by him known to us include only cats, dogs and horses, to which can be added flower studies and figure compositions.¹ The most remarkable among the latter are the short handscroll in the Hakone Museum representing Lao-tzu Passing the Barrier,² and the very large illustration of an Imperial Hunting Party in the Ku-kung collection. The first is a minor ink-painting of traditional Yüan type, the other a colourful, more than six feet wide composition with some thirty men on horseback in a rocky landscape where some large trees serve to mark and divide the groups of men³ (Pl. 123). The picture is essentially akin to the quasi-realistic history or genre-paintings which were produced by members of the emperor Hui-tsung's Academy and executed with utmost care in details, such as the outfit and weapons of the men. No better example could be found of the survival of a high grade of academic traditionalism in the Ming period; it was then as before (and later) a fundamental current in the field of painting.

Shih Jui, *tsü* I-ming, was summoned to service at court in the Yung-lo period and also honoured with a rank in the imperial guard. He continued his activity through the Hsüan-tê reign and probably later. A number of paintings in old Japanese collections are ascribed to him, among them three which have seals reading: "Shih I-ming (from) Ch'ien-tang", besides inscriptions by well-known men of the period. These are all uniformly composed, showing a single figure in a simple landscape,⁴ and as these figures all represent famous characters of the Han period who have served as models of virtue, e.g. Ning Ch'ü on the Ox, I K'uan labouring in his field and Chu Mai-ch'ên, the poor scholar carrying some dry wood, it may well be that the pictures formed parts of a series of ancient models of virtue (according to the Confucian tradition). They are remarkable for the refinement of the execution,

harking back in this respect to late Sung or Yüan models which, however, have been devitalized in the transposition. But the artist may well have possessed qualities which corresponded to the academic spirit and technical refinements of the epoch. He became thus particularly famous for his skill in so-called *Chieh-lua* or the representation of architectural motifs of the kind that Wang Chên-p'êng (of the Yüan period) mastered most successfully in his small paintings.

Shih Jui seems to have been something of an eclectic; he is also made responsible for pictures in the "green and gold manner", the characteristic technique introduced in the early T'ang period by Li Ssü-hsün and his son and transmitted with variations by Chao Po-chü and other painters of the South Sung academy. There are at least two pictures of this kind in Japan, traditionally ascribed to Shih Jui, one in a private collection in Kyôto, the other in the Inouye collection in Tôkyô. The latter represents a Steep Mountain Pass rather fantastically conceived, composed of piled up deeply split rocks closing in on a winding road that climbs almost to the top of the mountain, splashing cascades and large leafy trees which bend protectively over graceful pavilions from which white-robed old philosophers are admiring the view (Pl. 124). If this picture actually was done by Shih Jui, as sometimes claimed, it may be quoted as an example of his above-mentioned skill as a boundary painter. The pavilions are exquisitely rendered, one might almost say embroidered, and the golden outlines of the mountains give added lustre to their fantastic shapes. Yet it is not simply the technical refinement and dexterity that make this picture attractive, but rather the artist's faculty to steep the whole thing in an atmosphere of fancy and thus to transfer the scenery from the realm of objective reality into the

¹ Cf. K.-L. *Shu-lua chi*, vols. XV and XXIII, *Chügoku*, vol. II.

² Cf. Yonezawa, *Painting in the Ming Dynasty*, pl. 3.

³ *Ku-kung*, vol. III.

⁴ Cf. *Kokka* 283 and *Tôyô*, vol. X.

imaginary world, where the barriers of material existence no longer hold good.

We are not in a position to state whether this landscape in the "green and gold manner" actually was painted by Shih Jui, but there is no doubt that pictures of this kind enjoyed favour among the academicians of the Hsüan-tê epoch (and later). Shih Jui may well have been one of the men who revived this kind of imaginative landscape-painting, but there were evidently others during the succeeding generations who did similar things, the most famous among them being Ch'iu Ying who, however, was active only at the beginning of the sixteenth century when the Academy of Painting had become a rather shadowy institution. Yet, it may be said that the academic spirit was still alive; it was transmitted by men like Ch'iu Ying and T'ang Yin and expressed in works with an archaizing formal character. We shall return to these painters in a later chapter devoted to what may be called "post-academicians", i.e. artists who continued the academic tradition without an academy.

Here, however, should first be added some remarks about a different current or trend of painting which also had its representatives in the academic circle of the Hsüan-tê period, whence it was transplanted and variously developed into independent local schools. This applies in particular to the kind of monochrome landscape-painting which was represented by several prominent academicians in the Hsüan-tê period, who started as more or less faithful followers of the Ma-Hsia school tradition before they branched off along somewhat varying individual lines.

One of these was Ni Tuan, another Li Tsai, a third Tai Chin, a fourth Chou Wên-chin, to mention only some of the best known in this group of painters who at this time were summoned to service in the Jên-chih tien. The reports about their personal histories are rather meagre, but their signed pictures make it possible to form some ideas about their artistic personalities.

Ni Tuan is said to have painted Buddhist and

Taoist figures, but the only picture by him known to us (in the Ku-kung collection) represents a fisherman on a river-bank drawing in a large landing-net. Tall bamboos are bending over the water and a large stone constitutes a *point d'appui* at the lower edge of the design. If the picture did not have the artist's signature and a contemporary inscription, it would no doubt be classified as by a follower of Ma Yüan. The dependence on the Sung master is quite obvious in the design as well as in the brushwork, which is fresh and bold, with more skill than sensitiveness (Pl. 125B).

The large mountain landscape with the signature of Li Tsai in the National Museum in Tôkyô, reveals a far more important personality with deeper roots in the Sung tradition of landscape-painting ever since the tenth century. The composition which fills the picture to the brim rises rather sharply in successive stages or terraced planes. The middle region is marked by a rather thick layer of mist and circling clouds, spreading like a roof over the clumps of trees and split boulders along the banks of the stream below, while the sharply cut rocks and peaks which fill the upper part of the composition rise dominantly to its very limit. One is here reminded of certain monumental works by Li T'ang rather than of Ma Yüan's more airy and one-sided compositions, but the picture also contains reminiscences of earlier date.

The other large landscape in Japan (formerly in the Ôgawa collection in Kyôto) which is provided with Li Tsai's signature and commonly described as his work, represents snow-covered mountains of a somewhat bulging type. The design is inspired by compositions of early Sung masters, but the forms are coarse and lacking in structure.

A more interesting picture, likewise signed by Li Tsai, is reproduced on plate 22 in vol. I of *Gems of Chinese Painting*. The landscape is here reduced to two large trees and a rocky ledge on which some figures are gathered, greeting the return of Ch'iu Kao, i.e. an immortal who is riding on a carp, carried by a storm-wind. The motif and the drawing of the

figures remind us of Shih Jui's illustrative painting, and they also illustrate a legendary motif with a moral sense.

Li Tsai is said to have lived some time in Yünnan before he was summoned to Peking, but it is in vain that we look for any special impressions of southern nature in his landscapes. He did not follow the advice of Wang Li, who took Hua-shan rather than the old master as his teacher, but based himself mainly on studies of Kuo Hsi and, to a less extent, on the Sung academicians.

If we may believe Sesshu, the great Japanese landscape-painter who visited China in 1468, Li Tsai was then considered the foremost in the field. This becomes evident from the inscription that Sesshu made on his great picture (now in the Tōkyō National Museum) in which he said: "I wanted to acquaint myself with great artists while in China, but I could find few really excellent painters. The

only masters whose reputation impressed me were Chang Yu-shêng and Li Tsai. I learned the arts of coloration and black-ink painting from these two."¹ The painter Chang Yu-shêng mentioned by Sesshu has remained completely unrecorded, but as to Li Tsai, his great merits as a continuator of the Sung tradition is evident, though he is no longer considered one of the foremost of his time. Sesshu's verdict seems thus rather surprising and may, indeed, be due to insufficient information, yet it is worth remembering as a record of the high esteem in which Li Tsai was held at the time. He was apparently one of the best representatives of the classic ideals of the Southern Sung academy and as such one who contributed to the formation of the so-called Chê school, to which we will return in a later chapter.

¹ Translation by James Cahill from Seiroku Noma, *Sesshu*, Tōkyō National Museum, 1956, p. 12.

Continuators of the Yüan Tradition and Precursors of the Wu School

I

Wang Fu, Hsia Ch'ang, and other bamboo-painters

THE ACADEMICIANS and court-painters of the Yung-lo, Hsüan-tê and Cheng-t'ung periods mentioned above, were not the only prominent men in the field of landscape-painting during the first half of the fifteenth century. There were other painters of equal or even greater merit who followed entirely different ideas of style; they stood practically independent of the academic traditions of the South Sung or earlier periods and continued as painters in the footsteps of the great Yüan masters. From a stylistic point of view some of these painters might have been mentioned as "late born Yüan masters" in an earlier chapter (like the afore-mentioned Hsü Pen), but since they were born and active after the accession of the national dynasty they are introduced here as a kind of interlude in the discussion of the development of Ming painting.

The foremost among these masters was Wang Fu; born 1362, while the Yüan dynasty was still in power, he continued his activity through most of the Yung-lo reign, i.e. until 1416. He was a man of the scholarly type known as a poet as well as a painter, but also something of a solitary traveller like Ni Tsan, always in search of the inner meaning of the appearances and transformations of nature. He was admired as a character no less than as an artist, as may be gathered from the records in *Wu-shêng shih-shih* and the *Ming-shih*:

"Wang Fu, *tzü* Méng-tuan, was born in Wu-hsi (Kiangsu). From his earliest years he showed a very resolute and independent disposition and was particularly skilful in composing songs and poems in the old style. He started on travels to the North,

first along the Yangtse and the Huai-ho and then on the Yellow River, reaching T'ai-hang Shan (in Hopei). From there he continued through Yen-mên kuan and roamed about in Chin and Tai (parts of Shansi and Suiyuan). There he observed many ancient sites and thought with regret of bygone times. He stayed there for some time and did not like to leave.

"When the prominent men of the time heard about the man, they all wanted to entertain him, and when they met him, their admiration was still increased, because his air was so lofty and dignified and his speech so uncommonly severe (firm).

"After a long time he went back to the South and took up his abode on the Chiu-lung mountain. He used to hum a poem by Tso T'ai-ch'ung (a poet of the Chin dynasty) which said: 'What need is there of instruments when the hills and streams are singing?' From this place he took his appellation: The Hermit of the Nine Dragon Mountain (Chiu-lung shan-jên). His other by-name was Yu-shih (Friend of Stones).

"In the Yung-lo period someone recommended Wang Fu to employment in the Han-lin College because of his skill in calligraphy, and then he became a government secretary.

"He was particularly skilled in painting landscapes, bamboos, and stones. Whenever he got drunk he used to put on a yellow cap and robe and took on a haughty mien. He spread out some paper, rolled up his sleeves, waved the brush and went on splashing and scattering, doing the strangest things, quite impossible to describe. When he had finished

his paintings, he again started humming some old songs. He was indeed like a poet of ancient times . . . He died, 1416, in Peking at the age of 55."

Wang Fu's artistic habits and accomplishments are further described in the *Ming-shih* as follows:

"As a calligraphist he considered himself equal to the old masters. He did not paint very easily, but only when he was travelling or when he had enjoyed wine; then he let the ink flow freely over the white walls, splashing and soaking with the brush. If anybody offered him gold or money for his pictures he would get angry and shut the people out without the least regard for their social standing or wealth. And when somebody admonished him for this method, he answered: 'A man must be careful in regard to his company; if one does not look after small matters, how could one accomplish great things?'

"When living in the capital he once, on a moonlit night, heard a man playing the flute. It filled him with joy, and he painted a picture of bamboo and stones. In the morning he went to see the player in order to present him with the picture. The man happened to be a cloth merchant, and he gave a beautiful red carpet to the artist, asking him to do another picture so as to make a pair. But this made Wang Fu so angry that he took his picture back and tore it to pieces."

The same fundamental note as in the above descriptions of Wang Fu's proud artistic personality is evident in the following characterization written by Wên Chêng-ming on a picture by the master:

"Yu-shih stood (as a painter) in a class above the skilful (*néng*). The critics said that he combined the spirit of a scholar with that of a painter, but the man himself was superior to and not a slave of his art. He would not give away even the smallest picture to anybody whom he did not consider the right kind of man."

Among the pictures ascribed to or signed by Wang Fu are at least a dozen with dated inscriptions which may offer some indications regarding the painter's stylistic development. The earliest is a

rather elaborate mountain landscape dated 1393 in private possession in China.¹ The composition is made up of humps and hills in successive layers which rise towards a dominating peak. There are leafy trees growing in the folds between the humps and rich verdure everywhere. The general character of the picture brings to mind some of Chü-jan's grassy mountains (Pl. 127).

A similar motif treated in a somewhat more formal way occurs in a large picture dated 1396 and called "Temple on the Pine Peak" (likewise in private possession in China).² The buildings are practically hidden in the midst of the wooded humps of the mountain side which are here still more elaborated and detailed than in the preceding example. On the rocky bank at the foot of the hills is a group of large pine-trees as in so many of Wang Meng's landscapes. The influence from the Yüan master who had passed away only ten years earlier, while still in prison, is too obvious to need further elucidation. The picture offers as a whole clear evidence of the importance of Wang Meng's art for Wang Fu's development.

Another, though less perfect, example of this dependence is the minor picture of a narrow mountain gorge, dated 1396, which exists in two almost identical versions, one in the J. D. Chên collection in Hongkong, and another in the National Museum in Stockholm. Different opinions regarding the relative importance of the two versions are possible, but there can be no doubt that they both represent a well-known picture by Wang Fu as is explained in the inscriptions by the artist's brother Wang Ta and by the somewhat later critic and painter Li Jih-hua, who praises the brushwork in particular as exceedingly fine, surpassing Hsü Pên's and Lu Kuang's manner and comparable to Wang Meng's work³ (Pl. 128). The picture is no less

¹ Reproduced in *Chung-huo ming-hua*, III. *Banjin Gaseu*, I, 2. *Chügoku*, II.

² Reproduced in the Nanking Exhibition Catalogue, pl. 90.

³ The picture in Hongkong is on silk, the one in Stockholm on paper. Li Jih-hua's inscription is reported among his writings in *Liu-yan chai chü-pi*.

dependent on Wang Meng's art than the previous example, though of a more tentative kind, marking an early stage in the painter's endeavour to form a style of his own.

The most important influence in Wang Fu's later creations does not, however, originate from Wang Meng but from Ni Tsan. The growing importance of Ni Tsan's singularly pure and restrained manner for Wang Fu's further development is quite clearly discernible in a few dated paintings as well as in several undated but highly characteristic landscapes in which memories of Ni Tsan's art are absorbed in somewhat richer individual compositions.

The earliest and most telling among these pictures is the river view of 1401 (formerly in the Yamamoto collection in Tōkyō) which seems like a direct copy after the Yüan master.¹ If it did not have the inscription by the painter and poems by some of his contemporaries, it might pass as a work by Ni Tsan.² The composition consists of the usual bare trees and an open shed or pavilion on a low promontory on the bank of an open river. It possesses the refined simplicity of Ni Tsan's typical landscapes and is executed with a very sensitive brush (Pl. 129).

Another beautiful picture to be remembered in this connexion is the short handscroll in the Abe collection (Ōsaka Museum) which, according to the inscription, was painted in 1404 for a friend called Mi-chai. Here the traditional Ni Tsan design has been stretched out horizontally and is enlivened by three men. One of them is turning towards the boat which is waiting below, he is taking farewell of his friend, suggesting a note of sadness at the separation that harmonizes with the desolate emptiness of the open view. The group of three rugged old trees on the bank which rise in contrast to rocks and water accentuate rather than relieve the mood of loneliness. They are more severe and sturdy than the usual trees in Ni Tsan's paintings yet fundamentally of the same kind or stock of solitary country folk, and placed in the same relation to the rocks and the water as in pictures by the older master (Pl. 130).

Wang Fu would probably never have invented

them or utilized them as he did in this and a few other paintings if he had not first met with them in Ni Tsan's works. He modified them gradually and introduced them in new combinations, emphasizing them, however, as the main motif of the composition:³ tall sinewy trees, some rugged and bare, others with a few large leaves, brought together into closed groups as if for mutual protection against storms and sudden winds. The main accents are on the trees in the majority of Wang Fu's landscapes even when the compositions are enlarged and developed with rocky precipices, rapids and rivers and pavilions for philosophers as, for instance, in the characteristic picture in the Ku-kung collection called Seated with a Friend in a Pavilion at the Foot of steep Mountains, a truly brilliant sketch from nature radiating light and *ch'i-yün* in every inch⁴ (Pl. 131). Wang Fu never, as far as we know, worked in colour, yet some of his rocks and trees have a distinctly colouristic quality and make us feel that if he had worked under conditions more like those of Western painting, he probably would have used colour very successfully.

Wang Fu was also famous as a calligraphist and an excellent painter of bamboo, resembling also in this respect the gentlemen painters of the North Sung period. Bamboo-painting was no doubt to him as to Su Shih and Wên Tung the true test for the scholar's character, his self-control and control of the brush. Wang Fu belongs also as such to the Yüan period rather than to the Ming; he is of the same class as Li Kan, K'o Chiu-ssü and Wu Chên, decidedly superior to the pupils and imitators of the Ming period and as such the last great scholarly bamboo-painter. Most of his preserved works are minor sprays or twigs of bamboo with very long slender leaves which show a tendency to rise rather than to

¹ Repr. *Kokka* 466 and *Tōsō*, p. 234.

² *Sōrakan*, II, 44.

³ Typical compositions with solitary trees, in *I-yüan chên shun*, 7; now belonging to C. T. Loo Successors, New York, dated 1408. Another similar picture in *Chūgoku*, II.

⁴ *K-6, shu-hua chi*, vol. 10.

droop. This is beautifully displayed in the little picture in the Fogg Museum in which the leaves on the slender twigs are neat and distinct as if cut in metal, yet light and airy, spreading and folding like dragon-fly wings, all vibrant with a breath of life which the painter has transmitted at the tip of his brush.

There is a more important bamboo-painting in the Freer Gallery, in the long handscroll known as *Ten Thousand Bamboos along a River in Autumn*, which has a lengthy inscription by the master dated 1410 and eight colophons (Pl. 132). The bamboos are represented in sections, some cut near the ground, some at the top, or at the end of a long branch, and painted in tones of darker ink against a light grey background formed by rocks and water. The intervals between the clumps of bamboo are rather wide, which is hardly to the benefit of the design as a whole; the strength of it is thus not in the unity of the composition but in the single sections, where the leaves are unfolded with greatest freedom and replete with that living beauty which was noted in the smaller picture.

The critics of the Ming period who try to characterize Wang Fu as a painter never fail to place him on a level with the old classics of bamboo-painting active in the Sung and Yüan periods. He belonged stylistically to the same current even though more eclectic. "Thus", to quote the *Kuo-chih t'ang chi*, "he got the spontaneity of Ni Tsan without his carelessness, and the strength of K'o Chiu-ssü without his impetuosity. He painted bamboos enveloped in clouds, moving in wind, basking in the sun, elegant in their mien and bearing. The greatest men who worked with ink and paper, such as Wên Tung, Su Shih, and Wu Chên, could never be restrained by rules; but they used the rules and mastered all the relative proportions (feet and inches)."

It may well be admitted that in his most spontaneous works Wang Fu rose to the level of Ni Tsan and Wu Chên, though he resembled them less in his manner of painting than in his genius and temperament. He also was a real poet, and specimens of his

ability in this respect may be found in some of his pictures, as for instance the *Autumn Landscape*, which he painted as a record of a gathering of good friends. The pavilion on the shore is empty and the boat is ready to leave. Each of the distinguished men assembled wrote a poem in memory of the occasion, no fewer than fourteen in all, thus covering the whole painting with their compositions, but only the artist's own inscription can here be quoted in translation:¹

"I too was a guest at this place, but now I bid you farewell; you are leaving for home. River and sky are aglow with autumn colours covering the boundless expanse. The boat is small and light as a leaf, half-filled with sacks of poems, and half with fragrant herbs."

Wang Fu, like the foremost among his predecessors, was a great painter because a poet at heart, and no formal analysis of his compositions and his brushwork can render justice to his creative genius. It was said of him as of some other great painters, that "his bosom was rich in hills and valleys" – each picture of his was a fragment of his own innermost nature.

Ho Ch'êng, *tzü Yen-tsê*, hao Chu-hao lao-jên, from Chiang-yin in Kiangsu, was almost of the same age as Wang Fu and apparently of a somewhat similar disposition. His artistic activity seems, however, to have been rather delayed by the fact that shortly after he had passed the *chü-jên* degree, in 1403, he was exiled and subsequently thrown into prison for speaking too freely of the government, and was not released until 1425, the year after the emperor Yung-lo's death. Then, in the Hsüan-tê epoch, he was made governor of Yüan-chou and earned the affection of the people through his mild and just government. His personal inclinations seem to have been like those of Wang Fu; he spent much time, later in life, wandering through woods or travelling in a boat. When the moon was rising he would go up mountains to study the effects of mist. The inspiration thus gathered he expressed in very

¹ *Kuo-kung*, vol. VIII.

sensitive paintings such as the large misty mountain-landscape with travellers at a village inn (in the collection of Viscount M. Tanaka)¹ (Pl. 132) as well as in lyric poems. He is said to have followed Mi Fei as a painter, which to some extent may be recognized in the mist-enveloped mountains, but the picture is full of interesting details and compositionally more akin to works by earlier masters of the North Sung period such as Kuo Hsi. Even though he does not represent quite the same trend of style as is reflected in the works of Wang Fu, his approach to nature and poetic attitude are much the same as the older master's, as may also be gathered from the following poem by Ho Ch'eng recorded in *Wu-sheng shih-shih*:

"A silent sighing in the tassels of the reeds;
a limitless expanse of water,
The sinking moon is setting on the beach,
yet only half the night has passed.
Far from my home, my thoughts cannot be
bridled,
they follow with the geese beyond the empty sky.
Alone with a little lantern in my boat
I am a traveller in San-hsiang." (Hunan)

The best known of the immediate followers of Wang Fu was Hsia Ch'ang, *tzü* Chung-chao, *hao* Tzū-tsai chü-shih and Yü-feng (b. 1388, d. 1470), who came from the idyllic town of K'un-shan in Kiangsu. He became a *chin-shih* in 1415 and held some prominent official positions, but his great fame was mainly based on his skill as a bamboo-painter. It was said at the time: "A bamboo by Hsia is worth ten taels of gold", and even people from beyond the frontiers came to offer great sums for his paintings. He wrote a beautiful *k'ai-shu* style, and he came out as number one in the writing competition held in the palace in the Yung-lo epoch. The emperor ordered him to write tablets for several new halls of the Peking palace, presented him with a house, and showed him many kinds of favours. As an official he was beloved by the people for his easy ways; his manners were scholarly and he looked like a "superior man".

Hsia Ch'ang was certainly one of the most highly specialized representatives of bamboo-painting in China; he did nothing but bamboos and as the demand for his works grew rapidly with the years he could not help repeating himself more or less in most of the scrolls. He followed in the footsteps of Wang Fu, but there are noticeable differences in their works reflecting their respective temperaments. They were both great masters of their kind, but whereas Wang Fu "produced beauty with strength", according to one of the old critics, Hsia Ch'ang worked in a more fluent manner, with his sensitive brush suggesting the movements in the branches and the rustle in the leaves. Yet this brush was not a magic rod like Wu Chên's which could suggest or reveal unseen beauty, the soul of the bamboo, with a few touches; it was rather the instrument of a brilliant writer who excelled in the model script, *k'ai-shu*, by which things and thoughts are rendered most obviously. Seldom has the correspondence between bamboo-painting and calligraphy been better illustrated than in some of Hsia Ch'ang's scrolls, which are distinguished by the kind of perfection characterized in *Wu-sheng shih-shih* with the statement that he painted "even wind and rain in accordance with squares and measures".

His production became, as pointed out repeatedly, very large and his fame reached even foreign lands beyond the frontiers of China, where large sums were offered for his paintings. Nor have they lost their attraction with the passing of time. Hsia Ch'ang's long handscrolls of bamboo and rocks along the banks of the Hsiao and Hsiang, or some minor river, are still among the most coveted examples of Chinese painting and have in recent years been secured by several leading museums in America. It may not be necessary to describe them here in detail, because in spite of some variations in design and brushwork, the leading motifs and fundamental principles of arrangement are the same in them all.

The earliest dated scroll is now in the Chicago

¹ *Shimbi*, vol. XV.

Art Institute; it was painted in 1441 for a friend of the artist called Chou Chi-hung, who was a great amateur of bamboo. It is called Bamboo Stream and Spring Rain (a title that would serve for several of these scrolls) but might just as well be called "The Three Friends of Winter", i.e. Bamboo, Pine and Plum-tree; the two latter being here added to complete the traditional motif. The rocks, which form the background for the bamboos and trees, are split and craggy, while the water at some places is rushing through in broad cascades. The composition is richer and more intricate than in the later scrolls and executed with a fresh pictorial sensibility suggesting early spring (Pl. 134).

The latest of the dated scrolls is the so-called *Hsiao-Hsiang kuo yü t'u* (Spring Rain over the Hsiao and Hsiang Rivers), now in the Freer Gallery, which according to the inscription was painted 1464. The composition, which consists solely of bamboo, rocks and water, is more spacious; the intervals between the groups of bamboo are wider, the leafage of the bamboos and the rocky ledges are painted with a broader brush and richer ink. The whole thing seems to be the work of a more mature master, written down unhesitatingly with speed and concentration. It may be somewhat lacking in the pictorial quality so characteristic of his earliest scrolls, but its brilliant display of masterly brushwork makes it a no less attractive picture (Pl. 135).

The other bamboo scrolls in American museums must all have been executed within the quarter century that elapsed between the two specimens mentioned above. The one in the St. Louis City Art Museum which is called "Old Bamboo Valley", is dated 1446. It is remarkable for its spacious composition and strongly accentuating brushwork. Two scrolls are in the Honolulu Academy of Arts and the Pennsylvania Museum in Philadelphia, both representing Bamboo in Spring Rain; they are undated and so is the beautiful scroll in the Nelson Gallery in Kansas City. The composition is here partly sustained and divided by flat rocks which jut out like pontoons on the water, thus increasing the impres-

sion of depth and accentuating the rhythmic succession of solid and fluid portions. It may be noted that this picture was sometimes ascribed to Wang Fu, but the name has been altered to Hsia Ch'ang, which from a stylistic point of view is no less acceptable than that of Wang Fu. In view of the close stylistic affinity of the two masters, the case must here be left open. Certain portions of this composition appear again (with minor modifications) in a scroll (in the Shanghai Museum?) which is reproduced in *Genus of Chinese Paintings*, vol. II, dated 1462, and said to be after a model by Wang Fu. In addition to these pictures may be mentioned a long handscroll in the East Asiatic collections in Berlin, dated 1455, called Spring Rain over Bamboos along the Hsiang River, and another somewhat similar picture which has the title, Wind and Rain over the Hsiang River, which is signed and dated 1446. (Cf. Chang Ta-ch'ien, Catalogue I, p. 20.)

The grandest and most impressive product of Hsia Ch'ang's supreme skill and energy as a bamboo-painter is, however, a very large scroll in the Kung collection. The motif is the usual one, i.e. tall bamboos bending over strange rocks along a riverbank, but it is here handled not only on an extraordinary scale, probably never exceeded in size, but also with a broader brush in a more sweeping fashion than can be seen in any other of the master's scroll-paintings.

Beside the scrolls there are a number of vertical paintings by Hsia Ch'ang in Far Eastern collections which represent single bamboos or sections of them in combination with garden rocks, swayed by the wind or drooping under the moisture of a spring rain, but never actually shaken by a storm-wind or reflecting the sudden dramatic drive that may be observed in some of the bamboo-paintings by Ku An and K'o Chiu-sü. Only one of these pictures also includes a figure, viz. a white-robed Kuanyin placed on a rocky ledge under gracefully bending stems. The patterns of the others do not show any important variations, and do not call for any closer

descriptions, particularly as most of them are adequately reproduced in well-known Chinese and Japanese publications.¹

None of these pictures of single bamboos is comparable in artistic importance to the above-mentioned handscrolls, yet they all bear witness to the painter's extraordinary skill in rendering the large lanceolate leaves either in clusters ruffled by the wind, or stretching like streamers from the very tip of the twigs. The artist seems to be playing with them, making them turn and twist like fugitive thoughts. His mastery of the brush was certainly brilliant, yet it must also be admitted that the uniformity and spotless perfection of Hsia Ch'ang's bamboo-leaves sometimes result in impressions of monotony.

Hsia Ch'ang was by no means the only official during the first half of the fifteenth century who won a name as a bamboo-painter, even though his works are better known than those of other men. Yü Ch'ien, *tzü* Po-i, previously mentioned, who in 1428 was appointed president of the Board of Justice, was at the time no less famous than Hsia Ch'ang as a painter of bamboo and stones. Chang I (1385-1449), the well-known writer and poet, painted pine-trees and bamboo, but gave up this occupation when he found himself surpassed by his friend Hsia Ch'ang, whereas Hsia found himself surpassed by Chang I as a poet. Another friend of his was Wang Ch'ien, *tzü* Mu-chih, who served as Keeper of the Imperial Ancestral Temple. He specialized in plum-blossoms, as may be observed in a beautiful picture in the Ku-kung collection,² and co-operated with Hsia Ch'ang in painting *The Two Beauties of Winter*, i.e. a plum-tree in bloom and a pine (the latter painted by Hsia).

The men who specialized in bamboo-painting or kindred subjects, such as pine-trees and plum-blossoms, were mostly of the scholarly class and did their paintings as they wrote their poetry or played the *ch'in* when they were free from official duties. They were not professionals and did not depend on

their art for a living, but belonged to the class of gentlemen painters which ever since the beginning of the Sung period had been an important element within the general flow of Chinese painting.

The artistic attitude of the early gentlemen painters was clearly exemplified in various individual combinations by the great landscape-painters of the Yüan period, who had no use for the academic traditions surviving from the South Sung period. When these traditions were revived under the official protection of the early Ming emperors, as indicated in a previous chapter, they became once more a guiding, though by no means all-inclusive, influence in the general flow or development of Chinese painting. Nevertheless the stream of independent individualistic painting continued; it was transmitted, as we have seen, by some painters born in the Yüan period and their immediate followers, who grew in number and importance in the same measure as the official art-institutions began to crumble and lose their centralizing influence. Most of these painters had no connexion whatsoever with academic court-circles; they did not live in the capital, but in the south, mostly in Suchou, or the Wu district, which from now onward became the most influential centre of art and scholarship. This led gradually to what has been called the Wu school, *viz.* a generalizing appellation for a circle of independent artists, then a name for a homogeneous school or style. With the passing of time the Wu school broke up into several minor factions or schools named after localities in the same or neighbouring provinces. Painters of many kinds came thus to be included in it, but they had all something in common which separated them from their academic contemporaries and made them feel in closer sympathy with the Yüan tradition.

¹ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vols. IV, VI, XIV, XVI, etc. *Shên-chun ta-huan*, vol. 8. *Shina Nanga*, I, 4, III, 3. *Nangju*, vol. 8. *Kokeu* 485, a-o.

² *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XXVII.

II

Tu Ch'ung, Liu Chüeh and Yao Shou

Some of the older precursors of the Wu school, including artists like Hsü Pên, Chao Yüan, Ch'ên Ju-yen, Wang Fu, Ho Chêng and Hsia Ch'ang, have already been mentioned (most of them being natives of the Wu district), but a few younger men may here be added among the precursors who, so to speak, prepared the ground for Shên Chou, the final accomplisher of the Wu school, to whom we shall return in a later chapter; the most important among these precursors were Tu Ch'ung, Liu Chüeh and Yao Shou.

The first-named, Tu Ch'ung, was born in Suchou 1396 and died 1474. His *tsü* was Yung-chia but he used mostly the *hao* Lu-kuan (or Mao-kuan) *tao-jên*, i.e. the Taoist of the Deerskin Cap. According to Wang Chih-têng, the historian of the Suchou painters, he "was poor but well educated, and he expressed his noble character with his brush". As a youth he spent most of his time wandering about in the Wu district with some friends, but in later years he built himself a small hut in a beautiful bamboo grove, like so many other of these men, where he passed the rest of his life occupied in painting and writing.

His preserved works are not very numerous, but at least half a dozen are known in reproduction, as indicated in our List. In addition to these may be mentioned three pictures in the Ku-kung collection, viz. 1. The mountain landscape in the Wang Mêng style, with inscriptions by the painter, dated 1443, and by two of his friends. 2. The *Nan-hu ts'ao-t'ang* (The Straw-covered Pavilion by the South Lake); likewise an imposing mountain landscape with large pine-trees, rocky ledges and pavilions built over a broad stream, which from a stylistic viewpoint may be said to hold a place halfway between Wang Mêng and Shên Chou. It is a typical transition piece, illustrating how the manners of Wang Mêng and Wu Chên were modified and absorbed by painters of the Wu school about the middle of the fifteenth

century. 3 (Pl. 136). The third picture ascribed to the master in the Ku-kung collection represents Views from the Shih-tzü-lin Garden in Suchou. They are ink-paintings of the same kind as Hsü Pên's pictures from Shih-tzü lin and provided with a long inscription dated 1468, but since my acquaintance with them is insufficient, I can only mention them in passing.

The pictures reproduced in *Chügoku*, II and in *Sôgen*, p. 91, are both large landscapes, more related to Wu Chên's than to Wang Mêng's art; the former dated 1451, the latter 1463 and both rendered in that refined and noble manner which is known from Shên Chou's early works. His brush may be lacking in the vital force of the younger master, yet he has succeeded in rendering the intimate atmosphere of the scholar's pavilion, where tea is being served¹ (Pl. 137), and guests are being welcomed,² just as convincingly as he could render the severe grandeur of rugged mountains and old battered pine-trees.

Liu Chüeh (b. 1410, d. 1481), with the *tsü* Ting-mei and *hao* Wan-an, was a man in a prominent social position, well known as a poet and calligraphist and painter. He served for some time as secretary in the Board of Justice but retired at the age of 30 and managed to acquire a fine country estate where he arranged a famous garden which became known as Hsiao Tung-t'ing. Wang Chih-têng places him in the class of the very free, "unrestrained" (*i*) painters and says that he "painted landscapes with forests and valleys, deep spring-waters, rugged cliffs, beautiful trees and moving clouds, dense and mysterious, filled with a lovely atmosphere. His old trees were like dragons; yet he still had something to learn" (good enough for the outer chamber but not for the inner apartment).

¹ Cf. Album-leaf in *Shên-chou ta-kuan*, vol. 16, dated 1468, which shows a poet in his study pavilion by a mountain stream, served by a maid.

² Picture formerly in P'ang Yüan-chi collection; cf. *Sôgen*, p. 91; a composition akin to some of Shên Chou's works.

This characterization fits some of Liu Chüeh's landscapes quite well, though not all of them, because his works show various stylistic affinities. Liu Chüeh must have been a very sensitive, intelligent and probably entertaining gentleman in the circle of artists which also included Shên Chou. He knew the Yüan masters thoroughly and imitated them with success, but could also work in a more spontaneous individual fashion with a bold brush (Pl. 138B). One of the most successful early examples of his attachment to the Yüan masters is the picture of deeply split cliffs rising stepwise into a tower above an inlet of water, as in some of Huang Kung-wang's or Lou Kuan's landscapes. It is dated 1441 and inscribed with a poem by Yang Hsün-chi.¹ This is essentially a Yüan landscape in spirit and style. The same may be said of some other of Liu Chüeh's works, for instance the *Cloudy Summer Mountains* (with an inscription by Shên Chou) and a similar picture in Hui-hua kuan, though the effect is different, because here the painter has followed the Chü-jan - Wu Chên current, absorbing this as well as the Huang Kung-wang style.²

He worked, however, also in a more independent or unrestrained manner as is illustrated by the picture in the Motoyama collection of a pavilion built over a stream at the foot of cloudy mountains,³ which is executed in a bold expressionistic fashion (Pl. 141A). The intimate friendship between Liu Chüeh and Shên Chou must have meant a great deal for their respective development as painters. It touched the inner sources of their creative joy and contributed to the formation of their modes of expression which with the years became more and more alike. The evidences of this may be found in certain paintings as well as in inscriptions.

As an example may be cited the large album-leaf in Mr. C. C. Wang's collection, known as *Lin-an shan-ssü*, which represents a Mountain Valley on the way to the West Lake in Hangchow and was executed, according to the signature, in 1471. It is evidently a spontaneous record of a scenic spot along the mountain route, dotted down from memory and

provided with a descriptive text by Shên Chou. The brushwork reminds us of some of Shên Chou's studies; in fact, the leaf might almost pass as a work by the younger artist if it did not have the signature of the older, written a year before his passing (Pl. 139).

Another more important and appealing testimony of Liu Chüeh's close association with Shên Chou and his family is the picture in the Ku-kung collection known as the *Ch'ing-po Pavilion*, i.e. the painter's studio, which, according to tradition, was a favourite meeting place for the poets and artists of Suchou. It was apparently situated on a well protected spot at the foot of steep rocks where trees stood fresh and green and the water brought down by the mountain torrents formed a small inlet over which some graceful pavilions were constructed on poles. The picture shows two men seated in conversation and a third leaning on the rail admiring the view. Every detail is carefully rendered, the trees and vegetation on the mountains just as nearly as the lattice-work of the pavilions; the whole place has an air of harmonious refinement in a setting of impressive grandeur - a spot well chosen for those whose pleasure it was to attune themselves to the pulsation of nature's heart (Pl. 140).

The special historical interest of the picture depends, however, mainly on the inscriptions by the artist and his friends. In the first the painter says: "It was in the summer of the year 1458 that the old fellow Hsi-tien brought some wine and food to my Ch'ing-po studio. We had a meal together and then he asked me to paint and write", etc. Then follow half-a-dozen poetic allocutions written by Shên Chou's grandfather and his father, as well as by himself and two friends called Fêng Chi and Hsüeh Ying. Seventeen years later, when Liu Chüeh and the old members of the circle had passed away, Shên added another short poem in which he said:

¹ Reproduced in *Shên-chou ta-kuan*, vol. III, and in Liu Hsi-an, *Chin, Tang, Sung, Yuan, etc.*, p. 46.

² Cf. Liu publication, p. 45.

³ *T'aisü*, p. 243.

"The pavilion is now empty; the people are gone". The death of "old Liu", which happened in 1472, was a great loss to him; he laments it in his inscriptions on various paintings and makes us realize that Liu Chüeh had been to him like an elder brother, a faithful companion in art as well as in life.

* * *

Yao Shou, the third of the above-mentioned painters, was slightly younger than the two others and not by birth a member of the local Wu group, yet he was a close follower of certain Yüan masters and thus also an adherent of the so-called Wu school. Consequently he may also be recorded at this place. He was born 1423 at Chia-shan (in Chekiang) and died 1495. His *zū* was Kung-shou and two of his various by-names Ku-an and Yün-tung I-shih, but he was also called The Master of the Red Hill Studio after the place in Chia-hsing where he lived after he had retired from official service as a censor and a prefect of Yung-ming. He spent his time playing with the brush and humming poems when not travelling about in a houseboat like Mi Yüan-chang and Ni Tsan of olden times. He became well known as a poet and calligraphist, as is proved by the publication of his poems under the title *Yün-tung chi*.

His earliest paintings were spontaneous ink-sketches of bamboos or dry trees and stones executed in a rather free manner and accompanied by poetic inscriptions. A good example of this type of painting is the picture in Mr. J. D. Chén's collection in Hongkong,¹ which represents some slender bamboo branches hanging down from a rock (PL 141B). It has two poetic inscriptions, the first dated 1470, the second 1472, in which the painter expresses his love of the noble bamboos. The interpretation of the motif is unusual and the whole thing has a rather original scholarly character which may lead our thoughts to Wu Chên.

Several pictures of a somewhat similar nature representing bamboos and stones, or dry trees and birds might be quoted as examples of Yao Shou's skill in this kind of "gentleman painting", but it

seems of greater interest to recall here a few of the larger and more ambitious landscapes which reveal his dependence not only on Wu Chên, but also on other Yüan masters. One of the most significant in this respect is the beautiful River view in Autumn with a Fisherman in a Boat (formerly in the P'ang Lai-chên collection, now in Hui-hua-kuan in Peking) which is provided with a long inscription dated 1476, in which the painter says that the picture was done under the impression of a work by Chao Mêng-fu. The statement may be correct in regard to the design, but it can hardly be said to convey a correct idea of the pictorial effect and execution, because here again a comparison with Wu Chên's, or still better, with Shêng Mou's, landscapes would seem more appropriate (PL 143).

Yao Shou's special attachment to Chao Mêng-fu is, however, confirmed by other paintings, some of later date. He has, for instance, done another version of "A Fisherman on an Autumn River" (dated 1479) in which he again mentions Chao Mêng-fu as the model; a statement which apparently fits the case. A more revealing testimony of his dependence on Chao is, however, the landscape with two men seated under pine-trees on a river-bank (in the C. C. Wang collection in New York), which is a rather typical example of the kind of traditionalistic art for which Chao became famous; i.e. a work with an almost surprisingly faithful adherence to "the spirit of antiquity" and lack of individual accents (PL 143).

Yao Shou, who was a scholar and a poet no less than a painter, seems to have felt a natural sympathy for Chao Mêng-fu which perhaps also was nurtured by the fact that he came from the same part of Chekiang as his great predecessor. Neither of them was a *Wu-jên* or belonged by birth or training to the Suchou group, but they were both gentlemen painters and thus essentially akin to the masters of Wu, which also may serve as a good reason for the inclusion of Yao Shou among the precursors of the Wu school.

¹ Cf. T'ōi, p. 242.

The Chê School

I

Tai Chin and Chou Wên-ching

THE ACADEMIC trend of style briefly characterized in our initial chapter would hardly have become of leading importance for the further development of Ming painting and given birth to a special school, if it had not been for the fact that it was to some extent transformed and led into new channels by the creative genius of a painter who perpetuated certain elements of the academy style in works of fresh individual import. This man was Tai Chin, *tzü Wên-chin*, *hao Ching-an* and *Yü-ch'üan shan-jên*, from Ch'ien-t'ang in Chekiang. He was summoned to court at the same time as Li Tsai, Shih Jui, Chou Wên-ching and Ni Tuan, but his activity at court did not last very long. His superior talent and independent temperament did not fit in with the prevailing conditions and seem to have aroused jealousy on the part of some of the other painters, as became evident at the occasion of a competitive exhibition in Jên-chih tien. The event is variously described in *Ming-shan ts'ang*, *Wu-shêng shih-shih*, and other records, but always with emphasis on Tai Chin's artistic independence in effective contrast to the spirit of servility which prevailed among the members of the emperor Hsüan-tsung's academy.

The first picture which Tai Chin showed on this occasion was an autumn landscape with a solitary fisherman angling on the river, and the man was wearing a red coat. The picture was beautiful, the execution perfect in every part, including the red colour, which was most difficult to render properly, and it aroused much admiration particularly from the emperor, who expressed his intention of em-

ploying the artist for some important work. But this was too much for the advisers of the emperor; Hsieh Huan stepped out and said: "The picture may be beautiful, but it is vulgar and wanting in refinement". Asked to explain what he meant by this scathing remark, the old painter said: "The red colour is proper only for courtiers at imperial audiences; to introduce it in a fisherman's coat shows lack of proper style and judgement". To this the emperor nodded consent, and Tai Chin was told not to show any more pictures. It was thus made clear to him that in order to occupy a prominent place in the academy he would have to allow his own genius to be overruled by the authority and dictates of others. His career at the court was ended; he returned to his home province, where he lived and died in poverty.

Tai Chin's activity at the academy was thus of short duration, yet sufficient to secure him a place among the so-called academicians in the history of Chinese painting. He started as a faithful follower of the academic tradition with no intention of breaking away from the imperial fold or of seeking new outlets for his budding talent, but through the force of circumstances illustrated in the academic competition mentioned above, turned the course of his life and artistic activity in a different direction. Instead of keeping to the path of the court-painters who worked under imperial "protection" in Jên-chih tien in Peking, he retired to his home province Chekiang and there lived almost as a recluse for the rest of his life; the work with the brush seems to have been his only source of support, and it cannot

have been very successful in this respect, because at the time of his death he was a penniless old man.

No further details or dates regarding his *curriculum vitae* have been transmitted; judging by the fact that he was summoned to court in the Hsüan-tê period (1426-1435), it may be assumed that he was born at the end of the fourteenth century, a supposition also supported by the dates on three or four pictures which fall between 1444 and 1446.

From the scanty records at our disposal it seems safe to conclude that Tai Chin lived and worked for many years at Ch'ien-t'ang in Chekiang and there became known and appreciated by a number of younger talents, who thus formed the nucleus of a local school which gradually grew into a rather definite current of style that attracted painters from various provinces and became known as the "Chê school". The frequently repeated appellation of Tai Chin as the "founder" or head of the Chê school should, however, not be taken in too literal a sense as referring to a number of pupils around a master; it simply implies that Tai Chin after his retirement to Chekiang was the most important representative of a style of landscape-painting that existed both before and after him but to which he imparted a fresh life impetus and individual accents that made it more fitted to the needs and aims of the professional painters of the fifteenth century. The essentials of this stylistic current were after all a legacy from the South Sung academy and so closely connected or intertwined with academic traditions that it seemed almost self-evident that it should be called to life again when the academic institution was re-established. It formed a kind of undercurrent, one which was reinforced in the Yüan period by minor talents, but in order to become a productive flow it had to be brought to the surface and distributed in individual channels. This was done in many ways and various combinations by a number of painters at the beginning of the Ming period, among whom may be mentioned the academicians Li Tsai, Ni Tuan and Chou Wên-ching, but Tai Chin utilized

the same elements of the Sung academy tradition in a freer manner, particularly after he had left the court circle and settled in the south. It was only after he had enriched this underlying current of landscape-painting with fresh elements of expressionistic brushwork that it became an inspiring source for the painters of the Chê school. The stylistic differences between them and the academicians were, to begin with, variations of degree rather than of kind, but they increased with the years, which makes it necessary to devote a later chapter to the Chê school, whereas Tai Chin's own paintings are here discussed in connexion with related products by contemporary academicians.

The number of works ascribed to the master in Western as well as Far Eastern collections is quite large, but not a few of these are of a somewhat mediocre quality which may cause hesitation regarding their classification; they may be imitations or simply hack-work, turned out by the master *invita Minerva* in exchange for his daily needs. I am more inclined to accept the latter hypothesis in view of the fact the Tai Chin had no personal inhibitions that prevented him from repeating himself or from borrowing useful elements from other painters.

The Chinese critics base their appreciations of Tai Chin as a painter partly on his phenomenal skill in imitating or interpreting the manner of certain South Sung academicians, and partly on the marvellous dexterity of his individual brushwork. Both elements may be observed in some of his paintings, but we would naturally be inclined to place the imitative paintings earlier than his more independent and spontaneous creations. A definite chronological reconstruction of his development as a painter is, however, not possible, since only four or five of his paintings are dated by inscriptions and these all belong to the short period between 1444 and 1450. They are of the highly decorative type, consisting of deeply split and folded rocks rising into peaks, the one behind the other, and clumps of large trees growing among boulders at the lower level. A mud-bridge over a stream and a winding path

between the boulders with a few travellers on horse-back add a human note to the rather overwhelming scenery. Pictures of this type seem to have formed the main group in Tai Chin's earlier production, they are all based on compositional patterns borrowed either from early Sung masters, such as Kuan Tung and Kuo Hsi, or from the South Sung academicians of Ma Yüan's and Hsia Kuei's following. In fact, they might be most conveniently grouped according to the type-models. Excellent examples of the former group are the Autumn and Winter landscapes in a Japanese collection dated 1444 (reproduced in *Tâyô*, vol.X) and the Spring landscape formerly in a private collection in Peking (Pl.144). The mountains are in these pictures in the Kuo Hsi style with a tendency to become cloud-like, while the leafy trees form relatively well-closed dark groups. The classic designs are recognizable though modified by individual variations.

The other groups, in which the Ma-Hsia school-patterns predominate, are represented by two or three of Tai Chin's most attractive landscapes in the Ku-kung collection, and also by an interesting picture from a private collection in China.¹

The picture reproduced in Plate 145 represents Wên Wang of the Chou dynasty visiting Chiang Tzû-ya (his future adviser), who is angling on the banks of the Wei river. The two relatively small figures are, however, of less consequence for the artistic significance of the picture than the landscape. This is dominated by a large willow growing on a rocky bank and behind and above the tree by some towering rocks which rise through a slight mist almost to the upper edge of the picture. On the opposite side the view is open; the country is flat and swampy. The composition is unilateral after the fashion of the Ma-Hsia school. Nor is the design the only element that leads one's thoughts to the Hang-chou academicians; the brushwork on the sharply-cut and split rocks is also indicative; it has been achieved with a squeezed brush in a similar way to that in so many of Hsia Kuei's paintings. The same is true of the softly waving willow-branches which

also are elements that appear in paintings by the Hangchou master.

The other above-mentioned picture in the Ku-kung collection is a more elaborate composition, and as such of greater individual importance, but it contains likewise elements borrowed from Hsia Kuei. It is called *Returning Home on a Spring Evening*, and shows a man who is knocking on the gate of a garden wall while his servant is holding his horse. The motif has an intimate, almost local touch; the promontory with the enclosed garden and the tall pine-trees bending over the gate might be inspired by some spot on the West Lake; it is a motif rendered with great care and set off against the background of a light grey mist that sweeps over the river and the low mudbank across the shallow water. Further away, filling the upper portion of the picture rises a wooded hill lifting its dark crown of pine-trees above the white mist of the middle section. It balances the garden below and is likewise executed with great care in a graded scale of light ink tones more or less in the same way as in some pictures by Hsia Kuei. The picture is as a whole an excellent example of Tai Chin's faculty to combine elements borrowed from famous predecessors with observations from nature and integrate them in well-balanced individual compositions.

Tai Chin's dependence on models of the Ma-Hsia academy school is still more obviously illustrated by the landscape (in a private Chinese collection) which is reproduced on pl.98 of the Nanking Exhibition Catalogue, where the composition is not made up of detached elements borrowed from Ma Yüan, but is actually a complete, though somewhat simplified copy of a work by the Sung master known as *Ta-ko t'u* (now in Hui-hua kuan).² The picture has got its name from the human motif, i.e. peasants singing and making merry as they return home along a mountain road which winds along at

¹ *Cf. K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vols. XXXIII and XXXV, and Nanking Exhibit. Catalogue, pl.98.

² Ma Yüan's picture is reproduced in *The Great Heritage of Chinese Art*, vol.VII, pl.7.

the lower edge of the picture (PL.146). The middle section is filled with light mist covering all details, but above this belt of mist are tall pine-trees and sharply split rocks of the well-known Ma Yüan type. Tai Chin has modified the relative proportions of the various sections and made the composition a little broader and shorter, but these modifications do not alter the fact that the design as a whole, including the amusing figures, is a faithful imitation after Ma Yüan's picture. Tai Chin has, nevertheless, provided his painting with his seal and signature. It is evidently not one of his better works, yet historically important as a testimony of the survival of compositional patterns and elements of style of South Sung origin and their transposition in the works of a leading master at the beginning of the Ming period.

There are certainly other pictures traditionally ascribed to Ma Yüan which may have been executed at the beginning of the Ming period and thus might be quoted as links between the two epochs, but to what extent Tai Chin was responsible for them is difficult to tell when they are unsigned. I mention only in passing the beautiful composition in the Ku-kung collection representing a Philosopher seated under a Pine-tree on a Mountain Terrace looking at the Moon, which was exhibited in London, 1935-1936.¹ The traditional pattern is here schematized to an extent that may cause some doubts as to its Sung date. But, as said before, Li Tsai and Chou Wên-ching also did paintings of a similar type and there were certainly less known academicians who followed the same track.

Tai Chin was not exclusively a landscape-painter, he did also figure compositions, preferably with religious motifs, and pictures of animals, birds and flowers. These various kinds of paintings are all mentioned in *Tu-hui pao-chien hsiü-tsuân*, where it is further stated: "his pictures of gods were most dignified and the devils were fierce. He mastered completely the colouring of the garments and the drawing of their folds (with light and dark tones) and was not inferior to the great masters of the T'ang and Sung periods. His copies of the old

masters were so perfect that even good connoisseurs could not distinguish them from the original when the pictures were unsigned. They were of the skilful (*néng*) class."

No such coloured Buddhist pictures by Tai Chin have been identified (if they still exist); the only painting with a religious motif signed by the master represents a Lohan with a Tiger (in the Ku-kung collection) of which it may be said that though the subject is religious, the pictorial transformation is rather profane. The holy man is seated on the ground patting the friendly animal; behind him is the entrance to a mountain cave with a gate, half ajar, through which a curious boy is watching the fraternization of the man with the tiger. The combination emphasizes the anecdotic conception; the tone has a touch of humour and the picture has very little in common with the well-balanced meditative Lohan paintings of earlier periods. The marked difference in the execution of the main figure (in *kung-pi* technique) and the broadly sketched rocks and tree-branches which form the setting, contribute also to the somewhat strange impression of a broadly painted landscape sketch in which a minutely executed figure has been inserted. Landscape and figure-painting were evidently two quite different domains of art for Tai Chin and he was decidedly more at home in the former.

There can be no doubt that he gave the freest and most adequate expression to his individual temperament in the landscape-paintings, particularly when they were done independently of the patterns and principles of South Sung academicians. He worked then with a spontaneity and speed that few painters have equalled, his brush being pre-eminently fitted to catch the fleeting effects of natural phenomena: the sudden storms, cloud-bursts, pouring rain, scattered leaves from trees that are bending under the wind, rolling waves breaking against rocks and swamping boats which are trying to reach the shore. There is a remarkable picture in the Ku-kung collection in which such effects of storm and rain are

¹ Repe. *Ku-kung shu-luâ chî*, vol.XIX.

depicted, not only on the fluttering trees and mountain torrent but also on the men who are huddling together under large umbrellas on the bridge, and in the boats which are aiming for the shore (Pl. 148).

But the painter has also found occasion to depict this kind of sweeping movement, speed and fluidity, in illustrating fishermen's work on the river, with their nets and baskets, or cormorants tied to their small boats; here too it is the quick and supple movements, so decisive for the result of the cast, that he catches with the brush so that in thought we are wafted over the wide river and open marsh-land to the vague and hazy horizon.

How this is done may be best observed in the long handscroll in the Freer Gallery which is one of the most entertaining masterpieces of Chinese painting known to us. It is executed with light undertones of greenish blue and reddish brown (in the rocks) which serve to increase the effect of atmosphere and depth, but the structure of the composition and the conceptual thought or suggestion of movement that floats through the whole thing depends on the brushwork and this suggests the unifying rhythm in nature and man (Pls. 149, 150).

The motif as such, fishing-boats on a long river, has frequently been represented by Chinese painters. As an example may be recalled Wu Chên's scroll, described in a previous chapter. The differences between this and Tai Chin's rendering are very significant of the new trend in painting. In Wu Chên's picture the small boats, each with a single figure, are scattered quite freely over the empty paper; there is no painting of the water, and only at the two ends of the scroll some indications of shore-lines. The artist seems to have had no intention of representing an actual scene, he does not illustrate it, but notes down in simplified symbols the ideas or impressions evoked by the motif, expressing them at the same time with the aid of short poems between the pictures. The figures are quiet, some are seated in meditation, some are sleeping, and even those who are grasping an oar or holding a line do

not show any great excitement. The whole thing is more like a reflection of shifting moods and silent thoughts than a close illustration of the fishermen's occupations.

Tai Chin approaches the motif not as a poet but as a painter with an open eye for the actual scenery and the various activities of the men. He unrolls the river with its shallows and its banks, the rushes and the trees growing on the shores, the boats gathered in groups, the men working intensely with their various implements; some are throwing nets, some are catching crabs in basket-traps, some are using long sticks to catch their prey at the bottom of the river and others fishing with cormorants. Only the anglers are seated quietly, or are sound asleep in their boats, while the men who have finished the day's work are gathered under a large willow on the shore, eating their crabs and drinking their wine as is still the custom on such occasions along the rivers in Chekiang. Everybody is occupied, everything is bristling with life and movement. And this is perfectly brought out in the speed of the brush and the rhythm of the strokes. The figures are drawn with "mouse-tail" strokes, relatively short but replete with speed and energy; the rushes and the willows are painted with "epidendrum leaf" strokes, more soft and fluent, while the rocks and shrubs in the foreground are dotted in more broadly with deeper blots. There is no flaw, no pause or hesitation in the movements of the brush. It hits and catches the intricacies of the vegetation along the river and the postures of the figures with the same certainty as the fishermen employ to catch their prey. Few pictures reflect more obviously the joy and lust of using ink and brush, a technical mastery which seems almost transformed into a game.

The other scroll by Tai Chin in the Freer Gallery has been described by the picturesque title: *Breaking Waves and Autumn Winds*. It is smaller than the *Fishermen's* scroll and executed only in black and white. The composition is perhaps more original, more synthetic than in the previous cases, and the brushwork more spontaneous. Only some short bits

of shore are indicated, most of it is water. The wide open spaces have been utilized to give impetus to the storm which is sweeping through the whole length of the picture. Faint wavy lines which gradually disappear in the background carry a suggestion of huge waves, but there is no attempt to give a complete representation of the forms. It is the incessant rolling movement rather than the actual waves which the artist has rendered. The real motif is the hurricane, it dominates everything; the splashing water, the bending trees, the dismantled boats, which the men are trying to bring in safely to the shore, and the travellers who pass along the hillocky road, all drenched by the blowing rain or buffeted about by the gale. The momentousness of the whole situation is rendered in a most convincing way with impressionistic speed and concentration.

The picture has two colophons, the one of quite modern date (1912), containing a lengthy description of the motif; the other undated, but apparently still of the Ming period. It reads as follows: "This scroll by Ching-an is a perfect work by a divine master. He conceived it in his heart, and his hand responded. No one equals him among earlier men. Ho-hsü, Shên Ssü-tan wrote this after enjoying the picture."

Tai Chin's influence on the subsequent evolution of painting must have been felt in rather wide circles, though perhaps more after his death than during his life-time. He lived in seclusion, in poverty. He was neither poet nor official and enjoyed no personal popularity. It was only after his death that his influence became paramount among the younger generation and his importance as the first and leading master of the Chê school was recognized. A century after his death Wang Shih-chêng (1525-1593), who then was a leading critic and historian, wrote the following telling words on a picture by Tai Chin: "Tai Chin from Ch'ien-t'ang painted incessantly during his whole life, yet he could never buy a full meal. This was his minor misfortune. After his death he was famous in Wu, but when a hundred years had passed he was no

longer considered equal to Shên Chou. This was his greater misfortune. But in the eyes of real connoisseurs he will still be considered the foremost of all Ming painters"¹ – an opinion which is becoming more and more firmly established with the passing of time. For Tai Chin was a creative genius, strong and independent, who knew how to transmit his emotional reactions and his immediate impressions of nature with a masterly brush. Painting was to him not merely an amusement or pastime, when free from other occupations, it was the very centre or pole around which his life revolved, and he carried this art to a degree of individual perfection that few have attained. Whatever opinions one may hold as to the style of painting he represented, it may well be admitted that he stood head and shoulders above all the subsequent painters of the Chê school.

* * *

There must have been a fair number of professional painters who followed very closely in the footsteps of Tai Chin, but most of these have not been recorded in the history of art or identified through signed work. An important exception to this rule is formed by Chou Wên-ching, though it should be noted that the personal fame of Chou was, to begin with, based on his skill in magic arts and fortune-telling rather than on his ability as a painter.

Chou Wên-ching, hao San-shan, came from the same place in Fukien as Li Tsai, i.e. P'u-t'ien. He too was summoned to the court though not as a painter but as a soothsayer (*yin-yang hsün-shu*). His artistic talents were, however, gradually discovered and he was accorded the first prize in a competition for a picture called Winter Crows and Bare Trees. Whatever he may have accomplished as a diviner, it is evident that he established a more lasting fame in painting, not only through his landscapes but also through his paintings of human figures, animals, and birds.

According to the tradition reported in *Tu-hui pao-chien hsü-tsun*, he followed in particular Hsia

¹ Quoted from Yen-chou C'i-pa in *Shin-hua-p'u*, vol. 86.

Kuei and Wu Chên, excelling in the attainment of rich and decorative effects with the use of abundant ink. In the characterization of his brushwork the chronicler attributes to it an overflowing rich beauty in combination with refinement and elegance, thus emphasizing Chou Wên-ching's technical dexterity. This may to some extent be observed in the large picture (formerly in the T. Inouye collection in Tôkyô) representing the philosopher Chou Mao-shu admiring the lotus-flowers in the pond in front of his pavilion, which, according to the inscription, was "painted for Shao-fang while (the painter was) serving in Jên-chih-tien, Anno 1564" (Pl.152). The background is filled with precipitous mountains forming silhouettes which gradually fade away into the hazy atmosphere. The scene is further animated by a boy who is poling a boat, on the right of the picture, whereas the opposite corner is empty. All these compositional elements are utilized "one-sidedly", in accordance with the Ma-Hsia school tradition, the brushwork is firm without being particularly expressive. Details

such as the figures bear the strongest evidence of the painter's mastery of the brush. If we did not possess landscapes of a similar type by Ma Yüan, one might be inclined to consider this as a very important historical piece, but as the master's dependence on the models of more than two hundred years earlier is so evident, he should hardly be classified among the innovators, but rather as a conscientious transmitter of a definite tradition.

Unsigned paintings in the manner of Chou Wên-ching are not wanting in Western collections, where they often are honoured with attributions to Sung masters, but as they hardly add anything to the stylistic characteristics noted in the signed works, it may not be necessary to dwell on them here. They are more or less successful variations on the standard designs of Ma Yüan and his school, as may be seen for instance in the impressive picture in the Freer Gallery, representing two tall pines shading the pavilion of a philosopher on a rocky bank of a wide beach. The composition is dominated by a rigid formality but perfect of its kind (Pl.153).

II

Wu Wei, Wang Ê, Chang Lu and Chiang Sung

The fundamentally historical disposition of our study of Chinese painting inevitably brings us back again to the academy and the court painters who took a leading part in the development of painting during the latter part of the fifteenth and first half of the sixteenth century. Artistically none of them reached the same level as the leaders of the Chê and the Wu Schools respectively, who worked in the south independently of the Academy, yet some of them had a considerable influence on the general development and are traditionally assigned prominent positions in the history of Chinese painting.

But their great number and rather uniform production give us reason to present them here only in abridgement.

The imperial encouragement of the painters and their employment in Jên-chih-tien or other palace halls was resumed in the reign of the emperor Hsien-tsung (1466-1487) after a period of political unrest and relative unproductivity. The emperor himself is described as a weak and romantic personality with a decided interest in art. He was active both as a painter and a poet, and summoned prominent artists to the court. His own skill as a painter was, however,

very moderate, if we may judge by the ink-painting of Chung K'uei, the Demon-queller in the Ku-kung collection.

His son and successor, Hsiao-tsung (1488-1505), followed in his father's footsteps as a patron of painting, though his personal talent was directed more towards music. According to the records in *Wu-shêng shih-shih*, "he liked to play the *ch'in*, and when the censors remonstrated, he said to his courtiers: 'To play the *ch'in* constitutes no harm to public affairs; why then do these people criticize me?' But he did not grow angry. Once he gave several pieces of silk to the painter Wu Wei, but advised him at the same time to take them away quickly, so that nobody would know anything about it."

The painters who had been summoned to work at the palace in the time of the emperor Hsien-tsung continued their activity in the reign of his son and others were added. In discussing their works we shall thus cover the time until the beginning of the sixteenth century (and a few years more) which marks the heyday of the Chê school, or in other words, the stylistic current which drew much of its inspiration from the works of Tai Chin.

Wu Wei, *tzü Shih-ying* and *Tz'ü-wêng*, *hao Lu-fu* and Hsiao-hsien (b. 1459, d. 1508), was first summoned to the palace and made an officer in the imperial guard by the emperor Hsien-tsung and then further promoted and rewarded by Hsiao-tsung. He came from Wu-ch'ang (Hupei) and was a self-educated painter, strongly convinced of his own superior genius and impatient of criticism; "even friends of long standing could only make him throw away the brush, if they expressed some disagreement", according to the *Wu-shêng shih-shih*, where, furthermore, the following unqualified biographical notes about the painter have been preserved: "Hsien-tsung called him to the palace and made him an auditor in the imperial guard and a *tai-chao* in Jên-chih tien. Sometimes when he was summoned before the emperor he was completely drunk, his hair hanging loose, his face dirty, his shoes worn out, and as he tottered in with a swaying movement he

had to be supported by two eunuchs. The emperor laughed and asked him to paint some pine-trees in the wind. The painter knelt down, poured out some ink, and started smearing and brushing – and out came winds and clouds so appallingly strong that the two eunuchs who stood by grew quite pale (with fear). But the emperor drew a deep breath of admiration and said: 'The brush of an Immortal'.

"Wu Wei could go in and out of the palace as he pleased and he looked upon the noblemen contemptuously. When they asked him to paint for them, he usually refused. Consequently they spoke badly of him to the emperor, and after some time he was expelled from the palace. He went to live in Nanking and continued his habit of excessive drinking, sometimes not taking any food for ten days. The libertines of Nanking (who wanted his pictures) vied with each other in inviting him to drinking bouts, but Wu Wei, who liked women, told them that he did not want to drink without such company. When the libertines learned this, they brought together women to serve as baits for the painter."

In the time of the emperor Hsiao-tsung, Wu Wei was again summoned to the palace and promoted to the position of a captain in the imperial guard. The emperor gave him a seal with the inscription "The First among Painters" (*Hua-chuang-yüan*). The imperial favours increased day by day, and when he asked leave to go to his home in Ch'ü (Hupei) "to sweep the tomb" and sacrifice (to his ancestors) this was graciously granted.

"After a few months he started back again, and when he got as far as the Ts'ai-shih (on the Yangtse) he was met by an imperial messenger with an order to hasten the journey. The emperor then bestowed on him a house in the main West Street (in Peking) and there he lived for two years. Then he simulated illness and went to Nanking, where he took up his abode on the east bank of the Ch'in-huai river. In the third year of Chêng-tê (1508) he was again summoned to the palace, but as he was preparing to follow the imperial messenger he collapsed from drinking. He was then 50 years old."

The story of Wu Wei's life may here serve as indicative of the changing atmosphere in artistic circles. It is very different from the biographies of Wang Mien, Wang Fu or even Tai Chin, not to mention any of the earlier examples, and makes us realize that the traditional standards of a correspondence between an artist's mode of life and his creative work were no longer as strictly applied as before. Wu Wei may have been rather exceptional in his excessive drinking and sensual vulgarity, yet he had his *miliu* and was accepted also at court, which would hardly have been possible under the early Ming emperors or under their artistic predecessors of the Sung dynasties. It had never been admitted before, at least not officially, that a man who was habitually intoxicated could be "the first among painters". Whatever opinions one may hold in these matters, it must be admitted that Wu Wei's career and fame as a painter indicate a change in the traditional Chinese attitude towards art which, moreover, is illustrated in the biographies of other Ming painters.

Wu Wei was no doubt a genius of the brush, he painted with a freedom and ease that few have equalled. His best things are minor sketches; in his larger pictures there is often a lack of vigour and concentration which makes them look empty in spite of some decorative vigour. Quite characteristic in this respect is the well-known picture in the Boston Museum of a Man seated in contemplation under a Tree.

The most common subjects of the figure-paintings ascribed to Wu Wei are beautifully dressed ladies, sometimes with the attributes of Taoist fairies and usually represented as moving in profile, which gives full swing to their trailing garments and fluttering scarves. According to tradition, Wu Wei was trying to acquire Wu Tao-tzu's wavy brush-strokes, but he did it in a rather coarse manner which was more fitting for the representations of old rustics (as may be seen in the amusing sketch of an immortal with a crane and a bare-footed servant) than in pictures of heavenly ladies.¹

In Wu Wei's scroll-paintings of fishermen, woodcutters, field-labourers and the like, the men and animals are caught in their most expressive attitudes, sometimes with an amusing streak of humour.² The pictures are consequently entertaining and they are executed with a very effective reduction of brush-strokes, but they are not as carefully composed and balanced as Tai Chin's paintings of similar motifs, and the movements of the figures do not reveal the same swing or impetus as we have seen in Tai Chin's fishermen (PL.154).

Wu Wei could occasionally be an excellent landscape-painter, as is proved by some album-leaves in the National Museum in Stockholm. They represent impressions of streams and rivers, rendered with economy of means and artistic concentration. In three of them a figure is placed in the foreground indicating, so to speak, the observer, or the mind in which the scenes are reflected, and as the horizon is placed at a lower level than is usual in Chinese landscapes, the views become more like Western renderings of similar motifs. European impressionist painters have occasionally made sketches of a corresponding kind, but whereas their pictures are representations of momentary effects of light and shade reflected on the retina of the painter's eye, Wu Wei's sketches are synthetic notes of mental impressions rendered with impressive vigour (PL.155).

We are told that Wu Wei used the "axe-cut wrinkles" for the trees and the stones, making them very strong and tight, and "he splashed the ink like scattered clouds, so that the people looking on were quite afraid".

"Once he came to the Apricot Blossom village and, as he was thirsty, an old woman gave him some tea to drink. Next year he went back to the same

¹ The picture of an immortal with a crane and a servant in *Ku-fung*, vol.XV.

Another picture of an immortal with a Fungus in *Ko-k. shu-hua chi*, vol.XXVIII. Among the pictures of fairies may be mentioned two in the Chang Tsu-ch'ien collection (see Cat. I, p.21), one in the Lily collection, Indianapolis, one in Boston Museum, etc.

² Cf. The scrolls in the National Museum, Stockholm and in the Shinosaki collection, Tôkyô; Tôdô, p.244.

place and asked for the old woman, but she had died. He then took out his brush and drew a portrait of her (from memory) which was so true that it moved her son to tears. The picture became a treasure in the family.¹ On another occasion he was drinking with a friend and between the cups he painted. As a joke he took the seed-case of a lotus, dipped it in the ink, and pressed it in spots on the paper. Nobody could understand the meaning of this, but suddenly he grasped the brush, waved it freely, and made the whole thing into a picture representing 'Catching Crabs' which looked most wonderful."²

Wu Wei was not one of the great creative painters, but he was a wizard of the brush and ink and aroused great admiration among his countrymen. His works were keenly imitated by a number of younger men such as Li Chu, Chiang Sung, and later ones, who are sometimes classified in a special school called after Wu Wei's native place Chiang-hsia (Wu-ch'ang). But essentially this was only a branch of the Ch'ê school based on freely transposed models of the Southern Sung academy.

Among the painters who in the Ch'êng-hua period followed the same stylistic traditions as Tai Chin may be mentioned Chang Hui and Chang Ch'ien, both from T'ai-ts'ang (near K'un-shan), though apparently not of the same family. Chang Hui, *tzü Wên-chui*, is represented by a signed picture in the National Museum, Stockholm, representing a fisherman angling under a willow-tree at the foot of a steep cliff. A heavy mist floats over the water and covers the shores, so that only the upper part of the cliff becomes visible. It is the kind of atmospheric effect that might also have been chosen by Tai Chin, though he would have transposed it in a more expressionistic manner.

Chang Ch'ien, *tzü Wei-chien*, also painted landscapes in the Ma-Hsia style and is said to have grasped the real intentions of these masters, so that certain people considered him superior to Chang Hui. He was summoned to service in Jên-chih tien and enjoyed considerable fame, but as far as we know, no signed works by him are preserved. More

closely related to Wu Wei as a painter was Li Chu, *tzü Ch'ien-fu*, *hao Mo-hu*, whose art is known through a long scroll deposited in the Kyôto museum, called *The Fishermen's Pleasure*.³ The composition – a river between rocky banks and fishermen working in boats or regaling themselves with wine on the shore – is much the same as in Tai Chin's famous scroll but executed in a more dashing and blotchy manner with rich ink. We are told that Li Chu started as a pupil of Shên Chou but later on became a follower of Wu Wei; in the present picture the latter influence is predominant, and the picture may well be placed on a level with Wu Wei's works.

Chung Li, *tzü Ch'in-li*, *hao Nan-yüeh shan-jên*, was also summoned to the palace in the Ch'êng-hua period and continued his service in Jên-chih tien under the emperor Hsiao-tsung, who had a great admiration for the painter. It is reported that the sovereign once stood watching him from behind and then suddenly grasped the artist by the beard, exclaiming: "You are one of the old Immortals in this world!" thus manifesting his admiration in a more spontaneous than respectful manner.

The best known picture by Chung Li (reproduced in *Kokka* 318 and *Pageant*, p. 532), is a skilful imitation after Hsia Kuei representing a man seated on a mountain terrace viewing a waterfall on the opposite side of a misty gorge. It shows how effectively the Ma-Hsia patterns could be transmitted by a gifted painter at the end of the fifteenth century. He may also have done paintings with more individual character, because we are told that he used to sit in his studio watching the effects of mountains and clouds; then, when inspiration arose, he would grasp the brush and paint.

The more ordinary level of the Ch'ê-painters' transformations of the South Sung models is illustrated by two landscapes in the Chicago Art

¹ *Yü-chien tun-wên* quoted in *Chung-kuo hua-zhi ta-tz'ü-tien*.

² From *Chiang-ning fu-chih*.

³ The picture, which is in the Hashimoto collection, in Takatsuki, has been published in a separate album by Hakubundô.

Institute representing Summer and Winter respectively. They are signed by a man called Hsia K'uei who, however, is only a pale shadow of the famous South Sung master Hsia Kuei.¹

Wang Ê, *tzu* T'ing-chih, was a more important painter who transmitted models by the Hangchou academicians in an excessively bold and crude manner. Yet he stood in great favour at court; the emperor Hsiao-tsung used to say: "Wang Ê is the Ma Yüan of our time".

"In the Chêng-tê period (1506-1521) he was made an officer of the imperial guard, but he fell ill and asked leave to return to his home at Fêng-hua in Chekiang. There he lived to the age of 80, and the strength of his brush increased with the years. He prepared himself a tomb to the west of the city, took farewell of his family, arranged the funeral procession and led it to the place, whence he never returned."²

Among Wang Ê's imitative paintings may be mentioned the typical picture in the Ku-kung collection which represents a man walking over a bridge, followed by his servant with a donkey, while his friend is awaiting him in a pavilion on the rocky shore (Pl. 156). Angular pines and leafy trees bend down from the shore; steep mountains rise in the background through a misty atmosphere. The composition is a fine exponent of the Ma-Hsia School (it contains elements from both masters) and it is executed in the proper South Sung style with rich ink and a squeezed brush. It is as such a school work of historical interest with very slight individual character. Pictures of this kind seem to have been produced in great numbers by Wang Ê and the other Chekiang painters.

A more important example of his belonged formerly to the Maeda collection in Tôkyô. It represents Snow on the Mountains and strong Winds. The composition is built up of sharply-cut and fissured mountains and tall pines with jerky branches. Travellers and woodcutters on a winding path are advancing slowly against the wind. The air is cold, the waterfall is frozen and there are patches

of snow on the mountain side. The brushwork is energetic, almost crude, suggesting the angularity of ice. The "wrinkles" on the stones and cliffs are made according to the large "axe-cut"-method, and the branches of the trees form a zigzag of angular lines. The Ma Yüan manner is here exaggerated or strained beyond its natural limits and has thus lost something of its proper beauty and balance.

The painters who followed in the footsteps of Tai Chin and Wu Wei were numerous, indeed, too many to be completely enumerated here, and in addition to the recorded painters, there are not a few pictures in this well-established style with no signature, as pointed out above, or inscribed with names that are not recorded. To the last group belongs a very beautiful picture in the former East Asiatic Museum in Berlin, representing a Rainstorm and provided with the signature I-hsien, and the seal, Wu shih Hsien-chou, which may be taken to mean that the painter's name was Wu I-hsien, and his *tzu* or *huan* Hsien-chou. The name is not recorded in any of the Chinese chronicles, but the picture should be remembered as one of the most vigorous renderings of a rainstorm, a motif that seems to have attracted special interest among painters of the Chê as well as the Wu schools, such as Chou Ch'ên and Hieh Shih-ch'ên (Pl. 157). Wu I-hsien's picture gives an almost compelling impression of the sudden violence of the wind, which is tearing the leaves from the trees, washing against the cliffs and battering the waves of the rocky inlet where a man is working hard to bring his boat with its two huddling passengers to safety.

Among the anonymous pictures of the same group may be mentioned a large landscape in the Freer Gallery, representing a man in a boat, poled along by his servant in quiet water at the foot of a cliff with a large willow spreading out in plummy branches. It is painted with thinner, more watery

¹ Only the first character of the name (Hsia) is the same; the second character is differently written and pronounced.

² From *Fêng-hua hsien-chih* (quoted in *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XI). Cf. the similar story told of the painter Shih Chung in Nanking.

ink than Wu I-hsien's Rainstorm, in a manner which is more like that of Chang Lu. This rather popular artist, whose *tsü* was T'ien-ch'ih and *hao* P'ing-shan (c.1464-1538), was one of the few men of this group who did not come from the South. He was born in K'ai-fêng (Ta-liang) and whereas "the Northerners appreciated Chang's paintings like jade-*pi*, real connoisseurs thought that his works were not of the refined class". In the *Ming-hua lu* it is said that "he followed Wu Wei's manner in painting his figures; they were strong and vigorous, worth looking at, although wanting in freedom and beauty". In his landscapes he took Tai Chin as a model. Most of his works consist of sketchy landscapes: cliffs projecting into the picture from one side and bending over streams, or larger waters where fishermen are working with nets or cormorants. They are effective in a decorative sense, composed of broad masses of light and shade and executed with a fluent brush, but this can hardly prevent an impression of emptiness.

Chang Lu is a painter who has always enjoyed more appreciation in Japan than in China as is proved by the fact that his best works are found in Japanese collections. The most famous among these is the picture in the Gökoku-ji collection which represents a Fisherman throwing his Net from a Boat. It may well be called a lucky cast, because it holds a place quite distinct from the rest of the painter's production, nor has any other artist of the time accomplished anything of equal merit. By his use of light and shade and the position of the figures in the gliding boat (where the fisherman is on the point of throwing out his net) the artist has fixed an impression of a single moment in the infinity of time and space as swift and volatile as the touches of his fluent brush (Pl.158).

The general characteristics of Chang Lu's manner of painting and composition may be observed in a fair number of pictures, whether signed with his name or unsigned, in which certain typical elements and patterns are repeated with variations, e.g. silhouetted (partly overhanging) rocks, jerky tree-branches

ruffled by the wind, gliding boats with fishermen or travellers poled across the river, a rainy sky and grey water, adding up together to impressions of dreariness and monotony.¹

In the *Ming-hua lu* Chang Lu is mentioned again in the biography of Chiang Sung. The two painters are grouped together with Chung Li, Chang Fu, and Ch'eng T'ien-hsien, and it is said that they "all followed quite reckless ways and were considered depraved students", which probably refers to their manner of painting rather than to their personalities. They painted with a comparatively dry brush in a "coarse manner", caring less for structure and exactness of detail than for arrested movements and broad decorative effects. Chung Ch'in-li's remarkable personality was already mentioned among the followers of Wu Wei. Chang Fu, *tsü* Fu-yang (b.1410, d.1490), seems to have been a painter more closely connected with the Yüan than with the South Sung tradition, if we may judge by the handscroll in the Yürinkan collection in Kyōto.²

Chiang Sung, *hao* San-sung, was probably the most characteristic representative of this group in the Wu Wei following. According to the *Ming-hua lu*, "he liked to work with scorched ink and a dry brush, which was the fashion of the time, and his brushwork was rough and careless, unrestrained by rules and measures". This characterization is illustrated by several of Chiang Sung's preserved works; they look like weaker or paler versions of Chang Lu's paintings, sometimes with reminiscences from Hsia Kuei's, as may be seen in the landscape with fishing-boats belonging to Nanzen-ji in Kyōto.³ Among his minor and more attractive works should be remembered the four pictures mounted in the form of a scroll representing The Four Seasons,

¹ Four pictures by Chang Lu are reproduced in *Shinbi Taikan*, vols.13, 14, 15, 16; two in *Kokka*, 182, 375; one in *Ku-hung shu-hua chi*, XVIII; two in the Nanking Exhibition catalogue, etc. There are two pictures in the Froer Gallery representing fishermen with cormorants, which illustrate the Chang Lu style.

² Cf. *Yürintakan*, II, and *Tōcō*, p.300.

³ *Shinbi*, vol.III.

formerly in the Berlin Museum. The seasonal characteristics of these views are not very evident, except in the case of the snow-clad mountains of the winter scene. The summer view is characterized by a luxuriant bamboo grove which almost hides the little hut of the scholar, whereas spring and autumn are illustrated by more indifferent views of mountains, water and large trees. The flimsiness of the tattered trees in the autumn view is quite characteristic of the structureless manner of the decaying Chê school (Pl. 159).

None of the landscape-painters who at the very beginning of the sixteenth century (and shortly before) followed in the wake of Wu Wei reached a very high artistic level. They were, as far as recorded, professional painters, not men of letters or officials, and they were not necessarily all active in Chekiang; some of them did spend some time in the capital, others at their native places. Yet they are all placed by native historians in the Chê school, because this "school", or current of style formed the ward or stronghold of the academic traditions surviving ever since the South Sung period in Hangchow or thereabout. They followed certain well-known principles of design and brush which, however, with the passing of time grew coarser and slacker. Some of them contributed new elements of pictorial expression, others continued the old patterns more closely, but they all found their guidance in formal principles which had been developed and perfected by the academicians two hundred years earlier in Hangchow. These formed the vital nerve or undercurrent in the artistic efforts of the national renaissance at the beginning of the Ming period, when the imperial academy was re-established and the painters as far as possible were brought under the restrictive protection of the emperors.

It would be misleading to align the academy painters and the members of the Chê school, yet they had much in common, and when the Academy, after the Chêng-tê period, lost its practical im-

portance (even though it may still have existed formally), the stylistic current known as the Chê school began to dry up. Although there were still painters who continued along the old tracks of this school, they were hardly more than stragglers with no ability to infuse new life into the old ideals. The creative impetus which during the past generation had found expression in the works of some of the leading masters of the Chê school, was absorbed by other minor local schools, which will be named in later chapters.

It is interesting to note how Tung Ch'î-ch'ang in one of his attempts at systematization in *Hua Yen*, explained why the Chê school lost its importance or ceased rather early. He points to the fact that its name and formal composition were not in agreement with the individual origin of some of its later adherents (who, as pointed out before, came from various provinces). And in speaking about the correspondence between the characters (temperaments) of the painters and their manners of painting, he emphasizes the necessity for artists to keep in touch with their respective home provinces.

He enumerates the four great masters of the Yüan period, who came from Chekiang and Kiangsu, "their pictures contained the spirit (breath) of the rivers and mountains (of these provinces), which changes with the seasons. In the present dynasty the only famous man from Chekiang was Tai Chin from Wu-lin; he was chief of the Chê school. (I do not know whether Chao Mêng-fu was from Chekiang.) If the Chê school decayed, it was not because it became addicted to sweetness, awkwardness or vulgarity, but because there was no longer any relationship between it and its native province."

This may be essentially correct; yet it should also be remembered, as pointed out above, that the Chê school was based on an historical rather than a geographical orientation; it had served from the beginning as a support or an ally of the Academy; when this institution lost its practical importance there was no need for a supporting ally.

III

*Painters of Figures and Birds: Liu Chün, Wang Chao, Lin Liang, Lü Chi,
Chu Tuan, Tu Chin and Hsü Lin*

The above-mentioned artists were pre-eminently landscape-painters, but there were others following the same trend of style who specialized in figure or in bird-painting. Some of them followed in the wake of Wu Wei, who was no less appreciated as a figure-painter than for his landscapes. A close friend of his was Kuo Hsü, *tzü Jên-hung*, *hao Ch'ing-k'uang* (b.1456, d. after 1526), who was widely known and esteemed as a figure-painter. It was said that pictures of his were worth a hundred pieces of gold. When the foremost painters were summoned to court in the Hung-chih epoch (1488-1505), he was one of those who answered to the call and settled in Peking. The rebellious prince Ch'ên-hao tried to entice the painter into his service, but Kuo Hsü sided with the opposite party, headed by Wang Shou-jên, thus revealing his noble nature. The only picture known to us represents Hsieh An, a very substantial gentleman of the Chin dynasty, with his three concubines.¹ The picture is executed in a manner reminding us of Wu Wei's jerky drawing, and it is difficult to see why the artist of such a piece should be so highly appreciated, though it is entertaining as an illustration (Pl.160).

Liu Chün, *tzü T'ing-wei*, was another court-painter in the Hung-chih epoch, receiving, too, an appointment as an officer in the imperial guard. He seems to have specialized in large figures, Taoistic characters and *hsien-jên*, often represented with a touch of humour. Most of his works are in Japan, where his art became highly appreciated and exercised a considerable influence on the formation of the Kano school. As examples may be quoted the two large pictures in the National Museum in Tōkyō representing Han-shan and Shih-t'ê² (Pl.161), but there are other more attractive specimens of his art in private collections, for instance two pictures formerly in the Matsudaira collection illustrating

poems of the T'ang period. One is a farewell scene referring to some lines by Wang Wei: "I bid you take another glass of wine, for you will find no friends beyond the Yang-kuan Pass". The scene takes place on a spring morning outside a small pavilion, the mule is saddled and the departing man is receiving some farewell gifts from his friends. The other picture shows the poet Li Shê arriving at his friend Yüan T'ai-ch'u's pavilion situated at the foot of high mountains and is said to have been inspired by the following lines of the poet: "I walked two miles over hills and streams and passed across the bamboo forest to reach this place of an Immortal". The pictures are close literal interpretations of the text, but convey no suggestions of its poetry.³

Wang Chao, *tzü T'ê-ch'u*, *hao Hai-yün*, from Hsü-ning in Anhui, is said to have followed Tai Chin in his landscapes and Wu Wei in his figure-paintings, finally arriving at a stage "when he simply expressed his own genius". According to his biography in *Wu-shêng shih-shih*, he must have been quite a romantic genius. He used to sit for days watching the changing effects of mountains and clouds: these were his real masters, as is implied in his own saying: "My brushwork floats and sails like the clouds, that is why I call myself Hai-yün (Sea Cloud)". We are also told about his adventurous journey in a ship which was captured by pirates and how he managed to escape by amusing the pirates with his art and then making them completely drunk. The story bears witness to his wit and temperament as well as to the realistic expressiveness of his art. Wang Chao's preserved works, which again are more common in Japan than in China, show him as a rather eclectic follower of the Ch'ê

¹ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol.XV.

² *Tōyō*, pp.392,393.

³ *Shimbi*, III.

school. He is no longer accorded a place in the front row. The same may be said of Ch'ên Tzū-ho, hao Chiu-hsien, who is practically forgotten in China, but still appreciated in Japan, particularly as a bird-painter, owing to his large picture of two pheasants in the National Museum in Tōkyō.

The greatest master of bird-painting in ink was Lin Liang, *tzū I-shan*, who came from Kuangtung. No definite dates as to his birth and death or exact period of his activity are known, but it is generally assumed that Lin Liang was called to serve in the palace in the T'ien-shun epoch (1457-1464). In the *Ming-hua lu* it is stated that he was recommended to the emperor Hsiao-tsung (1488-1505), who appointed him an officer in the imperial guard. His style is described in the same work as follows: "Lin Liang painted birds, flowers, and fruits in colour very skilfully, in a refined manner, using ink only for mist and waves with flying and feeding wild geese, which he painted very smoothly and clearly. His trees were done with strength like grass-writing."

Nowadays Lin Liang is known mainly through his ink-paintings done in a somewhat restrained *hsieh-i* manner representing eagles, buzzards, cormorants, and wild geese, usually on the point of moving or restlessly flapping their wings; but he also painted fantastic creatures like the Fêng bird. He reached his greatest artistic triumphs in representations of birds darting through the air, for instance the eagle chasing a magpie in the Ku-kung collection,¹ a picture which conveys an impression of speed and strength at the highest tension: the kingly hunter is swooping on its prey, stretching out one long wing, while the magpie flutters down screaming with fear (Pl. 163). If Lin Liang had lived in a later age, he might have been a good painter of aeroplanes circling and soaring through space.

In a large picture belonging to the Sokoku-ji (temple) in Yamato province Lin Liang has represented the legendary Fêng bird in all its glory with a tail of a single peacock feather twice as long as itself. It is seen mainly from behind, standing on long legs on a projecting cliff, its head turned towards the

sun with the proud and ostentatious air of an imperial consort greeting the luminous symbol of her master. A few slender twigs of bamboo are visible by the cliff, but most of the background is filled with vaporous clouds adding an empyrean note to this magnificent transformation of a common bird-symbol into a strikingly decorative work of art (Pl. 162).

One may be inclined to criticize Lin Liang for his rather too sweeping or volatile manner of representing the various ornithological motifs, but it should at the same time be admitted that few Chinese painters have been able to the same extent as he to convey with some rapid strokes of the brush the speed of the swooping eagle, and the alertness of the proud Fêng bird. His brushwork has an individual quality that gives him a distinction of his own outside the school traditions; stylistically he is neither of the Chê nor of the Wu school, but a man of independent talent of southern origin who for a while was drawn into the circle of the court painters. His art was hardly fitted to satisfy the official taste, and very little is told about his personality in the records, yet it is said, with good reason, in *Wu-shêng shih-shih*, that his brushwork was vigorous and free, like grass-writing, and amazed people. He was, however, a rather uneven painter, most successful when painting most spontaneously in an abbreviated manner, reminding us of Pa-ta shan-jên and other expressionistic masters active at the end of the Ming period.

Lü Chü, the other famous bird-painter of the Hung-chih epoch, is often named together with Lin Liang. They must have been practically of the same age but they had nothing in common as artists except some of their motifs. They both painted birds, but whereas Lin Liang represented mainly eagles, hawks, crows and their wild companions, Lü Chü kept to domestic birds and water-fowl which he painted in colour with great refinement. Like quite a few other professional painters he came from Ning-po and was highly skilled as a technician.

¹ K.-k. shu-hua chi, vol. I.

According to *Ming-shan ts'ang*, "in his youth he studied the famous works of the T'ang and Sung eras and combined the merits of all the great masters. In the Hung-chih epoch (1488-1505) he was summoned to the palace and developed a more refined manner. His grass and trees, flowers and birds seemed alive and moving, his streams, stones and waves were all perfectly rendered with their effects of moisture as in nature. He was promoted to the rank of an officer in the imperial guard. Whenever he was summoned to paint before the emperor, he also used the occasion to offer some moral advice, which often made the emperor Hsiao-tsung remark: "Lü Chi is not only a painter, he also knows how to admonish the emperor".

Lü Chi was evidently by natural inclination as well as by training an eclectic, capable of painting not only colourful birds and flowers, but also landscapes and illustrative compositions, sometimes with a moral import. His figure-paintings are, however, nowadays lost or forgotten, while bird-paintings ascribed to Lü Chi are more abundant, though too uneven for a single high-class painter. The explanation of this copious production in Lü Chi's manner seems to be that he ran a large workshop and employed assistants of various grades of merit to meet the demands for decorative bird and flower-paintings, commonly used as gifts on New Year's Day or on other festival occasions.

The pictures of this type are too well known to need closer description, and as they are mostly executed in rich colours their decorative effect is striking. The most attractive are, however, not the paintings which show the richest display of colour, but the compositions in which white birds - swans, egrets or herons - form the principal motif. As an example of this class may be recalled a picture existing in two almost identical replicas, one in the Boston Museum and one in the Freer Gallery, which represent nine white herons gathering on a river bank and in the branches of a willow (Pl.164). They are singularly elegant and are represented in a variety of graceful postures forming, together with the

reeds and the branches of the weeping willow, an exquisite design. Lü Chi was probably responsible for this, as is indicated by the traditional attributions, but to what extent he actually executed the different versions of the painting is difficult to tell.

In the picture of two white swans in the Honolulu Academy, which has Lü Chi's signature, the birds are remarkable for their tactile quality rather than for any grace or agility; their voluminous bodies are clothed in soft down and feathers. The composition expresses repose and conjugal happiness, the female bird turning her head to preen her wings while the male looks up proudly with open beak.

More colourful birds like mandarin ducks, pheasants and peacocks are sometimes represented amidst snowy rocks and trees which give more brilliancy to their colours. In a picture in the Ku-kung collection the pheasant is seated on a rock under a bare tree covered largely with newly-fallen snow. The face of the rock and the stream below are painted in the broad ink manner known from so many of the afore-mentioned landscapes, but the plumage of the large bird is rich in colour and displayed with the technical refinement of a highly competent court-painter (Pl.165).

Lin Liang and Lü Chi had no doubt many skilful imitators and followers, but none of these seems to have reached great prominence as individual artists with the possible exception of Chi Li, *tsü Ju-ho*, who won some fame as a painter of chrysanthemum flowers. It was said at the time that "Lin Liang painted birds, Hsia Ch'ang bamboos, Yo Ch'eng grapevines, and Chi Li chrysanthemums in a manner like grass-writing", but no picture of his has to our knowledge been preserved. Like most of the bird-painters who followed in the wake of the above-mentioned leading masters he was probably a professional painter with no official or personal standing in the world of art.

More important from an artistic point of view than these men was Chu Tuan, *tsü K'o-ch'eng*, *hao I-ch'iao*, from Hai-yen, Chekiang. He is sometimes mentioned among the followers of Lü Chi, and is

said to have painted birds in the style of the master. His fame as an artist is, however, not based on his bird and flower-paintings nor on his bamboo-paintings, which were executed in the manner of Hsia Ch'ang, but on his landscapes in which he followed Sung academicians. He was an adherent of the same general principles as the earlier masters of the Chê school, but he did not lean on either Tai Chin or Wu Wei; his style is more influenced by the academicians of the North-Sung period, and he was highly esteemed as a court-painter in the Chêng-tê period (1506-1521).

There is an excellent example of Chu Tuan's faculty of utilizing characteristic elements of early Sung type in his landscapes in the National Museum in Stockholm. The central motif of the carefully elaborated design is formed by high cliffs which abut on a wide river reaching far into the background. Old trees with bare branches and drooping lianas stretch out from the cliffs. The fishermen are tying up their boats; the scenery reflects a quiet evening mood, the warm light being enhanced by slight colouring. The drawing of the mountains and trees is evidently done after the model of Kuo Hsi, but the general effect is not so virile or dramatic as in the works of the Sung master (Pl. 166).

The picture is signed Chu Tuan and provided with three of the painter's seals, the first reading *K'o-chêng*, the second *Hsin-yu chêng shih*, i.e. the Scholar summoned in the *Hsin-yu* year, which corresponds to 1501; the third and much larger seal at the top of the picture reads *Ch'in-tz'ü I-ch'iao t'u-shu*, i.e. Seal (pictures and books) bestowed by the emperor on the solitary wood-cutter. This the painter had received from the emperor Wu-tsung, but to judge by the indications contained in the other seal, he was summoned to the palace as early as 1501, i.e. in the reign of Hsiao-tsung. However this may have been, it is evident that his art is most closely connected with that of the Hung-chih epoch.

Several characteristic paintings by Chu Tuan could be described, as for instance the mountainous snow-landscapes in the Ku-kung collection, in which

the wintry atmosphere over the grey water is perfectly suggested¹ (Pl. 167), not to mention the well-known landscape in the Boston Museum, dated 1518, which represents a river scene in summer with a philosopher meditating in a boat, while his servant-boy is sleeping. The composition is old-fashioned, but the execution is not so elegant as in the above-mentioned picture.

Among the lesser men active in the Ch'êng-hua period along similar lines to those of Chu Tuan (without reaching the same degree of official recognition) there were two interesting painters whose individual manners may be recognized in some characteristic works. They followed, in a general way, the academic trend of the Chê school, though neither of them came from Chekiang.

Tu Chin, whose *tzü* was Chü-nan, and *hao* Ch'êng-chü, Ku-k'uang, etc., was born in Tan-t'u in Kiangsu but passed most of his life in the capital. According to *Ming-hua* he was an uncommonly gifted and studious youth, who acquired deep knowledge of the Classics and expected to enter on an official career, but as he did not succeed in the *chin-shih* examination (in the Ch'êng-hua period) he turned to literature and art and gradually became known as a poet and a highly talented painter. He painted every kind of subject, landscapes as well as figures besides flowers, birds and animals, and was praised in particular for his free and expressive brushwork. Some critics say that he painted in the *i* or unrestrained manner, others praise in particular his skill in painting which brings out the effect of speed and lightness, with strokes that appear "almost three dimensional".²

Of the two paintings by Tu Chin which were exhibited in Hui-hua kuan in Peking in 1954, one was an intimate garden scene recalling Wên Chêng-ming's presentations of similar motifs (dated 1509

¹ Cf. *K.-k. shu-hua shi*, vol. XIX, 2nd T'ao, p. 312.

² Cf. Benjamin March, *Some Technical Terms of Chinese Painting*, p. 19, where the term is further explained as follows: "*fei-pai*, flying white, a method of brushwork in which the hairs of the brush are allowed to separate so that a stroke is not solid black but broken by streaks of untouched ground".

and inscribed by Wen Po-jen), while the other – representing a Scholar writing on a Bamboo accompanied by a Friend – was a picture in the style of Tai Chin, thus a typical product of the Ch'ê school.

There are other remarkable pictures by Tu Chin in the museums in Shanghai (?) and Cleveland, Ohio. The former, which is called *Playing the Ch'in under a Plum-tree*,¹ represents again a garden scene: the scholar is seated on a balustraded terrace at the foot of an old plum-tree in blossom which is bending far out over the balustrade, curving and writhing like a restless dragon. Two boys are preparing tea, a lofty mountain silhouette fills the background. The elements of composition may lead our thoughts to Ma Lin, but they are treated in a still lighter and more fleeting fashion than in his picture (Pl. 168). The tree in particular is remarkable for its exceedingly jerky, not to say nervous, growth. The picture in Cleveland which represents a *Man with a long Staff wandering in the Moonlight* is likewise a spring scene, because here too the old plum-tree reaches out with jerky branches and blossom-bestrewn twigs almost to the edge of the hills behind the figure, but the mood is more restful, the tone more restrained. To say that the artist has succeeded in suggesting the silvery line of a moonlit night would be an exaggeration, but he has certainly rendered the impression of a transparently light atmosphere. Both pictures are painted with a very sensitive brush, though the actual "flying brush" is more noticeable in the former case, whereas the latter picture is a rare example of a transient atmospheric effect.

Tu Chin was in spite of his adherence to the academic tradition a relatively independent painter, reaching out in new directions and thus preparing the way for a later pictorial development.

Hsü Lin was a man from Suchou but lived mainly in Nanking. His *tsü* was Tzū-jên, his *hao* Chiu-fêng tao-jên and K'uai-yüan-sou. His precocious intelligence made it possible for him to pass the *hsiu tsai* examination at the age of 14, and he soon became famous for his skill in literary writing, various

kinds of calligraphy and painting. "When the emperor Wu-tsung travelled in the South, one of his retainers showed him Hsü Lin's writings and the artist was summoned to the emperor's travelling lodge. Wu-tsung liked the man and went to see him twice at his home.² He presented the artist with official garments of the first class and ordered him to follow with the imperial cortège to the capital. He was going to give Hsü Lin a high official position, but before it was done the emperor died. The artist then returned home and built himself a study with a garden to the east of the city which he called K'uai-yüan (The Garden of Mirth).

"He was very fond of rambling about and of music ('sing-song' girls?) and used to make short songs to which he composed music in the old style. When he was not occupied in playing chess or drinking wine, he ordered the servant-boys and girls of his household to play and sing; there was thus no single day when he did not feel happy. He wrote a book called *Nanking chih* (and several other books of poetry, travels, linguistics, and calligraphy). He loved the beautiful scenery of Sung-chiang and called himself Chiu-fêng tao-jên (The Taoist of the Nine Peaks) and also the Old Man of the Garden of Mirth (K'uai-yüan-sou)."

At least half a dozen of Hsü Lin's pictures are known in reproduction. The earliest is dated 1514 and represents *A Branch of a Peach-tree seen through Clouds on the top of the Moon*,³ the latest, which is a *River-landscape with a Man in a Boat*, is dated 1548.⁴ Besides these there are five undated paintings by him in Japanese collections, one representing *Chrysanthemums growing by a Rock and a Hare below*,⁵ the others being landscapes illustrating the *Four Seasons* somewhat schematically in accordance

¹ Reproduced in *Gems of Chinese Painting*, vol. I, pl. 27.

² On one of these occasions the emperor cut the long beard of the painter and made it into a fly whisk. Cf. *Chung-kuo hua-chia ts'ü-t'ien*.

³ Cf. *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XII.

⁴ *Shên chow*, vol. XIX.

⁵ Cf. *Nangia*, Vol. III.

with academic models.¹ The dominating motifs in all these landscapes are steep cliffs which rise at one side of the pictures; below them are trees of various descriptions (according to season) and figures with anecdotal significance. In the spring view Wang Hsi-chih receives the much admired White Goose from a visitor; in the summer view two fishermen are resting under a willow on the shore while a boy is sleeping in a boat; in the autumn view there is a solitary flute player in a boat on a misty river; and in the winter view some travellers are arriving at a closed gate in front of a mountain cottage (probably the messenger of Liu Pei arriving at the hermitage of Chu-ko Liang in the snowbound mountains). It is perhaps the most striking or effective of the four scenes, though hardly the most beautiful; it is

painted in the energetic but somewhat coarse manner which may also be observed in some of Wu Wei's paintings (Pl. 169).

The two painters were good friends; we are told that Wu Wei once did a picture called the Two Scholars in which he represented Hsü Lin together with Shên Chou. The fact that these painters followed quite different trends of style and came to be considered as representatives of opposite schools does not seem to have tampered with their personal friendship. To them there were no such barriers of school manners as were introduced by later theorists and used as premises for literary presentations of the development of painting.

¹ The Four Seasons are reproduced in *Tōsō*, pp. 308-311. They were at the time in the collection of Hara Kunizō.

The Wu School

I

Introduction

THE PAINTERS who formed the first and decisive nucleus of the Wu school, so called after Wu-hsien, a part of modern Suchou, were psychologically related to the gentleman painters of the North Sung period. Their attitude towards the work of the painter was practically the same. They were, as a rule, not professional painters and did not make a living by their art. In most cases they gave away their paintings quite freely to friends and amateurs esteemed worthy of them, and lived either as hermits on a mere pittance from their families or from an income from other occupations which they exercised independently of their skill as painters.

Most of these men were members of families with scholarly or artistic interests who from their earliest years were steeped in learning and cultural pursuits which provided an invaluable foundation for their later artistic activity. They were usually prominent as calligraphers, prose-writers, or poets and won in these fields a reputation often surpassing their fame as painters. It is recorded about more than one of them that they regarded painting as the least important of their artistic accomplishments. Painting served them mainly as a symbolic language; their works are most significant when they are most spontaneous and untrammelled by attempts at exact representation; then they have the character of poetry, or creative thought conveyed by pictorial symbols. The fundamental correspondence between writing and painting noted in our Introduction became thus again more emphasized than it had been, for instance, in late Sung paintings (of the academic type), and it also found expression in the gradual growth or more

frequent occurrence of the poetic inscriptions – the so-called *t'i-pa* – or colophons – on the paintings. This increase in the inscriptions had been inaugurated already (as noted in a preceding chapter) on the works of some of the great landscape-painters in the Yüan period, but it was now carried much further not only by the painters themselves, but also through the co-operation of friends and admirers.

Such was the psychological background of the Wu painters, the common fertile soil in which they grew, but if we consider them from a more formal stylistic point of view, we have to admit that they were by no means all cast in the same mould; on the contrary, they show marked individual differences in their manners of expression, their brushwork and compositions. They are as a matter of fact more varied and differentiated than the painters of the Ché school, who kept rather faithfully to certain models or patterns of style. The fact that they may be classified as poets or romantics (in the broadest sense of this word) does not imply that they followed a well unified broad current of style. It is, therefore, rather misleading to classify them all under one common stylistic denomination as was done by Tung Ch'i-ch'ang and a long row of his epigones in the Far East. Without entering into formal analysis or giving ordered statements of the inspiring motives, they have included practically all the Wu painters in a stylistic network which they call the Southern School. The origin and significance of this sweeping term will be explained in a later chapter, and we shall find on examination that it is something of a misnomer because it is used to signify a certain style

of painting which is not common to all the painters from the South – to those of the Chê as well as of the Wu school – nor does it apply exclusively to the one or the other of these two schools. To place a sign of equality between the Southern School and the Wu school is more confusing than illuminating, because while the second term is a designation with a strictly local sense for a somewhat mixed array of painters from the same neighbourhood, the first

term, *i.e.* The Southern School, was introduced by Tung Ch'î-ch'ang as the name for a rather definite current of style with no geographical limitations at all.

We mention this here simply because it is so often used in the characterization of the leading Wu painters, but owing to its vagueness and ambiguity we shall avoid it as far as possible in the following discussion of this school of painting.

II

Shên Chou and his Following

When Shên Chou is placed at the head of the Wu school, as has been customary in Chinese descriptions ever since the Ming period, it does not mean that he was the very first representative or founder of a new artistic movement, but simply that he was the dominating personality among the early painters of this school. He exercised the greatest influence on the younger generation and remained for more than a century the guiding force within this current which formed the most progressive movement within the large assemblage of Chinese painters. It seems consequently right to give a more detailed account of his life and activity than we have given of the preceding Ming painters.

Shên Chou's life is recorded by several authors, most extensively in the *Wu-shêng shih-shih* and in the *Ming-shih*, and although these accounts partly deal with the same events, it may be of interest to quote certain sections from both because the biographical materials are somewhat differently presented. The following paragraphs are from the *Ming-shih*:

"Shên Chou, *tzû* Ch'î-nan, was born in Ch'ang-chou (Suchou) (1427, d. 1509). His grandfather Ch'êng was offered an official position (in the capital) in the Yung-lo period, but did not accept it. He built himself a studio which he called the West

Cottage, and there he received his guests with wine every day. The people said that he was just like Ku chung-ying(?). His uncle Ch'êng-chi and his father Hêng-chi lived as retired scholars and built themselves a bamboo studio where they used to study, compose poetry, and to paint. Even the servants of their household could appreciate literature and calligraphy. Ch'ên Mêng-hsien, son of Ch'ên Chi,¹ was the first teacher of Shên Chou . . .

"When he grew older he read every book (he could get hold of). His literary style was like that of the *Tso-chuan*; in his poems he imitated Po Chü-i, Su Shih, and Lu Yu,² in his calligraphy he followed Huang T'ing-chien,³ and in all these arts he obtained the admiration of the whole world. But he was most skilled in painting, and has been represented by the critics as the foremost in this art in the Ming period.

"The governor wanted to introduce him as a candidate for official service (*hsien-liang*), but Shên Chou consulted the *I-ching* and found there the advice to withdraw. Consequently he decided to stay in retirement. He lived at a beautiful place laid

¹ A local painter, unknown except as the teacher of Shên Chou.

² Lu Yu (1125-1209), a skilled *literateur* and poet of the South Sung period.

³ Huang T'ing-chien (1050-1110), the friend of Su Shih.

out with watercourses, bamboo groves and pavilions around a palatial residence, and everywhere in the house there were books and antique bronzes. Famous scholars from all over the country came to visit him. His virtuous character and literary talent were, indeed, beacon lights of his day."

The story of Shên Chou's life is told in more detail, though in still less consecutive order, by Chiang Shao-shu in *Wu-shêng shih-shih*:

"Shên Chou, *tzü Ch'i-nan*, *hao Shih-t'ien*, was commonly called Master Shih-t'ien (Stone Field). His grandfather Chien-an (Ch'êng) was a retired scholar and famous as a poet in Chiang-nan. Shên Chou continued the scholarly tradition of the family and was an excellent student. He read everything from the earliest myths and legends down to the miscellaneous records of later dynasties. Worldly affairs had very little attraction for him, he rather passed his time in contemplation of mountains and streams and in absorbing (gathering) the shapes of the clouds. He composed poems and revelled in painting simply for his own pleasure.

"As a painter he followed in the footsteps of the old masters from the Chin and T'ang down to the Sung and Yüan dynasties and came to know them all. In his landscapes he followed Tung Yüan, Huang Kung-wang and Wu Chên and acquired a reputation of being superior to the old masters. Wang Yüan-mei¹ said: 'Mr. Shih-t'ien was the foremost painter of the present dynasty'. Wen Chêng-ming said: 'Our Shih-t'ien is one of the Immortals'.

"He was kind to everybody, but there were few to whom he opened his heart completely. His most intimate friends were Wu K'uan,² vice-president of the Board of Civil Office, Tu Mu,³ president of the Board of War, Wên Lin,⁴ governor of Wên-chou, and his son Wên Chêng-ming (the painter), all men of noble conduct, inspired by the spirit of antiquity, pure and upright like gold and jade. Wên Chêng-ming became his pupil.

"When his father died he discontinued his studies for examination and official career. His filial piety

towards his mother was so great that wherever she went, he accompanied her and carried water along for her use. She reached the age of almost 100 years. Whenever there was somebody in distress in his neighbourhood, he emptied his purse most liberally and helped the man with money. On cold winter days with sleet and snow, when he saw that there were chimneys along the road which did not emit smoke, he called his servants and ordered them to carry food (grain) to the people, remarking: 'I should not only fill my own stomach'.

"Once he paid a high price for an old book and left it visible in his studio. It attracted the attention of a visitor who asked him: 'Where did you get this book?' Shên Chou said: 'Why do you ask that?' The guest replied: 'I hope you don't mind, if I tell you that it is my book; I lost it some time ago and now I find it here. If I can know where you got it, I will make further inquiries.' Shên Chou said: 'Is there any mark in the book?' The guest replied: 'Yes, I wrote a note on a certain page in the book; maybe it is there'. Shên Chou opened the book and found the indication correct. Without further ado he closed it again and handed the book back to its owner, but did not give the name of the man from whom he had bought it, nor did he blame the person.

"He did not like to stay in the city but built himself a small house outside the wall, and there he received his intimate friends. But if high officials or noblemen came along in their carriages to pay him a visit, he refused to receive them with the following excuse: 'It is a long time since I wore the official cap and robe. I am now a recluse and would only defile your company.'

"Whenever he went to stay in his cottage (by the

¹ Wang Shih-chêng, *tsü Yüan-mei* (1326-1393), a famous patriot, poet and official.

² Wu K'uan (1435-1504), famous writer, official and teacher of the emperor Hsiao-tsung.

³ Tu Mu (1459-1525), prominent official and writer on antiquities, history and geography; also a poet and a student of *I-ching*.

⁴ Wên Lin (1445-1499), known particularly through his skill in divination based on a study of *I-ching*. Published several books and was promoted to high official positions.

city wall), people from far and near told each other: 'Mr. Shên is coming'. And there was soon a clanking of boats on the river and a throng at his door. Everybody asked him for a poem or a picture; and he gave all of them everything they wanted, so that everyone went away satisfied.

"When he had passed middle age and began to grow old, he withdrew from the world (suppressed his sound and hid his shadow), his only fear being that he could not do it completely. The governor Wang Shu from San-yüan did his utmost to attract Shên Chou to his office in order to obtain some advice from him in political matters, but Shên Chou simply refused to come. The next governor, P'eng Li, read his poem on the Hand-mill and found it deep and significant. He again invited Shên Chou at various times but the artist did not accept the invitations. When the governor finally by his command obliged Shên Chou to come to the office, they sat together talking for the whole day to the great satisfaction of the governor; but when he wanted to keep the artist there permanently, Shên Chou bowed deeply and said: 'I am a worthless fellow, not good enough to be your servant (ox or horse). In addition to this you should know that my old mother is so weak that she cannot move without the assistance of her son; therefore I hope that you will feel pity and let me go, so that I may return home, and the lives of my mother and her son may be saved. It would be the greatest kindness you could show me.' The governor sighed and consented.

"Later on there came a governor called Ts'ao who built a new office and wanted to have it decorated with wall-paintings. He sent out a call for painters. A man who wanted to insult Shên Chou sent in his name, and thus the artist received the command to do the work. When the messenger came with the order of the governor, Shên Chou said: 'Don't frighten my old mother, simply tell me what I should paint and I will start on the work early or late without delay'. Someone said to him: 'You are disgracing yourself with this job; you could get out of it, if you applied to a higher official'. But Shên

Chou answered: 'No, it is my duty to do the work and no disgrace. It would be more of a disgrace to apply to a higher official.' Then he went to work in deep secrecy and finished his part before the other painters. The governor Ts'ao never saw him before he left for home again.

"Some time afterwards the governor went to the capital to pay his respects to the emperor, and there he met officials of the same rank who asked him: 'Is Mr. Shên in good health?' He answered vaguely: 'He is quite well'. When he met the prime minister Li Tung-yang this gentleman asked: 'Did not Mr. Shên send me any letter?' The governor felt very surprised and said: 'Yes, but I did not bring it along; I will bring it later'. Whereupon the governor hurried to the office of the vice-president Wu K'uan and asked him: 'Who is this Mr. Shên and what is he like?' Wu told him all about Shên Chou, and said that he was so famous at the court that even noblemen and high officials did not equal him. The governor Ts'ao said: 'What shall I do?' Mr. Wu answered: 'I have many of his pictures; one of them may serve as a substitute for a letter. You might say that Mr. Shên was ill when you left and could not write a letter.'

"Governor Ts'ao then scolded the men in his retinue, and ordered them to start for home, telling them, however, that before they returned to the office they (he) would pay a visit to Mr. Shên. When they arrived at the house of Shên Chou, he came out very kindly to meet them and said: 'The door of my dwelling is very low, not worthy of such noble guests'. Governor Ts'ao bowed ceremoniously and asked for a peasant's meal; as soon as he had eaten the food he withdrew. But Shên Chou went to pay a return call at the governor's office in order to express his thanks.

"Shên Chou was a superior artist in comparison with both ancient and modern painters. He was upright and independent, loved his parents (during his whole life) like a child and stood in every respect above common men."

The biographical accounts of Shên Chou's life

make it evident that the great fame which he earned among his contemporaries was based on his life and personality as a whole and not only on his genius as a painter. He was the perfect example of a scholarly gentleman, high-minded and noble-hearted, learned, and accomplished in all the arts, and yet very simple and genuine in his daily life as well as in his painting. Wang Ao, his contemporary, who praised Shên Chou both as a poet and a painter, remarks: "Although he was superior to everybody else, yet he was kind to all; thus when pedlars and shepherd-boys brought him paper (asked him to paint) he made no difficulties, and when people brought him imitation pictures asking him to sign them, so that they would become saleable, he did not refuse to satisfy them."¹ He was never classified as a professional artist but as a hermit or gentleman painter who made his pictures as well as his poems to express his heart or satisfy the people who were beseeching him, and whatever he did reveals a note of sincerity which is very appealing.

Shên Chou's artistic development which, as pointed out by the biographers, was begun under the guidance of his father and his uncle is further described by some contemporary and slightly younger critics. Wang Shih-chêng (1525-1593), perhaps the most eminent connoisseur of the time, writes: "He knew thoroughly (could get in and out of) all the famous masters of the Sung and Yuan dynasties, but Tung Yüan, the monk Chü-jan, and Li Ch'êng made the deepest impression on his heart. He developed their manners to some extent, according to his own ideas, and if one takes his most successful works, it must be admitted that they are not inferior to those of the old masters."²

His skill and versatility as an imitator of the Sung and Yüan masters is often praised and also illustrated by many of his earlier paintings, though it would be wrong to imagine that these are faithful copies; they are free renderings or transpositions of certain modes or manners of the early painters in accordance with his own creative genius. Tung Ch'i-ch'ang wrote: "Shên Chou copied all the famous masters of the

past dynasty without exception. His copies are very like, some of them even superior to the originals. Only Ni Tsan's light ink was according to him difficult to render. This was because his strong brushwork and deep intentions were so different from the light and diffusing manner of Ni Tsan." Yet Shên Chou has produced some successful versions of Ni Tsan's picture-poems, even though he may have used stronger accents of light and shade and a somewhat heavier brush than the inimitable Yüan master.

The earliest phase of Shên Chou's artistic activity, begun at home under the guidance of his father and his uncle, was thus marked by his extensive studies and copying of certain masters of the Sung and Yüan periods. This seems to have lasted until his middle age, i.e. until about 1470, though some of his works in the manner of Tung Yüan and Ni Tsan are dated even later. Wên Ch'eng-ming, Shên Chou's intimate friend and pupil, made the following observations upon his development in a colophon written on an earlier work: "Mr. Shih-t'ien was a man by nature deep and bright. His taste and knowledge were unusual. While still a youth he freed himself from the traditional manner of the family. The old masters were his teachers and he copied many of them so successfully that his pictures could not be distinguished from theirs. Most of the pictures he did then (i.e. in his early years) were only a foot square. When he was over 40, he began to paint large scrolls, rugged trees with large leaves, in a freer manner. He no longer followed rules and measures, nor did he use colours with the same refinement as in earlier years. Yet his pictures were true to nature and most expressive. This picture, which belongs to T'ang Wên-jui, is a work of his early days. . . . The brushwork is entirely according to Wang Mêng. It is an excellent example of his early manner, beautiful and lovely."³

¹ Quoted from *Chên-t'ai chí* in *Sung Yüan i-lai*, vol. 28, 14.

² Quoted from *I-yüan chüeh yen* in *Sung Yüan i-lai*, vol. 28, 15.

³ *Shih-hua p'u*, vol. 87, 1, 3.

This characterization of Shên Chou's development and his artistic ideals is still better expressed by Li Jih-hua (1565-1635), the somewhat younger painter and art historian: "Shih-t'ien first learned to paint from his father and his uncle; then he studied various old masters and knew them all perfectly. In his middle age he chose Huang Kung-wang as his master, but in later years he was completely carried away by Mei tao-jên. His heart was drunk as if intoxicated with Wu Chên's art, he blended so closely with it that some of his works could not be distinguished from Wu Chên's if they were mixed up."

The quotations from leading critics of the Ming period regarding Shên Chou's artistic development could easily be multiplied, but since they all repeat the same views (with very slight variations) it would hardly serve any practical purpose or throw more light on the problem. They all seem to agree in trying to distinguish three periods or stages in the development of the great painter, whom they all place as *primus inter pares*. During the first of these periods he still followed in the footsteps of his father and uncle and studied unremittingly the classic masters of the T'ang and Sung period. His paintings were mostly of small size and executed in a very careful and neat manner, often with the addition of colour, but he had not as yet developed a more strongly marked individual style.

That was accomplished somewhat later, during a second stage, when he had become more closely acquainted with the works of certain Yüan masters such as Huang Kung-wang, Ni Tsan and Wang Meng, whose aesthetic dispositions and temperaments were most congenial to him. Yet he was still to some extent traditional and detailed in a naturalistic sense; he worked, at least occasionally, with more care than expressionistic ease and freedom. It was only after he had passed middle age that he became wont to let the brush flow quite freely, more or less as in writing, giving expression to his almost inexhaustible flow of animating thoughts or memories without paying too much attention to the

exactness of details and structure. This last stage in his development was reached when he had become "intoxicated by the art of Wu Chên", to use Li Jih-hua's expression.

This suggested division into three successive periods is, however, a very schematic way of representing Shên Chou's development; it may be convenient for a condensed survey of his art, but it must be understood that these periods overlap and that it consequently would be possible to point out contradictions just as well as confirmations of the theory among the numerous paintings still preserved under the name of Shên Chou in collections all over the world. It is not a theory that would stand strict analysis, and though it is worth remembering as a guide or pointer when we are trying to find our way through the mass of material attributed to the master, it certainly does not solve the problems with which we are continuously confronted in studying the two or three hundred pictures still commonly considered as Shên Chou's work. A certain number of these are noted in our Lists, which may in part serve as supplements to the descriptions in this historical text.

None of Shên Chou's small early pictures mentioned by the old critics as examples of the first stage in his development have, to our knowledge, been identified. But as we are told that they were done while the young artist was still working under the guidance or influence of his father and uncle, we may be justified in supposing that they were rather like the pictures by the older members of the family. As an illustration of these may here be reproduced a very pretty picture, formerly in private possession in Japan, representing A Scholar's Study in a Bamboo Grove by a Mountain Brook which is signed by Shên Chên, the uncle of Shên Chou. It is a work of great technical skill and refinement, traditional in composition but rendered with feeling for the idyllic charm of the motif, though in a somewhat thin *kung-pi* manner (PL170A).

The earliest dated picture by Shên Chou himself known to me is the relatively small landscape

(2 ft. 5 in. × 1 ft. 1 in.) in the Abe collection in the Ōsaka Museum. The painter's inscriptions date it in the year 1464 and besides these it has poetic inscriptions by Shên Chou's uncle, his two brothers and two friends, being thus also a kind of family document. The picture has still the air of a youthful creation, though not the appearance of an essay by a beginner. Technically it is far more advanced than the above-mentioned work by his uncle.

The scene represented is a small Homestead on a Misty Spring Morning in the Mountains. At the farther end of the mountain brook that cuts obliquely through the stony ground a few thatched cottages are visible under bare trees, while the willows closer to the foreground seem to be in bud and here a traveller is approaching in a small ox-cart. A light mist sweeps over the darker tree-tops and envelops the middle section of the mountains. The light is as yet subdued, which adds a note of intimacy to the scene, but there is nevertheless a suggestion of approaching spring in the air (Pl. 171).

The charm of the picture depends mainly on its intimacy; it is evocative of a definite mood or moment rendered with very close adherence to actual nature, yet interpreted by a rather definite individual temperament. The execution is very careful and detailed, not to say timid, compared with the brushwork in Shên Chou's later works, but it is not lacking in pictorial beauty.

About this time, or during the sixties of the fifteenth century, Shên Chou must have been studying classic models of the Sung and Yüan dynasties unremittingly with a view to attaining perfect command of the brush and of the various manners of using it, and thus finally a style of his own. As an important illustration of this endeavour – almost surprising by its size and its character, we can cite the very large picture (2.89 × 1.06 m.) in the collection of J. P. Dubosc in Lugano, which represents A Tree in Blossom Growing from a Garden Rock with two birds and flowering plants below. It is painted in ink and light colours and has two poetic inscriptions, of which one written by Shên Chou

himself, in the fourth year of Ch'eng-hua (1468), tells us that he did it according to the brushwork (manner) of Wang Yüan (Tan-hsüan), while the other was added in 1523 by a less known younger painter called Wang Ch'ung. Shên Chou's statement that he imitated in this picture the most famous bird and flower-painter of the Yüan period is perfectly confirmed by the pictorial quality and finish of the work, which has an academic exactness and cool refinement far more characteristic of Wang Yüan than of Shên Chou, as we know him from his later works (Pl. 170B). It is such an excellent example of the comprehensiveness of Shên Chou's studies, his constant endeavours to master every kind of brushwork and not crystallize in one definite style, one mode of expression. He was a rather catholic painter, particularly in his early years before painting had become to him a symbolic recording of fleeting thoughts and memories.

Among the relatively early pictures which serve to illustrate Shên Chou's catholic studies of old masters of various types and schools may be recalled the album with six paintings known as *Chiu-tuan ching-hua ts'ê* (formerly in the Tuan Fang and Hayashi collections) now belonging to Mr. Chiang Ku-sun, Taipei. The pictures are all done with great care and minute observation of the different manners of the respective masters mentioned in the inscriptions, viz. Chao Po-chü, Chao Mêng-fu, Hui-ch'ung (a monk painter of the Sung period), Chao Chung-mu, Wang Fu and Chao Ta-nien. This last picture has a lengthy poetic inscription by Tu Ch'ung (the friend of Shên Chou) dated 1471. These pictures may not at first sight seem very convincing as works by the master; they are executed in so many different styles, some in colour, others in ink only, yet they are no ordinary copies. Some of them reveal quite convincingly the touch of the master's brush, as may be observed in the pictures after Chao Chung-mu and Wang Fu; they are painted with such a sympathetic understanding that they could almost pass as originals by these artists (Pl. 172).

The stylistic correspondence between Wang Fu's minor landscapes and some of Shên Chou's most spontaneous ink-paintings from the seventies and eighties is so close that one might speak of a kind of natural affinity between the two painters; they were related by their poetic temperaments and followed the same general road of study, though separated in time by more than a generation. They were both deeply attached to Ni Tsan; their interpretations of the Yüan master's exquisite designs are on the same level and the influence remains as an undercurrent in several of their later, more independent creations. One of Shên Chou's most sensitive renderings of a typical Ni Tsan picture is the album-leaf in the Saitō collection (*cf. Min Shitauka*, pl.7). The composition consists of bare rocks forming a high river bank, and on a promontory in the foreground a little man is seated in meditation under some withered trees, the whole being steeped in light greyish haze and penetrated by the quiet mood known from some of Ni Tsan's simple picture poems (Pl.173). The source of inspiration is also mentioned by Shên Chou in his inscription: "The trees are scattered like a belt around the hill; the autumn sun is setting, and the kiosk is empty. My thoughts reach out to old Ni Yü, but he is far away - like the white clouds in the sky."

Another very good example of Shên Chou's faculty to transmit not only the formal design but also the spirit of Ni Tsan's art is the picture in the Nelson Gallery in Kansas City which is dated by the master's poetic inscription written in 1484, i.e. about ten years later than the above-mentioned picture. The Ni Tsan elements are here more freely used; the spare trees on the stony bank at the lower edge are more important, the pavilion has grown in size and is placed on poles in the water; there is a fisherman in a boat on the river, and the mountains on the opposite bank have become much more massive and imposing than in Ni Tsan's landscapes. The design has been transformed in a way that makes it an intermediary link between Ni Tsan and Shên Chou's most typical later works (to be mentioned

below), and the brushwork is characterized by rather strong painterly accents (Pl.174).

Ni Tsan's individual style constituted no doubt one of the most potent influences in Shên Chou's artistic development, but he also devoted special studies to Wang Meng's monumental landscapes. He evidently found them interesting, studied them closely and took pains to transmit some of the large designs quite faithfully, but he was not such a close follower of Wang Meng as, for instance, Wang Fu. Shên Chou's large picture in the Ku-kung collection representing a View of Lu Shan, which according to the inscription was executed after Wang Meng's original in 1467, is one of the painter's least attractive works; the composition and the tone are rather dull. It is six feet high and abounds in carefully executed details of brooks, rocks, and trees with other growth in the folds, which must have cost the painter much labour, but we miss the "dragon veins" of Wang Meng, the brushwork has not the sweeping verve that would bring out the structure of so large a motif (Pl.175). It should be noted that Shên Chou in his later days gave a more effective transcription of Wang Meng's style, in the form of a very large picture in J. P. Dubosc's collection which, according to the inscription, was done in 1491 in imitation of a work by the Yüan master. The picture is remarkable as an historical document and may be one of the most elaborate works ever accomplished by Shên Chou, but here too we miss something of the spontaneity that lends expressiveness to the master's individual brushwork (Pl.176). It seems that whenever Shên Chou tried his capability on such large and imposing mountain views, rich in detail and rising to a great height, he did not feel quite at home; they were not so familiar to him as views over rolling hills and winding rivers and consequently were more apt to make him look for guidance in the works of earlier masters.

One of the most surprising examples of this tendency is the large picture in the collection of Mr. H. C. Weng in Scarsdale which, according to the inscription, was painted by Shên Chou in 1480

after a model by Tai Chin, the founder of the Chê school. It represents the famous statesman of the fourth century, Hsieh An, on his daily visit to Tung Shan, a mountain in Chekiang, which was to him a place of pilgrimage all through his life. We see him walking in the company of four young women at the foot of a precipitous mountain which is formed by deeply split rocks into a tower-like structure that rises through the clouds. Nothing could be more unlike Wang Meng's pictures of Lu Shan or of other actual mountains, which are based on studies of nature and possess the faculty to reveal the life-breath of such gigantic formations. Shên Chou's picture, in fact, leads in an opposite direction; it does not convey the impression of an actual scene, it is more like a view of an Elysium of the Immortals, a world where painters and poets may feel equally at home if they are endowed with sufficient creative imagination. It is a highly traditional painting from a formal point of view, executed according to models of the T'ang and Sung periods, yet it reveals an individual conception of the beauty and significance of the motif.¹ This may, indeed, have appealed to Shên Chou, who was fundamentally a romantic, although the picture is in a style totally different from that of his more characteristic creations (Pl. 177). It thus offers an interesting confirmation of Shên Chou's unprejudiced attitude towards various schools or currents of painting and his willingness to learn even from quarters which were strange and could hardly have been very congenial to him. His subsequent production reveals no further influence of the kind.

Shên Chou's attachment to the great Yüan masters and their followers is the fundamental trait during his earlier years. We have mentioned some examples of his studies of Ni Tsai and Wang Meng and the parallelism between some of Shên Chou's and Wang Fu's most spontaneous ink-painting. One more example of this kind may here be recalled, particularly with a view to the historical importance of the inscriptions on the picture. It is a small picture in the Ku-kung collection (1 ft. 8 in. ×

1 ft. 3 in.) (Pl. 178) representing two or three mountain cones rising above a misty bay where the men in two tiny boats are casting their fishing lines. There is a clump of mostly dry and rugged trees rooted among the stones on a rocky spit that indicates the foreground. The upper part of the picture is covered by long inscriptions, partly by the artist himself, in which he says: "Mi is not Mi, Huang is not Huang. The rich ink brings out the luxuriant growth, I throw away the brush and laugh. I am an unsuccessful painter of the beautiful", by which the painter seems to indicate that he could not quite equal Mi Fei and Huang Kung-wang in his imitations, however much he tried. The latter part of the inscription refers to his friend the painter Liu Chüeh, and proves that the picture must have been executed before 1472, when Liu Chüeh died. It may, as a matter of fact, be only a year or two later than the preceding one. Here he says: "Whenever Liu Chüeh sees me he asks me to paint, not minding that I am a poor painter, nor whether I am drunk or sober, busy or at leisure. Nor does it make any difference to him whether the weather is wet and stormy, cold or warm; even in the poor lamplight he urges me to paint. This picture was done last night when I was drunk with wine. It is quite topsy-turvy and full of mistakes, yet he wanted it." We quite understand Liu Chüeh, because even though the picture is no more than a sudden improvisation, it is expressive of an irresistible life-breath.

Liu Chüeh's admiration for his younger friend is clearly expressed in the colophon quoted above and we have also, in a previous chapter, taken note of Shên Chou's attachment to Liu Chüeh. This is further emphasized in his lamentation over the death of the older friend in 1472 which is recorded on a picture in the Abe collection in Ōsaka Museum, representing Temple Pavilions and Figures on high Mountain Terraces.² The picture, which is known

¹ The picture is of large size and executed with colours and ink.

² Cf. *Sōraikan*, II, pl. 47. The picture (92.7 × 28 cm.) is executed with slight colour on silk in close imitation of Tung Yüan and is as such more of a historical document than an example of Shên Chou's individual style.

to me only in reproduction, can hardly be classified among Shên Chou's most convincing individual creations; it is painted in obvious imitation of Tung Yüan's manner and makes a somewhat monotonous impression. But even if the picture is a later rendering of a Shên Chou design, the inscription has the ring of authenticity, and may be cited as a beautiful record of the painters' associations and the happy memories of spring days spent together at Ling-yin ssü.

"In the third month of spring, when flowers were flying (falling), we stayed here together enjoying wine. The grass was fragrant and rain had filled the river. Candles are still burning, the incense is not finished (in the temple), they remind me of former excursions. I remember the night we spent last year in the old monk's room. My dreams still linger on the mountain, around the cave among the peach-trees and the pines – but now, as I come back, my heart is sorrowful, because old Lin is gone."

Shên Chou's production seems to have been growing rapidly during the 1470's. There are a number of pictures with definite or approximate dates from this decade noted in our List, but it would carry us too far to discuss them all here in detail, particularly in view of the fact that they are uneven in quality and not always convincing as the master's own work. Yet some of them have interesting inscriptions. As an example of this class may be mentioned the Mountain Landscape with a Man Seated on a Rocky Ledge by a Stream, formerly in the collection of G. Harada, Ōsaka¹ (Pl. 179B). The composition looks rather crowded, at least in the reproduction, and the brushwork may be called ruffled, a fact rather humorously pointed out by the painter himself in the following remark written in 1470:

"Shan-ku tao-jên once asked a painter to make a portrait of a sage. The picture became quite like Shan-ku, but the man was represented with too much beard. This picture of mine was done for T'ieh-mei, and someone said that it is like the works of Wang Fu. I say, it may be so, but the wrinkles of

the cliffs are confused and blurred, the grass too wildly luxuriant. I have not been able to avoid the fault of the sage's portrait, which had too much beard."

The statement in this colophon that some contemporaries of the painter recognized the rather obvious correspondence between Wang Fu's and Shên Chou's manners of painting may, indeed, be noted as a confirmation of our previous observations regarding this stylistic relationship. Shên Chou seems to have been quite conscious of it. Another almost contemporary picture in which the same relation may also be traced is known as Fishermen on the Maple River.² It is a mountain landscape of the same type as the preceding one, but there are two fishing-boats on the stream and the mountains, which rise behind into pointed peaks, are painted with strongly marked hemp-fibre wrinkles as in certain pictures by Wang Fu, whereas the leafy trees in the foreground have a softer pictorial touch. The poem by the master is dated 1477, but the picture was executed six years earlier (Pl. 179A).

In addition to the above-mentioned examples of the correspondence between Shên Chou and Wang Fu may furthermore be recalled a later small picture in the Ku-kung collection known as *Yeh-tso t'u*, i.e. *Sitting up Through the Night*.³ It represents three small buildings under tall pine-trees around a court at the foot of steep mountains. In one of the houses there is a man seated in meditation on a mat. The correspondence with Wang Fu becomes evident in the brisk, lively brushwork with its accents of deep black ink in contrast to the somewhat misty but very light atmosphere (possibly meant to suggest moonshine). The design is also akin to some of Wang Fu's mountain landscapes with tall pines and pointed mountain peaks. The landscape occupies here, however, only half of the scroll; the upper half is covered by a long inscription by the painter,

¹ Cf. *Min Shitaike*, pl. 4.

² The picture, which now is in the C. T. Loo Galleries in New York, is reproduced in *Shên-chou to-kan*, pl. 9.

³ Cf. *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, XLIII.

dated 1492, from which it becomes evident that the picture is a self-biographical document of considerable importance. Only a line or two may here be transmitted in substance:

"Listening to the sounds of the night, the wind, the barking dogs, the watchman's drum – the impressions still remain, but I do not know whether these things existed outside of me or only within."

The note is significant; what he painted were indeed experiences of his inner life derived from impressions, not necessarily visual, transmitted in the crucible of his genius into symbolic language collected in pictorial form.

If we pass from the pictures which have more or less the character of studies or records of experiences on the painter's path of development, into the large group of more independent and mature works, we find that many of these, particularly among the album-leaves and hand-scrolls, are representations of definite places, buildings, bridges and canals. The majority of these are, of course, views from Suchou, the famous pagodas at Tiger Hill and Kuang-fu ssü, gateways and temple pavilions, small studios shaded by blossoming trees and rows of miniature shops crowded along canal-streets into a picturesque jumble. There are at least three or four series of such pictures of famous sights in Suchou, or the Wu district, preserved either in part or completely, but to describe them in detail is of little avail, because their interest to us does not reside in the motifs or the designs but mainly in the sensibility of the pictorial rendering. The quality is uneven, depending on the amount of special attention and work that the painter has devoted to them; the landscapes which form the series known as the Ten Views from Wu are thus much more important works of art than the city views from Suchou or other views of the same class, which are noted down in the very bold, not to say coarse, manner which Shên Chou adopted for some of his scenic records from the 1480's.

It was about this time that he reached his supreme mastery of the brush. Minor paintings and album-

leaves offered the best opportunities for spontaneous expression, and their appeal is often accentuated by the addition of lyric improvisations. A series of such ink-plays in words and sketches are united in an album from which I made some photos in Shanghai in 1935 (but I have no idea as to where they may be hiding today). One of the leaves represents a garden rock with climbing plants, the others are sketchy river views with fishermen in boats or on the shore. The compositions are arranged diagonally across the sheets, a few trees forming dark groups in one foreground corner and mountains rising in fading silhouettes beyond the mirroring water (Pl. 180). The differences in design are not very marked, yet each picture expresses a special note also evoked in the accompanying poems:

1. The fishing-rod is seven feet of jade,
The setting sun is now behind the mountains.
The air is wonderful at eventide,
when all the birds are flying home.
2. The clouds are lying heavy on the peaks.
The rain is now approaching.
The wind grows strong and strikes the leafy trees.
But fishermen in bamboo hats and clothes of grass
know how to do their work.
3. The lake is covered by the gleaming rain,
which pours in slanting strides
and makes the surface of the water splash
in pearls which jump into the boat.
But I enjoy this sight of rain and lulls
without the bamboo hat and wooden clogs of Su
Tung-p'ò.

The poems as well as the small pictures seem to have been jotted down with no other aim than to express the mood of the moment. They are extremely simple but with a tone of intimacy and freshness which is far more appealing in the originals than in halting translations; yet even these may serve to show how closely the poet and painter coincided. They drew their inspiration from the same source, were equally sensitive to the shifting

moods of nature and skilled in reproducing with brush and ink the flash of the moment. Shên Chou may seem to us more important as a painter, but among his contemporaries he was no less appreciated as a poet; nor would the painter ever have attained his prominent place had he not been a poet at heart.

Shên Chou did a large quantity of such minor paintings, mostly in the shape of album-leaves in which he revealed his temperament as a painter and a poet most freely and happily. A certain number of them have been preserved, either as parts of complete albums or as single leaves detached from the series to which they belonged. Some of the albums have become known through reproductions issued in China and Japan, as may be noted in our List of Shên Chou's pictures, but only two or three of the most characteristic examples (besides those mentioned above) can here be described.¹ We find them in three of the series reproduced in *Chūgoku Meiga-shū*, vol. II (Tōkyō 1935).

One of these series, comprising fourteen leaves, is called *Wo Yu*. The pictures represent landscapes, flowers, fruits, animals and insects, very carefully studied from nature and accompanied by poetic inscriptions. Another series which comprises thirteen leaves, i.e. eleven studies of landscapes and branches of blossoming trees and two leaves with the painter's comments, is entitled *Sui Hsing*. These are of a more sketchy "impressionistic" quality and are in part distinguished by great pictorial beauty.

The third series, which has no special name, contains twelve leaves, one with an inscription, the rest with minor bits of hastily-noted-down elements of landscape such as mountain tops, steep precipices, misty river valleys, roofs of pavilions rising above clouds, dry trees, rocky ledges and narrow paths leading between mountain walls (Pl. 181). The motifs are fragmentary, not to say accidental and apparently noted down without any special purpose, but firmly and clearly with as few and strong touches of the brush as possible. This highly abbreviated manner of execution is evidently based on a close study of Wu Chên's paintings, which from the

beginning of the eighties served as the main guide for Shên Chou's work with the brush, but the fluently graceful style of the Yüan master is in most of these sketches modified into a heavier and more substantial brushwork.

One might, indeed, pick out certain of these minor studies—for instance, paintings of hills or roofs rising through mist—which would almost pass as sketches by Wu Chên, but there are other examples among Shên Chou's album-leaves—mountain tops, sharp cliffs, dry trees and the like—which are painted with a stiffer brush, stronger accents of black and white and heavier outlines than we find in Wu Chên's more softly toned sketches (Pl. 181). Shên Chou is more varied and unequal in his sketches than Wu Chên, but if we wish to assert that he represents a later, more advanced stage in the development of monochrome landscape-painting, we may find reason for that not only in his exceedingly bold and firm handling of the brush but also in his realization of space and three-dimensional form. His attitude towards the world of objective phenomena is different from that of the Yüan master; he is more interested, and sometimes more successful, in giving convincing representations of objective reality, i.e. of things as they appear in space, and of natural scenery, than in directly transmitting images that have taken form within him. He might thus be called more realistic, if he were not at the same time a romantic poet in his interpretations of impressions from nature.

This he did through inscriptions quite as much as through the painted image. We can thus never do justice to the artist without trying to understand at least some fragments of his inscriptions. The well-known picture in the Abe collection in Ōsaka Museum which represents a man seated on a projecting rock playing the *ch'in* under the moon, may here be quoted as an example. It is painted in a fairly

¹ Albums with paintings by Shên Chou have been published in China by the former Palace Museum (1932), the Commercial Press (1934 and 1940), the I-yüan ch'eng-shang shē (Shanghai); in Japan by Hakubundō, *Nanga Taisei* and *Chūgoku* (Tōkyō, 1935).



FIGURE 1. Shên Chou. Two views from Suchou: A. Tiger Hill Pagoda.
B. Crowded shops in Canal Street. Abe Collection, Ōsaka Museum.



FIGURE 2. Shên Chou. Album-leaf. Approaching a cliff-side temple. From *Chūgoku Meigashū*, II.

broad manner with rich ink like some of the above-mentioned sketches in the Wu Chên style. The main subject of the design – the man under leafy trees on the rocky shelf projecting over the water – has been repeated in several pictures by Shên Chou and his followers, but it has here received added significance through the poetic inscription in beautiful, large characters which may be interpreted as follows:

"The *ch'in* is in my hands, the moon is in the sky;
I strike the strings and beckon to the moon.
The moonlight glitters on the sounding strings.
The wind is pure, the moon is bright, I feel like an Immortal.
But now the time is passed: the moon is setting
and the wine grows cold."

Among the various kinds or forms of painting produced by Shên Chou during nearly forty years of intense artistic activity the so-called *chüan*, or horizontal scrolls, form an important section. In spite of the fact that they make greater demands on prolonged artistic concentration and work with the brush than the minor vertical scrolls and album-leaves, they are quite numerous in the *œuvre* of Shên Chou and were evidently produced at successive periods during his whole life. Their relative chronology is to some extent made evident through the dated inscriptions on at least a dozen such scrolls; in addition to these there are about ten undated specimens of this kind, and as several of these pictures reach a considerable length (varying between two and ten metres) it is evident that they represent a larger material for special study than can be fully examined at this place. But a few outstanding examples may here be mentioned in chronological order.

The earliest among these pictures is the scroll in the Abe collection in Ōsaka Museum which represents views from the Ta-shih mountain. It is signed and has a poem by Wu K'uan dated 1472. The attractive composition is formed by a picturesque succession of limited views over a river, rolling hills, open spaces with figures and buildings

and clumps of old trees and fresh bamboo, all steeped in a soft atmosphere of greyish tones. It may be criticized for lack of unity and is in this respect inferior to most of the later scrolls, but it has a pictorial charm that leads our thoughts to Wu Chên and gives little cause for doubts as to its merits as a work by Shên Chou. If the picture and the dated inscription are correct, as I am inclined to believe, it shows that Wu Chên had become a guiding influence in Shên Chou's art already at the beginning of the seventies. The picture is nearly three metres long and painted in ink with addition of slight colours.

Next in date follows the scroll now in the possession of Mr. Frank Caro, successor to C. T. Loo in New York. It is a somewhat shorter composition of wooded hills and winding streams brought together into a well-unified composition rich in variety and movement. The poetic inscription by the master is dated 1477, and as this is a beautiful accompaniment to the conception expressed in the picture, it is here quoted in the translation of Mr. Hsien-ch'i Tsêng.¹

"A clear stream bears the music of tinkling jade.
In a glance the splendid green of paradise.
There is the pure-in-heart who has escaped;
He and his grass hut pass the idle years."

It has been pointed out that Shên Chou in this picture follows more closely in the trail of Wang Mêng, which may be said to indicate that Wu Chên and Wang Mêng represented alternating trends in Shên Chou's activity during the seventies.

The same influence is still more emphasized in the famous scroll formerly in the possession of the Hakubundo Company in Ōsaka and now in some Japanese collection unknown to me² (Pl. 186). It represents mountain ranges and deep gorges, winding waters, bridges and pavilions, all brought closely together with scant room for the trees, buildings and

¹ Cf. The Catalogue of Loan Exhibition of Chinese Paintings, Toronto 1956. Selection and Text by Hsien-ch'i Tsêng; No. 15.

² Cf. Kokka, No. 545.

bridges. It is, so to speak, Wang Meng in highest potentiality, though compressed into a form which does not quite correspond to the requirements of his mode of composition. The picture is followed by several *ti-p'ia* and a dedication to Wu K'uan, the friend of Shên Chou, who received it as a farewell gift when he left for Peking in 1479.

Next follows a scroll known through the reproductions in an album published by the Yu Chêng Co. in Shanghai. It has an inscription by the painter dated 1481 and illustrates very clearly the importance of Wu Chên's art for Shên Chou at this time.

Another scroll with the same date, called the *White Clouds of Spring*, was shown to me by Mr. Piacentini in Tôkyô in 1951. It was painted on silk and had a colophon by Wang Shih-chên. About this time the Wang Meng influence seems to have reached a culmination.

Shortly after this date Shên Chou composed some long handscrolls of a more spontaneous and independent type. An example of this kind, dated 1486, was shown to me in the D. J. Chên collection in Hongkong in 1951 (Pls. 184B, 185B). It represented shifting views along a broad river, grassy hills with leafy trees, low shores, mud-banks and bridges and a fisherman's village. The whole thing differed very much from the preceding scrolls with its spaciousness, its wide empty stretches of water reaching to the sky, or bordered simply by narrow spits of distant land far away. In the inscription by the painter he says that he did the whole without any planning in accordance with the inspiration of the moment and adds: "When I now look at it by the window I feel as if I were walking along the mountain stream at the edge of the forest. The ancients used to say: 'to look at a picture is like wandering while lying in bed'; but I would change this by saying 'to ramble while sitting'." In other words, the painter has been recording quite spontaneously impressions gathered during excursions in former years, and he has done it without recourse to any particular models of style or type.

The same kind of individual recording in a rather

free or unconventional pictorial manner may be observed in one or two other scrolls which, though not dated by inscriptions, may be placed for stylistic reasons at about the same time. This applies for instance to the relatively short scroll in the British Museum, which is said to illustrate a poem by Wang Wei called *The Haven of Tao Yüan*. The composition consists of views along a river bordered by mountain ranges in the background, while the leafless trees on the low bank in the foreground form a screen of fantastic silhouettes against the quiet water and the low-lying mist. The trees are twisted and turned as the result of storms and age, but their energy is still visible in their branches and twigs which seem to reach out greedily as if seeking more and newer life. The picture is accompanied by an inscription by Wên Chêng-ming, who calls it "a genuine picture by Shên Chou" (PL187).

The two last-named paintings mark a definite stage in Shên Chou's development as a scroll-painter; they transmit his spontaneous enjoyment of nature in a relatively free fashion and have an air of fresh and life-like beauty that is attractive.

The next dated example is the scroll in the Freer Gallery which was painted for a friend in 1491 and represents a philosopher in his study awaiting guests. One of his friends is walking across the bridge that spans the channel in front of the pavilion, another is arriving in a boat. The composition is rather traditional but beautifully balanced; the misty river view occupies nearly half of it and is painted in soft grey tones, while the other half is occupied by the rocks and trees around the pavilion. Instead of painting these in the free, pictorial fashion that would harmonize with the river view, the painter has elaborated the trees (and their leafage in particular) in an archaistic manner that makes them look more ornamental than natural. They remind us of the trees in Shên Chou's early works in the manner of certain North Sung masters, such as the album-leaves in the so-called *Chiu-tuan ching-hua ts'ê*, dated 1471. The painter must have found pleasure in displaying time and again his

excellent knowledge of certain old masters (Pls. 188A, 189A).

But in his mature years he was not dependent on any particular model and consequently some of his undated pictures are difficult to place exactly in the series of dated works. This applies to the charming scroll in the Freer Gallery which represents *A Fishing Village by a Broad River*; a relatively small picture but delightfully animated and full of interest. A number of fishermen are occupied with nets and fishing-rods; others are eating, drinking and revelling; there are cottages on the rocks, and there are boats, and a few trees. All these details are displayed against a background of open water between low banks and grassy hills. The horizontal extension seems boundless, but it is balanced and held together by the dominating hump of boulders and shrubs in the very centre which mark the point from which all these views are to be seen (Pls. 188B, 189B).

Continuing our review of Shên Chou's dated landscape scrolls we come to one of the largest and historically most significant specimens, which is dated 1497. The picture belongs to Mr. J. P. Dubosc in Lugano but was formerly in the famous collection of Wu Ta-chêng in Suchou. It measures almost 1000 cm. in length and 53 cm. in height. According to the title and the beautifully-written colophon by the painter, it was made as a record of the artist's excursions in the Hsi Shan region; he says that as soon as he returned home he grasped the brush in order to note down his recollections of his journey through this beautiful country. It was not done with any special artistic aim in view, but simply to perpetuate his own pleasure and enjoyment as he passed from place to place in a typical southern country of hills and rivers, and luxuriant vegetation and magnificent trees, noting the friendly habitations, the boats on the water and the people on the roads which wind along the river-banks. The motifs are mostly of a traditional kind and as they are not juxtaposed or arranged according to a strictly preconceived artistic plan, their succession involves some repetitions. This in conjunction with the

extraordinary length of the composition cannot but cause a certain monotony in the general tone of the picture (produced with slightly coloured ink) as well as in the very fluent and somewhat undifferentiated brushwork (Pl. 190).

Characteristics of this kind, which may be discovered in several scrolls of the type under discussion, have evoked varying opinions about the origin of these pictures. It has been said that such huge and rather indifferent paintings could not be the work of Shên Chou himself but may rather have been painted by assistants after the master's designs, a conclusion which in some cases seems almost unavoidable. There must indeed have been able imitators who could supply paintings in the manner of the master and with his signature (when he had no time or inclination to do the work himself), but it seems hardly probable that they assisted in painting records of his own travels or excursions. The very fluent and sweeping brushwork which is characteristic of a picture like this big scroll may be lacking in the structural quality, or pictorial beauty that we have seen in some of Shên Chou's earlier landscape scrolls, but this gives us no reason to refuse to consider it a personal work by the master. He, too, had no doubt his periods of fatigue, or he may not have found it necessary to exert all his artistic faculties when composing a large scale record of his journeys.

It would lead us too far here to discuss more than a few examples of the kind of painting mentioned above. One of the most convincing is the scroll in the Vannotti collection in Lugano, which is dated 1501. It is painted in a fluent style with slight accents of a soft brush, but the composition, which includes humped mountains, deep bays, wooded promontories and pavilions along a shore-line, is perfectly controlled, so that all the elements contribute to the impression of a reposeful evening view over a calm sea, with boats now lying still and geese flying homeward for the night (Pls. 184A, 185A).

Of the three scrolls which are reproduced in the album published by the Commercial Press (1934) one is dated 1502; the others are undated.

The dated scroll represents a river in autumn, or simply sky and water between two spits of land. The central section, which covers about half the length of the composition, shows not a single spot of ink: it is simply clean paper, forming a wide expanse between the head and tail sections which are marked by low spits of land sliding out into the water. The picture begins with two scraggy trees and some leafless willows growing on the shore-line, beside which is an open pavilion built over the water where a man leans out in contemplation of the wide emptiness before him. Only far away do some dark streaks in the water appear, shooting out like tentacles from the sharply silhouetted cliffs on the farther shore. But these occupy only a strip at the upper edge of the scroll, most of the space being left empty, or slightly tinted to suggest calm waters. That is all – a momentary impression of a quiet river suggested with the least possible display of material forms, in a manner which becomes expressionistic through the use of intervals or pauses rather than through the shapes delineated by the painter's brush. The picture is accompanied by beautifully written colophons by the painter and a friend of his.

The first scroll in this album, which is much longer than the one just described, represents a river view in Chiang-nan. The composition, taken as a whole, is rich and varied, but it also includes sections in which the intervals (*i.e.* the empty stretches) are just as significant as the forms depicted. These, however, are preceded and followed by other sections in which hills and mountains, leafy trees and bamboo-groves, rocky promontories, homesteads and simple huts, etc. fill up every inch of space. The manner of execution is here essentially the same as in the above-mentioned scroll of 1502, though somewhat heavier, with bolder accents or contrasts of black and white, which may indicate that it was executed a year or two later. The ink is abundantly rich but laid on with a fat or stumpy brush, a technique which brings out the structure of the forms rather than the pictorial atmosphere. The bulging rocks seem to be filled with potential force and throbbing life, the

vegetation in their crevices is overflowing; the trees are heavy, bending down under the weight of their long branches; the low huts and fences are indicated with a few broad lines, and the men who are standing or walking on the river-banks and the projecting cliffs are solid as if hewn in stone. All these elements, and the rocks in particular, are shaped by a brush which has the qualities of a stonemason's chisel and at the same time the faculty of suggesting the play of light and shade. One cannot but recall Li Jih-hua's characterization of Shên Chou's picture of Nan-p'ing shan in which he wrote: "It is painted with flowing ink falling in heavy drops just like Wu Chên's pictures. He also wrote a poem on it, vigorous and noble, in the style of Huang T'ing-chien. The old man was indeed a true lion in his writing as well as in his painting."

The writer evidently knew and understood Shên Chou's art perfectly. His mature manner was without doubt fundamentally akin to that of the Yüan master. But although his brushwork was modelled on Wu Chên, in his last works it becomes still more forceful and severe than in the Yüan master's "ink-plays" – the ink falling in heavier drops and the brush leaving deeper traces – and his simple poems sometimes reveal his undertone of sympathy with every form of manifested life which is so characteristic of the noble Sung poet. It may indeed be truthfully said that the older he grew the more the greatness of the man came out, his majestic strength, his creative genius and his mastery of the brush.

Wang K'o-yü wrote on a similar scroll by the master: "Old Shih-t'ien painted landscapes on long scrolls, of which this is one. His bosom was full of hills and valleys, wonderful as the works of the Creator, which he expressed with the tip of his brush. He reached limitless effects without any mental exertion."

Besides landscapes Shên Chou did many other kinds of paintings, for instance of flowers and fruits, birds and small animals, also still-life, but rarely if ever pictures of larger animals or human figures alone. Such motifs did not accord with the

inclinations of the poet-painters. It would carry us too far here to mention all the numerous pictures of flowers and birds by Shên Chou which have been reproduced; they are mostly of smaller size than the landscapes and their aesthetic significance lies mainly in the fresh and spontaneous interpretation of the individuality of the flower or bird. The earlier ones such as the Striped Pheasant and a Lily, and the Cock at a Rockery with a Gardenia-flower (both reproduced in *Min Shitauka*, pp. 11 and 12), are executed in a very careful style with rather light ink and a close imitation of the feathery forms. Wang Shih-chêng, the well-known critic of the Wan-li period, writes about such bird and flower-paintings by Shên Chou as follows: "From the time of Hsü Hsi and Huang Ch'ian down to Hui-tsung (of the South Sung period) flowers and birds were painted most wonderfully with colours and white powder; they seem to stand out in relief. They were done with the greatest refinement and looked like real living things. Shih-t'ien, however, used only light colours and thin ink, but could nevertheless give the birds an air of fluttering and moving. They were rightly said to be the most wonderful and true to nature"¹ (PL.191).

Among the pictures of birds with Shên Chou's inscriptions and signatures should be mentioned in particular the simple but very appealing representation of a turtle dove on the branch of a bare tree in the Ku-kung collection. The design has here the perfect balance of a Sung painting and the tree-branch as well as the bird are painted with a remarkably firm brush which brings out the structural beauty of the motif (PL.192).

The pictorial beauty of Shên Chou's brushwork and his faculty of suggesting individual character, even in a single twig or flower, stand out brilliantly in some of the smaller pictures in an album of flowers and fruits which is reproduced in *Min Shitauka*, pp. 23-29. The pictures represent Silk-worms on Mulberry Leaves, A Branch of an Arbutus-tree, An Egg-plant, A Branch of Persimmon, A Chrysanthemum Flower, Wild Tea Flowers and Narcissi.

They are more descriptive than those mentioned above, yet executed with a soft, swift brush which synthesizes the forms into broad masses of light and shade. The silk-worms are eating into the big crumpled leaves, which are bending under their weight; the heavy egg-shaped fruit hangs down from the drooping stalk among tattered leaves; the persimmons are fresh and full, small cushions swelling on the jerky branch which stretches across the picture like a symbol of rhythmic growth. According to the painter: "The frost has touched these fully ripe persimmons, they shine red in the sun. They have often been praised in poems, and their taste is indeed unequalled." (To which all who have travelled in North China and tasted frost-bitten persimmons will agree.) But further descriptions of these pictures seem quite superfluous, because their appeal depends largely on qualities which are not of a formal kind (PL.193). The flowers and fruits have fragrance and life, odour and taste, all suggested by a few touches of the brush, apparently simple and easy, but evidencing a penetrating insight and concentration which very few painters of the Ming period attained. We quite agree with the words of Li Jih-hua written on a picture by Shên Chou: "The freer and easier, the truer were his paintings; the simpler he was, the further he reached".

The very great admiration bestowed on Shên Chou by critics of his own and the following generation has been expressed in many inscriptions and colophons on his paintings. His fame has lasted through the centuries, even though it was for a while, at the end of the Ming and the beginning of the Ch'ing era, overshadowed by that of later men. The immediate impression made by his great personality had then faded, and other ideals had won the day in painting. Yet his paintings were highly esteemed, and the best among them have certainly retained their place in the foremost rank of Ming painting up to present times. One of the most eloquent characterizations of Shên Chou's art was given in a colophon by Hsing T'ung, a well-known

¹ *Shih-hua p'u*, vol. 87, 1, 13.

painter and writer at the end of the sixteenth century: "Ch'i-nan's style of painting was the highest of the time. In his large pictures on big scrolls the compositions are firm and dense, the ink flows and drops; nothing could be improved in them either by Heaven or by the skill of man. His paintings were

more highly appreciated in Wu-ch'ang (Suchou) than the works of T'ang Yin or Wên Cheng-ming. This picture is done entirely in the style of Tung Yüan. It is nearly twenty feet long. If it were placed in the boat of the two Mi, I am afraid that the dragon would grasp it and carry it away."¹

III

Suchou, the Great Centre of Ming Painting

There was no lack of talented painters in Suchou at the time; the city was fast becoming an art centre of leading importance, unrivalled even by the imperial capital where painting, in spite of all official protection, never struck such deep roots. Suchou's importance as a home of painting during the sixteenth century may be compared with Hangchou's importance in the time of the South Sung dynasty (1127-1276) with the difference, however, that Suchou had no imperial academy, only private studios. A number of prominent painters formed here more or less independent centres of artistic activity which attracted younger men. Suchou had already a well-established reputation as a home for learning and refinement, a place where life was peaceful and harmonious, aloof from all political turmoil; and it was chosen as a place of retreat by scholars, poets and philosophers, as well as by artists who had grown tired of their official careers and preferred to devote themselves to less lucrative but more congenial pursuits, such as poetry, calligraphy, painting and gardening. Many of the picturesque gardens of Su, some of them still to be seen, were then the meeting places of artists and poets, scholars and writers. There were to be found places of laughter and song, wine and beautiful girls, but also quiet hermitages and temple gardens where artists met their friends from the temples and listened to their expositions of Buddhist doctrines. Such

meetings are mentioned, as we have seen, in some of the inscriptions on Shên Chou's pictures, and there were other hermit painters, as we shall find, besides the more impulsive and gay and carefree who enjoyed life to the utmost of their capacities.

A history of the Suchou painters of the sixteenth century might indeed become a very entertaining contribution to Chinese art-history, but it would require more specialized studies than I have been able to devote to the material; I can only dwell on the leading personalities and mention those among their followers whose works are known in reproduction. It may, however, be recalled that an attempt at such a history was made in 1563 by Wang Chih-t'eng with his *Chronicle of Painting in the Wu Prefecture* (*Wu-chün tan-ch'ing chih*), a short treatise from which we have already quoted some biographical information. The book also contains a preface in which the author in flowery terms extols the artistic glories and natural advantages of his native city. It may be quoted here as an example of how the Suchou men themselves appreciated the culture of their home:

"The painters of Wu ever since the time of Ts'ao Pu-hsing, Ku K'ai-chih and Chang Sêng-yu have been numerous like rising clouds, and their art was always free, unconventional and wonderfully refined. Was this (flourishing of painting) caused by

¹ *Sin-hua p'u*, vol. 87, 1, 12.

the spirit of the sea and of the mountain ridges along the eastern coast, or was it a re-echo from the old masters whose style lived on and in whose influence later men were soaked?

"In the autumn of the *kuei-hai* year (1563) I lay sick in my study. Rain was pouring and streets were empty. I closed the door, loosened my hair, and unrolled the famous pictures in my possession. The walls became crowded, one picture hanging over another. They were painted either in colours or in ink, brilliantly fresh and vigorous; some represented bamboos in light mist, some, flowers and trees under a clear sky, others represented stones which looked like clouds, or rivers which seemed to move. The figures of men and devils reflected the secrets of the human and the spirit world, the birds and insects seemed to be flying and wriggling. All these pictures made me aware of the fact that this country had been made famous by its numerous men of talent, and I realised the ceaseless efforts of these artists. Therefore when I grasped the brush I limited myself to the men of Wu and started with the present dynasty, of which I have transmitted some records for future generations."

The treatise itself is quite short and contains biographies of only a few of the Suchou artists divided into the four traditional classes: in the first, i.e. *Shên-p'in*, are placed Shên Chou, together with his father, his uncle, and his friend Tu Ch'ung. The second, *Miao-p'in*, includes Sung K'o, T'ang Yin, Wên Chêng-ming with his son and nephew, and Chang Ling; the third, *Nêng-p'in*, includes Hsia Ch'ang and his brother beside Chou Ch'ên and Ch'iu Ying; and the fourth, *I-p'in*, Liu Ch'üeh, together with Ch'ên Shun and his son. In addition to these are mentioned a few men who were not born in Suchou, but who settled there for some time, the most important among them being Chao Tso. The biographical notes are quite short, except in the case of a few of the very prominent men, when the notes become redundant with superlative praise. It can only be regretted that the author, who must have been familiar with the lives and works of

his fellow-citizens, did not take the trouble to leave us more detailed information about them.

We have already had occasion in the biography of Shên Chou to note some of the prominent men, artists, and scholars, who formed the circle of his friends. Well known among them was Wu K'uan, *tsü Yüan-po* (1435-1504), at one time president of the Board of Rites, but skilled also as a poet, painter and calligrapher. A tall river view with overhanging cliffs and three men in a boat which he painted in 1470, according to the signature, may be said to contain some reminiscence of Shên Chou's earlier works, though in a somewhat shadowy transcription.¹ Another former official of great reputation as a writer and calligrapher was Li Ying-chêng, *tsü Chêng-po* (1431-1493); he had served as vice-president of the Board of War, Tu Mu (1459-1525) was a prominent connoisseur of antiquities and a writer on geographical and historical topics after his retirement from official life. Wên Lin (1445-1499), the father of Wên Chêng-ming, was another member of the same circle. He served as a magistrate of Wên-chou and became known particularly for his skill in divination.

Chou Yung, *tsü Hsing-chih* (b. 1476, d. 1547), from Wu-chiang, was a somewhat younger man who reached eminence as an official as well as an artist. He is said to have received personal instruction from Shên Chou. According to the *Ming-hua lu*, "his style of writing was very refined and unrestrained, his landscape-paintings were vigorous and wonderfully dense; the far-off and near parts were brought out beautifully in layers and there was a harmonious reverberation of the life-breath". In his official career Chou Yung rose to be president of the Board of Civil Office (Li-pu) and tutor of the heir apparent; after his death he was given the posthumous title: *Kung-su* (Reverent and Respectful). Later critics like Ku Ning-yüan place him in a class with Shên Chou and Wên Chêng-ming, which proves his high standing as an artist and makes us regret that no works of his are known.

¹ *Nanju*, vol. XXX, in the collection of Mr. Kawahara (Kôrumie).

Among older painters who have been mentioned in a previous chapter may be recalled Tu Ch'ung, the intimate friend of Shên Chou, and Yao Shou, besides Liu Chüeh, whose death Shên Chou lamented in more than one inscription. But there were also outsiders, like Wu Wei and Hsü Lin, who were attached to Shên Chou by friendship, although they followed different currents in art and life and were mainly active in the imperial capital.

Shih Chung, *zhi* T'ing-chih, *hao* Ch'ih-weng (b. 1437, d. 1517), was a very original painter of the same generation, well worth remembering. Although he lived in Nanking, he also stood in friendly personal relations with Shên Chou without being directly influenced by the master as a painter. He followed his own course in art as well as in life, and must have been a rather peculiar man: "He appeared like a fool, though he was clever, and was generally called the Immortal Fool."¹ We are also told that he did not speak until he was 17 years of age, but that then he must have received a rather sudden illumination, since he became able not only to speak but also to write and to compose poetry. Several anecdotes concerning his strange life and habits are reported in the biographies, but they have little connexion with his artistic occupation except the following, which is related in the *Wu-sheng shih-shih*: "He once went to visit Shên Chou in Suchou, but did not find the master at home. When he came to the painter's studio, he saw some white silk hanging on the wall, grasped a brush and made a picture, but did not sign it with his name. The servant asked him to leave his name, but Shih Chung answered laughingly: 'When your master sees the picture, our spirits will communicate: there is no need to leave the name.' When Shên Chou came home he said: 'I have seen pictures by many men, but never such brushwork; nobody but the Fool from Nanking could have done it.' He ordered his servant to search for Shih Chung and to bring him back; whereupon they became intimate friends. The Fool stayed for several months with Shên Chou before he returned home. Later on Shên Chou went

to Nanking and stayed in the home of Shih Chung, which was called the "Tower of the Sleeping Fool" (*Wo-ch'ih lou*). His wife was called the Happy and Pure Taoist, and his secondary wife was called White Cloud. They both liked to paint small landscapes and were skilled musicians."

The end of his life was also extraordinary, as told in *Ming-hua lu*: "When he was 80 years old and felt that he was going to die, he asked his relatives and friends to sing, to start a funeral procession, and to lead him out through the Ch'ü-pao gate (in Nanking). He said it would be his funeral while still alive. But at the appointed time he passed away without illness."²

As a painter he is characterized in the same book in the following words: "He painted landscapes, trees, stones, and the like in a very free fashion. He did not adhere to the rules of any particular school, but expressed his own spirit." In the *Hua-shih hui-yao* it is, however, pointed out that he followed Fang Fang-hu and excelled in painting clouds and mountains in a light and free manner quite different from that of the common crowd.

A large mountain landscape in the Ku-kung collection is indicated in the inscription by the painter as an imitation after Huang Kung-wang and dated 1504.³ The high wooded mountain which rises in terraces above a misty gully and the small cottage where two men are seated in conversation are painted in a somewhat flaccid or flickering manner which has little in common with Huang Kung-wang's brushwork. The painter has evidently translated a composition by the Yüan master in accordance with his own individual style.

An interesting scroll-painting by Shih Chung belonging to the Boston Museum has been described in an article by Mr. Tomita in the *Bulletin of the Museum*.⁴ It is fully signed and dated in the year

¹ Cf. *Wu-sheng shih-shih*.

² Practically the same story is told of Wang Ê, who is also said to have arranged his own funeral and remained at his tomb until he died.

³ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XXXVIII.

⁴ *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts*, April 1940.

1504. The motif is beautifully indicated by the painter in his colophon, in which he writes: "The sky is clear; snow covers mountain and river. The myriad trees tower high; this is Nature's work. Alone and always happy to suffer poverty, this old man, moved to tears, records the divine picture." The old man referred to in the colophon is shown riding on a small donkey followed by a servant, huddling up in the cold air on the slope between the river and the sheer cliffs; a little farther away may be seen a boat by the barren shore and a cluster of small huts among the trees. The last section of the picture is practically swallowed up by the grey mist, in which two small sailing-boats are seen like dark streaks against the white background. The brushwork is most unusual, in parts almost like a transparent wash though with variation of deeper tones and some very effective black accents (Pl. 194). It is seldom that we meet a picture in which the forms are so completely transformed into purely pictorial values as here, according to the manner which was further developed by the impressionistic painters of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Another winter landscape by Shih Chung (dated 1506) belongs to the Museum of East Asiatic Art in Cologne; it is, unfortunately, in too bad a state of preservation to give a proper idea of the master's brushwork, yet interesting for its pictorial appeal. Here, too, the artist has described the motif in a poem from which the main part is worth quoting: "The snow is piling on the mountain; the year of the world is drawing to its close. The water freezes in the wintry river; a man is holding out his fishing-line. The wine is fresh; I would invite my neighbour, but now my purse is empty like my jar. The plum-trees open in the southern village and their twigs are full of fragrant scents. You must go out into the snow to pick the flowers, as said by Mêng Chiao in a poem he wrote while riding on a donkey."¹

The Old Fool was evidently also something of a poet, though his writing as well as his rather splashy picture bear witness to his over-fondness for wine

and also possibly to approaching old age and misery.

* * *

Among the men of the younger generation who were influenced more by the art of Shên Chou than by the scholarly circle of Wên Chêng-ming should be mentioned in particular Hsieh Shih-ch'ên, (*zũ* Ssü-chung, *hao* Ch'u-hsien (b. 1487, d. after 1567), whose art is known from a great number of large paintings. He was apparently more of a professional painter than most of the contemporary Suchou men and highly prolific as a landscape-painter. It is said of him that "he grasped the manner of Shên Chou but changed it a little; his brush was strong and he painted in a free fashion, sometimes also using colour."² The way in which he changed it is also indicated by Wang Shih-chêng, who writes: "Hsieh Shih-ch'ên did not entirely avoid the fault of minuteness and was not quite free from the manners of Tai Chin and Wu Wei."³ In other words, he had a leaning towards the Chê school, as had most of the men who were professional painters rather than scholars or poets, which from the point of view of the scholarly critics and aesthetes of Suchou may have been a weakness, but which does not make their paintings less interesting or important as works of art.

Hsieh Shih-ch'ên is said to have excelled in "painting long scrolls and large screens in a bold manner according to his own ideas, with an excess of spirit and strength but insufficient beauty and refinement", a characterization which again is coloured by the prejudices of the Wu critics.⁴ At least nobody could deny the extraordinary vitality of his art, the boldness and strength of his brushwork. Among his hanging pictures are some very large ones (more than 10 feet high), which might

¹ In the continuation of the poem the writer goes on to explain that the poet Mêng Chiao did not understand the proper use of certain characters. The remarks are, however, of no particular interest in this connexion and are therefore omitted here. Cf. The article by Dr. W. Speiser in *Oriental. Zeitschrift*, H. 3-4, 1936.

² Cf. *T'u-hui pao-chien hui-tuan*.

³ *I-yuan chü yin*, quoted in *Sung Yuan I-lai*.

⁴ Cf. *Wu-chêng shih-shih*.

well have served as screens, particularly when they were produced in series. The majority of his works are, however, minor pictures and scrolls.

The earliest dated one known to me is a short scroll of the year 1530, formerly in private possession in Peking, which represents a favourite motif, *viz.* Returning Home through Wind and Rain, in quite an original fashion. The composition, which follows the winding course of a river, is rich and full of variations; in the first section the mountains rise in huge bulging shapes with the water rushing down a deep gully; then the country opens out, the mountains recede towards the background and we have a promontory in the foreground occupied by a small farmstead among trees and within a bamboo fence. From here towards the end, the river broadens into a wide expanse of water on which are a number of fishing-boats hurrying towards the harbour. The wind is strong and rain is battering the surface of the water, the trees are shaken and torn by violent gusts, and the men along the paths, on foot or on donkeys, are bending low as they work their way against the storm. The composition has grandeur in spite of its relatively small size and it is pervaded through and through by the onrush of the sudden storm, which is reflected in every form, every element of the composition being gradually revealed and increased when the scroll is unrolled (Pl. 195).

Hsieh Shih-ch'ên is more descriptive than Tai Chin or Shên Chou in his representations of such scenery, though his compositions do not possess the structural unity and balance which we have found in the works of his predecessors. He painted a number of handscrolls, some of them representing actual scenes, while others seem to be more fantastic transpositions of those curving cliffs and rugged trees in which he specialized. A fine example of the former class is the handscroll in the collection of Mr. Walter Hochstadter in New York, which seems to constitute a somewhat free rendering of the Tiger Hill in Suchou. This is suggested by the combination of the temple and the beautiful pagoda placed on a mountain terrace which rises steeply above the

surrounding country. The identification of the motif is by no means convincing, yet the picture is distinguished by its intimate quality, no doubt based on actual observation. It is dated 1536, and painted with a lighter brush and more sensitive atmospheric tones than most of the painter's later scrolls, which are heavier and more compressed in composition. Half a dozen of these scrolls are shortly described in our List of the painter's works, to which the reader is referred. They all have merits in respect of stylization and sometimes a touch of dramatic intensity in the brushwork, but their pictorial beauty is often less marked.

The picture which formerly was in the collection of Prof. L. T. Huang of Yenching, is another interesting example of the painter's early style. It is dated 1535 and represents a river view in autumn. The foreground is here filled by a rocky bank where the water from the river beyond is dropping in cascades. Bare trees grow between the boulders and a bridge on high poles leads over the stream. Two pilgrims are walking slowly over the bridge towards the gateway higher up the mountain, and in contrast to all the rising lines of the trees and the mountains low spits of land stretch out over the illimitable expanse of water in the background (Pl. 196). The picture is remarkable for its structural balance and for the harmony of its soft grey tones, which suggest the cool atmosphere of a late autumn day.

Hsieh Shih-ch'ên's later works are seldom, if ever, as refined and attractive as this picture of 1535. His manner grows broader and more decorative with the years, which may also be a consequence of the increasing size of his compositions; and the tendency to repeat certain baroque formulas, for instance in mountains and trees, becomes more and more apparent. Sometimes the illustrative character is of dominating interest and the landscapes are merely scenery for the figures. This is true, for instance, of the set of four large pictures illustrating episodes from the lives of four ancient heroes who came close to death by starvation, painted in 1551 (in the

Seikado collection).¹ The main interest is here concentrated on the figures in spite of the quite elaborate landscapes, which are represented according to the four seasons through exhibitions of skill rather than of poetic sentiment. The twisting trees and curving cliffs in the Spring and Winter scenes have a definite calligraphic character which may be observed still further developed in some of Hsieh Shih-ch'ên's very large landscapes painted a few years later, in which the clouds hang over the ruffled mountains like soiled and tattered draperies.

One of the best examples of this kind is the picture called *The Four Old Hermits on Shang Shan*² (Pl. 197). The mountain is enveloped in heavy clouds from which the trees and the peaks emerge only in part. The forms seem to be gnarled or brought into a state of perturbation by a sudden earthquake. It is hardly possible to distinguish the humpy clouds from the creviced rocks and writhing branches of the trees. The same uneasy rhythm pervades them all. The painter seems to have felt a need to shake up the dusty world.

The frequent repetition of motifs according to the baroque formulas noted above may also be observed in Hsieh Shih-ch'ên's pictures of single pine-trees. He has represented them on a large scale, concentrating on the winding, scaly trunks and a few strong branches rather than on the complete shape and characteristics of these trees. In an inscription on one of these pictures he compares them to dragons: "Their sound is like the rattling of scales and fins; they talk together like heavenly dragons. As I play with my brush, clouds and mist arise, and it is as if thunder and rain were passing." The painter was evidently not lacking in imagination, but his means of expression were limited and he often repeated the same designs with slight changes under different titles.

Hsieh Shih-ch'ên is as a rule most attractive when he makes the least effort to elaborate natural scenery. His "Homeward Boat on a Snowy River" (in the Ku-kung collection) is a pleasing, minor representation of a calm river framed by snowy cliffs. The

characteristically soft and flowing manner of painting is suitable to the motif and the picture is made suggestive by its tone and atmosphere.³

The latest work by Hsieh Shih-ch'ên, with a date of the year 1567, represents huge mountains with a rich growth of trees and shrubs between winding streams and meandering paths.⁴ The composition reminds us of Wang Meng's works and consequently also, to some extent, of the contemporary *wên-jên hua*. It seems as if Hsieh Shih-ch'ên too had tried towards the end of his life to modify his style in accordance with the literary school which at the time dominated painting in Suchou through the numerous pupils of Wên Ch'eng-ming. But it was certainly not a mode which corresponded to his natural inclinations and ideals. He was by temperament rather independent and differed from most of his contemporaries, a fact also noticed by contemporary painters and critics. The following characterization of his art by the painter Hsü Wei⁵ is quite interesting in this respect: "The painters of Wu (Suchou) were mostly quite sparing in their use of ink; only old Hsieh used ink in abundance, to the great astonishment of his fellow citizens. But those who are like dwarfs at the theatre (*i.e.* too short to see for themselves) simply follow the crowd. Such people do not know whether a picture is defective or not; they do not understand that it is not the result of heavy or light ink but depends on whether the picture has sufficient life-movement.

"Chao Fei-yen (a courtesan of the Han period) was slender and Yü-huan (Yang Kuei-fei) was stout; the two ladies were thus quite different, and if their masters had changed places, they would not have pleased the men. But if a great connoisseur had looked at them from without (objectively), he would have had no difficulty in finding them both

¹ *T'ao*, pp. 315-318, and also *Kokka* 307.

² *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. X.

³ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XXXIV.

⁴ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XXIV. Another picture somewhat similar in style, called *Springtime in the Valley*, was in the Hagashi collection. Cf. *Omura*, I, 2.

⁵ From *Hsi Wên-ch'ang chi*, quoted in *Shu-hua p'u*, vol. 87.

very lovely. That is the way in which the ancients judged calligraphy, and still more, painting.

"Once old Hsieh came to Yüeh (Chekiang) and finally reached Hangchow. He gave me four or five paintings (on silk), all very vigorous. Then he went back home, and his work was ended. When I now look again at this picture, I cannot help feeling sad."

* * *

There were several other painters in or around Suchou who, like Hsieh Shih-ch'ên, started under the general sway of Shên Chou's art and then gradually developed in various directions. It may be said that Shên Chou's leadership in the field of painting became modified soon after his death by the influence of such prominent pupils of his as Wên Chêng-ming and T'ang Yin, two widely different artistic personalities, who did not confine themselves within the stylistic traditions of their master but continued along their own paths, which led in new directions. T'ang Yin, through certain of his works, particularly figure paintings, gave the impulse to a renaissance of what has often been called the academic school, whereas Wên Chêng-ming's scholarly personality and new transpositions of traditional landscape motifs opened the way towards the *wên-jên hua* (the literary school of painting) which became the general fold of the landscape-painters about the middle of the century. These two very different groups will be discussed in separate chapters, and we also treat a group of flower and bird-painters separately, although some of them, like Ch'ên Tao-fu and his son, might with good reason be placed among the immediate followers of Shên Chou, which is also true of Chou Ch'ên and Ch'ien Ku who will be introduced among the adherents of T'ang Yin and Wên Chêng-ming respectively. They all learned from Shên Chou, but since the master was gone and they worked in close personal relations with other artists who modified his standards, it seems most natural to reserve the discussion of their works to later chapters. Here may be added some information about one or two landscape-

painters who to some extent continued the artistic traditions of the Yüan masters in a way similar to that of Shên Chou.

Wang Wên, *tzü Tzû-yü, hao Chung-shan*, from Wu-hsi (b. 1479, d. 1576), is well recorded in *Wu-shêng shih-shih* and in the Ming History, because he attained eminence as an official as well as through his artistic activity. According to the account in the first-named book, he served on several government boards and was finally appointed to a position in a law-court in Kuangtung, and started, much against his own inclination and the hopes of his old father, on the journey to the south, "but when he got as far as the Hsiang River (in Hunan) he wrote twelve poems expressing his heart and sent in his resignation. He returned home to take care of his father and accepted no further official appointments. He lived on the shore of Tai-hu and did not visit the city for many years . . . Scholars and officials from every part of the country went to call on him, because they wanted to make his acquaintance, but Wang Wên wrote on his door: 'I am ill and beg to thank all guests'. When growing old he built a pavilion on Pao-chieh shan (the Paradise Mountain), planted bamboos, trees, and flowers, and arranged some watercourses and strange stones around it. There he used to sit alone, his hands folded around his knee, burning incense and reading the Book of Changes. When he felt happy and inspired he wrote poems and painted, and whenever he grasped the brush, he swept away all his weaknesses, soaked it in rich ink and painted figures, landscapes, flowers and birds reaching far beyond the narrow paths (of common men)."

The painted works by Wang Wên are not very common but they include figure paintings as well as landscapes. Among the former should be mentioned a scroll with the Sixteen Arhats in the collection of Mr. James Cahill in Washington and another shorter scroll in the Ku-kung collection representing a man making tea while his friend is writing on a long scroll. These pictures are painted in a rather neat linear style showing no connexion whatsoever

with the Yüan tradition, which evidently formed the fundamental element of his style as a landscape-painter.

This may be observed in two prominent examples in the Ku-kung collection, one representing a very tall mountain peak rising above a stream that is fed by rushing cascades. This very tall (over five feet high) design is executed in rich ink with deep accents in a spotty manner that leads our thoughts to Shên Chou's later works.¹ It is signed and dated 1552.

The other landscape in the Ku-kung collection is of a more common type but, according to tradition, it is a faithful representation of the beautiful spot at the foot of the Red Pool Mountain where the painter had built his studio. It is well shaded by rows of tall pine-(?) trees growing on the banks of the rivulet, but may be distinguished in part between them. The mountains behind it rise very high into fantastic, cloud-like shapes of the same kind as we have seen in Hsieh Shih-chên's paintings.² The tall figure who stands on the stone bridge that leads across the stream may well be the painter returning to his home from a walk in the woods (PL198).

The most interesting of Wang Wên's landscapes from a pictorial viewpoint is, however, the picture in the Seikadô collection. It is not a traditional combination of mountains and streams but a view over low marshy land, traversed by a river and enveloped by a misty atmosphere which is so dense that it almost obliterates the forms in the background.³ The leafy trees and bamboos in the foreground emerge like wavy plumes, and between them one may discover two small boats with fishermen and farther away the fishing hamlets on the shore, while the boats out on the river beyond are hardly more than faint shadows over the grey water. The whole thing is exceedingly light and vaporous, painted with thin washes and slight touches of a soft brush. One may possibly discover some connexion here with works from the beginning of the Yüan dynasty, such as Kao K'o-kung's misty landscapes, but the mode of representation is more descriptive and closer to nature. It is not a

vision but an actual view from the neighbourhood of the painter's home, Pao-chieh shan, as is confirmed by the signature.

Wang Wên may indeed have painted more pictures in the style of the Yüan masters, though none of them is known to us. A critic and admirer of his points out that "in his paintings he changed the manner of Ni Tsan and Huang Kung-wang; his spirit and skill were different from theirs. All the money he had saved he spent on buying silk. All his paintings were very light and free. There was nobody like him in the world."⁴ It may at least be admitted that he was a very gifted and sensitive man of the brush.

Chiang Ch'ien, *tzü* Tzû-chien, was the son of Chiang Sung, whose art was characterized in our discussion of the Chê school, yet he did not follow in the footsteps of his father, but formed his style after the manner of the Yüan masters and Wang Meng in particular, as may be observed in his mountain landscape in the Ku-kung collection⁵ and to a less extent in the small picture in the Vannotti collection in Lugano, which represents Old Trees on a River Bank. It is done in a rather free and playful manner, no doubt characteristic of Chiang Ch'ien, who, like several of these Suchou men, painted only to amuse himself. He never sold a picture if he could avoid it, although he lived in a ramshackle house at the Rainbow Bridge, which contained only "half a room". Once the local governor visited him and wrote on a tablet over the door four characters signifying: "The Mysterious Goose (Hermit) of the Eastern Sea".

Several painters active in the sixteenth century are mentioned in the records as followers of Shên Chou. Ho Ch'êng was mentioned in an earlier chapter; he started as a pupil of Shên Chou but then adopted the manner of Wu Wei. Ch'ên To and Chu Nan-yung

¹ Cf. *K.-k. shu-lua chi*, vol. XXXVII.

² *Ku-kung*, vol. XV.

³ *Kokka* 312.

⁴ *Ming-wên pieh-chi*, quoted in *Sung Yüan I-lai*.

⁵ *K.-k. shu-lua chi*, vol. XXXIV.

are also said to have followed in the footsteps of Shên Chou, but no works of theirs are preserved. The former, whose *tzü* was T'ai-shêng, lived in Nanking and attained considerable fame as a poet and landscape-painter in the Chêng-tê period (1506-1520); the latter, who came from Shao-hsing, served in various government positions and was finally, in 1580, appointed president of the Board of War. His landscapes, trees, and stones were painted after the manner of Shên Chou, but he also imitated Ni Tsan; "his art was pure and strong, quite detached from the vulgar".

Among later painters who carried on Shên Chou's style to the very end of the century may be mentioned Yü Hsi-lien, *tzü* Lu-wang, known through a rather cloudy and darkened mountain landscape (formerly in the Akimoto collection),¹ and Sung Hsü, *tzü* Shih-mên (1523-1605), who later on

became a Taoist monk and called himself Tsu-hsüan. He had a great influence on the younger generation and in particular served as teacher of Chao Tso and Sung Mou-chün. His pictures are not uncommon, but none of those which I have seen is distinguished by anything of particular interest beyond technical dexterity and a fair knowledge of Shên Chou's works and earlier models. He became famous in particular through his large views of the Hsiao and Hsiang Rivers, which he executed at the age of 76 (1598).² His earlier picture in the Ku-kung collection which represents Cloudy Peaks and a Waterfall in Autumn (dated 1583), is painted with a more sensitive brush and finer tonal values, but here, too, it is the adherence to a certain tradition of style rather than any individual features that makes the picture interesting. (Cf. *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XVIII.)

IV

Wên Chêng-ming and his Pupils

Wên Chêng-ming (1470-1559) was a pupil of Shên Chou and followed, to begin with, quite closely in the footsteps of the master, but as a personality he belonged to a different class and kept more closely to traditional lines in his artistic activity. While Shên Chou usually (as for instance in the Ming History) is classified among the "hermits", Wên Chêng-ming is characterized as a "scholar". He was a man of great cultural refinement and high ethical standards, who sought his models in calligraphy and also in painting among the masters of the Sung dynasty no less than among those of the Yüan period. The earliest account of Wên Chêng-ming's life is given by Wang Chih-têng in *Wu-chün t'ao-ch'ing chü*, the treatise published only three years after the painter's death. It contains the following:³

"Mr. Wên's name was Pi and his *tzü* Chêng-ming, but later on he used the *tzü* as his name and took another *tzü*; Chêng-chung. He came from an old and pre-eminent family of Suchou which for generations had produced officials. As a youth already, before he was 20, he showed remarkable intelligence and his fame reached the ears of noblemen and officials. He loved the virtues of ancient times, studied diligently and grew up as a highly refined gentleman. His fame as a calligrapher spread all over the country. As a painter he studied Li T'ang and Wu Chên and became gradually quite like them. He passed the *chü-shêng* degree and

¹ *Nanjü*, vol. 4.

² *T'ao*, pp. 334-337, belonging to Mr. Wang Chên.

³ Reprint in *Méi-shu t'ung-shu*, II (A) 2, 2.

became through recommendation a Han-lin *tai-chao*; but after some time he retired to his home. There he loved to wander through the woods and valleys and devoted himself more than ever to brush and ink-stone.

"His small pictures as well as his large scrolls are all of quite an original effect. With advancing years he became highly virtuous and perfect in his conduct, and aroused the admiration of everybody. Crowds of people brought him white silk for painting, so that it piled up like mountains, and there was a continuous bustle at his door. As soon as he had given out a small picture, thousands of people [*sic*] copied it, consequently the true and the false pictures (under his name) are now mixed up in private collections and on the market. There were at the time quite a number of people who tried to enrich themselves by the popularity of Wên Chêng-ming, but those who have keen eyes will be able to 'distinguish the fishes' eyes from the shining pearls'. Though he grew very old, reaching over 80, the brightness of his spirit did not fade. He used to sketch with ink and paper even by lamp-light, and, therefore, the collectors treasured his works like pieces of ceremonial jade.

"His son Chia and his nephew Po-jên continued his wonderful art; the former painted scattered bamboos and trees, the latter mostly large mountain landscapes; he held a prominent place among the painters."

More detailed information about the life of Wên Chêng-ming is offered in the biography in *Wu-shêng shih shih*:

"Who was Mr. Wên Hêng-shan? He was a man from Ch'ang-chou (Suchou), originally called Pi, with the *tsü* Chêng-ming, a descendant of the Duke of Hsing-kuo.¹ In order to avoid using the name of an ancestor, he adopted the *tsü* as his name and took another *tsü*: Chêng-chung. When he was sixteen years old his father, by name Lin, died while serving as governor of Wên-chou (in Chekiang). The officials who had served under his father collected several hundred taels as a contribution to the funeral

expenses, but Wên Chêng-ming refused to accept the money with the following remark: 'I am a fatherless boy, but I do not wish to stain the memory of the dead'.

"He passed the *chü-shêng* examination and devoted himself to further studies, but at the same time he played with the brush and ink and tried other arts also. The men for whom he had the greatest admiration were President Wu K'uan, Vice-president Li Ying-chên² and Mr. Shên Chou. He made friends with Chu Yün-ming, one of the Four Talents of Suchou, T'ang Yin and Hsü Chên-ch'ing.³ Wu K'uan and Hsü Chên-ch'ing were eminent in literature and poetry and also calligraphists; Li was strong in calligraphy, Chu a great poet and literary writer, Shên and T'ang great painters and poets, but they all considered themselves inferior to Wên Chêng-ming. In his *k'ai-shu* (formal style) he followed the two Wang; in his *li-shu* (model style) he followed Chung Yu (c. 1-51 230), and for his painting he chose Li Lung-mien and Chao Mêng-fu as models, attaining the greatest success in this art.⁴ In his poems he followed and surpassed the style of the middle and late T'ang period.

"He also prepared for a higher official degree, but when he tried to pass the examination he failed and only reached the *kung* (or *hsin-ts'ai*) degree. But

¹ The famous Duke of Hsing-kuo was called Wên T'ien-huang (1236-1282); he died in the defence of the South Sung dynasty.

² Wu K'uan, *tsü* Yüan-po, *hao* P'ao-an (1435-1504), poet, writer and painter, was one of the most prominent men of Suchou and rose to be president of the Board of Rites. Li Ying-chên, *tsü* Chên-po (1431-1493), was another famous writer and calligrapher in Suchou, who became vice-president of the Board of War.

³ The Four Famous Talents of Suchou at the time were T'ang Yin, Wên Chêng-ming, Chu Yün-ming (1460-1526) and Hsü Chên-ch'ing (1479-1511); the two first-named earned their great reputation as painters, the latter two as poets and writers.

⁴ In *Ming-hua lu* it is stated that "Wên Chêng-ming went in and out of Chao Mêng-fu, Wang Mêng and Huang Kung-wang and grasped also the brush idea of Tang Yuan. The most excellent qualities of his paintings are their spiritual tone and life-resonance. The best among them are narrow scrolls or small sheets." Quoted in *Sung Yüan I-lai*, vol. VIII.

through the recommendation of a high official he got a position in the Board of Civil Office and was made a Han-lin *tai-chao*. As such he collaborated in the writing of the History (of the preceding reign) and was liberally rewarded with money.¹ Two prime ministers, Yang Wên-hsiang and Chang Wên-chung, both very powerful at the time, wanted to engage him in their service, but he did not accept. After some time he resigned from all his official engagements and went back to his home town.

"There he simply amused himself with brush and ink. Crowds of visitors came to his door asking for paintings, but he only gave them away to scholars. When sons of old friends or relations in distress asked for his paintings he worked whole days for them untiringly. Other people such as provincial governors, prime ministers, members of the imperial family and rich merchants came to his door with gifts, but they did not even obtain entrance to his house. He was most particular not to establish any connexion with the imperial princes and the eunuchs and said that such was the law of the country. The reason for this (aversion) was his experience with Prince Ning, who once in the Chêng-tê period had tried to win him over with large sums of money (which he did not accept).² As the prince was shortly afterwards completely routed by the government (forces), everybody praised Wên Chêng-ming.

"When at leisure he went out for strolls in the beautiful country around the city, and wherever he went, people were anxious to receive him. When he was staying at home many friends came to see him; they sat together burning incense and sipping tea, while they discussed paintings and calligraphy or examined antiquities and strangely-shaped stones. Many of the old stories about the men of Wu were then told, which made the guests forget the time. Such was the kind of life he enjoyed during the last thirty years of his life. When he died (1559) he was ninety (eighty) years old. At the moment he was still writing an inscription on a tablet; his brush stopped

suddenly, and he passed away as happily as a butterfly. The people said that he did not die, but became an Immortal."

The biographical records make it evident that Wên Chêng-ming's life may be divided into three distinct periods: (1) His youth and period of formation, when he was living in Suchou, studying poetry, calligraphy, and painting under the guidance of such men as Wu K'uan, Li Ying-chên, and Shên Chou; (2) his middle period from about 1505 or 1510, when he was staying in the capital, serving as a *tai-chao* in the Han-lin Academy, occupied mainly with official duties such as the explaining of the Classics and the work on the dynastic history; (3) the last thirty or thirty-five years spent again in his home city and devoted mainly to painting. It was then that he reached the apogee of his creative activity holding, indeed, a leading position in the intellectual circles of Suchou, and considered not only as the greatest master in art, but also as the perfect gentleman. The great majority of Wên Chêng-ming's preserved works date from this last period between 1528 and 1559, when he had reached the highest point of his artistic development.

The historical records quoted above, as well as Wên Chêng-ming's preserved works, leave no doubt that he absorbed influences from many quarters and from time to time followed various masters of the Sung and Yüan periods without abandoning the guidance of his own genius. This is well expressed in a statement in *Wên Chia hsing-lüeh* (apparently a biography of his son)³ as follows: "Wên Chêng-ming was highly gifted by nature as a

¹ In the painter's biography in the *Ming shih* (*Wên Yüan*, v, 287), which is less inclusive than the above account, it is stated that Governor Li Ch'ung-sü recommended him to the state examinations and that Wên Chêng-ming, while serving in the Han-lin, also took part in explaining the Classics to the Emperor Shih-tsung, but as the Han-lin members mainly occupied themselves with competitive examinations the painter found this boring and asked leave to return home.

² Ch'ên-hao, restored by the Emperor Wu-tsung to the title of his grandfather, Prince Ning, headed a revolt in Kiangsi, but was defeated by the imperial army and beheaded in 1519.

³ Quoted in *Sung Yüan i-lu*, vol. VIII.

painter. He did not care about the ordinary way of copying and imitating, but whenever he saw fine works by the old masters he grasped their ideas simply by looking at them. His teacher was his own heart; he understood the spirit (of the old painters) very quickly and expressed their ideas . . . He was not inferior to the old masters." The statement may be essentially correct in so far as Wên Chêng-ming seldom, if ever, painted as close imitations of the old masters as Shên Chou, but it does not necessarily imply that he was a more independent or original painter than Shên Chou, simply that he was further removed from the Yüan masters – in time and spirit – than old Shên Shih-tien, who in some cases acted as an intermediary between them and his pupil.

If we, to begin with, focus our attention on the earliest dated pictures by Wên Chêng-ming, we are confronted by a group of three paintings all of which are inscribed with the date 1508. Two of them represent small mountain landscapes of a rather complicated type with massed peaks and deeply furrowed grassy slopes, i.e. the kind that is usually described as a derivation from Huang Kung-wang's designs, whereas the third is a rather sketchy *p'o-mo* study. It may not be necessary to describe them here in detail; the most important of these pictures is the small mountain landscape which is reproduced in *Gems of Chinese Painting*, I, pl.29. According to the painter's inscription it represents a view of T'ien-p'ing shan in Suchou, but the motif has been freely transformed so as to accord with the general type of Huang Kung-wang's compositions. The execution is distinguished by great refinement rather than strength, but the picture, nevertheless, and in spite of its small size, retains a certain grandeur.¹ It may here serve as an historical corroboration of the statement quoted in *Ming-shan ts'ang* that "Wên Chêng-ming combined the manners of Chao Mêng-fu, Ni Tsan and Huang Kung-wang."

Similar characteristics may also be traced in the other small landscape dated in the same year, but the reproduction of this picture in *Chung-kuo ming-hua*,

vol. XVIII, is so blurred that definite conclusions can hardly be based on it.

The third of the above-mentioned landscapes is something quite different; it shows no stylistic relation with the others. The picture forms part of the Abe collection in the Ōsaka Museum and has become widely known through numerous reproductions. It is also provided with poetic inscriptions by the painter as well as his friends T'ang Yin, Chu K'ai and Wu I, but executed in an exceedingly free, not to say loose, manner derived from Mi Fei or Kao Ko-kung. It looks more like the work of a highly trained master of the *p'o-mo* technique, a manner rarely used by Wên Chêng-ming. The only other example of a somewhat similar kind known to me among Wên Chêng-ming's paintings is the horizontal album-leaf in the Ku-kung collection, which represents a river valley with trees and pavilions emerging from the mist, but this picture is definitely marked as an imitation after Mei Tao-jên.² If the picture in the Abe collection actually was painted by Wên Chêng-ming in 1508, as stated in the inscription, it was something of an experiment tending to show that the relatively young artist was playing with brush and ink according to various technical methods without very definite individual accents. It was only as years went by that he formed a style of his own based on Li T'ang and Chao Mêng-fu no less than on Wu Chên.

The Wu Chên influence is most easily recognizable in some of Wên Chêng-ming's minor ink-paintings of bamboo, flowers and garden stones. The best among these are done in a brisk and forceful manner with a spirited brush that is full of life. Among the best examples of this kind of paintings may be quoted some of the bamboo studies in the album known as *Hua-chu p'u* and also the elegant Garden Rock with tall Chrysanthemums in the Abe collection in Ōsaka Museum,³ dated 1512 (Pl.200).

¹ The composition and the long inscription are repeated in a picture, formerly in the Piaccini collection in Tōkyō, reproduced on our Plate 199. The execution of this may be later.

² *Ku-kung*, vol.VIII.

³ *Sōraikan*, I, 30. *Min Shitaka*, pl.55.

the scroll of Bamboo and Epidendrum in the same collection,¹ dated 1519, and the undated Epidendrum paintings in the Musée Guimet. All these and a number of later pictures of similar subjects are a kind of *hsieh-i* or "idea-writing" i.e. fugitive impressions of tender plants in a garden atmosphere spontaneously recorded with well controlled brushstrokes. They are among the most appealing expressions for Wên Chêng-ming's individual genius, which at this time, under the guiding influence of Wu Chên, had reached its full *épanouissement*.

This is also recognizable in the large horizontal composition in the Ku-kung collection (dated 1519) which represents A Man Seated at the Entrance to a Mountain Gulley Listening to a Waterfall.² The picture may, indeed, make us recall some of Shên Chou's later works, but the design is somewhat more complicated and the structural definition of the rocks and trees more accentuated than is usual in Shên Chou's works. The picture offers furthermore some confirmation of Wang Chih-teng's remark that Wên Chêng-ming studied particularly Li T'ang as well as Wu Chên "and gradually became quite like them". This can be seen in the painting of the folds and wrinkles of the mountains with a squeezed brush (*ts'a-pi*) and in the sharp cutting of the rocks. Technical features of this kind are not so evident in Wên Chêng-ming's later works, which also indicates that they were not of his own invention but appropriated from one of his favourite predecessors (Pl.201).

Wên Chêng-ming's adherence to the Shên Chou-Wu Chên current or trend of style lasted through most of his life; it is evident in several remarkable paintings, executed during the thirties and forties and also particularly referred to in some inscriptions. Among these should be recalled the handscroll in the British Museum which represents a River Valley with Fishermen and Small Homesteads. According to the inscription, Wên Chêng-ming painted this in the fourth summer month of 1540 after a picture which Old Shih (i.e. Shên Chou) had done after an original by Mei Tao-jên (i.e. Wu Chên). He tells further-

more: "I had seen this picture more than thirty years ago and now I had an opportunity to see it again. The two gentlemen (i.e. painters) have both passed away, but this scroll is still surviving on the earth and gives me the feeling of the past in the present. I kept the scroll on my desk with the intention of making a copy which was finished within a month. But how could I claim to have done something as beautiful as (a work by) honorable Old Shih? Alas, 'as we (the present) look upon the past, so will the past look upon our present selves'; I could not but feel the truth of this while doing my work" (Pl.206).

Wên Chêng-ming's scroll may thus be called a duplicate copy or a third edition of a favourite picture, but it has, nevertheless, retained the fundamental stylistic character of Wu Chên's original. The two great Ming painters have evidently taken great pains to follow the Yüan master as closely as possible, not only in the rendering of the design but also by imitating the broad and fluent brushwork. This may not have served to increase the beauty or artistic significance of the picture, but it has certainly made it a rare and significant historical document for exposition of the interrelation of the painters here under discussion. The colophons by Ch'êng Chêng-kuei and Ko Chêng-ch'i bear witness to the interest evoked among later painters by this scroll.

Another shorter handscroll (in the Motoyama collection) which represents a river valley with overhanging rocks and trees along the banks, is also marked by inscription as an imitation after Wu Chên.³ The design is here quite simple and offers little of interest, but the brushwork reveals a close approach to Wu Chên's manner of painting. In other pictures we find that Shên Chou's transpositions of Wu Chên's ideas have meant more to Wên Chêng-ming than the original paintings of the Yüan period. This may be seen in such quasi Shên Chou pictures as A Flute-player in a Boat by a River (in

¹ *Sōraikan*, II, 54.

² *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XXVII (4 ft. 6 in. × 5 ft. 5 in.)

³ *Tsūn*, 290.

the Fujii collection)¹ and the Man Listening to the Rain among Trees by a Waterfall – which is dated 1544 – (formerly in the Yamamoto collection).² They are both typical examples of the Shên Chou style without reaching the level of his best works.

It may not be necessary to dwell here on further examples of Wu Chên's and Shên Chou's importance for the development of Wên Chêng-ming's pictorial style; it could be easily illustrated by a larger number of his paintings, but it seems more instructive to pay some attention to other artists or currents of style which also had a noticeable influence on the formation of Wên Chêng-ming's art.

According to the historical records quoted above, all the great masters of the Yüan period were of some importance in this respect; Chao Mêng-fu and Huang Kung-wang are mentioned as well as Ni Tsan and Wang Meng, though none of these seem to have had the same lasting influence on him as Wu Chên. Huang Kung-wang's importance is illustrated by two of the early landscapes (dated 1508) and may be said to linger in some of the later scroll-paintings but it never became paramount. Chao Mêng-fu had apparently some influence as a representative of the classic tradition; he transmitted certain principles of well-balanced illustrative designs which no doubt appealed to the scholarly painter and brilliant draughtsman. This influence is most marked in some of Wên Chêng-ming's coloured *kung-pi* work, as will be noticed in some examples mentioned in the following.

Ni Tsan and Wang Meng are both mentioned in the inscriptions on paintings, from which it becomes evident that Wên Chêng-ming studied them no less assiduously than he studied Wu Chên, yet it must be admitted that he did not stand in the same natural and intimate relationship to them as, for instance, Shên Chou or Wang Fu did. Their individual temperaments or aesthetic approach had few, if any, points of contact with Wên Chêng-ming's artistic personality.

The spirit of Ni Tsan's art, which finds its typical

expressions in the quiet river views with a few spare trees and thatched pavilions on low spits of rocky shores, has inspired Wên Chêng-ming to at least two characteristic paintings entitled Spring in Chiang-nan, one in the Ku-kung collection, dated 1547,³ and the other, in private collection, dated 1558.⁴ The two pictures are not very much alike, the first being a rather delicate view illustrative of the freshness of early spring with budding trees on the shores and a fisherman in his boat, while the latter, which represents a view over a river divided into sections by bare rocky spits (beside the spare trees in the foreground), is a more severe, not to say austere, painting. It is evidently one of the master's latest works, as is also testified by the inscriptions, which consist of poems by Ni Tsan and Wên Chêng-ming transcribed by the sons of the latter, i.e. Wên Chia and Wên P'êng (dated 1558). The stylistic adherence to Ni Tsan is obvious, though it must be admitted that the transcription does not contain much of the Yüan master's spirit.

An earlier and more important example of Wên Chêng-ming's studies of the unattainable Ni Tsan is the landscape of the year 1530 which is now in the Museum in Shanghai(?).⁵ It consists really of two almost equal portions: a river view with some spare trees and low thatched buildings on flat spits of land and, beyond this, a high mountain with a rushing stream dominating the whole. The lower part is an excellent variation on a typical Ni motif but the effect of it is not improved by the somewhat oppressive mountain that covers a large portion of the background.

In other pictures such as the short handscroll in the Chicago Art Institute called Autumn in the Mountains, Wên Chêng-ming has introduced Ni Tsan's lanky trees, rocky ledges and low open houses in freer combinations, yet perfectly recognizable. The picture is executed in a rather hasty spontaneous

¹ Ibid. 291.

² Ibid. 296.

³ *K.-k. shu-hui chi*, vol.IV; London Exhibit. Cat.1275.

⁴ *Sōgen*, 117; Collection Yüan Shun-ch'u.

⁵ Cf. *Gems of Chinese Painting*, vol.I, p.30.

manner, probably at a relatively advanced period; the single elements are obviously borrowed from Ni Tsan but rendered without a very intimate grasp of their import.

During his later years Wên Chêng-ming quite often returned to such motifs as withering and scraggy old trees, but they are never as spare and thin as the trees in Ni Tsan's paintings. The motif did not have for him the undertone of loneliness and autumn chill so often suggested by Ni, but is elaborated with a forcefulness and intricately decorative beauty which make some of these tree-studies by Wên Chêng-ming deeply significant.

The references to Wang Mêng and pictorial records of his art may not be so frequent and obvious in Wên Chêng-ming's *œuvre* as the evidences of his studies of Ni Tsan, yet there are at least two important pictures which, according to the inscriptions, were executed after originals by Wang Mêng, besides a few others in which stylistic elements from the same source may be observed. All these specimens in which the Wang Mêng influence is noticeable are from the middle or late period of the master when he had formed his own manner but, nevertheless, absorbed new elements of style and technique when he met with some inspiring model.

The earliest of these examples is the very tall and narrow picture dated 1535 in the Ku-kung collection,¹ which represents a steep, deeply folded and furrowed mountain slope with clumps of trees and shrubs growing in the fissures, and a pavilion at the foot. The composition is rich in fine details but rather compressed, which makes it difficult without close study to distinguish the winding mountain stream leaping in cascades from terrace to terrace, the innumerable crevices in the mountain side, the small pavilions at various heights, and the minute figures. They are all executed with the utmost care and precision in ink only; the whole thing is more like a large engraving than a painted composition, and though the "dragon-veins" of Wang Mêng may still be discernible in the general pattern, they have lost their innate strength.

The other picture on which the inscription refers to a model by Wang Mêng is dated 1545; it was formerly in the Yamamoto collection and may still be in Japan.² The composition is more open and spacious, it is called *Dwellings in the Mountains* and represents a number of small homesteads on the successive terraces of a split and wooded mountain which rises to the upper edge of the picture. It is executed in a rather bold Wang Mêng fashion, the modelling of the overhanging rocks and clumps of trees is very effective in a pictorial sense and (to judge by the reproduction in *Min Shitaike*, pl. 48) heightened with colour, thus conveying an impression which seems more akin to Wang Mêng than to Wên Chêng-ming. He has here rendered not only the pattern or design of a typical Wang Mêng landscape, but also something of its pith and marrow.

Among other pictures in which a similar approach to Wang Mêng is to be observed may be mentioned the landscape in the Saito collection which represents three or four small pavilions on poles built across a stream in a deep gulley between grassy slopes,³ and, furthermore, the picture in private possession in China called *Verdant Peaks of the Lung-ch'ih Mountains*, which is dated 1554,⁴ and one formerly in the Yamamoto collection dated 1541, in which a cascading winding stream is again the central motif.⁵ Here Wang Mêng is again mentioned as the immediate model; in the two other pictures his style and manner are paramount without mention of the master's name. The most impressive is probably the picture dated 1554 with its magnificent pine-trees shading the simple retreat at the foot of the steep mountain and adding grandeur to the atmosphere mystery which envelops the little man who sits along there meditating in the pavilion.

With the passing of years, as Wên Chêng-ming's genius grew more independent and sought the deeper significance of motifs or natural phenomena,

¹ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XV.

² Omura, *Bunjin Garen*, I, 30 and Kokkei, 516.

³ Tōjō, pl. 286; *Min Shitaike*, pl. 49.

⁴ Sōgen, pl. 116, Yüan Shun-ch'ü collection.

⁵ Sōgen, pl. 118.

he also moved nearer to the position of Wang Meng, coming to understand better and better the tremendous creative force of this great Yuan master.

It is indeed out of the question to attempt here a detailed description of Wên Chêng-ming's *œuvre*. His preserved works may not be more numerous than those of Shên Chou, yet they amount to nearly two hundred, and they are far more varied than the paintings which form the existing works of the older master. He absorbed influences from different quarters which modified his manner of expression, and his intellectual interest in aesthetic and technical subjects was evidently keen and active. Unlike Shên Chou he was a philosopher more than a poet, and in painting with the brush he expressed ideas rather than sentiments, even though the individual life-breath of his pictures is often appealing. A few remarks about some outstanding works by the master may serve to round-off the idea of his artistic personality.

One of the most original works by the master, executed in 1528, is the View of the Wu-sung River¹ (Pl. 202). The composition consists mainly of the broad river, an open stretch of quiet water which only at the very top is bounded by narrow strips of land. Two promontories which project into the picture from opposite sides divide the river into sections, but they are quite low and also seen at a distance in a kind of bird's-eye view. The main concern of the painter seems to have been to convey the impression of an immense expanse of water rippling gently, and he has rendered this with an infinity of very fine lines. The fishing-boats on the river are hardly more than a few curving strokes of the brush, the farther promontory and background shore little more than undulating silhouettes. Only on the promontory in the foreground are the trees and pavilions rendered with more detail, though still in a very subdued tone with no strong contrasts. The picture is executed in the *kung-pi* manner, but what gives it artistic significance is the atmosphere, the far-reaching spaciousness of the whole thing. Here

one may realize what the critics had in mind when speaking of Wên Chêng-ming's "spiritual tone": something very faint, yet perceptible, suggested by light touches of the brush.

The picture is provided with three poetic inscriptions, one by the artist himself, one by his pupil Wang Ku-hsiang, and one by the emperor Ch'ien-lung. Wang Ku-hsiang informs us that it was painted in the *wu-tzu* year, i.e. 1528, for a man called Ch'ên Hsi-chiang, and he wrote his colophon thirty years later. Wên Chêng-ming's own poem is interesting as a description of the motif:

"Look in the distance and see how the waters of the Wu-sung are flowing. Thatched huts line the river-banks. As I lie on my couch I see blue mountains mirrored in water. The sun is setting; it gleams on the waves and fills the fishermen's boats. Along the beaches there are withering reeds and rushes. It is like a view of dream-land seen in the mirror of autumn. The hermits are boiling their drink of red reed-shoots; their minds are at peace, and they feel as free as the sea-gulls."

The Twin Pavilions, a somewhat smaller picture of the same period, is a more intimate illustration, probably recording a meeting of the artist with three of his friends; they are seen in the open bamboo pavilion below a projecting cliff.² The poem was written in 1528 by a man called Wang Chün-lu, probably on the very occasion of the meeting here illustrated, but Wên Chêng-ming only copied it six years later onto his picture, which, he says, was then old.

A similar motif is represented in a small picture in the Ku-kung collection with an inscription dated 1531. The low thatched pavilions are here sheltered by a large pine and some leafy trees growing on the border of a small stream.³ Two men are seated at the low table in the open pavilion sipping their tea; and

¹ Tōbō, p. 295.

² Ōmura, *Bunjin Gassen*, II, 2.

³ K.-k. *shu-hua chi*, vol. XXXVII. The same composition with slight differences is repeated on a larger scale in a picture in the Ueno collection, dated 1546, which is inferior in quality. Cf. *Min Shuika*, p. 49.

here we need have no hesitation as to the autobiographical character of the motif, it is explained by the artist in a colophon at the top of the picture in which he says: "In the *hsin-mao* year of the Chia-ching epoch (1531), when the tea on the mountains was most abundant, Lu Tzū-chuan, Shih-tao, came to see me. I drew some water from the well; we made it boil and sipped the tea. It was a moment of pure delight" (Pl.203).

Among the various pictures of the same period, related to the above in style and partly also by their motifs, may be mentioned one in the Ku-kung collection, another in the Vannotti collection in Lugano, and a third in private possession in China; the two last are dated 1531, while the first may be included in the group on stylistic grounds.¹ In this two scholars are seated on a veranda outside a little house in the shade of some beautiful trees. It is like a scene on a summer day when the trees and the bamboos have reached their full luxuriant growth. The poem was added on it thirty years after its completion (without date).

That is also true of the exquisite little picture in the Vannotti collection called *A Farewell* (Pl.205). The two gentlemen are here seated on a stone bench beside old trees under which their servants are visible. The three or four different kinds of trees are minutely characterized by their foliage; the trunks and branches are drawn with the utmost exactitude, and with fine lines which give them more likeness to etchings than to ordinary paintings; the colours are exceedingly thin and light, almost transparent, and completely fused into the drawing instead of being spread in washes. The third of the above-mentioned paintings, which is dated in the same year, is a similar study of trees, but without any human figures.²

In all these pictures may be traced elements of the refined style that was used with great success by such academicians of the Sung period as Liu Sung-nien and Chao Po-chü and transmitted by Chao Mêng-fu in some of his most academic compositions. There can be little doubt that Wên Chêng-ming had a great admiration for the Nestor of the Yüan

painters, who also was considered as the best model in calligraphy, though his name does not appear, as far as I know, in any of Wên's inscriptions. A natural correspondence might indeed have prevailed between the two masters; they were both highly cultured and dignified scholars with marked inclination towards classic traditionalism.

This may, however, be more evident in certain works by Chao Mêng-fu than in those of Wên Chêng-ming, which, as a rule, have a more intimate character and are more remarkable for refinement than for decorative effect. Wên Chêng-ming's approach to the quasi-academic mode that was transmitted by Chao Mêng-fu seems only tentative and often mitigated by the romantic atmosphere of the landscapes. This may be observed in the very charming small picture in the Ku-kung collection, called *Talking with a Guest in a Pavilion by a Mountain Stream*,³ whereas the more imposing larger picture which represents *A Scholar's Cottage in Autumn* is a more academic product, impressive through its strongly accentuated structural design and effective colouring.⁴ It is dated 1531, and as such an interesting historical document; and has, furthermore, a poetic inscription in which the master explains how human friendship and scholarly enjoyment of an autumn in the mountains have inspired the picture: "The colour of the mountains all around is fresh and blue. The shadows are transparent and the evening cool. South of the stream the autumn spreads its beauty. With tardy steps I walk across the bridge" (Pl.204).

Several of Wên Chêng-ming's most beautiful landscapes were produced in the latter part of the thirties and early forties; they represent his mature art in which elements from the Yüan masters are absorbed and recast in an individual style which is more structural than the manner of any of his predecessors, and yet rich in pictorial beauty and tonal

¹ *K-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XXIX.

² *S'gen*, p. 121. Wang Huang-chüan collection.

³ *K-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XXIII.

⁴ The picture was 1935 in private possession in China, its present place of preservation is unknown to me.

values in harmony with the human sentiments and memories which form the starting point and nucleus of so many of his motifs.

The picture in the Ku-kung collection called *Luxuriant Pine-trees and Clear Springs* (dated 1542) is one of the most attractive among those pictures which seem like mirrors reflecting the moods of human beings.¹ The man who is seated on the terrace under the magnificent trees has put away the *ch'in* and is looking into the water as if listening. His companion sits quite silent, steeped in meditation. It is a scene which the emperor Ch'ien-lung has well described in his poem: "He has put away the *ch'in* for he has played what was in his heart, and is listening to the stringless music of the water. Sitting in the shade of luxuriant trees, he faces his friend in silence. They do not speak of vulgar things, but only of the past, like friends, who of old were wont to gather on the grass" (PL207).

The landscape dated 1534, in private possession in China, which is called *Talking of the Past by Candle-light*² is a rather unusual picture of more austere appearance. Here we see several friends gathered in a hut under some tall leafless trees. The mountains are bare, the atmosphere is grey and chilly, the small figures are huddling together in the hut. The artist described the situation in a poem ending up as follows:

"No autumn water is as clear, no winter night as long, as is our friendship.
It seemed too much for me to say farewell once more.
Yet when the morning came and all the cocks were calling, each one beyond its wall, I had to go."

To this the artist has appended the following note: "I visited Mr. Ts'ung-lung and passed the night in his west study. We had been separated for a long time, but now we sat together all through the night speaking of the past without noticing the flight of time. I wrote this picture and the poem as a record of the occasion."

Wên Cheng-ming, like so many others of the "romantic" or "literary" landscape-painters of the Yüan and Ming periods, felt the strongest attraction towards quiet autumn views with bare trees and a chill in the air. He has painted such views over and over again, sometimes with a poet alone in the forest listening to the silence,³ or meditating in his study, or with a fisherman seeking shelter on the shore from drizzling rain.⁴ Winter views, on the contrary, are exceptional; I know only two or three of them, and they cannot be counted among the painter's better works.

The delightful summer landscapes and intimate illustrations of friendly gatherings, which hold an important place among the painter's earlier works, become more and more rare towards the end of his life, and when they appear, for instance in the illustration of T'ao Yüan-ming in his study in the chrysanthemum garden, dated 1544, they are done in a rather dry manner.⁵

On the other hand the drab views of bare hills and old trees become more frequent and imbued with meaning. The picture, dated 1545 (formerly in the Yamamoto collection), which is called *Listening to the Rain in a Boat by the Shore*,⁶ is an excellent example of these. The boat is moored under a rugged old tree on the river bank; the man is seeking shelter in the straw cabin; a flock of wild geese is settling on the farther shore and the hills rise bare and desolate over low mist. The very monotony of this simple view conveys a strong impression of the chill and loneliness of late autumn and may indeed be said to possess more of the "reverberation of the life-breath" than any of the spring views.

Wên Cheng-ming's development as a painter and the influences that he absorbed from various sources during successive periods of his artistic activity may

¹ K.-k. *shu-hua chi*, vol. XXXVI.

² *T'ao*, p. 293.

³ Cf. K.-k. *shu-hua chi*, vol. XXXVII (1545).

⁴ Cf. *T'ao*, p. 294.

⁵ *T'ao*, p. 294. Private collection in China.

⁶ *T'ao*, p. 283.

be followed through a series of paintings in which he treated practically the same motif with certain stylistic modifications. We can only note a few points referring to one or two of the most characteristic features.

The majority of Wên Chêng-ming's landscapes might, for the purpose of a general survey, be divided into two groups, one comprising pictures in which the human element predominates over the scenery and attracts the main interest, the other consisting of pictures in which the human element does not dominate but melts into the landscape, emphasizing more or less the mood of nature reflected in the picture. To the former group belong most of the pictures representing scholars' gardens with thatched huts for meditation and tea-drinking, or mountain retreats with scholars "talking of the past by candle-light", or writing poems. These pictures, which begin about 1520 and are called by many names, such as *The Study in Green Shade*, *Receiving Friends*, *Drinking Tea*, etc., culminate, so to speak, in the verdant and truly picturesque garden landscape in the Ku-kung collection known as *Tu-lo yüan* (*The Garden of Solitary Pleasure*) painted in 1558 as a kind of free pictorial transposition of Ssü-ma Kuang's essay and Su Tung-p'o's poem on the same subject (Pl.208).

The pictures of the second group seldom, if ever, represent garden views, they have no pavilions, no places for receiving guests or the like, and if human figures are included they are reduced to a single man, a poet in a still forest, listening to the sound of pine-trees, or admiring a waterfall; or a solitary wanderer who is disappearing in the woods, hardly to be distinguished from the trees. Among the early examples of this type may be recalled a picture in the Ku-kung collection called *Pine-forest and Waterfall*, which according to the inscription by the painter was begun in 1527 and finished in 1531.¹

The information that the picture was not done at one cast but at two periods divided by three or four years may account for a certain amount of dis-

crepancy or incongruity between the two main portions of the composition, viz. the grove of tall pine-trees in the foreground, and the very high overhanging mountain beyond, which strikes one as oppressive. In the lower portion, the pine-grove with the brook (where also three minute figures may be discovered behind the trees), the painter has placed a winding brook which leads our gaze towards the background. There, however, it receives a check from the above-said overwhelming mountain, which seems to be bulging and bending in an opposite direction, i.e. emerging out of the distance, thus counteracting or destroying the recessive impression arising from the lower half of the picture. This discrepancy may perhaps be taken as a sign of uncertainty or hesitation on the part of the painter who, as explained above, seems to have worked at the picture at two different periods (Pl.209A).

The problem here introduced, but not completely solved, might be observed in several paintings by Wên Chêng-ming; but since we have no occasion to illustrate them all, we shall dwell only on the most obvious result of the painter's attempts to find convincing solutions of the spatial problem under discussion. This can be seen in a picture in the collection of Mr. Ernest Ericson of New York, which is dated 1554 and represents *A Solitary Wanderer in an Autumn Wood*. The view here is through a grove of sparse trees along the banks of a meandering brook, and follows a narrow path leading towards a dim background behind the grove. The solitary man with the black hood is seen from behind; he is still at the beginning of his ramble but is walking on briskly along his clearly-marked pathway. Our attention is at once fixed on him, he becomes the living guide or agent who leads us, in our thoughts, through the silent wood and along the winding path towards the enticing distance (Pl.209B).

The painter has found a way of suggesting this receding movement more clearly and convincingly

¹ K-k, *shu-hua chi*, vol.XLV.

than any of the earlier great masters of landscape-painting in China. His solution of the space problem marked also a closer approach to Western art than we find in the works of other Ming painters, but this was not due to any influence from outside, but simply to the fact that Wên Chêng-ming was a remarkably intelligent and independent student of actual nature, who painted what he saw as well as what he thought. He was here stepping out from the traditional principles of Chinese painting, abandoning them to some extent in his attempt to introduce a more realistic or objective method of representing space. And in so far he was an innovator, a man who opened up new roads for Chinese paintings, though it must be admitted this was little understood at the time.

Wên Chêng-ming was not only a master of landscape-painting; some of his finest works are ink-paintings of bamboo and epidendrums, or bamboo and chrysanthemums with stones. The best early example is the picture in the Abe collection of bamboo and chrysanthemums by a garden stone (dated 1512), but a freer and more picturesque treatment of similar motifs may be observed in the short handscroll of 1542 in the Freer Gallery. During the thirty years which lie between these two flower-paintings the brushwork of the painter has gained a freedom and breadth which do greater justice to the essential life-breath of the motif.

Wên Chêng-ming was certainly an excellent painter of bamboo and flowers, yet there were others who could match themselves with him in this speciality. As a painter of coniferous trees he stands supreme among the painters of the Ming period. He has introduced them in many of his best landscapes, but he has also treated them as isolated motifs or in parts, *i.e.* has transformed sections or branches of such trees into decorative designs.

These trees are often called cypresses, but the name is misleading because they belong to other families, either *Juniperus Chinensis*, or *Thuja Orientalis*, two kinds of trees, both of which are

common in China and not always easy to distinguish from each other. They are generally very sturdy and enduring trees able to withstand storms and droughts through four or five centuries, and consequently highly venerated as guardians in the old temple courts and places of sacrifice to the protective forces of nature, and they also became favourite Chinese motifs. We find them in the works of many of the Yüan painters as well as in the ink-studies of Shên Chou and Wên Chêng-ming in which they are transformed into paintings of a highly specialized character. Judging by some of the still preserved juniper paintings by the two great Ming masters, they were particularly fascinated by the intricate patterns of the tortuous and entangled branches, symbols in their rugged and unbeaten strength of the spirit of man, like them condemned to wrestle perpetually with a hostile world.

It may be noted that when Shên Chou in 1484 transformed this motif into a picture (formerly in the Piacentini collection) he still kept rather close to nature and rendered the juniper crowns in shapes that may be observed on growing trees, but when Wên Chêng-ming represented the same motif in 1532 in the Seven Junipers scroll (in the Honolulu Academy) he emphasized the decorative stylization of the motif to such a degree that it became more like an abstract expressionistic pattern than a study from nature. He transformed the jerky branches and truculent twigs into shapes that suggest the snouts of horned dragons, beaks of fighting eagles or claws of raging gryphons grappling fiercely with each other, they continue the chain of movement, linking everything together in their frantic efforts to secure their hold (Pl. 210).

According to the inscription by the artist, he painted this scroll in the manner of Chao Mêng-fu, but whatever he may have learned from this great predecessor he has evidently absorbed and transmuted it according to his own creative genius.

In a shorter scroll dated 1535 in the J. P. Dubosc collection, Wên Chêng-ming has treated a similar motif in a more naturalistic way; he insists here

more on the refinement and freshness of the bushy tufts of leaves or needles rather than on the fantastic shapes of withered old branches and it has given him an opportunity to display a very high degree of technical perfection (Pl. 210, above).

In later years when he turned again to the thuja or tree-juniper motifs he conceived them differently, his main interest was no longer centred on any special portions or on details, nor on their decorative beauty or suggestiveness, but on their typical nature in their character as venerable trees. He has represented such trees in a number of his most impressive later works. First among these may be mentioned the large (6½ ft.) picture in the Ku-kung collection known as *Old Trees and Cold Springs*, dated 1549.¹ A whole thicket of junipers is here growing in front of a steep mountain wall watered by a stream that is whirling and splashing over their roots. With their dense branchery they are almost a jumble, yet they have a certain grandeur, and their branches balance a cascade of water falling over the rock.

The same combination of the trees with rocks and rushing water is repeated on a smaller scale in a somewhat simplified form in a picture now in the Yanaguchi collection in Ashiya. According to the inscription this was painted "as a play with ink" when the artist "was at leisure from occupations", in the day of the Dragon Boat festival in 1549. There is certainly nothing playful about this work, yet it has a freshness and strength that expresses spontaneously the mental attitude of the octogenarian master. The trees which rise in front of the mountain wall (more distinctly than in the larger picture) are bent and twisted by age and storms but, nevertheless, still expressive of resisting vigour, symbols apparently of the inner man who created them when "playing" with the brush.

Another combination of the same elements, in which the rock plays a more important part, can be seen in the Nelson Gallery in Kansas City. This picture has not got a dated signature by the master but it is accompanied by no less than twelve

colophons by friends and relatives of the painter, the last of them dated 1550, which also for stylistic reasons may be accepted as the most probable date of the picture. The composition may in this case be a free rendering of an actual garden arrangement of the kind that can still be seen in some Japanese temple-gardens (for instance Nanzen-ji). The rock is fantastically silhouetted, hollowed out by nature into an antediluvian animal head; the withered juniper stretches out its crawling trunk and twisted branches in an effort to cling to the rock and to follow its capricious cavities as closely as possible. Stone and tree seem joined in a death struggle – still undecided, though it has been going on for centuries.

A third picture (formerly in the Hiyoshii collection in Japan), which is dated 1551, shows two storm-beaten rugged junipers standing isolated on arid stony ground through which a small stream has cut a furrow. Its windings can be followed towards an unseen background; the horizon is low, the emptiness oppressively complete. The broken and withered branches of the trees stretch out like maimed arms lifted in despair towards the sky. The undertone of pathos which may be felt in several of Wên Chêng-ming's later landscapes has here found poignant expression (Pl. 211B).

A further variation of the same motifs as those described above may be seen in a small picture in Mr. Ernest Ericson's collection, which is dated 1556. Two intertwined junipers are here growing on the rocky border of a rushing stream; the background is formed by a high mountain wall laved by a thin cascade. The elements are the same as in the preceding pictures, but the composition is a little more spacious owing to the intersection of the stream between the trees and the mountain. The scale of these elements has been clearly indicated by the introduction of three figures (two scholars and their servant-boy with the *ch'in*), and in comparison with these the trees as well as the stream and the mountain gain in size and importance. The figures are very

¹ Cf. *K-ki shu-hua chi*, vol. II.

small and may seem insignificant in these surroundings, yet they are important as a kind of expressionistic symbol indicating the human relation of the artist to these austere landscapes which now at the end of the master's life became the most adequate expressions of his genius and his attitude towards nature and the world around him.

Compared with these late works much of what he did in earlier years becomes relatively insignificant from a psychological viewpoint. The lovely scenes from the poets' gardens and the mountain resorts of philosophers all have their attraction, but they are conceived and rendered in accordance with traditional patterns and do not reveal very much of the artist's individual mind beyond the poetic sentiments and scholarly enjoyments appropriate to the subject-matter.

Motifs of this kind were no longer the proper symbols, nor were they suitable means to transmit the thoughts and emotions of the octogenarian painter. The fundamental element in his later works is different from anything he had done before. They bear the impress of courage and resolution in the face of trials. A breath of life runs through them like that which warmed the old man's heart, pulsating through his veins like the sap of life in his rugged old junipers standing indomitable by their mountain streams, which to him became the closest friends and perfect symbols of his inmost nature.

When he finally passed away, at the age of 90 people said that he disappeared like a butterfly and became an Immortal.

* * *

No painter of the Ming period had a larger following or exercised a wider influence on the development of painting among contemporaries and immediate followers than Wên Chêng-ming. He stands in the history of Chinese painting as the central master of the long and fruitful Ming period, perhaps not necessarily the most gifted or brilliant master, but the one who by his character, his intellectual accomplishment and his artistic activity

represented the *chün-tzu*, the cultured gentleman of Chinese ideals. This was no doubt a reason why he became so highly appreciated among his contemporaries and so influential as a leader in the field of art.

Wên Chêng-ming had many strings to his instrument as a painter, but he knew how to attune them to harmonious resonance. He absorbed the essential elements of the great masters of the Sung and Yüan periods, he worked in various styles and technical manners in accordance with the requirements of the subjects and the moods of the occasions, and he also made new attempts to solve the space problem in landscape-painting, adopting a more convincingly naturalistic way than was customary in Chinese art. In other words, he was an innovator as well as a transmitter of the old, but in spite of it all and through the various phases of his continuous development he remained a singularly harmonious and well-balanced artist, and as such, an ideal teacher.

Wên Chêng-ming's importance in this respect can hardly be exaggerated, but a full account of his "school" or following would easily swell into a large volume and must consequently not be attempted at this place. Most of the numerous Suchou painters active in the second half of the sixteenth and at the beginning of the following century, were to some extent pupils of Wên Chêng-ming, though their individual importance varies. Only the most prominent among them can be mentioned in this general review of Ming painting.

Wên Chêng-ming might have quoted Chao Mêng-fu's well-known saying "all the members of my family are painters", and to this he might have added (with some intuition of the future): "their sons and grandsons, up to the fourth generation, will also be painters"; such was the sequence, or red thread of painting, running through the Wên family. The genealogical table established on the basis of various historical sources may serve to illustrate this; it contains more than twenty individuals who won a name as painters. They were all

more or less conscious of their position as upholders of an important family tradition, but only the first generation, i.e. Wên Chêng-ming's sons and nephew, can be said to have administered their artistic inheritance with success.

Painters like Wên Chia and Wên Po-jên had certainly had a thorough training during their years of apprenticeship with their father and thus gained great technical skill, but they interest us less as imitators than in their more independent works by which they reveal their individual gifts. A few examples of these illustrated below may serve to show that both had some ideas of their own as individual representatives of the so-called *wên-jên hua*, or scholarly painting.¹

The eldest son of Wên Chêng-ming, Wên P'êng, often called by his *hao* San-ch'iao, was more famous as a writer and calligrapher than as a painter. His name is found on many paintings but they are mostly works by other men on which he composed poems or colophons. Paintings executed by himself are rare and of rather slight interest as works of art.

The younger brother, Wên Chia, *tzü* Hsiu-ch'êng, *hao* Wên-shui, who was born 1501 and died 1583, was a more gifted painter though he did not start on his artistic career until later in life; his earliest dated landscapes are signed 1558 and 1559.² In younger years he served as a school-teacher in Huchou in Chekiang but was also known as a poet and greatly appreciated as a connoisseur and critic of

painting. He must, indeed, have been a highly cultured gentleman, characterized, however, by knowledge and refinement rather than creative genius. His works are all of a high class and some are quite attractive, but seldom, if ever, marked by a very strong individual character. If they did not have Wên Chia's signature it would not be easy to attach definite attributions to them.

The larger landscapes in the Ku-kung collection reveal close studies of Wang Meng's art. They are what the critics term "works of a real scholar" and painted "with an abundance of fine wrinkles", generally tall and narrow compositions crowded with wooded mountains full of fissures and winding paths, torrents and leafy trees, which leave no open spaces or breathing intervals. To describe them in detail is hardly necessary or possible because they give the impression of abstract patterns rather than of actual views of nature; in other words, they are typical specimens of *wên-jên hua*.³

Wên Chia's minor landscapes are as a rule more enjoyable as pictorial studies from nature, some of them being inspired by actual sites, while others are more imaginative transcriptions of motifs from nature. Among the former may be mentioned in particular the View from Shih-hu (lake) in which the contrast between the sharply rising rocky ledge along the shore and the open view over the limitless water has been brought out effectively in a broad pictorial manner; and also the striking view of Tiger

¹ *Members of the Wên Family recognized as Painters*

Wên Chêng-ming (1470-1559) 文徵明 and his brother, whose name is not known, are the ancestors of the well known painter family. Wên Chêng-ming had three sons; the eldest son was Wên P'êng (1498-1573) 文彭, the second son was Wên Chia (1501-1583) 文嘉 and the third son's name was Wên T'ai 文臺.

Wên Chêng-ming's brother had a son; this nephew of Wên Chêng-ming was Wên Po-jên (1502-1575) 文伯仁, the well known painter.

The eldest son of Wên Chia was Wên Yüan-shan (1554-1589) 文元善 and the niece of Po-jên was Wên Ying 文英. The eldest son of Yüan-shan was Wên Ts'ung-chien (1574-1648) 文從簡. The three grandsons of Wên Po-jên were (a) Wên Ts'ung-chung 文從忠; (b) Wên Ts'ung-chung 文從忠 and (c) Wên Ts'ung-lung 文從龍.

About this time there lived a great-grandson of Chêng-ming, viz., Wên Chêng-hêng (1585-1645) 文震亨. The daughter of

Ts'ung-chien, Wên-shu (1593-1634) 文淑 was married to Chao Hün-chün (1591-1640). Ts'ung-chien's son was Wên Jau (1596-1667) 文祚. Wên Ts'ung-chung had two sons; the elder son was Wên Ch'eng-kuang 文承光 and the second was Wên Shih-kuang 文世光. A contemporary was the great-grandson of Wên P'êng, viz., Wên Ting 文定.

Wên Ch'êng-hêng, the great-grandson of Ch'êng-ming, had two sons, viz., Wên Kün (Monk Ch'ao-kuei) 文果 (題額) and Wên Tien (1633-1704) 文慤. His son was Wên Ch'ih 文鼎. The son of Wên Jau was Wên T'an (1641-1701) 文揆. Wên Ch'ih had two sons; the elder was Wên T'ai 文泰 and the second was Wên Yung-feng 文永豐.

² The only dated work by Wên Chia before 1558 is a picture of Chung-k'uei signed 1548, in the C. T. Loo collection. The earliest landscapes are reproduced in *Ming-jên shu-hua*, XXIII and *Mei chun té-kan*.

³ Cf. K.-k. *shu-hua chi*, vols. XII and XXI.

Hill with the famous pagoda in Suchou which inspired so many of the contemporary painters to more or less faithful representations. In other paintings the impressions from nature are rendered in more conventional combinations and are in accordance with the Wên Chêng-ming patterns. This may be observed in the very attractive picture in the Ku-kung collection called *The Yin-chou Island* (or *Abode of the Immortals*)¹ and also in the beautiful picture representing a *Pavilion under a Luxuriant Tree at the foot of a Mountain* (in private collection in China),² which is dated 1578, and the landscape with a mountain cone and some tall pine-trees, painted the same year for Hsiang Yüan-pien.³ Practically the same compositional elements are utilized (though somewhat differently) in a landscape dated 1559 called *A Small Temple on Chiang-shan*,⁴ which may be noted as a sign of the relative monotony of Wên Chia's repertoire.

In contrast to these more or less conventional landscapes may be recalled a minor picture in the Ku-kung collection of almost the same date (1576).⁵ It represents the source of a river fed by a great number of torrents rushing down over a mountain wall behind some rugged pillar-like rocks (Pl. 214), and is inscribed with two poems, one by the emperor Ch'ien-lung, and another by the artist, who describes the motif as follows: "Blue water rushing from far away falls in a thousand streams; jade mountain peaks rising high in lofty solitude".

The poetic temperament of the painter has also found expression in other paintings of a more intimate kind, inspired by literary sources. The best known among these is the illustration to Po Chü-i's "Song of the P'i-p'a", which is copied at the top of the picture, which is tall and narrow.⁶ It consists mainly of an open stretch of calm water, bounded at the lower edge by some flat rocks with bare trees and at the top by a distant range of hills. Between these bordering strips there is a wide expanse of water suggested by the empty paper; the only spot in this bleak space is a small house-boat far away. The economy of means is carried to an extreme, yet

it must be admitted that the airy picture has atmosphere and a suggestion of deep evening calm. The painter was a poet as well as representative of the *wên-jên hua*.

Wên Po-jên, *tzü Tê-ch'êng*, hao Wu-fêng and Pao-shêng, was practically of the same age as his cousin Wên Chia (i.e. born 1502, died 1580?) and likewise a member of Wên Chêng-ming's artistic family circle, yet individually a different type of man. He had a great reputation as a painter (equal to that of his uncle) but was disliked as a personality because of his uncontrolled temperament. According to a tradition reported in *Wu-shêng shih-shih*, he often lost his temper and quarrelled with people, which made him rather unpopular. "Once in his early years he was brought before the magistrate by his uncle and put into prison. There he fell ill and was nearly dying. Then in a dream he saw a man in golden armour who told him that in a previous life he had been a painter who always washed and purified himself before painting images of Kuanyin Bodhisattva. By this he had acquired merit and would escape further trouble in his present life." He recovered and was released; and devoted himself thenceforth to painting in accordance with the family tradition, gradually becoming considered as the most gifted of all the members of the Wên family.

It may also be noted that the family tradition was successfully continued by three grandsons of Wên Po-jên: Wên Ts'ung-ch'ang, Wên Ts'ung-chung, and Wên Ts'ung-lung, who were active at the end of the Ming and beginning of the Ch'ing dynasty, more or less during the same period as Wên Chia's grandson, the painter Wên Ts'ung-chien and his children, who also are recorded as painters.

Wên Po-jên's dated paintings fall between 1526 and 1580; they are all landscapes with the exception

¹ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XVII.

² *T'ien*, p. 299.

³ *Nanking Exhib. Cat.* 135.

⁴ *Mei chun t'ê-kun*, p. 27.

⁵ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XXXI.

⁶ Abe collection, Osaka Museum. Cf. Kobbe 442.

of the very earliest one which represents Yang Chi-ching playing the *ch'in*.¹ It is an album-leaf of very moderate size, yet a striking portrait from life revealing a touch of human sympathy and a simple art of characterization that make us regret that no other portrait painting by Wên Po-jên has been preserved.

A good number of Wên Po-jên's landscape-paintings, those which have always formed the main foundation for his artistic reputation, are to be found in the Ku-kung collection; but there are also some remarkable examples in Japan (as may be noticed in our List), whereas his works in Western collections are few. The distribution may be observed as symptomatic of the fact that these pictures represent a type of painting that has always been more appreciated in the Far East than by Western connoisseurs, i.e. the real *wên-jên hua*, the kind of scholarly painting which ever since the middle of the Ming period has been very popular in China and Japan. The formal origin of this kind of painting may be traced in Wang Meng's overwhelmingly grand and complicated mountain landscapes, but whereas these still had their origin in actual impressions or studies of the woods and gorges where the painters as well as the monks and hermits loved to dwell, the *wên-jên hua* reflected such motifs in more abstract transpositions which had less connexion with objective nature than with the imaginative world of the painters. Their popularity and consequent development was connected with the idea that they offered effective substitutes for the enjoyment of nature; the contemplation of such pictures could give the scholar the same inspiration as an excursion among the wildest and most distant mountains. It was a period when the scholar's life became more and more withdrawn from reality, and if art could supply corroborating evidence, it had fulfilled its purpose (Pl. 216).

It seems useless to attempt any closer description of these tall and narrow landscapes, because even though they are called by different names, e.g. The Abode of the Immortals, or A Temple Hidden in

Autumn Mountains, they are all so rich in details and intricate in their patterns of creviced rocks, winding streams and luxuriant trees that no descriptions would do justice to their designs; it can only be noted that from a technical point of view they represent a rare degree of perfection. They are sometimes executed not in ink only but with additional light transparent washes of pink or greenish tones which serve to suggest the airiness of distant dreamlands.

Besides these lofty mountain landscapes, where one could ramble for hours along the winding roads; Wên Po-jên painted also river views of similar vertically elongated proportions, which to no small extent are filled with long stretches of calm water. One of the best examples of this type is the picture (in the Ku-kung collection) of Fang-hu Island, which is seen in bird's-eye view from above, as is also the rippled water that extends to the upper as well as the lower edge of the picture (without any indication of a horizontal extension).²

Another and rather more successful rendering of a similar river view forms part of the famous series called "*Ssü wan*" (now in the National Museum in Tōkyō), a title composed of the words "four" and "ten thousand", because the pictures represent the four seasons by a very rich display of such phenomena of nature as might be considered characteristic of their respective seasons. Spring is rendered by ten thousand gulleys and pine-trees; summer by ten thousand luxuriant bamboos along the banks of a broad river; autumn by a limitless stretch of billowing water; winter by numberless peaks in snow rising above a frosty river. The pictures have all inscriptions by Tung Ch'i-ch'ang besides the painter's signature; one of them is dated 1551³ (Pl. 217).

The two mountain landscapes (Spring and Winter) are typical *wên-jên hua*; the summer picture is a delightful suggestive study of bamboos in rain

¹ Ku-kung collection; reproduced in Nanking Exhibit. Cat., pl. 158.

² Dated 1563; reproduced in K.-k. *shu-hua chi*, vol. XV.

³ Cf. *Tōbō*, pp. 302, 303, 304, 305.

and mist; the autumn is a blank, boundless expanse of water in which slight wavy movements are indicated with faint billowing lines. The left corner at the lower edge is occupied by two rocks and a man in a boat, while the upper limit is marked by a low strip of land and a small mountain cone. The relative proportion and juxtaposition of these elements serve to give wings to the imagination and to carry the beholder beyond the formal limitations indicated with brush and ink sometimes heightened with slight touches of colour.

Wên Po-jên occasionally also did minor paintings of a more spontaneous kind, which are interesting as reflexions of his individual temperament, such as the little picture representing the West Mountain on the Tung-t'ing Island. The picture is like a delicate pen-drawing and it is accompanied by poetic inscriptions by six contemporary artists, so that it is at the same time a document of friendship and an illustration of the convivial gatherings of these men in the studios at Suchou. The poems are signed by the two cousins of the artist, Wên P'êng and Wên Chia, and by the painters Wang Ku-hsiang, Lu An-tao, Lu Chih, and Hsieh Shih-ch'ên, the last signature being accompanied by the date 1559. It may not be necessary to quote all these improvised poems; one may suffice, the inscription by Wên Chia, which is descriptive of the picture: "This place of beauty is not far away. Here one may travel on the quiet and boundless lake. Two lines of geese are flying across the empty sky; it is an autumn river in the land of Ch'u."

This circle of painters was completely dominated by the personality of Wên Chêng-ming, the venerated old master, who gathered round him most of the younger talents of Suchou. He was their ideal, and some of them went so far in their admiration for him that they made their living by imitations of his works. It is told, for instance, of Chu Lang, *tsü Tzu-lang*, *hao Ch'ing-ch'i*, that he could paint pictures which passed as works by Wên Chêng-ming. Once there was a wealthy man from Nanking (on a visit in Suchou) who sent his boy

with a sum of money to Chu Lang in order to obtain some paintings which could pass as works by Wên Chêng-ming. Through some mistake, however, the boy arrived at the house of Wên Chêng-ming instead of that of Chu Lang and there delivered his master's message. The old painter smiled and replied: "I could paint some real Wên Chêng-mings instead of imitations by Chu Lang; would that do?" The story is certainly characteristic of the prevailing habits among minor artists; it was afterwards often told in Suchou and caused much amusement.¹

A minor attractive winter landscape in the Fogg Museum in Cambridge, Mass., is signed Chang-yü Lao-jên and dated 1571. It is composed according to the pattern current among the followers of Wên Chêng-ming and executed with great care and effective use of white colour to suggest snow. The painter, whose proper name was Yo Tai, *tsü Tung-po*, *hao Chang-yü* or *Ch'in-yü shan-jên*, was a recluse who lived in a hut on Yang-shan and spent much of his time travelling to famous mountains and beautiful sites in Chekiang, Fukien and Kiangsu. His poetic temperament is illustrated by the following two lines quoted in *Ming-hua lu*: "The mist and clouds are flowing from my heart, and from my lungs the verdant green" (Pl. 215B).

Wang Ch'ung, *tsü Li-chi*, *hao Ya-i shan-jên* (b. 1494, d. 1533), was generally considered as one of the most gifted of all the young painters in Suchou, but he died at the early age of 40. "If he had lived longer he would have become a rival of Shên Chou and Wên Chêng-ming", according to *Wu-chêng shih-shih*. To this characterization may be added the remarks of Li Jih-hua, that "Li-chi was not very well known as a painter, but sometimes, when he felt inspired, he painted simply as the brush moved and grasped the deepest significance of Ni Tsan and Huang Kung-wang, which was more than their brushwork."

¹ A picture signed by Chu Lang, reproduced in *Nanju*, vol. 4, shows him as a rather ordinary traditionalist with no particular stylistic attachment to Wên Chêng-ming.

A single picture by the young master known in reproduction shows him as a talented follower of Huang Kung-wang.¹ It represents a deep mountain gulley between sharply rising rocks cut step-wise as wooded terraces. If it were not signed, it might easily pass as a work of the Yüan rather than of the Ming period.

Lu Shih-tao, *tsü* Tzū-ch'uan, *hao* Yüan-chou, was practically of the same age as Wên Chêng-ming; his activity lasted from about 1510 to 1570. He was prepared for the official career, passed his *chin-shih* degree in 1538 and served for several years in prominent positions in the capital, but his great interest in art and care for his old mother brought him back to his native town. There he went to pay his respects to Wên Chêng-ming, applying for instruction in painting and calligraphy. This caused some criticism from the high-brows, who said to him: "You are a man of prominent position, why should you bow so deeply to one who is simply an artist?" But Lu Shih-tao replied: "You are quite wrong; Wên Chêng-ming harbours Tao in his art. When I met Mr. Wên, I found that he was a real master in every inch."

Lu Shih-tao's admiration for Wên Chêng-ming simply increased with the years and Wên also grew very fond of Lu. They became inseparable, like glue and varnish. Lu did not accept any further official appointments but remained in Suchou where he belonged to the circle of artists and scholars which included such men as Wang Ch'ung, P'êng Nien, Chang Fêng-i with his brother, the learned Wên P'êng, and the schoolmaster Wên Chia. "They met every day in the house of Wên Chêng-ming, discussing literature, comparing and studying old bronzes and stones, and investigating the principles of calligraphy and painting, while tea was served and incense was burnt. The days passed thus very quickly. When Wên Chêng-ming felt inspired he started playing with the brush, and whatever he did, if it was only a foot-square picture, was considered very precious. People were always ready to pay high prices for his work, whereas Lu Shih-tao's pictures

held a second place, which, however, did not annoy Lu."²

These indeed must have been happy and harmonious days for the good friends and lovers of art who gathered around the old man in his famous garden, which still exists in part, though under another name: *Cho-chêng yüan*, the Garden of Inefficient Officials. It is now in a state of deep decay, the lotus-ponds have dried up, and the zig-zag bridges and winding galleries that may be seen are of later periods. Yet the weeping willows still mark the old layout, the contours of the composition, and behind decay and destruction we can see, or sense, old Wên and his friends in the garden, can relive the thoughts and inspirations that found expression in their work. It lies with the visitor to fill in the vision and read the inscription in the light of his own knowledge and his own experience, experience of the things that were created, the ideals that were cherished there.

Several other men of the same group of artists would merit a more detailed discussion than we can here devote to them.

Sun Chih, *tsü* Shu-ta, *hao* Hua-lin chü-shih, was according to the *Wu-shêng shih-shih*, "a good painter in Suchou. His manner was derived from Wên Chêng-ming, his trees were luxuriant, his stones beautiful, his brushwork was free and his paintings detached from the dust of the world." His picture of Narcissi by a Rockery and a Branch of a Plum-tree, in the Ku-kung collection (dated 1559), is a piece of attractive spring poetry clothed in symbolic

¹ *Chin T'ang Sung Ming Ch'ing ming-hua pao-chien*, edited by Liu Hai-sü, pl. 70.

² Cf. Lu Shih-tao's biography in *Wu-shêng shih-shih*. Three landscapes by the artist are known to us in reproduction; the most interesting of these is the picture in *K-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. III, representing A Deep Gorge partly covered by mist, and a man seated on a rocky ledge reading. The design leads our thoughts to certain works by Shên Chou rather than to Wên Chêng-ming. The picture is dated 1544 and has a poetic inscription by the painter in which he indicates the inspiring mood: "Red dust whirls and fills the world of man; it leaves them no rest, not a single day out of ten. I long for the hills and luxuriant trees; I take my books and wander alone into the far away blue hills."

form.¹ His close adherence to Wên Chêng-ming is also evident in the beautiful handscroll in the Freer Gallery, which is signed and dated 1579. It represents the ever-recurring motif, A River View in Autumn, but in a personal interpretation of great refinement (Pl.218). The brushwork is very light and sensitive, suggesting a cool transparent atmosphere, and gives minute details of the trees, stones and cottages below the hills. It is accompanied by five colophons of the period. Another interesting landscape by the painter, in the Ku-kung collection, illustrates some lines by Tu Fu and represents a wide river view. It is more remarkable for its refinement of detail than for any such sweeping qualities of design as we have seen in the somewhat related pictures by Wên Chia and Wên Po-jên.²

Chü Chieh, *tzü Shih-chên*, *hao Shang-ku*, was according to *Wu-shêng shih-shih* "the noblest pupil of Wên Chêng-ming and a man of great character. His painting was in complete correspondence with the spirit of Wên Chêng-ming and he followed the master also in his poetry and calligraphy. His works were considered very precious and quite as good as those of Chu Lang and Hou Mou-kung." One of his two pictures in the Ku-kung collection is a close copy after Wên Chêng-ming's picture, Preparing Tea in the Mountains, and bears copies of no fewer than ten poems by the master,³ whereas the other picture (dated 1582) is a more original composition built of vertical sections, rectangular blocks rising stepwise towards the background, producing an effective interplay of rectilinear, horizontal and vertical folds.⁴

Chü Chieh's picture in the National Museum, Stockholm, is also in the spirit of the Wên family. It represents a steep river-bank, rising in terraces almost to the upper edge, while the bank on the opposite shore is visible only along the lower edge, where the stream is spanned by a bridge. Some birds circling over the water add to the impression of open air. The tone is pale with slight additions of reddish and bluish colours. It has the following inscription: "In the 4th year of the Wan-li reign

(1576), on an autumn day, when I was at leisure and staying in a mountain cottage, I found some good paper on the table and painted this picture of Spring Mountains after Rain" (Pl.219A).

Hou Mou-kung, *tzü Yen-shang*, *hao I-mên*, is also classified among the pupils of Wên Chêng-ming, though he was a more eclectic painter, as may be observed in his landscape in the Ku-kung collection, which may be described as an effective imitation in Yüan style. It has a colophon by Tung Ch'ich'ang who was a great admirer of this late but very able epigone.⁵

Ch'ien Ku, *tzü Shu-pao*, *hao Ch'ing-shih* (b. 1508, d. after 1574), was a more independent painter who, however, may also be attached to this group. He started as an orphan boy with no opportunities for study; "Only as a grown man did he begin to read, but as he had no books at home, he went every day to Wên Chêng-ming's house to read the classics. In his leisure time he practised ink-painting and acquired the manner of Shên-Chou."⁶ To judge by some of his pictures, he must also have been familiar with Tang Yin's art, but, historically, he is classified among the pupils of Wên Chêng-ming (Pl.219B).

Ch'ien Ku painted landscapes as well as flowers and birds, and in the landscapes he often placed figures of comparatively large size, nor did he crowd the trees and stones together as we find them in ordinary *wên-jên hua*. The picture in the Musée Guimet which represents a company of scholars resting under leafy trees, is an excellent example of Ch'ien Ku at his best. According to the artist's inscription it is the record of a gathering of his friends on a hot summer day, June 26th, 1569. Most of his pictures, however, are illustrations to popular

¹ K.-k. *shu-hua chi*, vol.VII.

² Ibid. vol.XII.

³ K.-k. *shu-hua chi*, vol.XXXII. Another copy of the same picture likewise with long inscriptions and the date 1534, was shown to me a few years ago by Mr. Kawai in Kyoto. It looked like an inferior work by a pupil of Wên Chêng-ming.

⁴ K.-k. *shu-hua chi*, vol.XXIV.

⁵ Ibid. vol.VIII.

⁶ Quoted from *Lieh-ch'ao shih-chi* in *Sung Yüan I-lai*.

stories or poems, as is indicated by the following titles: The Washing of the Wu-t'ung Tree, Preparing Tea on Hua-shan,¹ Collecting Fungi (dated 1574),² The Red Cliff,³ illustrating the poem by Su Tung-p'o, etc. The titles are descriptive of the pictures which (in the three first-named cases) are composed of a few large trees and figures in various occupations, executed with relatively rich ink and a strong brush in a manner derived from Shên Chou rather than from Wên Chêng-ming. But there are other pictures by Ch'ien Ku, such as the very tall Snow-covered Mountains with a Traveller (dated 1572),⁴ which show him as a close follower of Wên Chêng-ming.

Ch'ien Ku was not, strictly speaking, of the scholarly class, nor an official or a man of means, and he might thus have been introduced in the next chapter among other "professionals", yet his traditional place is among the friends and immediate followers of Wên Chêng-ming. His only means of making a living was with the brush, but his pictures were not of a kind that attracted much attention and the cash return was meagre. This may have been one of the reasons why he gradually devoted much of his time to fan-paintings, a speciality which had become a fashion in Suchou in the sixteenth century and consequently was more saleable than the ordinary

larger hanging-scrolls. Several contemporary masters, including Wên Chêng-ming, painted fans either as personal gifts, or for sale, thus developing the art of fan-decoration to a high standard of artistic perfection. Ch'ien Ku's contribution to this kind of refined pictorial decoration seems to have been considerable; there are more than a dozen of such pictures by him in the Ku-kung collection and at least as many in private collections all over the world. Most of these fans are decorated with landscapes, often with figures, as could be seen in the beautiful examples included in the Venice exhibition of 1954.

Such productions may have helped to keep this proud and independent man alive, but it certainly did not bring him wealth. Like several of these highly gifted Suchou painters he remained very poor in material things but rich and independent in spirit. "He did not know how to take care of his house, and consequently became poorer and poorer. Once when Wên Chêng-ming came to see him he wrote over the door the two characters: *Hsüan ch'ing* - A House like an Empty Jar. Ch'ien Ku smiled and said: 'That is exactly what I meant'."

¹ *K-l, shu-hua chi*, vols. XXII and XI.

² *Ku-kung*, vol. XXIII.

³ *T'êiô*, p. 307.

⁴ *K-l, shu-hua chi*, vol. XII.

Eclectics and Professionals

I

T'ang Yin, Chou Ch'ên and Chang Ling

AMONG THE numerous painters active in Suchou during the sixteenth century there were not a few who in their persons, their manner of life and artistic production did not exactly correspond to the definition of *wên-jên*, or scholars, but nevertheless reached great fame as men of the brush and sometimes were appreciated just as highly as Shên Chou or Wên Chêng-ming. They did not follow exclusively the same currents of style as the men commonly grouped under the name of the Wu school did, they also absorbed influences from the academic current which, as shown in a preceding chapter, had lived on there since the days of Sung, and consequently became more eclectic or varied in their modes of painting. They did not form a homogeneous school like the faithful followers of the Wu and the Chê school respectively, but stood more isolated, each by himself developing a mode of his own based on his studies of the Sung and Yüan masters.

The best among these independent masters were indeed individualists, though of many shades and degrees, and it is consequently not easy to find a descriptive name or title that would cover them all. The two terms that we have introduced at the head of this chapter – Professionals and Eclectics – refer to their personal standing and mode of life just as much as to the rather composite characteristics of their art, and the words were chosen for the title because they seemed to be the least exclusive. Some of the painters to be discussed here might just as well be called post-Academicians and Traditionalists, but that does not prevent them from being Professionals and

Eclectics, at least in comparison with the gentlemen painters within the range of the Wu school.

T'ang Yin, the foremost of the painters to be discussed in this chapter, may be said to stand with one foot in the Wu school and with the other in the academic tradition. He was a born genius, started as an outstanding scholar and poet but ended as a professional painter who had to make his living by producing pictures of a popular type for the Suchou bourgeois.

Before turning to the strange events by which T'ang Yin's advance along the path of a brilliant scholar and gentleman painter was brought to a close, it may be useful to insert a few notes about his origin and early life. He was then generally known in Suchou under his *tsü* Po-hu (Senior Tiger) whereas the *hao* Liu-ju chü-shih (Scholar of the Six Likes) was adopted only after he had devoted himself to studies of Buddhist philosophy, i.e. towards the latter part of his life. He was born in 1470 (the same year as Wên Chêng-ming) as the son of a small merchant, but as a youth enjoyed the special protection and guidance of Wên Lin (father of Wên Chêng-ming) who treated him as a member of the Wên family, which at the time was the main centre of artistic and literary people in Suchou.¹ Among the many prominent people whom the

¹ T'ang Yin is one of the few Chinese painters who have been made subjects of special publications also in Western languages. A monograph on the painter was published by Professor W. Speiser in *Orientalische Zeitschrift*, 1936 (also in a separate volume). Another more recent article based on Chinese sources by Mme. Ts'êng Yü-ho was published in *Oriental Art*, II, 3. It gives a detailed account of the events in connexion with the examination fraud.

young T'ang Yin probably met there should be mentioned Shên Chou and Wu K'uan, as well as the famous men of letters Hsü Chêng-ch'ing and Chu Yün-ming.¹ He became a friend of theirs and of all the members of the Wên family, gaining their admiration by his talents as a poet and a painter and his scholarship in the classics.

The Ming History (Sect. *Wu Yün*, vol. 286) contains the following condensed account of the main events in T'ang Yin's life and of his personality: "T'ang Yin . . . was a gifted and versatile nature. He used to drink a lot with Chang Ling, a fellow citizen of his who was a very reckless fellow, and did not trouble himself with any students' preparations. But when Chu Yün-ming admonished him, he shut his door (devoted himself to study) and after one year, in the eleventh year of Hung-chih (1498), passed the provincial *chü-jên* examination, in which he took the first place. The chief examiner Liang Ch'ü was surprised at the excellence of his composition and on his return to the capital showed it to the sub-chancellor Ch'êng Min-chêng, who also felt surprised. A wealthy man from Chiang-yin called Hsü (who had been in T'ang Yin's company at the state examinations) had bribed the servant of Min-chêng and thus obtained the examination questions. The matter was exposed; the censor accused Min-chêng in a memorial to the throne and T'ang Yin was also involved. The examiner was imprisoned, and T'ang Yin was degraded to the rank of a minor official. This was very humiliating for him; he did not accept the position, but went back to his home town and became more and more reckless.

"Prince Ning, whose name was Ch'ên-hao,² invited T'ang Yin with liberal promises, but when T'ang Yin became aware of Ch'ên-hao's dangerous intentions, he feigned to be quite mad and drunk and displayed such disgraceful manners that the prince could not stand it and sent him away. He built himself a house on the Peach Blossom Embankment, and there he passed his time drinking with his friends. He died at the age of 54.

"T'ang Yin's poems and writings showed, to

begin with, great talent, but as years passed, they became more careless. He said to himself: 'People of later times will not understand me from these'. This was a matter of regret to those who wrote about him. At the time, in the country of Wu, there were several men such as Chu Yün-ming who attracted much attention by their unrestrained and reckless lives, but their literary talents were light and lovely, and they exercised great influence on the following generation."

The story of how the fraud at the state examination, in which T'ang Yin was involved, was prepared and performed has been transmitted with some variations by different recorders, and it seems hardly necessary to dwell on the details of it here, because all the accounts lead to the same conclusion, *viz.* that all the men concerned with this shameful affair, which means the examiners as well as T'ang Yin and Hsü Chin, were denounced by an envious competitor and after some cruel investigations (including bodily torture) were sent to prison, or, in the case of T'ang Yin, stripped of all the honours that they had won at the examination and excluded from honourable official appointments. For T'ang Yin the event thus marked the quenching of all hopes for an official career; it placed him socially in the position of an outcast and made it necessary for him thenceforth to live simply on such sums as he could raise with the work of his brush. In other words, his place was no longer among the gentlemen painters but among the professionals, even though the friendship with the former still held good in most cases. His own reactions to these changes are dramatically expressed in a letter to Wên Chêng-ming (who was still a confidential friend) from which a few lines here may be quoted.

¹ The last two men were well-known scholars, poets and writers, who together with Wên Chêng-ming and T'ang Ying were called The Four Great Scholars of Suchou.

² This very enterprising prince, who tried to usurp the imperial power from the emperor Wu-tsung, seems to have been anxious to win over the leading artists to his side. He made a similar offer to Wên Chêng-ming, probably about 1518 or shortly before.

"I am the object of scorn on earth. When mentioning my name people rub their fists and grind their teeth as if I were their worst enemy. Those who know me and those who do not, all point their finger at me and spit. What could be more wounding . . . What I have experienced is cruel beyond limits. It has changed my countenance so that it bears only (marks of) guilt . . . When I face my room and behold my few broken kitchen pots, I know I have absolutely nothing beside my clothes."¹

The blow was evidently crushing to T'ang Yin's sensitive nature. His moral stamina had never been very strong and now he saw no other way of forgetting the disgrace of the situation and people's spite than by throwing himself more recklessly than ever into the pleasures of women and wine. Yet at the same time he was obliged to go on with his work as a painter in order to subsist; pictures had to be produced when food ran short, whether or not the *ch'i-yün* was aroused.

T'ang Yin's biography in *Wu-shêng shih-shih* contains short references to the same events as are described in the Ming History, but in addition to these more information about his development as a poet and a painter, and this is sufficiently interesting to be quoted here in part:

"T'ang Yin stood very high as a painter. He studied the works of Sung masters such as Li Ch'êng, Li T'ang, Fan K'uan, Ma Yüan and Hsia Kuei and also Huang Kung-wang and Wang Meng of the Yüan dynasty. After he had become a *chü-shêng*, he first passed the provincial examinations in Nanking. Then he presented himself at the state board of examinations (*li wei*). There he came into contact with Mr. Hsü from Chiang-yin.² They bribed the chief examiner Ch'êng Min-chêng, who handed them (information about) the examination questions. Through this he got into trouble (an inquiry was started) and his degree was annulled. He was given the standing of a minor official, but this he refused to accept.

"T'ang Yin was by nature a bright and eccentric character who indulged his whims without restraint.

He had a great inclination for wine and women, and after he lost his degree he sought more and more his companions in the wine-shops, but he also found comfort in poetry and painting."

(The recorder then mentions the attempt of Prince Ning to draw T'ang Yin into his service and how the painter saved himself from this dangerous company by simulating madness. Shortly afterwards he divorced his wife.)

Years before, at the time of his *chü-shêng* examination, he had composed a poem called *Ch'ang-ch'ang shih* (A Song of Grief) which contained the following lines:

"The peach-blossoms of Tu-ch'ü (an appellation of women) are like snow within the cup; the fragrant grass of Pa-ling (another allusion to women) is like the mist of dreams. On the path of my future no glory is left, and I shall wipe my tears with my sleeve. The case of my miserable fate was already decided three lives ago."

"These lines contained a poetic prophecy. Later in life he devoted himself to Buddhism and took the by-name Liu-ju (Six Likes), which is borrowed from the Diamond Sūtra (where life is characterized under six 'likes'). He planted a garden on the Peach Blossom Embankment (T'ao-hua wu), in which he used to whistle and sing both night and day. He died at the age of 54 in the 12th month of the 2nd year of Chia-ching (January 1524)."

We have no detailed information about the last stage in T'ang Yin's chequered life, yet the notes quoted above and elsewhere make it evident that he sought a kind of consolation in the meditative form of Buddhism known as *Ch'an*, which had served as a refuge and inspiration for so many of the great painters of earlier epochs. The expressions used in *Wu-shêng shih-shih* point to the acceptance of the

¹ From Tseng Yu-ho's article on T'ang Yin in *Oriental Art*, vol. II, 3.

² Hsü Chin, who was the son of a wealthy family in Suchow; he became a close friend of T'ang Yin and spent money freely on their bouts and revels. They went for the state examination together to Peking, where Hsü Chin found occasion to use his wealth in perpetrating the fraud.

karmic law of cause and effect working through a moral chain of successive incarnations, and the conviction that there is reason and justice in life even when it may seem cruel or senseless. Wang Chih-t'eng, writing in *Wu-chün tan-ch'ing chih*, says definitely (after mentioning the disastrous state-examination) that T'ang Yin "sought refuge in Ch'an Buddhism and became quite indifferent to the world".

Only one or two religious paintings by T'ang Yin have been preserved; they may not be on the highest level of his art, but they show a remarkable effort to penetrate into the mystic significance of the motifs and are executed with the utmost care and refinement and bespeak great devotion. The same author characterizes T'ang Yin's natural talents and inborn spirit as "like bursting flowers and flying clouds"; yet "His art was deep and melancholy; his style original and vigorous, free from trifles and vulgarities. He aimed at density and luxuriance and used to combine many streams and pile up peaks without limit in his pictures. Truly his works were as fine as those of real scholars, and he achieved the stage of the wonderful as a painter. According to the critics, his particular model among the old masters was Li T'ang, and he became just as good as his model. Among modern men only Shên Chou could 'divide the mat' with him."

The extensive reports about the vicissitudes and adventures of T'ang Yin's personal life from which some extracts have been communicated above may easily lead to the impression that the artist spent most of his time and energy in dissipations and all sorts of quips and cranks, and a minor part of it in creative work. This notion must not, however, be stressed too much because it may easily become misleading. It should be remembered that T'ang Yin's still preserved pictorial *œuvre* of paintings is hardly less extensive or important than the collected works of Shên Chou or Wên Chêng-ming, in spite of the fact that it was produced within a relatively short span of time, less than half the time covered by Wên Chêng-ming's artistic activity. He must have

worked with extraordinary facility and spontaneity, imparting to his minor works such as album-leaves and short scrolls the charm of precious flowers on the point of withering (before they have lost their scent). He hardly ever indulged in such extensive works, in the form of long picture-chronicles or descriptive landscapes, as Shên Chou produced in fair numbers during the latter part of his life.

T'ang Yin never became the head of a school or a workshop like Wên Chêng-ming, even though he had some assistance for a while from Chou Ch'ên (to whom we shall return presently), nor was he considered sufficiently important to be imitated to the same extent as the above-named great contemporaries. He stood far more isolated, yet was very closely attached to a definite tradition and definite models or patterns of earlier times. In other words, he did not break new ground or open up new paths or principles of pictorial creation, yet when at his best he was one of the most brilliant, wittiest and most charming painters among the *virtuosi* of the Ming period.

If we may judge by T'ang Yin's still preserved dated works, his main activity as a painter did not develop until after the disgraceful *chü-jên* examination, when he was a man over thirty. His earliest dated paintings are of the year 1506, the latest of 1522, and even if some of the undated works were painted a year or two earlier, we can hardly avoid the conclusion that his pictorial *œuvre*, as it is known today, belongs to the last twenty years of his life. According to our List, it includes about 150 items all signed with his name, but only twenty-three of them are dated. Within this large group of paintings produced during a relatively short period of activity it is hardly possible to trace a stylistic development of the kind that we observed in Wên Chêng-ming, or a definite succession of decisive influences. But in the following we shall, as far as possible, illustrate some of the outstanding features of T'ang Yin's art by means of a few characteristic examples.

The early works are mainly landscapes, including in some cases illustrative figures. The best known

among them is probably the large mountain landscape (formerly in the P'ang Yüan-chi collection) called A View of Hua-shan. The steep mountains are built up of serried or tightly folded vertical layers divided by deep fissures. Their shapes are angular or crystalline, and they stand out from the picture more than they merge into it. The tonal values are deep, quite black in the shadows, only the soaring mist on the uppermost terrace and the water which rushes down over the precipice are luminously white, whereas the leafy trees in the foreground are tinted in colours. The prevailing impression is one of austerity and rugged strength. The brushwork is firm, almost meticulous in details such as the leaves of the trees, whereas the deep folds of the mountain are painted with a squeezed brush according to the *ts'a-pi* manner of Li T'ang, which probably was transmitted to T'ang Yin by Chou Ch'ên, who had a special predilection for this manner and practised it with success. This will be further illustrated by some of Chou Ch'ên's painting, but here should be recalled the statement that "when T'ang Yin became famous and sometimes was too lazy to work, he asked Chou Ch'ên to do it in his stead; thus many of the pictures which still exist under T'ang Yin's name were done by Chou Ch'ên, but those who have eyes can distinguish them" (Pl.220).

This may be possible, as stated by the recorder, yet the recognition of the two artists' individual manner is a very relative matter, because they both sought their guidance in a very close study of Li T'ang's brushwork and the principles of design which formed the foundation of the South Sung academy style. The inscriptions signed by T'ang Yin are never missing but may not always be guarantees of his personal execution, even though they were intended to make the pictures pass as his works.

The dependence on Li T'ang is also confirmed in the inscription on the very elaborate large landscape with a man on horseback passing over a bridge leading to a mountain retreat, which is marked as an imitation after the Sung master.¹ There are other

typical and probably relatively early examples of this quasi-academic sharp and serried manner in the C. T. Loo Galleries² and in Mr. C. C. Wang's collection in New York,³ in the Herron Art Museum in Indianapolis and in private possession in China (as may be seen in the Nanking exhibition catalogue, pl. 124).⁴ They are all characterized by the same kind of sharply silhouetted angular rocks with strongly accentuated folds or wrinkles which are rubbed in with a squeezed brush as described on the preceding page. The connexion is obvious and could easily be illustrated by several paintings; to do so, however, would be supererogatory at this place. It has also been pointed out by Chinese critics, for instance in *T'u-hui pao-chien, hsü-t'uan*, where it is stated that T'ang Yin "took over Liu Sung-nien's and Li T'ang's manner of painting wrinkles, but his brushwork was more refined than his predecessors". The observation is correct as far as it goes, but might have been carried further by adding that Li T'ang was to him the best guide for painting stones and rocks while Liu Sung-nien was to him the special guide for painting trees.

The pictures discussed above can hardly be classified among T'ang Yin's best works but, from a stylistic point of view, they form an interesting group (with a few more). They illustrate the phase of T'ang Yin's art in which he is closest to Chou Ch'ên, or rather to Li T'ang, their common model or stylistic ancestor of the Sung period. But T'ang Yin did not stick to this stylistic phase (as did Chou Ch'ên); the manner seems to have been too schematic or restrictive for him; in the large landscapes which form a following (and probably slightly later) group in his *œuvre* he gives a somewhat freer transposition of the Li T'ang manner which better corresponds to his own temperament.

¹ Cf. *T'ao*, pl.270. The picture was formerly in the T. Yamamoto collection.

² Cf. *Toronto Exhibit, Catalogue*, pl.18.

³ Private photograph.

⁴ Cf. *Nanking Exhibit, Catalogue*, pl.124. There is an important picture of the same group, a handscroll in the Abe collect. in Osaka Museum, called *Garden of a Retired Scholar*.

The largest of these landscapes, *i.e.*, a six and a half foot tall picture in the Ku-kung collection, is called *Listening to Pine-trees on a Mountain Path*. It is a standard work of its kind¹ (PL221). The composition consists of precipitous rocks which reach almost to the upper edge of the picture and descend step-wise in terraces marked by cataracts of the stream that rushes down into the river below. It is spanned by a bridge, where a man is passing, and shaded by the far-spreading branches of luxuriant pine-trees. The relative size of the figure and the elements of nature makes us realize the overwhelming grandeur of the rocks and the trees, but the little figure may also serve as a kind of symbolic embodiment of the painter's mind, and the view be reflected from it. The inspiring mood is also expressed in the inscription: "In front of Nü-chi Mountain there is a lonely path; the pines sigh in harmony with the roaring stream. I listen at my leisure and feel as if my spirit had reached Tao." It is sounds of nature lingering in the memory of the painter which in this case, as in quite a few others of T'ang Yin's landscapes, have been the source of inspiration.

Variations on the same or quite similar motifs (likewise in the Ku-kung collection) are known as *Contemplating a Waterfall in Quiet Mountains*² and *Late Spring in a Mountain Valley*.³ The former in particular is a very noble work owing to its classic design, apparently inspired by one of Hsia Kuei's "unilateral" compositions. Precipitous rocks here rise in successive vertical folds at the one side of the picture, whereas the other side of the gulley where the water is rushing down, is partly veiled by light mist. The man contemplating and listening to the water is again placed under large pine-trees of a kind that recalls to us some of Liu Sung-tien's most beautiful pictures.

The picture which is called *Valleys and Trees in late Spring* shows overhanging twisted mountains and budding trees shaken by wind. There are again some small figures on the river-bank apparently overpowered by the restless mood of nature, while others are seated in the pavilion at the bottom of the

ravine. The picture is rich in fine details but the composition is not so firmly balanced as in the previous example. It reflects a more dramatic mood more reminiscent of Kuo Hsi than of Hsia Kuei. The dramatic vein in T'ang Yin's art is here to some extent discernible but it is more dominant in the picture in the Ueno collection (dated 1508) which represents *A Rainstorm over a Mountain Village* (PL222).

This picture holds a very prominent place among T'ang Yin's landscapes. Apparently inspired by direct observation of nature, it shows the master's skill in giving a coloristically effective rendering, mainly with various shades of ink, partly intensified with thin washes of colour. The motif is a sudden burst of rain over mountains and a farmstead by a riverside. The violence of the storm is suggested both by the design and by the tempestuous way in which the ink is applied. The wind is shaking the trees on the terraces and driving the mist through the gorges behind the village. There is speed in the brush and vaporous transparency in the ink suggesting a wet and heavy atmosphere with a sort of luminosity that may be observed after sudden spring rain in southern countries. The picture is thus more related to certain works of the Yüan period, for instance by Kao K'o-kung, than to academic landscapes of the Sung dynasty, which makes it a rare exception among T'ang Yin's landscapes. The artist has explained the motif in the following lines:

"A raging wind, a violent rain; the river-banks grow dark.

The mountains ring with a thousand sounds; the summer is turning cold.

The shepherd-boy alone is out; he wears a bamboo hat,

and rides with ease his buffalo - home through a shoreless mist."

Similar efforts of impressionistic brushwork also evoke the resonance of life (*ch'i-yün*) in some of

¹ K.-k. *shu-hua chi*, vol.I.

² K.-k. *shu-hua chi*, vol.LXX.

³ Ku-kung, vol.IX.

T'ang Yin's pictures of birds and flowers. One of the best examples of the former is the tall and narrow picture *A Mynah Bird on a Dry Branch* (formerly in the P'ang Yüan-chi collection)¹ (Pl.223B). The motif is very simple and it is rendered with a few swift strokes of a well soaked brush, but these are enough to transmit an impression of the rising sap in the branch and the bird carolling and rejoicing after the spring rain, the motif of the picture as well as of its short poem:

"The mountain is empty and silent, no human voice is heard, but the bird perched upon the bough is warbling, for the showers of spring have passed."

T'ang Yin's flower-paintings may be divided into two classes or groups, one consisting of naked branches of plum, apricot, or other fruit-trees bursting into blossom before they put on any leaves,² while the other group consists of highly finished studies (partly with colours) of such striking and coloured garden flowers as lilies, peonies, hibiscus, narcissus, etc.³ The pictures are evidently records of fugitive impressions gathered in the flowering gardens of Suchou and they are sometimes also explained in short poems: "When I walked across the bridge over the stream the bare plum-trees were budding with blossoms. Their secret perfume was not yet aroused, but light shadows were playing crosswise." This was written on a small picture of two branches of a scraggy old blossoming plum-tree; but in another example the tree is combined with some tender bamboos still touched by frost, while the tree is bursting into blossom. "The one like ice, the other like jade, and they look at each other . . ." But as noted by the painter on a similar picture: "The spring dream is short, it soon disappears like a traveller ever hurrying on" (Pl.224).

Among these spontaneous records of happy moments in a garden may also be counted the remarkable picture in the Honolulu Academy, which represents a slender branch of a blossoming fruit-tree rising in a double curve over, and touching the roof of an open pavilion where a man is seated on a meditation mat with incense burning in a vessel

at his side. In her "Notes on T'ang Yin" Tseng Yu-ho has made it clear that the man in meditation is a self-portrait of the painter, and that the picture was executed towards the end of his life when he must have spent a great deal of time in religious meditations. She also points out that T'ang Yin in this painting used "a brush of rather blunt-pointed quality and probably finished the whole thing in less than twenty minutes". This may well be correct because the picture has the freshness and openness of a sudden visionary flash noted down but not quite finished (Pl.225). The forms are not elaborated but merge into an atmosphere of soft evening light shot through with the perfumes of the burning incense.

T'ang Yin has more than once returned to the motif of the philosopher's retreat either in his own garden or somewhere among hills, near a purling mountain stream, where slender bamboos rustle and whisper to the solitary occupant sitting on his straw mat sunk in study or meditation.⁴ This is very delicately paralleled in a picture in private possession in China which, according to the inscription, depicts a lonely pavilion in autumn, the rustle of the slender bamboo leaves foreboding an early cold. This too is painted with a soft brush in a flowing manner, though less vaporous than in the preceding example, which gives the picture a more definite structure (Pl.223A).

The two above-named pictures are not dated but they are in tone and general character so closely related to two short handscrolls dated respectively 1520 and 1521, that they may confidently be assigned to the same period. The earlier of the two (in the Ku-kung collection) is called *Gathering Lotus-seeds*, but the man in the little boat is in fact insignificant compared with the large lotus plants. The scenery is a quiet lake on a misty morning in late summer. There are mountains in the distance

¹ *Tōsō*, p.269.

² Cf. *Atsu Shiraita*, pls.31-34.

³ *Ibid.*, pls.37, 38 and *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol.XXVII.

⁴ *Tōsō*, pl.263 (Collection Shên Jui-lin).

appearing as faint silhouettes; the sky and the water are steeped in a slightly translucent veil of silvery mist from which the plants and flowers emerge as in a vision. The whole thing is painted with a light and soft brush, yet every detail of the plants on the water and of the old willow that marks the foreground shore is clear though rendered with light touches without use of any strong accents. The prevailing impression is of the moist atmosphere that belongs to the southern summer in the lake country (Pls. 226, 227, lower picture).

In the picture in Stockholm, painted the following year, the landscape is less important and serves mainly as a stage for two men who are occupied with the preparation of tea. One of them is attending to the little stove with the tea-kettle, the other sits waiting, and there are some books at his side. A few simple objects such as an incense-burner, a vase with a flowering spray, a jar, etc., complete the arrangements for this tea ceremony, performed on a garden terrace indicated by a picturesque stone, two stems of bamboo, two banana plants and a flowering lespedeza(?). By means of these few elements of composition and the faint mountains in the background the painter has evoked the mood of a quiet evening with two old men seated in silence listening to the purling of the water in the kettle and the hush of nature. To this picture is attached a colophon containing a copy of Su Tung-p'o's description of the preparation and enjoyment of tea (Pls. 226, 227, upper picture).

A somewhat larger picture in the Boston Museum has certain points of correspondence with the last-mentioned scroll. It represents a man seated in the shadow of a spreading leafy tree watching a servant-boy who is occupied in preparing food on a small charcoal stove. It is more like a picnic in the open, and the man may be a portrait, but the illustrative character and the very refined execution are much the same as in the previous example. The figure here is dominant over the landscape, a relative proportion which becomes more marked with the years, the figures gaining in importance over the scenery in

which they are placed. But before we turn to the figure-paintings properly speaking, two or three dated landscapes may be recorded as illustrations of his development.

The picture in the Abe collection (Osaka Museum) may be mentioned because it is dated 1517 and is a good example of Tang Yin's eclecticism or faculty of combining stylistic elements from various sources in a picture which, nevertheless, bears the imprint of his individual genius. It represents a hermit or old scholar standing on a bridge that spans a rushing stream at the foot of sharply cut mountains which rise through a layer of mist (Pl. 229). The mountains are rendered in accordance with the academy tradition of Sung times, but the lower portion of the composition with the spare trees at both ends of the bridge in front of the mist are rather representations of the Yuan style or Wang Fu's dry trees than of any Sung models. The romantic note of the inspiring mood is expressed in the inscription: The hermit stands here on the bridge contemplating cascades which seem "like a thousand feet of snow", to "cleanse his mind from worldly dust".

A later picture of unusual refinement and intimacy (in the Ku-kung collection) is called *Speaking of Old Times with Hsi-chou*. It is executed with the exquisite care and finish that Tang Yin bestowed on his best works in the 'twenties. The painter is here seated with his friend in an open thatched pavilion under some old trees which are beginning to put out some spring leaves, while slender bamboos and banana plants are growing between the garden stones on the other side. The men are quietly celebrating their meeting after years of separation; there is a large wine-jar in the hut but no mats or tables (Pl. 228).

In the colophon above the picture the painter describes it as follows: "I had been separated from Hsi-chou for thirty years. When you quite unexpectedly came to see me, I wrote my simple poem and this picture. Will you accept it? I am ill and depressed and have done my work quite roughly just to show you my intentions." In the preceding

poem he gives a somewhat burlesque characterization of the friend:

"You drank and danced and sang for fifty years.
 You found pleasure in flowers (girls?) and slept in
 the moonlight.
 You never troubled your countrymen to
 transmit your name and *tzu*.
 Who ever could doubt that your purse had the
 money to buy your wine?
 You were shy of showing your knowledge and
 would not be called a scholar.
 But none among the common people can doubt
 that you are an Immortal.
 A little work performed by you would open the
 gates of Heaven."

We can only regret that this presentation of Hsi-chou does not make it possible to identify him in history; but the type is no doubt characteristic of more than one among the friends of T'ang Yin.

The sensitiveness of the artistic interpretation endows all these later works with gracefulness and charm. They are painted in subdued tones of light grey, sometimes with an addition of pale local tints. The brushwork is neat and pure. T'ang Yin seems to have absorbed the classic models of the Sung period and transmuted them into more varied pictorial interpretations, based on observations of nature no less than on the fundamental principles of the old masters' works. At times he painted very close representations of actual scenery, as in the picture in the Ku-kung collection called *Farmsteads in Chiang-nan*, in which the rice fields, the mulberry groves, the residential courtyards and the life on the river, are carefully rendered, and also in scenes of meditation and lonely walks, described above, in which the grandeur and silence of Nature are conveyed in symbols of huge mountains, rushing streams and spare trees issuing from a misty background. When he asks the question: "Why does the hermit linger here alone?" He answers: "Because his mind is filled with thoughts of poems."

Our study of a number of T'ang Yin's most interesting landscape-paintings may indeed have

served to make it clear that his individual style and characteristics in this particular field of painting are more difficult to grasp and epitomize than the essential merits and features of men like Shên Chou and Wên Chêng-ming. Shên Chou's landscape-paintings and, to a less extent, those of Wên Chêng-ming, have a more homogeneous, not to say uniform, type-character or fundamental style recognizable in the designs as well as in the technical execution. T'ang Yin's production, on the other hand, is rather unequal and variable, fascinating by its surprises and unpremeditated flashes of wit and momentary impressions.

Shên Chou and Wên Chêng-ming followed to no small extent the same traditional lines of study and absorbed similar influences, but they interpreted them differently, each according to his individual temperament. For Shên Chou, who adhered most closely to the Yüan masters (in time as well as in natural aptitude), there was hardly any choice or hesitation as to the proper models in landscape-painting; he saw them in Huang Kung-wang and Wu Chên, the two masters who remained his guides all through his life.

Wên Chêng-ming's historical orientation was more inclusive and more differentiated. He was fundamentally a scholar no less than a painter and had a deep-rooted veneration for "the spirit of antiquity" cultivated and transmitted by the great masters of Sung and earlier periods; but he had also studied and felt a great admiration for some of the Yüan masters, such as Ni Tsan and Wang Meng, who represented a scholarly rather than a romantic or emotional approach to the problems of painting and thus had some importance for the development of the so-called *wên-jên hua*. Wên Chêng-ming's landscape production may thus appear less homogeneous than Shên Chou's, it reflects influences of a more varied kind, yet these seem to have reached him successively rather than simultaneously and are more or less clearly discernible as one by one they go to form an artistic personality more sensitive and less robust than Shên Chou.

render the charm and gracefulness of the feminine model with the utmost refinement in accordance with the fashion of the time. But as modes changed, so did the models and the artistic approach to them, and thus it happened that T'ang Yin's beauties became more like figurines of the finest Ming porcelain than like Chou Wên-chü's musicians or courtesans at their morning toilet.

T'ang Yin's moon-fairies may seem rather artificial to us, yet they were exactly what amateurs expected from figure-paintings of the kind. They have been highly praised by many competent connoisseurs such as Wang Shih-min, the great master at the end of the Ming period, who on a picture by T'ang Yin called "Tired from Embroidery Work" wrote as follows: "T'ang Po-hu mastered every kind of painting, but he specialized in paintings of beautiful ladies and in such pictures reached beyond Ch'ien Hsüan and Tu Chin, because he was always fond of a gay life (with girls). This picture is copied after a work by Chao Meng-fu, and therefore the beauty of the colouring and the balancing of the composition are superior to his other works. With regard to the beautiful expression and elegant manners (of the ladies) it may be said that their meaning goes beyond the brushwork. In this respect Po-hu is always Po-hu, and it depends on the onlookers themselves whether they grasp it or not."

T'ang Yin's originality as a painter was indeed, as we have seen, a rather subtle thing even when he imitated some of the old masters quite closely. He knew how to add a note of gracefulness to the artistic transposition, how to reflect silent thought in certain figures as well as in landscapes.

The best example of this pervading faculty is the picture of an Arhat in Meditation (formerly in the Yamamoto collection) which, according to the inscription, was painted in T'ao-hua an, the Peach Blossom Temple, in 1521. It is executed mainly in ink with slight addition of colour in the finest *kung-pi* manner, possibly under the influence of some Arhat painting by Li Lung-mien¹ (Pl. 232).

The old man is seated on a mat laid on a small rocky island (in an expanse of water), which rises behind him in steep hollowed-out formations like stalactites. His very large square head is sunk between his bare shoulders; the bearded chin is supported on his hand, his elbow poised against his knee. His eyes are closed and over the whole of his face is spread an expression of immobile calm – an impenetrable mystery, like a drawn veil. The inner equipoise and concentration of the man is suggested not only by the expression and the well-balanced centralized posture but also by the clear contrast between the vertical and horizontal lines of the cliff and the mat. Only the folds of the mantle, gliding down from the body, suggest with their curving lines the faint rhythm of material life, as with the ebbing of his consciousness it rises to a state of pure spiritual perception.

Of all the writers and critics who have expressed themselves on T'ang Yin's art none has better summarized the characteristics of the man as well as of the painter than his friend the poet Chu Yün-ming, when he wrote: "In his studies he devoted himself particularly to the investigation of the secrets of nature; he paid little attention to ordinary literary compositions and poetry, and expressed the originality of his mind mainly in painting. In his paintings he often followed the famous masters of T'ang and Sung times. He was admired by everybody, nobles and commoners, poor and rich, and his door was daily besieged by people who came to ask for his pictures."²

T'ang Yin's popularity among his contemporaries was hardly less than Shên Chou's or Wên Chêng-ming's, though not based so exclusively on his art. He was, as told above, also widely known for his gay life and brilliant wit, which made him in this respect a true son of his native city, Suchou, the home of *histoires galantes* in China. He lived more in

¹ Practically the same figure of a meditating Arhat is represented together with some worshippers in a handscroll attributed to Ch'ien Hsüan in the former Abe collection, but this, too, seems more like an imitation after an earlier model.

² Quoted in *Shu-hua p'u*, vol. 87, from *Chu-shih chi-liieh*.

the world than the other great artists, particularly than Shên Chou, who preferred to live outside the world. He was extraordinarily supple and versatile in life as well as in art; it was easy for him to change methods and models according to the impulse of the moment. Thus, in spite of the fact that he belonged by birth and education to the Wu school, he might with almost equally good reason be placed in the Chê school, which seems to justify the heading of this chapter: Eclectics and Professionals.

* * *

T'ang Yin's immediate following, in the strictest sense, was not very large; it consisted only of two or three personal friends, but if he is considered as a leading representative of the eclectic tendency which from now on gradually gained ground in Chinese painting, he may be said to have had a large following. This tendency or current of style which we, with a generalizing term, have called eclectic, was, however, not a definite school but a rather wide flow nourished by tributaries of highly varying individual qualities. They can hardly be discussed all in a group, but we shall contact some of the most prominent "eclectics" or "traditionalists" in the following as we pass into the later dynastic eras of the Ming period.

We have already had occasion to point out on the preceding pages the close personal connexion between T'ang Yin and Chou Ch'ên, emphasized by the recorders and substantiated by stylistic correspondences between some of their works. Chou Ch'ên has sometimes been described as T'ang Yin's teacher, and at other times as an assistant of the more famous master, but since no definite dates for Chou Ch'ên's activity have been transmitted it is hardly possible to decide which of the two alternatives is the more probable. The fact remains that the two painters were for some time closely connected, they may indeed have co-operated in the execution of certain paintings, which shows that for a while they followed exactly the same current of style, though at other times they diverged onto different paths.

They were both highly gifted individuals active mainly during the first quarter of the sixteenth century.

The historical information about Chou Ch'ên is not so abundant as the records concerning T'ang Yin. The following notice in *Wu-shêng shih-shih* contains the essential facts:

"Chou Ch'ên, *tzü* Shun-ch'ing, *hao* Tung-ts'un, came from Ku-su (Suchou). In his manner of painting he imitated the Sung masters and did some pictures of high peaks and mountainous country which were quite like the works of Li T'ang. But he also painted in the style of Ma and Hsia, and in such pictures he was equal to Tai Chin. He was thus also a prominent representative of the academy style. T'ang Yin's manner of painting was also a derivation from Chou Ch'ên's, and when T'ang Yin became famous as a painter and was sometimes too lazy to satisfy his clients, he used to ask Tung-ts'un to do the work in his stead. Thus many of the pictures transmitted under the name T'ang Po-hu are executed by Chou Ch'ên, but those who have eyes can distinguish them."

Wang Chih-têng, who was almost contemporary with Chou Ch'ên, writes of him that he "painted landscapes with deep gorges and thick mist and old-fashioned figures in strange costumes . . . He was considered a good painter at the time; yet he could not give the air of loneliness and silence, the effect of remoteness and tranquillity" (as did T'ang Yin).

The pictures by Chou Ch'ên preserved in several public and private collections are mainly landscapes but there are also figure-paintings among them, and though they are all characteristic in one way or other they may be said, taken altogether, to illustrate the eclectic nature of his art. He must have studied the paintings of the South Sung academicians with the closest care, yet he was not a simple imitator or transmitter of academic pattern, on the contrary, he was a keen observer of actual nature and the grotesque or humorous side of humanity which he depicted with unrestrained realism. It is, however, difficult to follow a definite line of

development in his production because only one or two of the pictures are provided with dates.

One of the most typical is the large landscape in Boston which represents steep mountains and tall pine-trees rising above a broad river. The composition is constructed according to the principles of the Ma-Hsia school but animated with a greater number of figures than was usual in landscapes of the Sung time; some are here travelling along a road, others are enjoying an imposing view from the upper story of a handsome pavilion built on the rocks. The execution is reminiscent of Li T'ang and Liu Sung-nien rather than of Ma Yüan, and the picture is altogether a distinguished example of well-balanced academic eclecticism (Pl. 233).

The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston has lately acquired another characteristic picture by Chou Ch'ên which, however, is executed in a softer, more pictorial manner, thus illustrating the painter's easy way of changing from one manner to another. The picture represents two men seated on a grassy river-bank under leafy trees. The view extends into a deep gulley partly veiled by mist. The picture has the appeal of an early summer day with sunshine behind vaporous mist in a mountain valley—a spontaneous record of the kind that Shên Chou used to paint after his excursions in the mountains.

Here may also be recalled a picture in the Ku-kung collection which is dated 1534 and provided with an inscription according to which it was inspired by a work by Tai Chin. The notice is interesting as one more confirmation of Chou Ch'ên's eclectic attitude; the elements of the composition, such as the jerky pines and the sharply cut rocks are, indeed, typical reminiscences of the Wu school, but their juxtaposition in the picture has not led to a very well-balanced harmonious result.

The long handscroll in the H. C. Wêng collection in Scarsdale is a far more important picture. The motif consists mainly of massy mountains along winding streams and small homesteads in the shade of leafy trees, but it is handled here with the utmost care and a rhythmic division of the masses that

makes the composition very impressive. The very firm, not to say tight, brushwork in the split rocks is evidently derived from Li T'ang, though it is less sweeping and more detailed than in the paintings of that Sung master. This unfailing exactness in every detail is here carried rather far, as must be admitted in spite of the fact that the leafage of the trees is united in broad masses, while the bamboo-groves by the small houses on the river-bank have a soft feathery air as if swayed by the wind. The whole picture is a perfect work of its kind in accordance with the best academic tradition, though executed by a man who seems to have succumbed to the finical style of Ming technique (Pl. 235).

Chou Ch'ên's fame with posterity, like the renown of T'ang Yin, is based mainly on his landscapes in which he followed in the footsteps of certain South Sung academicians, yet he, too, was a very competent figure-painter. In his landscapes he often placed large figures which form the main motif of the picture and dominate their surroundings, and besides such illustrative scenes he did also figure-studies without any scenery or background. But these are entirely different from T'ang Yin's fashionable ladies and legendary fairies. Chou Ch'ên had apparently no use for such lovely personages; he painted mainly men, particularly decrepit old men famous for their uncouth appearance. Some of these figurative representations are illustrations to popular tales, such as Ning Ch'i Feeding his Ox (a famous picture in the Ku-kung collection), or the poor old woman saving the life of the destitute Han Hsin (picture in the National Museum, Stockholm), but others are more directly painted from life and as such examples of an art of realistic characterization seldom displayed to the same degree in Chinese painting. The most striking specimens of this kind are to be found in an album in Mr. W. Hochstadter's collection (in New York). They represent a motley crowd of beggars, monks, conjurers, tricksters and other *ladroni*, an assemblage which certainly in the time of Chou Ch'ên, as well as in later ages, formed a characteristic element in the

street life of Chinese towns. The artist has rendered them *con gusto*, characterizing their grotesque features and gaunt limbs with scathing realism, thus creating a genre seldom seen in Chinese painting (Pl.234).

Chou Ch'ên is, however, most enjoyable in his paintings of the amusements and labours of Chinese peasants, motifs which he seems to have known from first-hand observations. He has painted labourers in the rice-fields, fishermen at their catch, and village people gathering round a cock-fight entertainment. The latter picture (in private collection in Japan) is an illustration of country life in China as it may still be seen today. The small white plastered cottages are grouped behind walls of mud or thatched straw, a few old trees are growing by the pond where ducks are quacking and there, on the muddy shore in front of a cottage, the villagers, old and young, have gathered to watch the combat between two furious cocks, taking sides and quite absorbed by the tension of the situation. It is all depicted in detail with unadulterated realism not devoid of humour. The picture is also one of the best examples of the growing tendency to use real landscapes as settings for animated figure scenes, represented at close range on a comparatively large scale (Pl.236). T'ang Yin tried something of this kind in some of his short scrolls, but with him the poetic sentiment was stronger than the realistic approach. He was, after all, more of a poet than Chou Ch'ên, who, fortunately, did not "give the air of remoteness and silence or the effect of distance and tranquillity" to his realistic scenes.

The same seems to have been true of T'ang Yin's other friend, Chang Ling, if we may judge by his picture in the Ku-kung collection called *The Fishermen's Pleasure*. His art and reckless mode of life are described quite extensively by the old writers, who dwell on his close friendship with T'ang Yin and their common adventures. Wang Chih-t'eng writes:

"Chang Ling, *tzü Mêng-chün*, was a neighbour and good friend of T'ang Yin. The two men had the

same inclinations. Both were men of great talent and equally good in painting; consequently their friendship became strong ('like pepper and orchids'). Ling painted figures in old-fashioned costumes, very true to nature and pure in drawing and colouring. His landscapes were not of a traditional type, but painted with a lively brush and strong ink in a manner which was quite out of the common. Many of them were admirable. Ling was a reckless character, very simple and unceremonious. Whenever he had money, he bought wine. He did not seek any position, but boasted like ancient adventurers. He passed the *chü-shêng* examination, but was deprived of his degree, because of his mad ways."

These "mad ways" and the painter's insatiable love of wine form the main contents of his biography in *Wu-shêng shih-shih*, which contains nothing about his art, but merely some burlesque anecdotes, which may be quoted in part in so far as they serve to throw light on the character of T'ang Yin and the circle of friends in which he moved (Pl.237).

"Chang Ling came from a family of poor village workmen, and was the first member of his family to study. He liked, however, the company of bold fellows and when he got drunk he acted like a madman... Once when T'ang Yin intended to visit Tiger Hill (in Suchou), he went to ask Chang Ling to come along but found him asleep. T'ang Yin went into the bedroom and shouted: 'The sun is already high up and warm. Why do you sleep still?' Chang said: 'You have brought no wine today; my subtle mind does not like starting (with a jerk). I have just been in the land of happiness and now you wake me up.' Yin answered: 'When I came to fetch you, I certainly had the intention of inviting you to drink.' Chang Ling felt happy; put on his clothes and went out with T'ang Yin in a boat. There he started to sing like a wild man, beating time against the railing of the boat, drinking to his heart's desire."

In the continuation of the rather lengthy story we are told how the happy companions discovered some merchants in a pavilion, where they were

drinking and composing poems. Chang disguised himself as a beggar, went over to the merchants and amazed them by his skill in writing poetry. When he suddenly disappeared, the men thought that they had seen an Immortal. But after a while he went back again and performed a Tartar dance to the merchants' astonishment.

Of all the gay and carefree painters in Suchou Chang Ling must have been the foremost at least in drinking. The pictures by him known to us are rather unequal, though all more or less akin to T'ang Yin's art, which implies that he, too, based himself principally on Li T'ang. This is quite noticeable in a large picture in the Ku-kung collection called *The Fishermen's Pleasure*;¹ a river landscape with reeds and willows along the banks where boats are moored. The men in the boats are drinking and the women occupied with babies, and they are all characterized with something of the same humour as we have observed in Chou Ch'ên's realistic paintings. The poem contains, however, a more romantic interpretation of a fisherman's life: "Fishermen stay on the water with tranquil hearts; like sea-gulls and waves they travel far. They sell their fish, they buy their wine and get drunk. While the moon is clear, and plumes of reeds fill their boats."

This happy mood is certainly reflected in the

figures, while the rocks and willows show his stylistic dependence on Li T'ang's art.

An earlier picture by the master (in private possession in China) represents *A Scholar in an Autumn Wood* and is executed in a more fluent pictorial manner, reminding us of certain works by Shên Chou.² According to Wên Chêng-ming's inscription on the picture, dated 1501, it was originally in his possession, but he presented it to a pupil as a farewell gift, because he had no time to paint a picture of his own. The early date of the picture makes it particularly interesting and tends to prove that Chang Ling started as a follower of Shên Chou and was probably somewhat earlier developed than T'ang Yin. Stylistically he is still less influenced by the Academy tradition than Chou Ch'ên and T'ang Yin, but he has been introduced at this place because of his close personal relations with the latter. This friendship is also confirmed by the portrait which Chang Ling has drawn of T'ang Yin; a very simple but intimate picture of a rather stout, small man in a long robe and round hat, standing full face, looking smilingly at the beholder. Like most Chinese portraits of this kind, it is a rendering of a type rather than an individual characterization. It has two inscriptions; one being a panegyric of T'ang Yin by Wang Ch'ung, and the other a poem by Wên Chêng-ming.

II

Ch'iu Ying and his Following

Two other pupils of Chou Ch'ên are often recorded beside T'ang Yin, i.e. Shên Chao, tsü Ch'iu-o, and Ch'iu Ying. No works by the former seem to have been preserved (they are said to have been mainly landscapes in the "green and blue" manner), whereas probably a greater number of pictures are marked with the name of Ch'iu Ying than with that

of any other painter of the Ming period. His popularity is extraordinary, and the imitations of his works almost numberless, but Ch'iu Ying's present fame is something which has developed gradually; it did not exist, at least not to the same extent, in the

¹ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XXIX.

² *T'ao*, p. 364.

lifetime of the artist. He is not one of the artists whose life is very extensively recorded, and although much praise is bestowed on his skill in copying the old masters and on certain of his most famous compositions, he is not placed on a level with painters like T'ang Yin and Wên Chêng-ming. He was not a scholar, nor a poet or calligrapher, but simply a very able painter, a past master of technical refinement and classic rules of composition and was consequently placed (for instance by Wang Chih-têng, who was almost his contemporary) in the *nêng p'iu*, the lowest of the three or four traditional classes.

The fullest biographical information about Ch'iu Ying is found in the *Wu-shêng shih-shih*: "Ch'iu Ying, *tzü* Shih-fu, *hao* Shih-chou, was born at T'ai-ts'ang (near Shanghai) but moved to Suchou. He came from very humble circumstances and served for some time as a painter's apprentice. But when Chou Ch'ên saw his works, he was surprised and took him on as a pupil. Ch'iu's paintings were beautiful and elegant, full of delicate and graceful detail. The brushwork was so refined that the pictures looked as if they had been carved in jade. He copied the famous works of the T'ang and Sung periods and kept sketches of them, and so successful were his imitations that they could take the place of the originals. He was particularly skilled in painting gentlemen and ladies; they were all brilliantly coloured and looked alive. If Chou Fang came back, he could not surpass Ch'iu Ying."

Wang Chih-têng bestows no less praise on Ch'iu Ying, but he balances it with a characteristic critical remark: "Ch'iu Ying was a pupil of Chou Ch'ên, but did not come up to the master in strength. He was particularly skilled in executing copies with white powder colour on yellow paper, and his pictures were such that they could be confused with the originals. Even the smallest hairs on the figures were done with colour or gold; their costumes of red silk and white cloth were most refined, brilliant and natural. He had no reason to feel ashamed before the old masters, but sometimes he got out of the old

ruts and changed his manner. Yet, he could not abstain from adding feet when painting a snake" (he was too meticulous and added too many details).

The most interesting information about Ch'iu Ying is, however, contained in a colophon which the painter P'êng Nien wrote on Ch'iu Ying's picture *The Tribute Bearers* (*Chih-kung t'u*), which was executed in accordance with an early tradition reaching back to T'ang times and transmitted by the painter Wu K'o-wên of the Sung period. This colophon, as well as another by Wên Chêng-ming on the same picture, was dated 1552, and as the writer says that no pictures can be obtained from Ch'iu Ying any longer, it seems that the painter had passed away or was unable to continue his work. His activity must thus have been limited to the first half of the sixteenth century. The colophon runs as follows:¹ "This is a picture by Ch'iu Shih-fu, a pupil of Chou Ch'ên, whose manner he grasped completely. He was specially good in copying. After the death of Chou Ch'ên he was for twenty years [sic!] without a rival in Chiang-nan, but now nothing further can be obtained from him. This picture was painted in the house of Mr. Ch'ên from Huai-yün. Ch'ên was a famous official from Suchou and a good friend of Ch'iu Ying, who stayed in his mountain cottage for many years where he was undisturbed and free to work. The inventions of his mind were wonderfully subtle, his works were beautiful in every detail, the manners of his figures most expressive. Although the figures (in this picture) represent many different countries, they are all rendered according to the records without the least mistake. He has shown himself able to surpass the old masters.

"Master Wên Chêng-ming, the Han-lin scholar, has already discussed this picture in detail (a flattering exaggeration). But if Mr. Ch'ên had not been a lover of antiquity and a generous friend of the painter, it would not have been possible for him to produce such a work. According to what I have heard, the intentions of the painters in making such

¹ *Ch'ing-ho shu-hua tang*, vol. XII, 1, 58.

works are either to hold up antiquity as a correction to the present time or to transmit the customs of their own time to the future.

"Those who have acquired great strength and the highest skill in art have never done meaningless things. If Ch'iu had worked at court, he could himself have seen the barbarian people coming in procession to bring tribute to the emperor, and his picture would have been still finer."

In other words, Ch'iu Ying's picture of the Tribute Bearers and other similar historical representations were by no means simply illustrative compositions rich in decorative details, they were also "mirrors of antiquity" i.e. of the glorious deeds and beautiful manners of ancient times, and had thus a moral import like pictures by the old masters. And this was, indeed, one of the principal reasons why he was so highly appreciated; he not only continued the classic tradition in the formal sense through his innumerable copies and his adherence to the rules and principles of the T'ang and Sung dynasties, he also transmitted the spirit of antiquity through the very conception of the motifs.

The pictures which pass under Ch'iu Ying's name are indeed too numerous for all to be mentioned here; we have to limit ourselves to a few characteristic examples of various types or kinds of paintings which bear his name. As we have learned from the old historians, Ch'iu Ying was not a scholar nor a poet like the leading masters among his contemporaries, and he did not compose poems or colophons on his paintings; they are rarely (if ever) dated by himself, and the dates which result from the inscriptions by some of his friends and colleagues may not always indicate the exact period of the execution of the pictures. Consequently we have very little documentary support for a consecutive chronological study of his development as a painter.

The biographical accounts quoted above make it clear that at an early age he became a pupil of Chou Ch'ên, who consequently must have had some influence on Ch'iu Ying's artistic formation, but he seems also to have remained all through his life an

assiduous student and copyist of certain masters of Sung and pre-Sung times. His copies were such that "they could be confused with the originals", and he reached an unfailing skill in painting "figures with colours and gold in costumes of red silk and white cloth, which he made most refined, brilliant and natural", to repeat the statement of Wang Chih-têng. This refers in particular to the large figure-compositions of more or less traditional type in which Ch'iu Ying's individual qualities were less marked than his ambition to transmit in colour and design the decorative patterns of certain old masters. Such paintings may well have occupied him at various epochs during his life – no less towards the end than at the beginning – because they were always in demand, and it may be noted that a fair number of them found their way into the imperial collection. In the catalogue of the former National Museum in Peking more than half a dozen such pictures are listed; some of them may be copies rather than originals, but even as such they are examples of the kind of *pompier* paintings for which Ch'iu Ying became altogether too famous. The descriptive titles mostly refer to legendary stories with Taoistic or romantic background, for instance: Preparing the Pills of Immortality in a Mountain Cave, after Chao Po-chü; Towers and Pavilions on the Mountain of Immortality (dated 1550); The Hundred Beauties; The Poetical Gathering in the Western Garden, after Chao Po-chü (the first original was by Li Lung-mien); Taoist Immortals Assembled to Celebrate the Birthday of Hsi-wang-mu, etc. Among the pictures in the Ku-kung collection may be noted The Fairy Mountain (inscription dated 1548) and The Poetical Gathering at Lan-t'ing.¹ To these could be added various scroll paintings in Far Eastern and Western collections in which imperial hunting parties or legendary travellers are represented in fantastically coloured landscapes.

There is an excellent example of such landscape-scrolls in the Chicago Art Institute, the picture

¹ *K.-h. shu-hua chi*, vols. XXI and XIV.

which illustrates the story about the fisherman who happened to enter the enchanted Peach-blossom Garden, but then could never find the entrance again. The picture is accompanied by a colophon by Wên Chêng-ming, dated 1530, the year of its execution, or a *terminus ante quem*, and as such the earliest date on any picture by Ch'iu Ying known to us. The landscape, which is composed of open views over rice-fields and winding waters alternating with precipitous mountains rising through clouds to inaccessible peaks, and then again groves of blossoming peach-trees along the water's edge and rows of dark pines in the crevices, is a very skilful transposition of the old-fashioned *ch'ing-lü shan-shui*, enriched and made more natural through the introduction of blossoming trees and verdant fields. In other words, Ch'iu Ying has given a new version of the traditional blue and green landscape style that Chao Po-chü transmitted from his predecessors, the two Li of the T'ang period, and thus made it live again for a while (Pl.239).

The relatively early date of this picture should not be taken as an indication that this kind of quasi-archaistic brightly coloured figure or landscape-painting was only done by Ch'iu Ying in his early years, or that they completely dominated his production at the beginning of his career. Neither the one nor the other of these suppositions seems quite correct. The old-fashioned pictures of the kind indicated above formed a special group or division within Ch'iu Ying's artistic production and they were not limited to a short period, but continued, with some modifications, through most of his life. We shall have occasion to mention a few more of the kind at the end of this chapter; they became quite important as an artistic legacy, even though most of them survive in imitations rather than in originals. The more characteristic expressions of Ch'iu Ying's own genius are of a simpler kind, closer to nature and more akin to the works of Wên Chêng-ming and T'ang Yin. It may even be noted that he did certain pictures in co-operation with T'ang Yin, as appears from the inscription on the

handscroll (formerly in the Ti P'ing-tzû collection) representing a scholar seated under some large trees on a projecting cliff.¹

Another important point of contact between T'ang Yin and Ch'iu Ying, which should be particularly noted, was their common admiration for Li T'ang. We have had occasion to notice how closely T'ang Yin imitated Li T'ang's *ts'a-pi* manner of painting rocks and river-banks. Ch'iu Ying evidently tried to follow along the same track, as is proved by the very remarkable handscroll in the Freer Gallery, which represents a mountain landscape and is signed: Ch'iu Ying Shih-fu of Wu-mên copied the brushwork of Li Hsi-k'u of the Sung dynasty. The intricate design of rocky mountains leading out into a beautiful bay with shady trees, pavilions and bridges, is a typical Li T'ang composition, impressive through its structural character and massiveness. Ch'iu Ying has rendered it with great care in every detail and tried his best to imitate Li T'ang's way of painting the sharply cut and creviced rocks. His performance is in this respect an admirable display of technical skill, but it must, at the same time, be admitted that the painter's own genius has been lost in a *tour de force*. The whole thing has the merit of a high-class imitation, in which the formal beauty of the original has been faithfully rendered, but very little of its life-breath. Consequently it is more important as an historical document, illustrating Li T'ang's persisting influence, than as an example of Ch'iu Ying's individual style. This can be better observed in some minor ink-paintings which also presumably date from the early part of his career.

Considering the fact that Ch'iu Ying started (like T'ang Yin) as a pupil of Chou Ch'ên, we might expect to find similarities with the older master's style in his early works. This connexion can in fact be observed in some very spontaneous paintings like the one (formerly in the P'ang Yüan-chi collection) which is signed: An Ink-play by Ch'iu Shih-fu. It represents an old scholar seated by a stream watching his servant, who is occupied in tying up a bundle of

¹ *Chung-huo*, II, p.22.

scrolls. The motif is of a kind that also appears in some of T'ang Yin's minor paintings (cf. picture in Boston) but rendered in the more realistic spirit of Chou Ch'ên and executed in a relatively broad manner with stronger accents of light and shade than we find in Ch'iu Ying's more finished works.

A somewhat later stage in his stylistic evolution is illustrated by another ink-painting, which also represents an old scholar, this time quite alone, seated in deep thought at the root of a large tree, looking down into the water splashing among the stones below.¹ The composition is completely dominated by the old tree, which bends and writhes like a huge dragon with long legs; the ground and the rocks for the setting, and the man, who is leaning in a restful pose against the tree, almost seems to be growing into the trunk. The inscription by the painter Wang Ch'ung, who died in 1533, makes it practically certain that the picture was executed before that date, a conclusion also supported by its stylistic approach to Chou Ch'ên's works (Pl.238).

Another picture with an inscription by Wang Ch'ung, besides poems by P'êng Nien and Wên Chêng-ming (which also formed part of the P'ang Lai-chen collection), may be slightly later.² It represents a man seated in an open pavilion which is surrounded by high bamboos and large *wu-t'ung* trees. The background is filled by a mountain slope and the pavilion is built on a rocky ledge below, surrounded by water. The picture may have been painted as a record of some friend, or it may be autobiographical, representing the painter in Mr. Ch'ên's mountain home (as described by P'êng Nien). The popular motif – the scholar's mountain resort – is represented in the same way as in so many of T'ang Yin's or Wên Chêng-ming's pictures, the two contemporaries who probably had the greatest influence on Ch'iu Ying. The poems by Wên Chêng-ming and P'êng Nien are interesting as documents of friendship and make us realize that Ch'iu Ying, too, had connexions with the scholarly circles in Suchou described in preceding chapters (Pl.241).

In connexion with the above examples one of Ch'iu Ying's pictures in the Boston Museum should be mentioned. It represents a high pavilion on the bank of a broad river shaded by luxuriant trees growing on the slope behind and on the rocky ledge below. A lady is standing at the railing contemplating the view over the river which fills the upper part of the picture and spreads an air of grey loneliness reminiscent of Ni Tsan's river views. The whole is rendered with great simplicity and an economy of means, which makes it more appealing than most of Ch'iu Ying's later more elaborate paintings (Pl.240).

Ch'iu Ying's individual genius is most strongly felt in his minor paintings (as described above), but the decorative brilliance and strength of his brushwork are more evident in the larger compositions, which are painted in a somewhat broader manner.³ Of the two examples of equal size (8 ft. 7 in. x 3 ft. 1 in.) in the Ku-kung collection, one represents two scholars meeting under a *wu-t'ung* tree by a cliff, and the other two musicians playing the *ch'iu* and the *p'i-p'a* respectively, in the shade of some large banana plants at the foot of high cliffs. The scene is completed by a servant who is arranging a flower vase on a low table. The pictures are executed with luminous accents of deep ink heightened with colour, the cliffs being painted in a *ts'a-pi* manner not unlike that of T'ang Yin, while the trees and figures are drawn with a fine brush. The common influence from Li T'ang seems thus to be lingering here as an under-current, somewhat modified and combined with other elements derived from earlier Sung masters. The designs are, however, quite original and unlike the current mode of *wên-jên hua*, and the technical means are handled with a mastery that probably no other painter of the period possessed to the same extent (Pl.242).

A separate group within the *œuvre* of Ch'iu Ying is formed by the figure-paintings executed in pure

¹ *Min Shihua*, p.61.

² *T'ao*, p.277.

³ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vols. XIX and VII.

pai-miao technique, i.e. drawn with a fine brush in ink, sometimes with a slight addition of colour. Characteristic of this group is the little picture which used to form part of the Kuo Pao-ch'ang collection representing the painter Ni Tsan (probably drawn after some earlier portrait) seated on a low platform or couch covered by a straw mat, while a boy with a fly-whisk, and a maid-servant with a water-bottle are standing at the sides of the platform.¹ The arrangement is rather formal, and the figures not devoid of stiffness, but the picture is significant as an *hommage à Ni Tsan*. The long inscription is a copy of Ni Tsan's epitaph, written by Wên P'êng in the year 1542 (Pl. 243, lower picture).

The short scroll (formerly in the Hsü Shih-ch'ang collection) in which a scholar in an official cap is represented seated by a tree with his servant-boy tying up a parcel of scrolls, is another picture of a somewhat similar kind. The motif is the same as in Ch'iu Ying's early picture, described above, but it is executed in a *pai miao* manner, and the composition is simpler. The artistic interest is concentrated on the figure, the landscape is only indicated with a few strokes of the brush.²

To the same group may also be referred a hand-scroll in the Saitō collection, representing The Eighteen Drunkards, according to the poem by Tu Fu copied by P'êng Nien, whose writing is dated 1543.³ Each of the heroes is surrounded by a number of assistants and servants, occupied in preparing wine, bringing books or food, waving large fans, or showing pictures, while the old men are placed on couches or chairs in easy postures. They are evidently deeply influenced by their enjoyment of wine, but not turbulent or hilarious, rather the contrary: some have fallen asleep, others seem to have passed into a state of quiet ecstasy, or to be sunk in meditation with closed eyes. The tone of the whole thing is quite free from vulgarity, an impression which is born out by the refinement of the execution. The figures are drawn with hair-fine lines on the well prepared powder-ground in a manner which reminds us of Li Lung-mien's finest works, though

Ch'iu Ying's brush is more graceful than structural. The same model seems to have guided the artist when he did the little picture illustrating the imperial messenger Hsiao I in conversation with the monk Pien-ts'ai from whom he obtained the famous Lan-t'ing manuscript of Wang Hsi-chih.⁴

Another well-known example of Ch'iu Ying's *pai-miao* work is the picture in the Boston Museum which was done after a design by Chao Mêng-fu. It represents a Tartar soldier leading a horse and has inscriptions by Lu Chih and Wang Ku-hsiang, which, however, are on a separate piece of paper probably added on to the picture afterwards. They are historically interesting; Wang Ku-hsiang characterizes Ch'iu Ying's picture as follows: "I once saw a picture by Chao Mêng-fu representing 'Examining a Horse', in ink and colour, which was entirely in the manner of the T'ang painters. Today I had the opportunity of seeing Ch'iu Shih-fu's copy of it. The brushwork of his picture seems too fine and delicate, but the style and life-resonance (*ch'i-yün*) are exactly the same (as in the original). One may say that it was executed in complete harmony with the old masters. My friend Shang-chih brought it to my mountain cottage, asking me to write a colophon, and I jotted down these hasty lines. Dated 1553." Wang Ku-hsiang's remarks are quite to the point; Ch'iu Ying has transposed the original in his own manner of almost playful elegance, which, however, does not conceal the T'ang style in the man as well as in the horse.

In the large landscapes and long scrolls with buildings and figures of ancient type, which are illustrations to classic poems and episodes of history, Ch'iu Ying has made it his aim to "hold up antiquity as a mirror to his own time", representing the motifs in accordance with his knowledge of the old masters, yet transposed in a decorative style of his own. The most prominent representatives of this

¹ *Tōan*, p. 278.

² *Tōan*, p. 281.

³ Fully reproduced in *Tōan* (the Saitō catalogue), 27, 3-5.

⁴ *Min Shitaku*, pl. 59.

type of painting are the two large compositions in the Chion-in temple in Kyōto, which are executed in rich colours with abundant display of ornamental details. One illustrates the gathering of Li Po and three of his friends in the so called Peach and Pear Garden in Ch'ang-an on a spring night. The men in white robes are seated at a long table under an old peach-tree, girls in beautiful costumes are serving them, and boys are occupied in preparing and bringing food and wine. The trees on the garden terrace are all full of white blossoms like snow-flakes on the bare branches, and the scene is illumined by two high lanterns at the ends of the table. One may well recognize the spring season here with all its enchanting beauty and fragrance; but as to the night, it is suggested only by the lanterns and to some extent by the mist which screens the background view behind the wall. The main part of the scene is as clear as if it were broad daylight.¹

The companion piece represents the Chin-ku (Golden Valley) Garden of Shih Ch'ung, a wealthy man in the time of the emperor Wu-ti of Chin, who made a great display of his riches and refused to surrender his most lovely concubine to his powerful rival. Shih Ch'ung is standing in a gorgeous pavilion accompanied by a retinue of girls receiving a man who is followed by a servant-boy. The meeting is ceremonious and takes place in a setting of the most exquisite garden architecture amidst rare trees, flowering peonies, and gorgeous peacocks strutting along the marble railings (Pl. 244; central portrait of picture).

The reason why these two very large pictures have become so famous all over the world and sometimes been hailed as supreme examples of Ming painting, is no doubt to be found in their illustrative appeal combined with their decorative beauty and refinement of execution. They are certainly very impressive products of a supreme technical skill more or less corresponding (*mutatis mutandis*) to the ingenious creative faculty that produced the finest *san-tsai* ("three-coloured") porcelains of the Ch'êng-hua and Hung-chih epochs.

In spite of the fact that the lustre of their colouring has been worn off, to some extent, in the course of centuries or has sunk into the silk, the tones are still distinct, the lacquer-red of the buildings and the white, yellowish pink and blue of the garments, and the blossoms still form luminous contrasts to the dark green of the trees and the yellowish brown tone of the silk. The colours interblend harmoniously, but they do not form part of the atmosphere or enter into the substance of the various elements of the composition, they have been applied without much regard to light and shade or the tactile qualities of the objects. They may, indeed, have been applied by various skilled assistants in accordance with the indications of the leading master, though not by his own brush.

These pictures, like so many others of the large compositions which are provided with Ch'iu Ying's signature, seem to be the result of a well organized co-operation of a group of painters under the direction of a master who no doubt was responsible for the design and the colour composition, but only to a small extent for the actual execution and brushwork.

The same impression is strengthened by a closer examination of the figures. The gentlemen in white gowns who are seated at the table do not arouse much interest by individual features or expressions; they show no visible emotional reactions to the enchanting atmosphere of a spring night when the fruit trees are in blossom. The artistic significance or expressiveness is more evident in the small boy, seen from the back, who is walking stumbly over the bridge in the foreground carrying a teapot and a large lantern with a red candle. His awkward movements are very expressive; they make us feel the efforts in his attempt to balance his burdens. He attracts our attention and we are amused by the intrusion of the rather humorous urchin into such a dignified circle of great poets. Other servants are shown occupied with dishes or approaching with burdens; they are also characterized with the kind of

¹ An early copy of this famous composition is in the Boston Museum, a free rendering of it in the Chicago Art Institute.

unconventional realism that attracts attention, whereas the main personages, for whom there were no living models, remain in the class of rather indifferent symbols.

The two above-named compositions hold the foremost place among a number of large figure-paintings with historical or legendary motifs which bear the signature of Ch'iu Ying and consequently must have been made, if not by the master, at least in his workshop by able assistants under his direction. But since none of them contribute anything new to the artistic characterization of the painter, they need not detain us in this connexion. The best among them are also shortly mentioned in our List of Ch'iu Ying's pictures. Unfortunately not a few of these studio paintings which traditionally pass under the master's name, have become better known than his more authentic individual creations, and have consequently served to obscure his actual artistic merits rather than to consolidate his position in the history of Chinese painting. The best characterization of Ch'iu Ying as a specialist of such highly decorative but often very artificial illustrative paintings sometimes executed in the so-called "blue and green" manner, and sometimes with more naturalistically chosen colours, was coined by Tung Ch'ü-ch'ang in his oft-quoted remark: "Ch'iu Ying was a re-born Chao Po-chü; even Shên Chou and Wên Cheng-ming did not attain the same skill."

Ch'iu Ying may not have contributed anything new to the progress of painting, but he perfected this art and brought it to a degree of refinement that no other painter of the Ming period had attained. By transmitting in his own way the old masters' ideas, technical methods, and elements of style, he has made us better acquainted with certain features in the painting of earlier periods, no longer to be seen in the originals, and at the same time he transformed these models into more graceful keys of colour and design in keeping with the rococo spirit that gained the field at the end of the Ming and beginning of the Ch'ing periods. Innumerable paintings of romantic garden landscapes with

blossoming trees and puppet-like fairies, or of blue mountains and green waters where the Immortals live on dew and honey, or heroes of old are mounting elegant steeds, were executed at the time by skilled artisans who followed in the footsteps of Ch'iu Ying. They carried on and satisfied the taste for playful landscapes and decorative transformations of nature, which also found expression in the gardens and products of the applied arts which gradually became known in Europe and contributed to the development of *le goût de chinoiserie*.

Ch'iu Ying's immediate followers may not have been of great importance individually; most of them remained anonymous or unrecorded in the historical annals, yet they continued faithfully a definite tradition of style, some of them devoting themselves also to Buddhist painting. His daughter, Ch'iu Chu, hao Tu-ling Nei-shih, collaborated no doubt in her father's later works, but she also painted figure scenes and garden landscapes of her own, as for instance the picture representing Lady Musicians in a private collection in China,¹ and another of a Lady in a Garden (in the Ku-kung collection) which is an illustration to a Tang poem,² but she also became famous for her sweet and appealing pictures of Kuanyin Bodhisattva.

Among other minor painters recorded as followers or assistants of Ch'iu Ying may be mentioned Ch'ing Huan, who is said to have painted landscapes in the green and blue manner, and Chiang Yin, tzü Chou-tso, who was a skilful painter of noblemen and ladies as well as of flowers and fruits, all in an old-fashioned and very refined manner. A picture of his representing the Emperor Mu wang visiting Hsi-wang-mu is reproduced in *Kokka*, No. 63. These, as well as a few other painters of the same class, were probably employed by the master for executing more or less important portions in his large compositions.

Yu Ch'iu, tzü Tzū-ch'iu, hao Fêng-ch'iu, who married the daughter of Ch'iu Ying and continued

¹ *Tōsō*, p. 284.

² *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XXXIX.

the family tradition, was, however, the most gifted of the master's pupils. He received his artistic education in Suchou, but moved later on to T'ai-ts'ang in Kiangsu where he was active until 1590. As a painter he mainly followed Ch'iu Ying, but evidently also studied very closely older masters like Li Lung-mien and Ch'ien Hsüan, reproducing their works preferably in a pure *pai-miao* manner. He became a prominent master of this technique, but occasionally did coloured paintings, for instance on fans. He may well have been responsible for some of the best imitations in Sung style which in later times have passed under the name of Li Lung-mien.

Most of Yu Ch'iu's paintings are illustrations to ancient legends or popular stories, such as Chao Chün on her Way to Mongolia, Threading the Needle on the Seventh of the Seventh Month,¹ Wang Hsi-chih and his Friends at the Lan-t'ing Poetry Competition, and illustrations to Po Chü-i's Song of Lasting Sorrow,² but he also occasionally did portraits such as the picture in the former Fang Ju collection which, according to the inscription, represents Hsüeh-ko shan-jên, a name used by Pa-ta shan-jên, the famous painter who, however, was born only about the time of Yu Ch'iu's death. The name of the model seems thus misleading (or may have to be differently explained), but the picture looks certainly like a work by Yu Ch'iu.³

Yu Ch'iu's landscapes are mostly composed according to early Sung patterns, as may be seen in a picture in the Ku-kung collection⁴ and another in the National Museum in Stockholm (dated 1572). The landscape serves here as a setting for a great number of scholars placed along a winding stream and all occupied in floating their cups in accordance with the rules of the traditional poetry competition,

while the great master Wang Hsi-chih is seen in a pavilion writing the so-called Lan-t'ing scroll, as explained by the title of the picture: *Wang Hsi-chih Lan-t'ing chi-hui t'u*.

In another minor picture Yu Ch'iu has represented Wang Hsi-chih on his way to the Lan-t'ing meeting, famous in the annals of China owing to the calligraphic masterpiece which he produced on this occasion.

The most fitting forms for Yu Ch'iu's illustrative paintings or drawings are, however, the handscrolls in which he unrolls with great distinction the illustrations to successive scenes of a story. One of these, i.e. the illustration of Chao Chün's Journey to Mongolia, is a free version of a composition by Li Lung-mien; others take us into the fairyland of poetic imagination, as may be seen in the illustrations to Chao Po-chü's poem in the Fujii Collection in Kyôto, or represent the serene enjoyment of scholarly gentlemen in an enchanted garden. Beautiful variations on this classic motif are depicted with the utmost refinement in the long scroll in the Nelson Gallery in Kansas City, which as a whole is one of the very best examples of the painter's faithfulness to the technical and stylistic traditions of the early Sung period (Pl. 245). This exceptionally strong traditionalism, combined with skill and refinement, were no doubt qualities which served Yu Ch'iu well in his illustrative wall-paintings executed in the Kuan-ti miao in T'ai-ts'ang. They are no longer preserved, but are said to have contributed greatly to the fame of the artist.

¹ *Sôgen*, pp. 134 and 135.

² *Yüan-tai-tan*, II.

³ *T'ien*, p. 145.

⁴ *K'o-shu-hua chi*, vol. V.

Painters of Flowers, Birds and Landscapes

I

Ch'ên Shun, Lu Chih, and other Suchou painters

NO KIND of Chinese painting has aroused more interest and been the object of more general enjoyment also among Westerners than the paintings of flowers, plants, trees and birds which were produced in China at various periods and in many different styles. A main reason for this wide-spread appreciation of Chinese flower-painting has no doubt been connected with the fact that such paintings seemed natural and easy to understand; they did not require any such modification or adjustment in the Western art-lovers' traditional attitude towards painting as was often necessary for a proper understanding of Chinese landscapes; they could be enjoyed without any special regard to the lack of perspective, plastic modelling or other formal qualities of the kind that Westerners are inclined to look for in Far Eastern figure and landscape-paintings.

Yet it must be admitted that the naturalness which to Westerners constitutes the attraction of Chinese flower-painting does not signify exactly the same thing as the connotations of this word in Western art. It is true that the Chinese were past masters in rendering the formal beauty and characteristics of the various plants and flowers, yet their artistic ambition was more searching, more penetrating; it made them go beyond the outward appearance and seek to evoke those unseen qualities of odour and atmosphere essential to the living flowers. To the great flower-painters in China the plants and the trees were no less important sentient beings than human individuals, they, too, had their aspirations, their needs and yearnings, though expressed in a silent language, which painters as well as poets tried to interpret in their works.

In our study of flower-paintings of earlier periods we have had occasion to return to the above-mentioned points several times and also to quote some of the Chinese interpretations of the characteristics and significance of various flowers; it may not be necessary here to return to the same ideas again, yet it seems useful to recall the tradition (or theory) that when flower-painting first became an independent kind or class of painting (on an equal footing with figure or landscape-painting), i.e. about the middle of the tenth century, it branched off into two different lines of development, or currents of style, which originated from the two most famous masters of Chinese flower-painting, Huang Ch'üan and Hsü Hsi (both active about the middle of the century), and then were continued by their pupils, followers and imitators all through the ages far into the Ming period and even later. Such is the general view of the leading Chinese art-historians, sweeping and schematic as most of these endless aesthetic theories are in China, yet suggestive and helpful to students who are trying to find their way through this flowery jungle.

The general view of the origin of these two currents of style and their fundamental differences is stated by several critics of the Sung period, and particularly by Liu Tao-ch'ün who, in writing about the flower-painters of the Five Dynasties, says that it was customary among scholars of the Sung period to consider Huang Ch'üan's and Chao Ch'ang's pictures as the best models, "because their ways of painting things from life and using colours went far beyond the thoughts of common men; but if they are compared with Hsü Hsi's works, we realize

their inferiority". The critic then characterizes in a few words their different methods of painting and says, referring to the two first-named artists, "those who are working in a refined manner blend their colours simply to obtain formal likeness; how could they give life-breath and structure? That was not the way of Hsü Hsi." He first indicated the essential parts of the flowers with a light ink sketch and then he applied the colours. "Thus the life-breath and the design were first indicated and the pictures seemed exuberantly vigorous almost like the works of the Creator." He was regarded as the greatest painter, deserving to be placed in the very highest, "divine" class.

This may sound somewhat strange or far-fetched to Western amateurs, yet it indicates the two different approaches to flower-painting that the Chinese considered as the essential sources or characteristics of the two currents within this kind of art, and it also makes it clear that the supreme position accorded to Hsü Hsi was due to the fact that he did not stop at a refined and effective rendering of the formal aspects and beauty of his models, but reached beyond their appearances into the inner structure of the plants and flowers, and thus was able to reveal their very life-breath with his brush. The whole problem was transferred into a world of unseen subjective realities, which no doubt was more familiar to the Chinese than it ever has been to Western artists.

The perfect flower and bird-paintings executed in colour in the so-called *mo-ku* manner by Huang Ch'üan, his sons and successive followers, soon became favourite pictures at court and among wealthy officials and amateurs. They corresponded exactly to the popular demand for colourful beauty, and they were the results of technical skill that could be transmitted from teacher to pupil and accepted as a foundation for the studies and principles of style cultivated at the imperial academies. It was mainly this kind of refined realistic flower-painting that was perfected at emperor Hui-tsung's painting academy in K'ai-feng and also at its successor in Hangchou,

and the same ideas and principles of style were again revived by the flower and bird-painters who worked for the early Ming emperors in Jen-chih tien and Wu-ying tien, for instance Pien Wen-chin and his imperial patron Hsüan-tê, not to mention Li Chi and a number of later men who painted flowers and birds more or less for decoration. They did not form a definite school but they carried on the academic tradition, and may thus be said to have followed a line parallel to that of the landscape-painters of the Chê school, but the larger part of this production of decorative bird and flower-paintings has remained anonymous, particularly when done for the decoration of porcelain, textiles, furniture, etc., i.e. various kinds of useful objects on which flower decorations found a place in the Ming period.

Side by side with this very broad and varied stream of decorative paintings, among which the flower and bird-paintings occupied a large place, there existed in the Ming period another current of flower-painting which, at least in part, may be considered as a continuation of Hsü Hsi's brilliantly expressionistic art (if we may call it so having in mind the descriptions of the old recorders). This current was a branch of the literary, non-professional painting inspired by Taoist or Buddhist conceptions of man's essential unity with every form of life in Nature, which were particularly favoured by poets and scholars who were masters of the brush. It was indeed what we would call a kind of romanticism expressed in pictorial form, sometimes accompanied by poetic inscriptions.

The fundamentally expressionistic character of this kind of painting made it quite distinct from the many schools of decorative flower-painting which existed at the same time. The painters who carried on this line of work had no ambition to render the motifs of nature with formal perfection or finish, but rather to transmit, as far as possible, the "reverberation of the life-breath" by the strokes of their brush.

Paintings of this class had to be executed with the greatest possible speed and concentration if they

were to transmit sudden flashes of inspiration or the reverberations of life, a condition which led perforce to a reduction of the technical means. Work with colours, which in the time of Hsü Hsi had been an important complement to the ink designs, was reduced or dropped particularly towards the end of the Sung and in later periods. Ink-sketches were quite enough to transmit the significance of the motifs or convey the intentions of the painter. This method of reducing brushwork which won the field in the Yüan and Ming periods, became generally known as *hsieh-i*, "idea-writing", a name that indicates the essential purpose and character of the method. But it must not be forgotten that *hsieh-i* is a rather generalizing term referring to the philosophical or aesthetic approach of the painters' activity as well as to their technical procedure. It covers consequently many kinds of individual variations or different degrees, depending on the painters' temperament and their mastery of the technical means of expression. Nor is it limited to a single kind of motif such as flowers and birds or plants and trees; it has also been used in landscape-paintings and in figure studies of the most spontaneous kind.

Most of these *hsieh-i* paintings executed after the Sung period are monochrome ink sketches, yet there are also some excellent examples by Ming painters like Ch'ên Shun and Lu Chih, not to mention Tung Ch'ü-ch'ang, which are toned with light washes of colour by which means their suggestiveness of certain moods of nature is greatly enhanced. But the colour element in the *hsieh-i* paintings of the Yüan and Ming periods is never as important as it was, for instance, in Hsü Hsi's famous flower-paintings.

We have had occasion to observe in our studies of great landscape-painters of the Wu school that some of them also painted occasionally flowers and fruits, bamboo and plum-blossoms, and insects and birds. Shên Chou was a great master of this kind of painting, which he often did in a kind of *hsieh-i* manner, whereas Wên Chéng-ming's paintings of bamboo

and plum-blossoms are mostly done in a more finished style. T'ang Yin, who was a brilliant virtuoso of the brush, was quite able to do spontaneous *hsieh-i* paintings as well as pictures in a highly finished style.

Among the followers of these great masters were, however, a number of minor talents who did excellent flower-paintings as well as landscapes in a more or less perfect *hsieh-i* technique and who consequently are well worth remembering in this connexion. The best known among them was Ch'ên Shun, *tzü* Tao-fu, *hao* Po-yang (1483-1544). According to the biography in *Wu-shéng shih-shih*, in his youth he worked in the manner of the Yüan masters, but in his middle age he was attracted by the two Mi and by Kao K'o-kung (the continuator of the Mi style). His ink was light, easily flowing, "dripping dropping", and productive of far-reaching effects. His flowers, birds, trees, and stones were all vibrant with life; and he was also a wonderful writer of grass characters.

His art is still more intimately characterized by Wang Chih-t'eng, who was only slightly younger than Ch'ên Tao-fu and evidently had a great admiration for the painter, of whom he writes: "He possessed a beautiful talent by nature and his brushwork was highly original. In painting landscapes he followed Mi Fei, Wang Meng, and Huang Kung-wang, but did not imitate them slavishly, losing his nature. His paintings were done in such a free and spontaneous fashion that they seemed like living things before the eye.

"He was a wonderful painter of flowers and birds; a single flower or half a leaf done with light ink in a sketchy fashion, or flowers scattered without order on the paper, some turned sideways, some upside-down, oh, how true they were to nature! In such things he surpassed all the other painters of the same class. But he did not paint green leaves and red flowers with clearly divided petals and pistils as ordinary artisans do, who are unable to acquire the free manner of the great masters. He was also an excellent writer of grass and seal characters, which

he did in an imposing manner, truly worth looking at. His second son, Ch'ên Kuo, was a man who indulged in wine and an extravagant life, like (the old Sages of) the Bamboo Grove. His pictures were painted in a careless fashion, but they were certainly not of the common sort.²

The above characterizations of Ch'ên Shun's graceful and easily flowing manner might be illustrated by a number of landscape-scrolls as well as flower-paintings in both Western and Eastern collections. His works are not rare and they are always pictorially attractive and of fairly even quality.

Among the landscape-paintings the handscrolls in the Freer Gallery, the Chicago Art Institute and the Nelson Gallery, Kansas City, may be mentioned in particular. The Freer Gallery handscroll, which is dated 1535, is the most faithful imitation after Mi Yu-jên. It represents the usual mountain ridge with a series of conical peaks rising through mist that covers the river-banks below. The brushwork is reduced to very light, almost transparent washes of greyish tones of various grades; there are no sharp outlines and there is little definition of details (Pl.246).

The scroll in Kansas City is also painted in accordance with the Mi fashion, though it is perhaps closer to the older than to the younger Mi, owing to the flocky application of the ink on the dark hills. The Chicago scroll, which is known under the title *The House of the Eight Poems*, and, like the previous one, dated 1538, is painted in a more patchy manner perhaps more inspired by studies of Kao K'o-kung than of Mi Fei. A fourth scroll representing a river view enclosed by rocky shores, dated 1544, which is in the former Abe collection, is stylistically more related to Shên Chou than to the Mi or to the Yüan masters (Pl.248).

Shên Chou, who was a close friend of Ch'ên Shun, had evidently the greatest influence on the younger master as a flower-painter; his best works of the kind could almost have been painted by Shên Chou, even though they do not possess the structure of Shên's flower-paintings. They are as a rule done

without outlines, not drawn, but painted with washes of ink and colours, and their artistic expression depends on the tonal values and the touch of the brush. This may be observed in the picture in the Ku-kung collection³ representing a Duck among Lotus Flowers, which is remarkable for its elegant brushwork and suggestion of moist atmosphere, and also in the twenty studies of flowers and fruits reproduced in an album dated in the year 1544⁴ (Pl.247B).

The majority of his flower-paintings are done simply in ink, with something of the same freshness and spontaneity that we know from Shên Chou's renderings of similar motifs, though with a lighter brush and a less definite rendering of form. The compositional part is often neglected; it seems as if the flowers were thrown off hastily to be records of various species, and they are accompanied by short poems, as may be seen in several handscrolls containing series of cut flowers with a few leaves.⁵ They are fixed on the paper with the same speed and flowing rhythm as the grass characters of the inscriptions by which they are accompanied, though with broader touches and more variations of tone.

The pictures known to us by Ch'ên Shun's son, Ch'ên Kuo, *tsü Tzû-chêng*, are of a somewhat more formal kind, executed in closer adherence to Sung traditions of flower-painting, yet in an individual manner with fine gradations of tone. Even if he learned his art from his father, it must be admitted that he did not follow in his footsteps, but went his own way, and (as pointed out by some critics) it may well be that he would have attained the same fame as the older Ch'ên if he had lived longer.

Tao Ch'êng, *tsü Mêng-hsüeh* and *hao Yün-hu* hsien-jên, was another gifted flower-painter who followed rather closely in the footsteps of Ch'ên Tao-fu. His known pictures are few. Besides a minor painting in the Ku-kung collection representing *New Year's Flowers in a Vase*, which is signed

¹ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XXIX.

² Published by the Chung-hua Co., Shanghai, 1914.

³ *Li-tai*, vol. 2 and *Shina Nangô*, vol. II, 2.

and dated 1532, there are only two or three others, such as *An Old Plum-tree in Blossom*, formerly in the Hoyt Collection in Cambridge, and the handscroll with *Chrysanthemums and Cabbages*, which is reproduced in the Nanking Exhibition Catalogue and is now in the collection of Mr. W. Hochstadter in New York. These examples are all painted in a very free *hsieh-i* manner with a spirited brush and appropriate divisions of the successive plants and stones within the handscroll. There is hardly any historical information about this master, but to judge by the style and quality of his art he must have been an excellent representative of the kind of expressionistic flower-painting described above.

Lu Chih, *tsü Shu-p'ing*, *hao Pao-shan-tzū* (1495-1576) was an artist of rather different character from Ch'ên Tao-fu, who also won his fame as a painter of flowers and birds. He was a more versatile man, able to paint in many different styles; his landscapes are sometimes quite in the *wên-jên* fashion, sometimes done in a freer, more expressionistic manner, and his flowers and birds reflect the same vacillation between classic ideals and a more spontaneous *hsieh-i* style. According to the biography in *Wu-shêng shih-shih*, he was "an upright and unrestrained character who gave away his money to his brother and built an ancestral temple on land which he owned. The people called him Hsiao-yü, the filial and friendly man." Wang Yüan-mei¹ said of him: "In his landscapes he liked to imitate the Sung masters, though he also expressed his own ideas; his landscapes were lofty and sharp-cut, far-reaching and thought-provoking, built up in layer upon layer, yet he did not discard 'short cuts' (the more sketchy ways). In his flower and bird-paintings he grasped the ideas of Hsü Hsi and Huang Ch'üan, but did not reach the wonderful points of Ch'ên Tao-fu and was not so true to nature.

"He built himself a house on the Chih-hsin mountain (south of Suchou) which was quite enveloped by rosy clouds and surrounded by running

water. There he planted rare flowers of many kinds. When good friends sometimes came to see him, he invited them to sit among the flowers and offered them honey and bamboo shoots. But if the people were not the kind he liked, he bolted his door with a stone and paid no attention to their knocking. In particular he disliked people in high positions and did not want to have anything to do with them. Those who urged him to paint never got anything from him, whereas those who did not ask for his pictures had a better chance." We are told elsewhere, that "a man, who through a friend had obtained a picture by Lu Chih, sent him some money in return, but the painter refused to accept it with the remark: 'I paint to express my friendship, not to earn money'."

Most of Lu Chih's landscape-paintings are rather elaborate and filled with towering mountains, yet there are some exceptions to the rule which are of a more simple and sketchy kind. Foremost among these should be mentioned the small early picture (about one foot square) in which T'ao Yüan-ming is represented on a mountain terrace under some large pine-trees.² It was painted in 1523 and provided with an inscription fifty years later, when its owner brought it again to the painter, who found it "as fresh as when it was first done". The style reminds us somewhat of late works by Shên Chou, who at that date was still alive and no doubt also meant something to Lu Chih.

Fundamentally Lu Chih was an intimate painter who gave his very best when working on a relatively small scale; his minor landscapes, inspired by actual observations of nature, like the flower-paintings, are more interesting than the larger decorative landscape compositions in which he followed traditional models of Sung or pre-Sung times. Their archaistic tendency is noticeable, though more or less modified by the painter's individual manner of execution.

The mountains, their peaks and terraces, as well as

¹ Wang Shih-ch'eng, *tsü Yüan-mei* (1526-1593), a famous poet, official and scholar, is often quoted in *Wu-shêng shih-shih*.

² *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, vol. XII.

the cliffs and stones are sharply outlined in angular shapes which gives them the appearance of silhouettes cut out in coloured cardboard or from a metal sheet; they are treated as elements in well unified decorative designs rather than as parts of actual landscapes. In these large pictures the main interest of the painter is centred on the decorative transposition of the motif and not on the convincing representation of natural scenery.

One of the best examples of this landscape-type is the large picture in the Ku-kung collection¹ which represents steep overhanging cliffs framing a wide river view with flat mountain silhouettes in the background (Pl. 249). The very tall rocks with their overhanging tops stand out like side-wings in a stage-setting; their overwhelming size is accentuated when we compare them with the human beings on the shore below, and the elements of the landscape appearing through mist in the background. The composition thus consists of a number of thin vertical layers, one behind the other, which by their stylization and colouring give the impression of a somewhat unrealistic stage arrangement. The poetic inscription on the picture is dated 1550, when Lu Chih was a man of 54.

The other large landscape-paintings by the master in the Ku-kung collection are of less importance and need hardly retain us in this connexion; they illustrate, at least in part, legendary motifs indicated in their titles: *The Jade Cave on the Mountain of the Immortals*² (an over-crowded composition in the Kuo Hsi style); *The Hermit Fisherman on the Flower Stream*,³ and *The Chih-hsin Mountain*,⁴ a place where the painter is said to have lived some years. Yet this, too, is a more fantastic than realistic landscape; it is formed of deep gulleys and lofty peaks, sharply cut and rising in "layers beyond layers", to quote the words of Wang Shih-ch'eng. There are roads along the edges of precipices and clumps of trees around small sanctuaries, but they are all elements in a decorative pattern which lead our thoughts to the abodes of the Immortals rather than to dwelling-places in the human world.

If we turn from the large compositions to Lu Chih's minor studies of actual sites which he knew by experience, we move into a world of more intimate charm. Their artistic significance is dependent on their faithfulness to nature and refinement of execution. Some of these studies are just as exact and incisive as the best Dutch landscape-drawings of the seventeenth century and at the same time very sensitive in tone and atmosphere.

This is true of the large album-leaf (formerly in the Manchu Household collection) which represents a wide bay enclosed by high mountains and budding trees in early spring, and also of the more sketchy album-leaf in the Dubosc collection, which according to the inscription represents an impression of Tiger Hill in mist (Pl. 250A). The towering rocks which rise over the dense mist at one side of the picture are crowned by a pagoda, and some graceful temple pavilions which seem to be soaring in the air, while the small fishing-boats on the water below are only faintly visible. The brushwork has the light and jerky rhythm that reflects the sensitive and impulsive temperament of the master.

The handscroll in the Freer Gallery (dated 1554) known as *Autumn Colours at Hsiu-yang*, is a more finished example of Lu Chih's sensitive manner of interpreting the moods of nature (Pl. 250B). It is nominally an illustration to Po Chü-i's *Song of the P'i-p'a*, often illustrated by the romantic Ming painters and here attached to the picture (in a copy by Wên P'eng). The view opens over a wide stretch of quiet water; only low strips of land and some dotted islands mark the distances; the near shore where the boats of the poet and the mourning woman are moored is indicated by some stones and shrubs rising gradually into a rocky promontory with some wind-shaken bare trees. It is truly autumn; the interpretation has the same cool airiness as we know from Ni Tsan's paintings.

¹ Ibid. vol. XLV.

² *K-k, shu-lua chi*, vol. XIX.

³ Ibid. XXVI.

⁴ *Ku-kung*, XXIX.

though it lacks the distinction of the Yüan master's structural brushwork. The pictorial effect is heightened by soft colouring in light tones of green, brick-red and grey; pure black ink is here used only in spots. In spite of the almost depressingly simple motif the picture possesses something of the same exquisiteness or lyric charm as Lu Chih's most sensitive flower-studies.

The flower and bird-paintings, which form nearly half of the master's production, may also be divided into two groups, one consisting of carefully finished coloured paintings of a somewhat "academic" type, the other more spontaneous in an individual *hsieh-i* style. The former may be decoratively more effective, but the latter reveals the artist's genius and his sensitiveness to the charm of the living models more immediately.

A typical example of the former class is the picture in the Ku-kung collection representing a Parrot and two White Swallows on the Branches of a Blossoming Peach-tree.¹ It is an early work (dated 1544) elaborated with great care in bright colours and put together decoratively, evidently in an effort to equal or surpass the Sung academicians. The Quails by a Rockery is a free version of a Sung composition dated 1552,² whereas the large picture known as Birds Joyfully Calling in a Spring Garden (*Chin pu ming-ch'ün t'u*),³ i.e. peacocks among *mutan*-flowers, is a gorgeous display of colourful garden-life in the somewhat vulgar manner of Lü Chi.

The simpler pictures by Lu Chih in the same collection representing plants and flowers (mostly without birds) give a better idea of the artist's faculty for observations of plant-life and for transmitting momentary significant impressions of it. Some of these pictures are executed in conformity with academy tradition with the utmost exactness in every detail, others in a more spontaneous *hsieh-i* manner. Among the former may be recalled the picture representing A Pine-tree with a Fungus and Bamboo by a Rockery,⁴ and another in which Branches of White Magnolia are combined with a slender stem of bamboo.⁵ These pictures are no less

remarkable for their structural drawing than for their flowery charm. Yet as evidences of the painter's faithfulness to Sung traditions and ability to produce close imitations of the Hsü Hsi type of flower-paintings they are surpassed by the picture of a single *mutan*-flower.⁶ The flower is large and bending downward on a slender stem; the structural designs of the leaves, petals and pistils are indicated with fine ink-lines, but the actual painting is accomplished with light washes of colour which suggest an atmosphere and equally the heady perfume emanating from the well filled calyx. At the top of the picture is an inscription dated 1571, containing an extract from a treatise on *mutan*-flowers (*Hua-p'u*) which shows the painter's particular attachment to this kind of flower-motif and its pictorial transposition.

Among the flower-paintings done in a more fluent manner, mainly with ink, should be recalled the charming picture in the Ku-kung collection called A Day-lily with a Pomegranate (1570).⁷ The pictorial transposition is here concentrated in a few reducing brush-strokes, vibrant with life, suggestive of the rising sap in the plants (Pl. 251). In pictures of this kind Lu Chih comes very close to Ch'ên Shun, as also may be seen in the excellent sketches of various flowers on twelve large album-leaves in the Ku-kung collection. All these pictures, done in a masterly *hsieh-i* manner, may be said to disprove the often repeated statement of some old critics according to which Lu Chih "did not quite attain the marvellous points of Ch'ên Shun". It may well be that Ch'ên Shun was a stronger artistic personality, but Lu Chih was more of a lyrical poet and the more sensitive interpreter of the individual characteristics of the flowers he transposed in spontaneous sketches of brilliant brushwork.

¹ K.-k. shu-hua chi, XVIII.

² Ibid. XXV.

³ Ibid. XXXVI.

⁴ Ibid. XXXII.

⁵ Ibid. VII.

⁶ Ibid. VIII.

⁷ K.-k. shu-hua chi, XVI.

The flower and bird-painters mentioned above also painted landscapes, but there were others who concentrated mainly on the flower-motifs. Paintings of this kind preserved from the sixteenth century are quite numerous – some anonymous, some with names – but only a few examples can be mentioned here, and that briefly. The works by Wang Ku-hsiang, *tzü* Lu-chih, *hao* Yu-shih (1501–1568), are among the most attractive. According to the biography in the *Wu-shêng shih-shih*, he was a handsome and intelligent youth who passed the *chin-shih* degree in 1529, became a Han-lin scholar and a vice-secretary to the Board of Civil Office, but as a result of disagreements with one of the ministers retired from official life and went to stay with his mother in Suchou. There he lived in complete retirement, occupying himself with painting and the copying of old books. "He used to shut the door, sweep the ground, burn incense and sit in meditation. His room was a quiet place, filled with precious specimens of old jade and bronze. Various ministers tried to induce him to re-enter official life, but Ku-hsiang answered them smilingly: 'I retired while I was still young, why should I now, when my hair is grey, put on the official hat?'"

Wang Ku-hsiang's favourite motifs seem to have been varieties of chrysanthemum, bamboo, soft tufts of long grass and plum-trees in blossom. An excellent picture of chrysanthemum and bamboo growing by a stone (probably in the Shanghai Museum) is reproduced in *Gems*, vol. I. The picture in the Ku-kung collection which represents an old plum-tree by a rockery and a bunch of narcissi at its foot is a more important composition and no less remarkable for its energetic, not to say expressionistic, brushwork. It is a true "literati-painting" close akin to a scroll of poetic writing, though more easily comprehensible (Pl. 252).

Most of Wang Ku-hsiang's relatively rare flower studies were probably done as improvisations when he met with some friends of the Wên Chêng-ming circle in a Suchou garden. On occasions like that pictures were produced as well as poems in which

the silent music of the moment was retained in verse and rhythm. A picture of a blossoming branch of an old plum-tree (in the National Museum in Stockholm) may here be mentioned as a record of such a gathering of poetic friends, for though the painting is more likely to be a faithful copy than an original by Wang Ku-hsiang, the ancillary poems have the ring of original compositions and transmit the thoughts that inspired the painter as well as his friends Wên P'êng, Wang Ch'ung and Ch'ên Liu. The first, by the artist himself, may be rendered as follows:

"The moon comes out. It stands so cold against the little window. The snow on a thousand peaks has not yet melted. Faint perfumes and sparse shadows now descend. The guest abides until the night is ended."

The last of these poems, written by Ch'ên Liu, is the most imaginative: "Thin shadows fall across the window. The waxing moon stands bright above the fairy terrace. The sound of flying cranes is spreading through the night. There is a guest who sees the fairies in his dreams."

The visions of these men were rather frail, but they knew how to convey them in symbols of art and words without destroying the enchanted touch.

Chou Chih-mien, *tzü* Fu-ch'ing, *hao* Shao-ku, is often mentioned in connexion with Ch'ên Shun and Lu Chih, because he was also a Suchou man who painted mainly flowers and birds, though of a somewhat younger generation. His dated paintings range between 1572 and 1609, and most of them represent birds, preferably poultry or crows in combination with garden rocks, also bamboos or banana plants, but he did plum-blossoms as well, and peach-trees (as may be seen in our List of his reproduced paintings). The most famous among the pictures in the Ku-kung collection are the Eight Minah Birds in a leafy tree¹ and A Pair of Mandarin Ducks in a Pond by a blossoming garden tree;² but the picture representing a squirrel on the winding

¹ *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, XIII.

² *Ku-kung*, XXV.

branches of a grape-vine¹ is more attractive than these, and the motif has offered an excellent opportunity to the painter to display his mastery of a fluent and graceful *hsieh-i* technique (Pl.253A). The elastic strength of the climbing plant with its tendrils, leaves and clusters of grapes is rendered with a light and swift brush, while the watchful little animal that is swaying on a thread-like branch accentuates the momentariness of the situation. We are told that Chou Chih-mien kept many kinds of birds at his home in order to study their habits and movements, and he may well have taken a similar interest in squirrels.

He was not of the same scholarly class as Ch'ên Tao-fu and Wang Ku-hsiang, but a highly gifted painter whose life-like cocks, ducks and crows became very popular and were often copied. The best that has been written about him is contained in the following encomium by the poet Wang Shih-ch'êng (reported in *Wu-shêng shih-shih*, III, 28).

"Among the painters of flowers and grass active during the present dynasty none were better than the men of Suchou, and in this country of Wu (Suchou) there was no one after Shên Chou who surpassed Ch'ên Tao-fu and Lu Chih. Tao-fu was wonderful but not so exact (true); Lu Chih was exact (true to nature) but not so wonderful. Chou Chih-mien seemed to be able to combine the merits of the two masters, but he was addicted to drinking and thus fell into decay" (Pl.253B).

* * *

Suchou, or the country of Wu, was no doubt the main centre of flower and bird-painting during the sixteenth century; this kind of art had struck deep roots there ever since the days of Shên Chou and had been assiduously cultivated not only by the famous masters mentioned above, but also by a number of minor talents whose works are little known nowadays.

It should, however, be remembered that Suchou was not the only place where flower and bird-

painting enjoyed much favour at the time; prominent painters in this field were also active in Nanking and in Ch'ien-t'ang and Shao-hsing in Chekiang. Several of them are recorded in *Wu-shêng shih-shih* and in *Ming-hua lu*, but since our presentation is to be based on the pictures rather than on literary traditions, we may pass over artists whose works are not accessible in reproduction or original.

Plum-blossoms seem to have been the favourite motif of the flower-painters in Chekiang in the Ming period just as in earlier times. The tradition of Wang Mien's enchanting art was kept alive as a source of inspiration in his home province, while flowers of a richer formal beauty – lilies, roses, mutan, k'uei-hua and their likes – attracted more interest among the scholars and painters in Suchou.

One of the earliest of these plum-blossom painters was Wang Ch'ien, *tsü* Mu-chih, *hao* Ping-hu tao-jên, who may have been active already at the end of the fifteenth century, if the statement in *Wu-shêng shih-shih* that he did a picture of bamboo and plum-blossom together with Hsia Ch'ang is correct. It should, however, also be remembered that he accepted the invitation to act as a teacher of plum-blossom painting to Chang Yu, the Duke of Lung-p'ing in the Ch'êng-tê period (1506-1521). And he was also for a while Keeper of the Imperial Ancestral Temple in the capital.

His prominent position as a plum-blossom painter is well substantiated by the picture in the Ku-kung collection which represents some slender branches of a young plum-tree strewn with white blossoms. The noble design and its rising rhythm are rendered with a firm and yet graceful brush which, however, can hardly be said to convey the impression of "dragons issuing from their cave", as claimed by an old critic.²

This statement would seem more applicable to the plum-blossom paintings by Liu Shih-ju, *tsü* Chi-hsiang, *hao* Hsüeh-hu, from Shao-hsing. As a boy he saw some plum-blossom paintings by Wang Mien and was deeply impressed by them. They decided

¹ K.-k. *shu-hua chi*, XLIII.

² K.-k. *shu-hua chi*, vol. XXVII.

his career. When he had finished his studies he started wandering about his home province, visiting all the mountains and valleys where wonderful plum-trees were to be seen, grasping all their varying manners and characteristics thoroughly. His whole life was devoted to plum-blossoms. It is said that he painted them for eighty years and died at 90. He also published a special treatise on the subject called *Mei-hua p'u*, and excelled in composing poetry at convivial meetings with his friend and fellow-citizen Hsü Wei.¹

Liu Shih-ju's plum-blossom paintings are not very common, but two characteristic examples may be mentioned here, one in the Inouye collection in Japan,² the other in the Fogg Museum, Cambridge,

Mass. (Pl.254). They represent the same motif with some variations, to wit, branches of old plum-trees seemingly dry and dead, which at the approach of spring burst into new life and are strewn all over with small white flowers fastened to tender twigs. The beauty and meaning of the motif, well known to us from Tso Fu-wei's and Wang Mien's pictures, are perfectly expressed in conformity with traditional standards, the brushwork has the strength and rhythm that may be said to transmit the rising sap of spring. We agree with the old critic who said that the effect of Liu Shih-ju's pictures "was vigorous yet quiet and refined".³ His manner was, as a matter of fact, not unlike that of his friend Hsü Wei, though the latter was of a more unrestrained temperament.

II

Hsü Wei

Before we turn our attention to Hsü Wei's biography and extensive production, a word should be added concerning another Chekiang painter, called Wang Ch'ien, *tzü l-ch'ing*, *hao Ts'ang-ch'un*, who painted "birds, insects, melons, fruits, flowers and grass and also trees and shrubs, thickets and mountain gullies most wonderfully". His picture of A Cock and Hen and some Crows in a Snowy Tree, in the Ku-kung collection,⁴ and another representing Geese Playing in Water, with a Mynah mocking them from a bare tree on the shore,⁵ are done in a rather broad and fluent manner almost like bird-paintings by Lin Liang. According to *Wu-shêng shih-shih*, "old Wang painted simply for his own pleasure and never for other people; consequently his pictures became very rare after his death and as precious as the feathers of the spirit horse (*chi-kuang*)"⁶—praise which sounds redundant to us who have only seen the quite ordinary works by old Wang and never any traces of the "spirit horse" or

Pegasus which he is said to have mounted (Pl.253B).

The above-mentioned painters may with more or less reason be classified as late offshoots of the old Chê school as it survived in a somewhat diluted form known to us through the paintings by Lin Liang, Chang Lu, Chiang Sung, and some other artists of their generation. They were no doubt able men of the brush, some of them with scholarly background, but none of them seems to have been an outstanding genius or to have possessed an original talent of primary importance. The only Chekiang painter of this generation who may be said to have possessed at least the germ, or a seed, of

¹ Cf. Sun Ta-kuang, *Chung-kuo hua-chia-jên-ming ta tzu-tien*, p.661.

² Tôsô, p.231.

³ *Ming-hua lu*, ch.7 and *Wu-shêng shih-shih*, VII, p.2.

⁴ *Ku-kung*, vol.XX.

⁵ *Nanju*, vol.IV (Obata collection, Tôkyô).

⁶ *Chi-kuang*, a mythical animal sometimes called a spirit horse. The feathers of *Chi-kuang* is an expression used of precious literary fragments.

genius in his character was Hsü Wei, but the seed was, in his case, never allowed to grow into full bloom. His unusual talents were rather frittered away over many fields, and the artistic harvest of his life-work cannot be ranked in the same class as the individual *œuvre* of the somewhat older leading Suchou masters. Hsü Wei nevertheless holds a prominent place in the history of Chinese painting owing to his abundant production and the decisive influence that his art exercised on two or three generations of younger painters. Accounts of his adventurous life are found in the *Ming shih* as well as in the *Wu-shêng shih-shih*, from which the following may be quoted.

"Hsü Wei was born in Shan-yin, Chekiang, in 1521 and died in 1593. Among the various by-names found on his paintings, the following are the best known: Wên-ch'ing, Ch'ing-t'êng, T'ien-ch'ih and P'êng-fei. His early education and promotions are described as follows in the *Ming shih*:¹

"He had only just passed his tenth year when he wrote an Essay on Slander in imitation of Yang Hsiung's Essay on Ridicule.² When he grew older he was a pupil of his fellow townsman, Chü Pên.³ He passed the *chü-shêng* degree and became widely known. The governor Hu Tsung-hsien summoned him to be one of his secretaries, and he served in the governor's office together with Yü Yin and Shên Ming-ch'ên. It happened at the time that a white stag was caught, and the governor wanted to present this (as an auspicious omen) to the emperor. Consequently he ordered his secretaries to draw up dedicatory memorials to the throne. These he submitted to a friend, the vice-chancellor, and asked him to select the best for the purpose of presenting it to the emperor. The vice-chancellor selected Hsü Wei's writing. This satisfied the emperor Shih-tsung (Chia-ching) completely, and in consequence he showed great favour to the governor Hu Tsung-hsien. Hsü Wei rose still higher in the governor's esteem. The governor was known for his severe manners, and none of the officials dared look him in the face, but Hsü Wei used to walk in quite

unceremoniously in simple clothes and a hermit's cap, talking freely."

Hsü Wei's heedless ways of performing his official duties are described in *Wu-shêng shih-shih* in more detail: "He often sat drinking with the young people in the wine-shops. (Once) when there was some important work to be done in the office and Hsü Wei could not be found, the governor stood waiting until late in the night at the open gate of the yamen. He finally sent the chief of police to fetch the secretary, but the police came back and reported: 'Mr. Hsü is at present completely drunk; he is shouting loudly, and it is quite impossible to bring him here'. The governor could only say: 'Never mind'."

But, according to the *Ming shih*, "Hsü Wei also had some knowledge of military arts and was a master of clever stratagems. When the governor captured Hsü Hai and defeated Wang Chih, Hsü Wei took part in planning the campaigns. And in consequence of the great power of Hu Tsung-hsien he rose into prominence. When the governor was finally thrown into prison Hsü, fearing disaster, simulated madness. He took a large awl, forced it several inches into his ear and also broke his testicles; yet he did not die."

He lost his first wife, and after much hesitation he married again, but as the woman aroused his suspicion, he beat her to death. Consequently he was taken to prison; according to the *Wu-shêng shih-shih*: "This made him quite mad and he planned to kill himself and wrote his own epitaph (which is still preserved). A friend of his, however, succeeded in getting him out of prison. He started on a journey to the North, went first to Nanking and then to Peking where he lived for many years next door to his friend Chang Yüan-pien⁴ who had helped him out

¹ *Ming shih*, vol. 288, pp. 2, 3.

² Yang Hsiung, 55 B.C.-A.D. 18, famous philosopher and moralist.

³ Chü Pên, philosopher and author of books on the *I-ching*, was a pupil of Wang Yang-ming.

⁴ Chang Yüan-pien (1538-1588), philosopher and writer; a pupil of Wang Yang-ming and a member of the Han-lin.

of prison. Unrestrained and reckless as he was, he suffered a great deal from ceremonious people in his surrounding. Sometimes he spoke out fearlessly: "I have killed my wife, and should have been put to death right away by the sword, but now it is worse, for they are cutting my flesh away bit by bit!"

"Then he fell ill and left the capital and returned to his home town. He was in poor health, but between times he shut himself up in his home with drinking companions, enjoying wine to excess. When the governor or vice-governor came to call on him, they were not admitted. Once there was a man who took advantage of an unguarded moment, opened the door and entered half-way. Hsü pushed the door back forcibly and said: 'I am not at home'. People thought that he was too strange, and nobody liked him . . ."

He grew exceedingly poor and had to live by the work of his hands; but "only when he was quite penniless did he do writings and paintings, and when these were properly paid for, he added some colophons on them. He had collected thousands of books, but gradually he sold them one by one; even his bed-clothes and mattress became completely worn out, and he had nothing else to sleep on than the papers which he used for sketching." He died at the age of 73.

"His grass-writing was very original, strong and bold. He used to say to himself: 'Calligraphy is the first of my arts, then comes poetry, then prose writing, and last my painting'. Real connoisseurs agreed with this. Most of his paintings represent flowers and herbs. In calligraphy he followed the two Mi."

Hsü Wei's verdict as to the relative importance of his various "arts" has, however (with good reason), been contradicted by later critics, as for instance T'ao Yüan-tsao (1716-1801), who wrote in *Yüeh-hua chien-wên*¹ "In my opinion, Wên-ch'ang's brushwork is most wonderful in his paintings; his calligraphy takes only second place, his poetry third, and his literary writings a fourth. His calligraphy is often careless like the most uncouth kind

of Ch'an writing ('wild fox Ch'an'). It can easily be imitated, but as to his paintings, they are of such a high class, so marvellous and far-reaching (in their effect), that even clever men cannot imitate them. Therefore, as soon as one opens a scroll, one can see whether it is a true work of his; no trickery is possible there."

In support of his opinion the author quotes the verdict of a poet of the K'ang Hsi period, Chü L-tsun, who said of Hsü Wei: "The truth is, that his poetry and prose writing were impetuous and careless, not comparable to his painting. His small as well as his large pictures are all of a noble and old-fashioned kind." We concur with these opinions unreservedly. Hsü Wei was in the first place a great and inimitable painter, whereas his calligraphy and poetry, in spite of their skill and cleverness, are not of a very high class.

T'ao Yüan-tsao also characterized him as "an independent and overbearing character who did not attune himself to the world and, therefore, was followed by misfortune during his whole life. Once he painted some grape-vines and wrote the following lines on the picture: 'The bright pearls which drop from my brush cannot be sold anywhere; they are thrown away as useless among the wild creepers' - by which he expressed his feeling of loneliness and uselessness. My grandfather, Wên-chien, told me that Hsü Wei was a very tall, well-built, fat and clear-skinned man, who spoke with a loud voice like the crying of a crane. When he was lamenting in the night, cranes responded with their cries."

Hsü Wei's paintings are not infrequent in private collections in the Far East - particularly in Japan - but there are, to my knowledge, only two minor pictures of his in the former imperial collection. They are both reproduced in *K.-k. shu-hua chi* (vols. I and XI), the one representing A Pomegranate, the other Plum-blossoms and Banana-leaves, but neither of them reveal much of the master's recklessly dashing *p'o-mo* brush, i.e. the lion's claw. They are

¹ Quoted in *Sung Yuan I-lai*, vol. I, p. 17.

rather apt to convey the impression that the more significant examples of Hsü Wei's unfettered brush were not considered as desirable and fitted for the imperial collection in the time of Ch'ien-lung and later. Yet it is exactly these supremely spontaneous or irrepressibly expressionistic paintings of flowers, fruits and birds by Hsü Wei which, in recent times, have aroused the admiration of connoisseurs in the Far East as well as in the Western world, and secured him a more prominent place in the history of Chinese painting than he occupies in the traditional records of the Ming and Ch'ing dynasty.

The biographical information conveyed above makes it evident that Hsü Wei did most of his pictures quite spontaneously with no practical purpose but simply in response to promptings of his genius and to give pictorial form to fleeting impressions. The written colophons usually occupy very prominent places on these pictures; in some cases they actually form part of the design and though their contents may seem perplexing or inscrutable, they are apparently, from the artist's point of view, no less expressive than the figures, the birds and the flowers. In other words, the pictorial motifs no less than the written characters are symbols of expression which receive life and significance through the individual rhythm and ductus of the master's brush. The majority of Hsü Wei's pictures are thus excellent examples of the *hsieh-i* manner, the kind of "idea-writing" which formed one of the fundamental currents in the development of Chinese painting.

Hsü Wei's painted works have thus a closer correspondence with writings than the paintings by other artists of the period, a correspondence emphasized by the fact that they are mostly horizontal scrolls or minor hanging pictures executed in ink only. They are usually signed with one or two of the painter's fantastic "noms de plume" but only four or five have definite dates, which makes it difficult to arrange them in a comprehensive chronological series. The earliest dated example is the intensely expressionistic picture in the Vannotti

collection which, according to the beautiful inscription, represents "Four Friends of the Cold Forest", in the year 1570, i.e. two pairs of small birds perched on a dry branch on a cold winter day (Pl. 255). The motif is by no means specially appealing or interesting, but it is rendered with thorough understanding of the unpleasantness of the situation (reflected, too, in the expressions of the birds) in a design which is remarkable for its concentration and perfect balance.

The pictures which yield a series of dated specimens are handscrolls and album-leaves. The first one, which was done in 1575, forms part of the Takashima collection in Kugenuma (near Tōkyō) and is executed in a very dashing manner with broad washes of ink and no outlines.¹ The excellent pictorial effect is obtained by variations in the ink tones from deep black to almost transparent grey. The composition is not continuous but divided by lines of poetic inscriptions in several sections, yet the pictorial unity is unbroken, the brush seems hardly to have stopped or rested between the execution of the successive groups.

The other scroll (in the K. Sumitomo collection in Ōiso) is dated 1591 and likewise arranged in sections accompanied by inscriptions. It represents various specimens of flowers, fruits, vegetables, crabs and fishes, rendered in a somewhat firmer and structural *p'o-mo* style with rich ink in effective modulations, which serves to suggest the velvety skin of the peaches and the opulent beauty of the *mitan*-flowers.

The album which is dated 1588 is made up of fifteen double leaves, some of which represent vegetable plants or single flowers like the lotus, or roses, while others show men fishing in boats or resting on the ground under leafy trees.² These sketches are executed with a rather stiff brush in a very rough or crude manner; some of them are entertaining through the humorous characterization of the figures. But the rather careless drawing and uncontrolled ink-splashes, which in some cases

¹ T'ien, p. 328.

² Published by the Commercial Press, 1934.

resemble swarms of black flies or moths spreading over the sheet, make them look like accidental products rather than intentional.

A more important series of album-paintings (thirty-six leaves divided into two volumes) known as *Mô pao* (Ink Treasures) was formerly owned by the painters Sung Lo and Wu Li and lately (before the war) were in the collection of Mr. Kikuchi in Tôkyô but seem to have perished like many other art treasures in the same collection. We know these leaves in part through reproductions in Ômura, *Bunjin Gasen*, II, 1-4. They represent motifs of many kinds such as flowers, vegetables, insects, birds, fishes, animals and figures in landscapes. Some of the pictures are accompanied by long inscriptions, on other leaves there is only the painter's signature, but they are all spontaneous records of observations and passing thoughts written down with a few bold touches or splashes of the brush, yet complete and convincing in form and movement.

One of the most amusing of these leaves represents two cats watching a large butterfly soaring somewhat mockingly over their heads; one cat is crouching, the other seated and seen from the back - a black mass in three oval sections with a pair of ears and a long tail, yet with a suggestion of softness and mobility that makes it entertaining. In several of his compositions Hsü Wei has used this method of presenting an animal or a figure from the back rather than from the front, apparently because they interested him more as masses of light and shade appearing in an atmosphere than as individual beings. In fact he had little use for the finer distinctive features of human character or the like, but looked at the phenomena of the world around him from the painter's viewpoint as manifestations of light and shade, or moving forms in an atmosphere, and was as such a kind of "impressionist" *in mae*, though he only worked in black and white.

Another of these album-leaves shows a man seated under some pine-trees on a river-bank with a *ch'in* on his knees. He is seen from the back as he sits there contemplating the boundless expanse of empty

sky (Pl. 256). But, according to the poem, he is interpreting on his instrument the music of the winds and waves: "The cliffs are high along the river-bank; the autumn sky is clear. The wind is sighing in the pines, mingling with the sound of waves. Who else understands it but this solitary man who plays the self-same tune of loneliness upon his seven strings."

Hsü Wei's landscapes are perhaps, on the whole, less satisfactory than his pictures of plants, animals and flowers, because he seldom takes the trouble of finishing a composition in all its parts. The forms are sometimes merely suggested by a few strokes or dots of the brush, not actually defined or represented in detail, as may be seen in the sketchy landscape in the National Museum (Stockholm) in which the painter has represented himself as "a wailing child" seated in solitude on a projecting cliff which he has sketched with expressionistic freedom. The undertone of desolation and wretchedness which is struck in the somewhat cryptic inscription seems also to prevail in the rough work of the brush. In other pictures, no less expressionistic than the above, the painter has been able to convey a humorous undertone with a light and playful brush. The little picture in the Hui-hua kuan in Peking, which represents a dignified scholar on a small trotting donkey, cannot be forgotten if once seen, because the capricious interpretation of the painter has here found expression not only in the man on the donkey, but also in the jerky branches of the old plum-tree above his head (Pl. 257B). The spacing is perfect. The same motif is repeated with minor changes in a picture in the former Abe collection in the Ôsaka Museum.

Hsü Wei returned repeatedly to a motif popularly called The Four Seasons, i.e. flowers, plants and fruits or sprays of trees and sections of creepers selected and arranged to represent symbolically the seasons of the year. Two of them were mentioned among the dated pictures; another, comparable in quality, though not in composition to the Sumitomo scroll, is in the Shanghai Museum and has been published in *Gems*, II, p. 17. It is executed with a supreme neglect of compositional unity but with a

wonderful sense of rhythmic flow; the sprays of flowers, torn leaves, sections of heavy trunks and sproutings twigs are all dashed off at random as if he were playing with the brush or in a half-conscious state of drunkenness.

In the somewhat shorter (and probably earlier) scroll in the National Museum in Stockholm, the Four Seasons are more definitely characterized by means of typical plants: Winter by a plum-tree in blossom, spring by fresh bamboo-shoots, summer by large banana leaves; autumn, by winding stems of grape-vine (Pls. 258, 259). As they succeed one another the successive plants are partly interlaced; they form an unbroken sequence like four parts of a musical composition or poem, bound together not only by the outward arrangement, but by the continuous rhythm and flow of the brush-strokes. The brush seems to have moved over the paper with the ease and sensitiveness of a violin bow, the tones continuously varying according to the structure of the forms, the play of light and shade, sometimes deep and heavy, sometimes light and transparent, and even when the strokes are interrupted, like short pauses in the playing, they suggest continuity, an unbroken flow of inspiring thought. It is creation in the purest *hsieh-i* manner, here applied with supreme command of the expressional means. At the end of the scroll follows a short poem written in grass characters which reflects the same rhythm as the winding tendrils of the grape-vine. It is perhaps less comprehensible than the painting, but certainly not less original, the main idea being that the painted grapes are transformations of the pearls into sea oysters, to wit: "When last year's mid-autumn moon was full, the oysters of the southern sea could find no sleep. But nobody cared for the bright pearls that night. They sprang out and fixed themselves on paper. Whose paper was that? The Taoist Ch'ing-t'eng painted this long scroll in the *p'o-nu* (sling ink) manner and wrote the poem about the grape-vine while dwelling on the Rock of Carefreedom." Indeed, no place in this world would seem more suitable to Hsü Wei because, wherever he lived, he

always found a home on this Rock of Carefreedom.

It should, however, also be noted that Hsü Wei during his earlier years in Cheking had a place of his own where he could live in solitude unseen by the world. It was called The Study of the Green Creeper (Ch'ing-t'eng t'ang), a name that he also used as a *hao*. We know it from some of his paintings; it was composed of three low thatched huts and a large shed situated close to a towering rock. In front of the buildings were a small court and a lotus pond, behind them clumps of bamboo and bananas. Hsü Wei has represented it with more care and sympathy than is habitual in his landscapes and signed it "The Fisherman-hermit Hsü Wei Tien-chih".¹

Hsü Wei's pictures are as a rule of relatively small dimensions, which was most natural in view of the fact that his favourite motifs were flowers and herbs, and perhaps also a consequence of his hasty manner of painting, but there are exceptions to the rule. The large picture in the National Museum in Stockholm, representing a Banana and a Plum-tree by a Rockery is quite remarkable in this respect. The artist has treated these common motifs on a larger scale with still more vigour and boldness than in the smaller pictures representing similar subjects. The rockery which rises out of the earth like a black fantastic shadow covers half of the field; the decaying banana leaves spread out from it like a gigantic torn and tattered fan, but of the plum-tree there are only a few small sprays, the thin yet vigorous harbingers of spring. Like most of Hsü Wei's paintings this, too, is by no means simply a representation of certain motifs from the realm of nature, but an "idea writing" (*hsieh-i*) in the proper sense of the word, the motifs are mainly pictorial symbols of thoughts written down to express a state of mind or a flash of inspiration also expressed in symbols of written characters. They contain the words which may seem

¹ This picture has been more frequently reproduced than any other work by the master. Cf. *Chung-kuo*, II, 48, *Tōsō*, II, 326, *Chigoku*, III, *Shina Nanga*, I, 11 and other publications. Another version of the same motif, with a different background and a tall pine-tree instead of the rock, belongs to Professor Cheng Tē-k'un, Cambridge.

less comprehensible than the pictorial symbols, but nevertheless explain why the whole thing was done: "The winter banana is ragged; its shoots will sprout in the spring. But over the wall the old plum-tree is smiling at it. Two things which are good cannot be combined in this world. When you have enjoyed a meal of fish, you should not ask for shrimps" (Pl. 260).

The picture with its inscription may indeed serve as an illustration to the fact mentioned by T'ao Yüan-tsao, the author quoted above, that Hsü Wei, contrary to his own claims, was in the first place a great painter and only in the second and third places respectively a calligrapher and a poet. There is no doubt that he was also a gifted writer and an exceptionally dashing calligrapher, but he gave his thoughts, I believe, the most striking expression in pictorial symbols which he wrote down with the same ease and speed as he did more abstract calligraphic signs or symbols. The individual rhythm or pulse-beat was the same in both and consequently there was hardly any dividing line between writing and painting in some of his works, a fact which makes us realize that his brushwork was equally fitted for the one as well as for the other mode of symbolic expression.

Hsü Wei's strongly marked erratic personality was hardly of the kind that easily attracted students or assistants capable of forming a school or a circle of faithful followers. The minor talents who at the time tried to imitate his forceful manner, did not get very far in this attempt; it was said about some of their paintings that "the fishes' eyes could easily be distinguished from the real pearls".

The influence from Hsü Wei's boldly individualistic art did not, however, fade away or cease with his death. It lived on for two or three generations as a kind of undercurrent in the vast sea of Chinese painting, from time to time inspiring painters who practised the *hsieh-i* manner in accordance with their individual temperaments. It may have been modified but its essential impetus was the same when, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, it

rose again to the surface like a new surge or vortex of creative activity. This became evident in the works of some of the so-called Strange Masters of Yangchou, e.g. Huang Shên, Li Shan, Li Fang-ying and other *virtuosi* of the same group, to whom Hsü Wei's paintings sometimes served as inspiring models, even though their aesthetic or spiritual background was different from that of the later painters.

* * *

Besides the actual painters like Hsü Wei and others mentioned above, there were a number of amateur collectors and dilettanti who all practised the *hsieh-i* manner and attained a more or less perfect skill in the management of the brush. This kind of artistic occupation was something closely connected with the literary and aesthetic culture of the time and served as a fitting expression for the scholarly spirit which began to spread in ever-widening circles towards the end of the dynasty. It contributed thus to the formation of an artistic *milieu* which offered a fertile soil for some of the leading masters and also for a more general development of painting. But this can hardly be described in detail without its leading us beyond the limits of the present study. Yet it may be of interest to insert here a few additional words about one of the most influential of these amateur painters.

Hsiang Yüan-pien, better known under his *hao* Mo-lin (Ink Forest) and *tzü*, Tzû-chung, was not a professional like the men mentioned above but a leading expert and successful amateur of painting. His name has become widely known and quoted in the history of painting because he was one of the most indefatigable collectors of the Ming period and a great connoisseur of painting. Few collectors' seals are more common on Chinese paintings than that of Hsiang Mo-lin, or Hsiang Tzû-chung, and quoted as testimonies of the age and importance of the picture on which they occur, though not a few of these seal-marks have been added by later men on paintings and calligraphies of doubtful origin in order to increase their commercial value.

Hsiang Mo-lin was born 1525 as a member of a wealthy family in Chia-hsing in Chekiang and passed most of his life as a student and amateur of painting and pottery in this little country town. According to the inscription on one of his pictures, he was still alive in 1602, but may have died shortly afterwards.¹ His magnificent collections, which had already become widely known in his lifetime, only remained in the family's possession for about half a century, for when the Manchu armies penetrated into Chekiang, after the fall of the Ming dynasty, they were carried away by the commanding officer and then gradually dispersed. A large number of the best paintings were later acquired by the emperor Ch'ien-lung, but others remained in private possession and passed through many hands in the following centuries. But, as said above, Hsiang Mo-lin's seals and inscriptions have frequently been used on paintings which never formed parts of his collection.

He was no doubt a man of wide knowledge and experience in the field of art, but his creative faculty was by no means on a level with his aesthetic sensibility. In spite of all the praise bestowed on him by some of the leading critics, it must be admitted that he was hardly more than a skilful amateur as a painter. His ideal as an artist as well as a collector was Ni Tsan, but the difference between the paintings by the famous Yüan master and those of his late admirer is like the difference between a broad river and a purling stream. We are told in the *Wu-shêng shih-shih* that he became so thoroughly imbued with the works of certain masters that he could make quite similar things, but the similarity seems to have been of a rather superficial kind.

The pictures signed by Hsiang Mo-lin which have come to our knowledge represent mostly tufts of epidendrum, old plum-trees in blossom, bamboos and chrysanthemums growing by garden rocks, or branches of fruit-trees, sometimes accompanied by inscriptions which increase their poetic significance.² But besides such motifs he also did landscapes, among which may be quoted two handscrolls dated respectively 1578 and 1579. The former, which forms part of Chang Ta-ch'ien's collection,³ represents a somewhat unusual motif which may be described as the entrance to a cave or a long bay (if not purely imaginative), while the other scroll offers a view over wide open waters between distant cliffs: i.e. a composition of the kind that sometimes was practised by the pupils of Wên Ch'eng-ming.⁴ All these pictures, be they flower studies or landscapes, are remarkable for their sensitive execution, the light touch and the soft flow of the brush. But it must be admitted that this graceful refinement is in some instances carried so far as to make one hesitate whether this kind of *hsieh-i* products should really be classified as pictures or simply as the artistic diversions of a highly cultured connoisseur.⁵

¹ Cf. *Shina Nanga*, II, 5 and 7, reproducing sections of a handscroll with an inscription by the painter dated 1602.

² Cf. *Chung-kuo*, II, 5; *K.-k. shu-hua chi*, X; *Omura*, I, 11.

³ *Chang Ta-ch'ien Cat.*, I, 27.

⁴ *Ch'ing-shi*, III.

⁵ There is an epidendrum picture closely resembling Hsiang Yüan-pien's rendering of this motif, signed by his contemporary Tu Ta-shou and dated 1558, in the Musée Guimet in Paris. Later paintings of a similar kind, executed in a more finished and refined manner, were done by Hsiang Sh'eng-mo, the grandson of Hsiang Yüan-pien, to whom we shall return in a later chapter.

Bibliography to Part Two, Vols. IV and V

The present Bibliography, which was mainly compiled by Dr. R. Goepfer, forms a supplement to the earlier one, which is inserted in volume I. It refers to books and articles on the history of Chinese painting during the Yüan, Ming and Ch'ing dynasties published up to 1957, when the composition of the text of volumes IV and V was closed. For obvious reasons inherent in most of the

general books on Chinese painting, it was impossible not to repeat here a few items also mentioned in the earlier Bibliography, which contains material from later as well as earlier periods. Another supplementary Bibliography, containing only books of reproductions, is to be inserted in volume VII, devoted to the Annotated Lists of the Yüan, Ming and Ch'ing dynasties.

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