

The Great Art of China's 'Soundless Poems'

Chinese artists employ different instruments and means from their Western counterparts, but express familiar ideas—a wonderful example of the diverse richness and universality of mankind.

Leni Rubinstein traces the legacy of Confucian philosophy in shaping the extraordinary cultural heritage of Chinese painting

Among the world's great civilizations, that of China is unique, because it is the oldest continuous culture in the world. Despite such adversities as repressive regimes, foreign invaders, and, in the last centuries, the repeated efforts of the British oligarchy to crush it, both from within and without, China has had the inner strength to rebound, again and again.

This puts China in an unparalleled position in today's world. It compels us to understand why, and how.

It is unarguably the case, that the key to China's civilizational strength, is to be found in the ideas of the philosopher Confucius.¹ Further, that these ideas were developed, transmitted, and deeply imprinted through active, living great art among China's educated strata—through music, poetry, calligraphy, and painting.

Confucius' legacy was born of his discovery of fundamental ideas concerning the lawful ordering of the universe, and man's relation to it (the principle of *li*). Every person is by nature good, said Confucius, and the key moral element in man's nature is

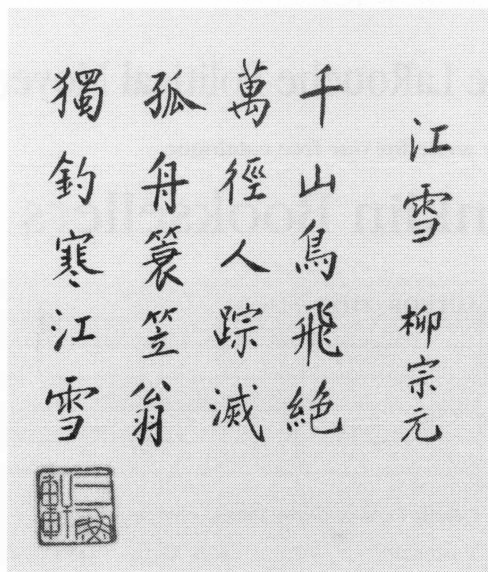


FIGURE 1(a). *This poem by Tang Dynasty poet Liu Zong-yuan inspired "Fisherman on a snowy day," the painting shown on the facing page. (Calligraphy by Dr. Kenneth Chang)*

agapē (ren). True freedom, he said, lies in man's pursuit of truth. And, perhaps most significantly, he laid great emphasis on the importance of universal education, without regard for rank or social status. For Confucius, a leader ought not to be defined according to wealth or family background, but instead by his moral perfection; the more moral a person, the higher his rank should be.

This idea—of the importance of the development of a person's character in determining leadership—forced the men of the educated elite to not only “learn from books,” but to actively refine and cultivate their character as a whole, through active engagement in the arts—a cultural matrix which is still very much alive today, 2,500 years later.²

This article will provide a glimpse of how these ideas have uniquely shaped the great cultural heritage of Chinese painting. An effort has been made to convey the ways in which the artist actively engages the mind of the viewer—that is, that the key is not in the appearance of a painting in itself, but rather, in the way the painting transmits *ideas*. Painting is a marvellous language through which to gain deeper understanding and insight into another culture. It is my hope that this presentation may inspire others to deeper study—and countless moments of enjoyment.³

A brief outline of the fundamental ideas of Confucian philosophy appears on page 53, and a chronology of China's dynasties on page 57.

'A Painting within the Poem, A Poem within the Painting'

Through the centuries, great art in China has been regarded as a part of daily life.

Imagine a party of educated people in the Song period. The guests sing, play musical instruments, and compose poems on the spot. Some bring a few especially treasured paintings to show to their friends—these are known as “hand-washing paintings,” because everyone must wash his hands carefully, to ensure that no spot of dirt is left on these treasures. A couple of friends might be inspired to jointly

FIGURE 1. “Fisherman on a snowy day,” anonymous artist, Tang Dynasty.



Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taiwan Republic of China



FIGURE 2. Ma Lin, "Night outing with candles," Song Dynasty.

Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taiwan, Republic of China

paint a painting, to be finished off by the writing of a poem on the painting by a third friend, who is particularly skilled in beautiful calligraphy.

Clearly, such gatherings were not just a way of "killing time." On the contrary, they were intended to inspire and cultivate the personalities of the individuals participating.

Great paintings were not used as wall fixtures, to beautify a room together with the furniture. Rather, they were used actively, to inspire the cognitive processes of the mind.⁴ They would be shown at gatherings as a sort of "live painting concert," or perhaps hung on a wall for a short while for a special occasion, or sent as a "letter" to a good friend. Or, they could be lent to a student for the purpose of studying and copying. This tradition influenced the external forms of Chinese painting,⁵ and, more importantly, the integration and active use of the arts meant that they participated together within the same "field," and not as separate entities. A poet would write a poem inspired by a painting, a painter paint a poem—or compose a poem, then paint—and maybe put the poem on the painting. In this way, there developed the beautiful and unique idea: "a painting within the poem, a poem within the painting."⁶

'Soundless Poems': The Merging of Poetry and Painting

Let us investigate this beautiful concept, that "within a poem there is a painting, and within a painting there is a poem."

Look at Figure 1, "Fisherman on a snowy day." This is a painting composed about 1,200 years ago, in the Tang Dynasty, by an anonymous painter. It is definitely snowing. Apart from the snow laying on the ground and weighing down the branches of bamboo, the fisherman himself also has snow on his hat, on his shoulders, on the cloth he is holding up to his face to protect against the weather—even his fishing pole has a layer of snow. In contrast to this, you see the man's eyes full of thought. Another contrast is his bright red belt, neatly arranged. The focus in the painting is clearly on this individual and his eyes,

Transliteration of Chinese Characters

Chinese words are not spelled with letters representing spoken sounds. Instead, each word is written as an ideogram (or "character") representing an idea. A number of systems have been devised to spell Chinese words in the Latin alphabet; the modern Pinyin transliterations of Chinese words are used in this article. A fair approximation can be made by using the equivalent English sounds for Pinyin consonants, with these exceptions: *c* is pronounced *ts* when it begins a word; *q* is pronounced *ch*; *x* is pronounced as *sy* (soft *sh*); *z* is pronounced *dz*; and *zh* is pronounced *j*.

enforced through the framing created by the snow on the bamboo and on the man himself. The whole combined scene creates a connection between the viewer and the fisherman, in a somewhat humorous setting.

“Fisherman on a snowy day” is a painting of a poem by the Tang Dynasty poet Liu Zong-yuan (A.D. 773-819) [SEE Figure 1(a)], which in translation reads:

River Snow

Over a thousand mountains
has flight of birds ceased,
On ten thousand pathways
have men’s footsteps vanished;
Only, an old man—
cloak of straw, hat bamboo,
A solitary boat,
childless, angling amid cold river snow.

Look at the painting again. Register the shift in the way you look at it now, in the thoughts generated by an awareness of the poem.⁷

Painting ‘Poetic Ideas,’ or *shi i*

In the Northern Song period, the merging of poetry and painting become so valued, that the use of poetry in the examination of Academy painters was introduced.⁸ The painters would be given a poem, or a few lines, and it was up to them to express the poetic idea in their compositions. Several of these tests, and their results, are reported. Here is an example:

Treading the flowers returning home,
Horse hooves are fragrant.

How would you paint that?

The painting chosen as the best in this test, depicts a group of butterflies fluttering around the hooves of a trotting horse.

Choosing an old poem as the subject for one’s composition is called painting “poetic ideas,” *shi i*, and a good example is “Night outing with candles,” painted in the Song Dynasty by Ma Lin, who was active in the middle of the Thirteenth century A.D. [SEE Figure 2].⁹ A gentleman sits in a six-cornered pavillion. Before the pavillion door, four pairs of tall candles line the walkway. It is evening, a full moon shines in a clear sky, and the lake mists soften the contours

of the mountains.¹⁰ Weightless, almost floating crabapple trees in flower surround the pavillion.

“Night outing with candles” is a painting of the following lines of a poem by Su Shi (see footnote 6):

My fear is that in the depth of night,
The flowers will fall asleep and depart,
So I light the tall candles
To illuminate their beauty.

The ‘Three Perfections,’ *san jue*: Painting, Poetry, and Calligraphy

In another painting by Ma Lin, “Sunset landscape,” the artist has created a very simple composition: a few swallows fly over water at twilight toward the setting sun [SEE Figure 3]. In the distance, misted mountain contours lead the eye into the glowing sky beyond, where the painter has written the following poetic lines, from Tang Dynasty poet Wang Wei:

Mountains hold the autumn colors near,
Swallows cross the evening sun slowly.



Nezu Institute of Fine Arts, Tokyo

FIGURE 3. Ma Lin, “Sunset landscape,” Song Dynasty.



FIGURE 4. Shen Zhou,
"Pomegranate" from
"Dream Journey,"
Ming Dynasty.

This combination, known as the "Three Perfections," *san jue*, creates a larger field for the Chinese artist to play with ideas. Through the combined poem-painting, the artist can create ironies and contrasts not only within the painting itself, or within the poem, but also composing a triple interplay between the poem and the painting to the painting itself, creating a new realm for ideas. But it goes further, because the way the calligraphy, the third "perfection," is itself executed, will influence the idea of the painting as a whole.¹¹

The following two paintings are examples of how apparently simple themes are completely changed by the voice of a poem. Figure 4, by Shen Zhou (Ming Dynasty), is one of seventeen paintings depicting landscapes and flowers, from an album called "Dream Journey," in which each painting is accompanied by a poem [SEE also inside back cover]. On this painting of a pomegranate, Shen Zhou has written the following lines:

Who split open the pomegranate
To reveal the ruby fruits inside?
I don't want to hide anything.
All my life I've feared deceit.

On the painting "Yellow Armor" by Xu Wei (Ming Dynasty) [SEE Figure 5], the

FIGURE 5. Xu Wei,
"Yellow armor,"
Ming Dynasty.



painter has inscribed the following poem:

The village rice has ripened, the crabs are
in season;
With their pincers like halberds, they
swagger in the mud.
If you turn one over on a piece of paper,
You will see before you Dong Zhuo's
navel.

Who is this Dong Zhuo, whom Xu Wei compares to a crab with pincers, swaggering in the mud? Dong Zhuo was a powerful minister during the Eastern Han period. The story is, that his belly had so much fat, that after he died, people lit lamps with the fat from his navel! With these few poetic lines, the idea expressed in this seemingly simple painting is completely changed, and the delicacy of the painting itself is in sharp contrast to the harsh attack on corrupt officials who prosper at the expense of the common people.

The landscape painting “Autumn trees and crows” is by the Qing Dynasty artist Wang Hui [SEE Figure 6]. Having “travelled” through the composition, the viewer’s eye is led to the distance, where the following poem by an artist from the Ming Dynasty is inscribed:

The little house by the stream looks more
beautiful at dusk,
The autumn tree around the eve gathers
shadowy crows.
I wonder when we can meet again,
So together we can taste tea by the cold
light.

When painting this work, Wang Hui was eighty years old, in the autumn of his life, and the melancholy evoked by the painting and the poem is executed in an unconstrained unity.



The Palace Museum, Beijing

FIGURE 6. Wang Hui,
“Autumn trees and crows,”
Qing Dynasty.

The Chinese ‘Lied’

The Song period was the greatest renaissance in Chinese history, expressed in the arts, in statecraft, in economic development and population growth, and, underlying this, in a great revival of the ideas of Confucius, prompted by the work of the philosopher Zhu Xi (see footnote 1). It is therefore not accidental that the peak of development and execution of the integration of poetry and painting was reached in this period, comparable, in my view, to the development of the *Lied* during the Classical renaissance in Germany in the Nineteenth century.

By combining two (or more) art forms, not only is there created a new dimension from which to generate ideas, but such combination also helps lessen the characteristic limitation of each of the individual art forms, without, however, removing its specific advantages.

In the *Letters on the Aesthetical Education of Man*, Letter 22, Friedrich Schiller writes, that the “artist must not only overcome, by his treatment, the limitations which are inherent in the specific character of his type of art, but also those belonging to the particular material with which he is dealing.” Schiller says, that the more the different forms of art attain a higher level,

it is a necessary and natural consequence of their perfection, that, without displacing their objective borders, the different arts *in their effect upon the mind* always become more similar to one another. Music in its highest ennoblement must become a *gestalt* and act upon us with the tranquil power of the antique; the plastic and graphic arts in their highest perfection must become music and move us through their immediate sensuous presence; poetry in its most perfected form must, like musical art, seize us powerfully, but at the same time, like the plastic, surround us with quiet clarity.

Isn't that what the artists of the Song period strived to achieve—thus creating a “*Lied*” with Chinese characteristics?

‘Breath-Resonance Generated by Movement,’ or *qi yun sheng dong*

About A.D. 500, Xie He wrote “Evaluating ancient paintings,” in which he presented his famous Six Principles, or *liu fa*, to be

applied to painting, of which the First Principle emphasized the “breath resonance” or “spirit resonance,” *qi yun*, of painted forms.¹²

Look at “Travellers among mountains and streams,” painted by Fan Kuan in the Song Dynasty [SEE Figure 7]. Unfortunately, reproductions of paintings are always merely a faded mirror of the real thing, particularly when it comes to paintings of this size—81.2 × 40.7 in. (that is, almost 7 feet high by 3 feet wide). Try, therefore, to imagine this size, and imagine you are standing in front of it, and later, perhaps, look at the reproduction through a magnifying glass.

This is like an exploration. You are at eye level with the large mountain, but where are the travellers? At the very bottom of the painting is the first scene, some big boulders, and just to the right of these, you see some travellers with their pack animals next to a creek [SEE detail, Figure 7(a)]. Then the second scene, the middle scene, consists of two rising slopes with some buildings to the right, intersected by a forward-moving stream [SEE detail, Figure 7(b)]. And, in the third scene, we see the massive mountain rising up abruptly from the mist created by the waterfall. When you stand in front of this painting, you are forced, through the composition, to move through the ever-changing appearance of mountains, as one travels through them. The painter has used three different perspectives: near, middle, and distant, and by masterful use of water, mist, and clouds, he breaks the spatial limits of the painting and integrates the various scenes harmoniously, so that the motion appears perfectly coherent. He has used what the Chinese call a “moving perspective.”

So, the question is: Who are the travellers? And, the answer is: It's you, the viewers!

Figure 7(c) shows a photograph of Huashan, the mountain Fan Kuan used as the model for his painting. Clearly, in his composition, Fan Kuan has transcended the limits of what the eye perceives, to create a new world.

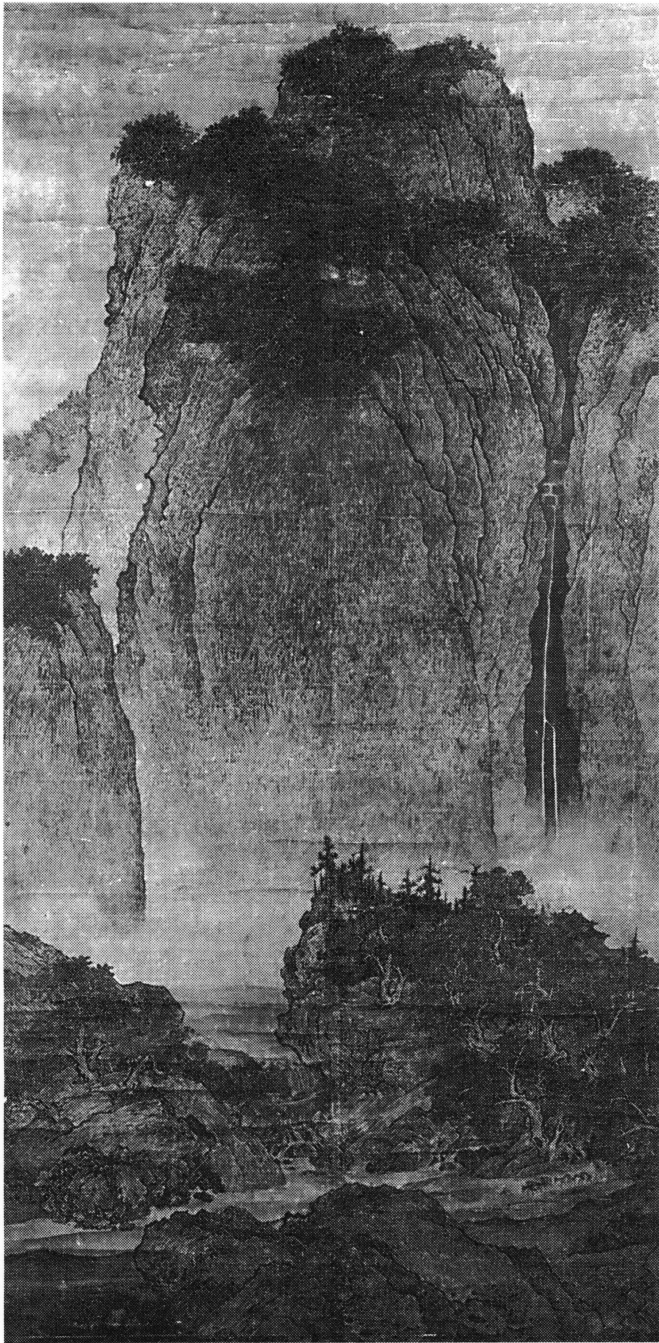
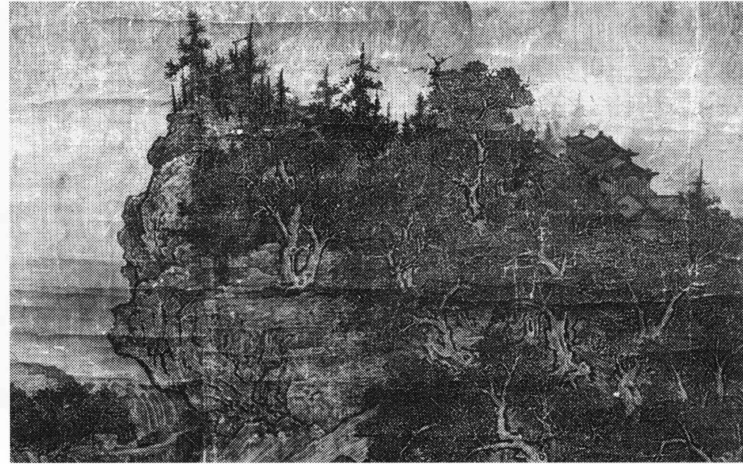


FIGURE 7. Fan Kuan, "Travellers among mountains and steams," Song Dynasty.



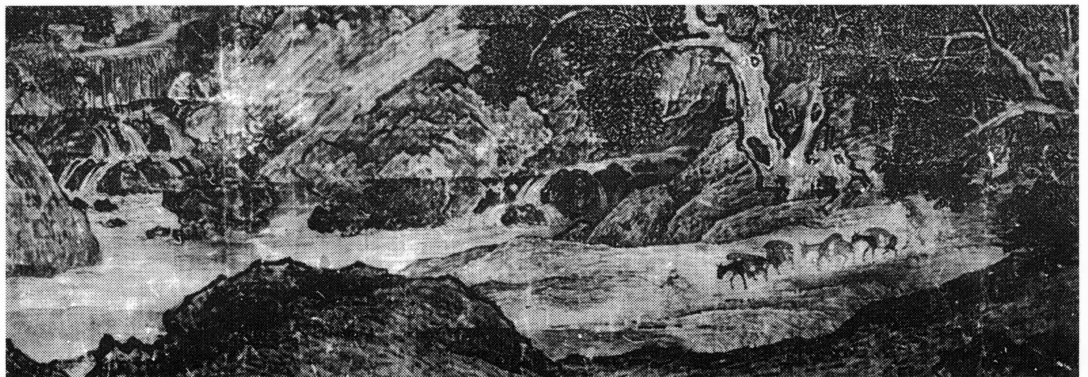
FIGURE 7(c). Photograph of mount Huashan.

FIGURE 7(b). Detail, middle scene, "Travellers among mountains and streams."



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FIGURE 7(a). Detail, bottom scene, "Travellers among mountains and streams."



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FIGURE 8. Dong Yuan,
“Evening scene on a
riverbank,” Tang Dynasty.

‘The Idea Being Present, Before the Brush Descends’

According to the classical Chinese painting tradition, the entire composition must be present in the mind and heart of the painter, before he begins to paint. In other words, the “idea-realm,” *i jing*, the process of interplay between ideas and the scene, has to be fully worked through as a concept beforehand. As Meng Jiao (A.D. 715-814) expressed it: “Heaven and Earth enter my heart, images are my own design. The past and the present gets

FIGURE 8(b). Detail, middle scene,
“Evening scene on a riverbank.”

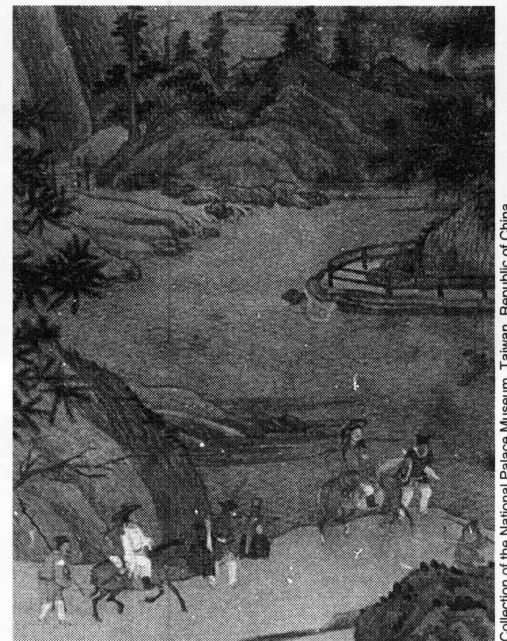


FIGURE 8(a). Detail, lower scene,
“Evening scene on a riverbank.”

FIGURE 9. *Dong Yuan, "Festival in the provinces," Tang Dynasty.*

absorbed in a flash, the four seas stroked in an instant."

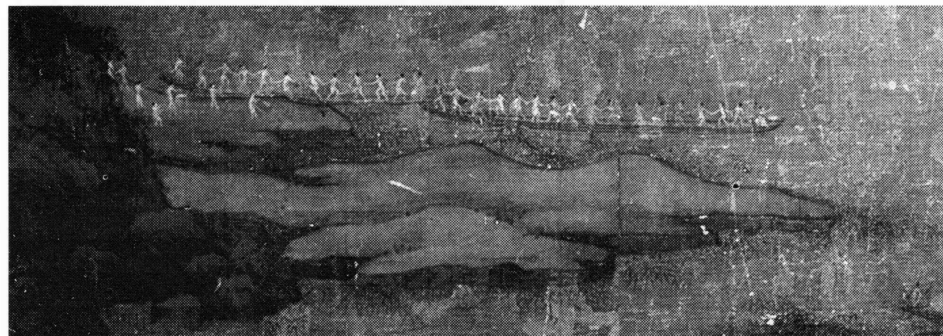
In "Evening scene on a riverbank" by Dong Yuan of the Southern Tang Dynasty, the painter has also employed the principle of moving perspective, but here the idea content is very different from that of "Travellers . . ." [SEE Figure 8]. Whereas the journey in "Travellers . . ." proceeds over a virtual obstacle course, as the scene is set in a harsh area of China's geography, the "Evening scene . . ." shows the lush, Yangtze valley region. It is much more habitable, and seems as if every spot has been touched by man. The lower part of the painting [SEE detail, Figure 8(a)] looks like a formal garden, where some well-dressed gentlemen and their servants travel in leisure, aiming to settle in for the night at the inn further up the winding, easy-going path [SEE detail, Figure 8(b)].

Another example of moving perspective is "Festival in the provinces," also by Dong Yuan [SEE Figure 9]. Here, in a different way, the composition establishes continuous lines of force integrating the celebrating people, mountains, and water. The viewer enters at the bottom, with the people celebrating at the banks of the river, next to a grove of trees to the right [SEE detail, Figure 9(a)], and is then led smoothly in a curve by the water, making a zig-zag at the upper right, to return down through the mountain valley to the starting point.¹³

Look at this painting and then read the following verse by the poet Chen You-yi (Song Dynasty):



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FIGURE 9(a). *Detail, lower scene, "Festival in the provinces."*

Filling one's eyes, the waters of the long river;

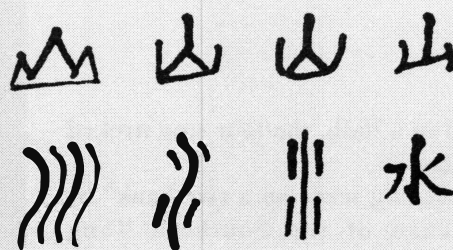
Richly verdant, the mountains of an unknown prefecture.

The hastening of ten thousand miles, All in the frame of a single window.

Witness, how the handling of space is the same in both poetry and painting.¹⁴

Mountain—Water: ‘Stillness’—‘Movement’

The development of the Chinese characters for “mountain” (*shan*) [top] and “water” (*shui*) [bottom] is shown from left to right. The concepts of “stillness” and “movement” are conveyed through the forms of the characters themselves. (Calligraphy by Dr. Kenneth Chang.)



‘Shan shui’

The Chinese word for landscape painting is “*shan shui hua*.” *Shan* means “mountain,” *shui*, “water,” and *hua*, “painting” [SEE Box]. In Confucian philosophy, mountains are an image of calm stillness, and water, of movement and change—hence, of the complementary concepts of Being and Becoming. Thus, the skilled artist can use his works to address and portray the transformations and subtleties of the universe.

Bearing in mind that all great artists were deeply steeped in the Confucian classics, the following excerpts from one of the most important writings of Confucius, “The Doctrine of the Mean,” or “*Zhong Yong*,” are relevant to emphasize the ideal realm in which the artist was operating when composing his works:

Only those who are their absolute true selves in the world can fulfill their own nature; only those who fulfill their own nature can fulfill the nature of others; only those who fulfill the nature of others can fulfill the nature of things; those who fulfill the nature of things are worthy to help Mother Nature in growing and sustaining life; and those who are worthy to help Mother Nature in growing and sus-

taining life are the equals of Heaven and Earth. . . .

Truth means the fulfillment of our self; and moral law means following the law of our being. Truth is the beginning and end of material existence. Without truth there is no material existence. It is for this reason that the moral man values truth. . . .

Truth is not only the fulfillment of our own being; it is that by which things outside of us have an existence. The fulfillment of our being is “*ren*” (*agapē*). The fulfillment of the nature of things outside of us is “*zhi*” (reason). These, *agapē* and reason, are the powers or faculties of our being. They combine the inner or subjective and outer or objective use of the power of the mind. Therefore, with truth, everything done is right.

Thus, truth is indestructible. Being indestructible, it is eternal. Being eternal, it is self-existent. Being self-existent, it is infinite. Being infinite, it is vast and deep. Being vast and deep, it is transcendental and intelligent. It is because it is transcendental and intelligent, that it embraces all existence. It is because it is infinite and eternal, that it fulfills or perfects all existence. In vastness and depth it is like the Earth. In transcendental intelligence it is like Heaven. Infinite and eternal, it is the Infinite itself.

Such being the nature of absolute truth,

it manifests itself without being seen; it produces effects without motion; it accomplishes its ends without action.

The principle in the course and operation of nature may be summed up in one word: because it obeys only its own immutable law, the way in which it produces the variety of things is unfathomable.

Nature is vast, deep, high, intelligent, infinite, and eternal. The Heaven appearing before us is only this bright shining mass; but in its immeasurable extent, the sun, the moon, stars, and constellations are suspended in it, and all things are embraced under it. The Earth, appearing before us, is but a handful of soil; but in all its breath and depth, it sustains mighty mountains without feeling their weight;

rivers and seas dash against it without causing it to leak. The mountain appearing before us is only a mass of rock; but in all the vastness of its size, grass and vegetation grow upon it, birds and beasts dwell on it, and treasures of precious minerals are found in it. The water appearing before us is but a ladleful of liquid; but in all its unfathomable depths, dragons, turtles, and fishes are produced in them, and all useful products abound in them.

In “The Book of Songs” it is said:

*The ordinance of God,
How inscrutable it is and goes on
forever.*

That is to say, this is the essence of God.
. . . Moral perfection also never dies.¹⁵

A Brief Outline of Confucian Philosophy

Confucius lived 2,500 years ago—from 551 to 479 B.C.—and was succeeded by the philosopher Mencius about a hundred years later. He lived in a period of great social upheaval, at the end of what is called the “Spring and Autumn” period, when the House of Zhou fell into the hands of the various states.

- **Political harmony is only possible through moral harmony**

For Confucius, there is no distinction between politics and ethics. He taught that political order and harmony are only possible from a foundation of moral order, which is achieved when man creates moral harmony in himself. This is the very same notion which Friedrich Schiller developed in his *Letters on the Aesthetical Education of Man*, where Schiller says that “only through an ennoblement of the character of the individual, can a change in the political affairs of man be accomplished.”

- **The nature of man is good**

Confucius says: “What is God-given is what we call human nature. To fulfill the law of our human nature, is what we call the moral law. The cultivation of the moral law, is what we call culture.”

The nature of man is good, and each individual is born with four moral elements: love (*ren*), which includes the notion of “love of man” (*agapē*); righteousness, which includes the notion of “love of justice”; propriety; and wisdom, which includes the notion of “love of knowledge.” Every individual possesses these four elements, just as he has four limbs, and it is his duty to develop them all to the fullest. If he does not do so, man plays the thief with himself.

- **Love is the most important element in human nature**

According to Confucius, “love is the leader and home of all virtues, and it is necessary to practice it with all one’s might,” and “love is man’s mind [soul] and righteousness is man’s path.” Confucius emphasizes that the central thread of all his teachings, is the all-pervading principle of love and its realization, and he asks all people to cultivate it: “The people are in need of love more urgently than of water or fire. The principle of love should be applied to the governing, as well as to the governed.”

- **Freedom is the pursuit of truth**

In all actions, man must follow the principle of *cheng*. *Cheng* means “freedom from all deception,” “being

true to oneself.” Confucius says: “Being ‘true to oneself’ is the law of Heaven. To try to be ‘true to oneself’ is the law of man.” The result of “freedom from all deception” is the fulfillment of ourselves, and “only he, who is fully true to himself, can assist the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth. Able to assist the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth, he may with Heaven and Earth form a ternion.” And further, he, “who is naturally true to himself, is one, who, without effort, hits upon what is right, and without thinking understands, what he wants to know; one, whose life is easily and naturally in harmony with natural law. Such a person we call a man of divine nature.” This concept is similar to Friedrich Schiller’s notion of the “beautiful soul.”

- **Man relates to the universe through moral law**

According to Confucius, “the life of the moral man is an exemplification of the universal moral order (*zhong yong*),” because “he is a person who unceasingly cultivates his true self or moral being.” Confucius remarks: “To find the central clue to our moral being which unites us to the universal order, that indeed is the highest human attainment.” Confucius says, that moral law is to be found everywhere, and yet, it is secret—in its utmost reaches, even the wisest and holiest of men cannot live up to it.

“Great as the Universe is, man is yet not always satisfied with it. For there is nothing so great, but the mind of the moral man can conceive of something still greater, which nothing in the world can hold. There is nothing so small, but the mind of the moral man can conceive of something still smaller, which nothing in the world can split.

“The ‘Book of Odes’ says: ‘The hawk soars to the heavens above and fishes dive to the depths below.’ That is to say, there is no place in the highest heavens above, nor in the deepest waters below, where the moral law is not to be found. The moral man finds the moral law beginning in the relation between man and woman; but ending in the vast reaches of the universe.”

- **Universal education**

Confucius advocates education for all, poor as well as rich. He attacks rote learning and says that weight should be laid on teaching the student to

think, on forming character, and on ennobling the individual.

- **Social order through *li***

There is no adequate English word-equivalent for *li*. It is the idea, that to have social order, each person must fulfill his place in society—in relation to himself, his family, society at large, and the universe. *Li* also situates the individual in relation to the past, the present, and the future, a concept Lyndon LaRouche has called the “simultaneity of eternity.”*

Confucius says, that “man is the heart of the universe,” and that “*li* is a great channel through which we follow the laws of Heaven, and direct to proper courses the expressions of the human heart. Therefore, only the Sage knows, that *li* is indispensable.” As a consequence, “human nature is the field cultivated by the Sage. He ploughs it with *li*, sows it with the seeds of duties, weeds it by education and learning, harvests it with true manhood, and enjoys it with music. Therefore, *li* is but the crystallization of what is right. If a thing is in accordance with the standard of what is right, new social practices may be instituted, although they were not known to the rulers in the past.” Confucius says that by following the principle of *li*, society will progress, so that in the future, man will enjoy the society of the “Great Harmony,” in which nobody is poor, great harmony rules, and “the ruler rides in the carriage of Virtue, with music as his driver.”

- **A note on Confucian texts**

“The Four Books”: “The Great Learning” (*Daxue*), “The Doctrine of the Mean” (*Zhong yong*), “The Analects” (*Lunyu*), and “Mencius” (*Mengzi*), contain the main body of Confucian thought. A very good introduction in English is *The Wisdom of Confucius*, edited and translated by Lin Yutang (see footnote 15).

“The Five Classics”: “The Book of Odes” (*Shijing*), “The Book of History” (*Shujing*), “The Book of Rites” (*Liji*), “The Book of Changes” (*Yijing*), “The Spring and Autumn Annals” (*Chunqiu*). These ancient Classics were in large part edited by Confucius, and he insisted that they be studied very carefully.

* Cf. Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., “The Essential Role of ‘Time-Reversal’ in Mathematical Economics,” *Fidelio*, Winter 1996 (Vol. V, No. 4).

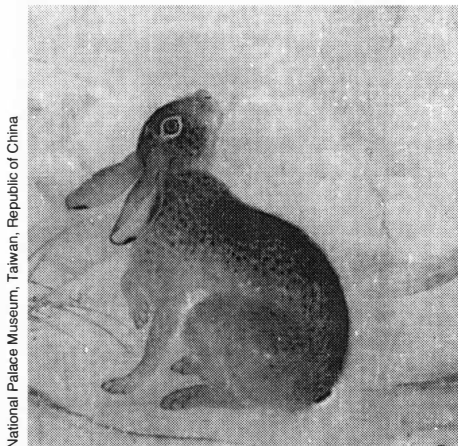
Overall Air and Force, *qi shi*

"To paint the hand plucking the zither is easy, but to paint the eye sending off the flying geese is hard."

Or, in other words, to "capture the ideas beyond the image," through the interplay between idea and scene, *i jing*, is the challenge and task for the artist. The Chinese artist will say, that in an excellent painting, an overall air and force, *qi shi*, an unseen energy, determined through the composition by the different interrelationship of the images, has been brought into play. A lack of *qi shi* leaves a lifeless, disjointed painting.

"Magpies and hare" by Cui Bai (Song Dynasty), is a playful example of this concept [SEE Figure 10]. A hare is sitting totally still with his right paw lifted and his face turned upward toward two colorful, hysterical jabbering birds, one sitting on a branch with outspread wings, another circling in the upper right corner [SEE details, Figures 10(a) and 10(b)]. You can almost hear the noise. The wind is blowing, and the bushes, the grasses, and the bamboo are swept in the same direction as the hare is turned. The hare is like the eye of a storm, and this focus is reinforced by his complete stillness, the line of sight between him and the birds, and the painter's use of light surrounding the head of the hare.¹⁶

FIGURE 10(b). Detail, "Magpies and hare."



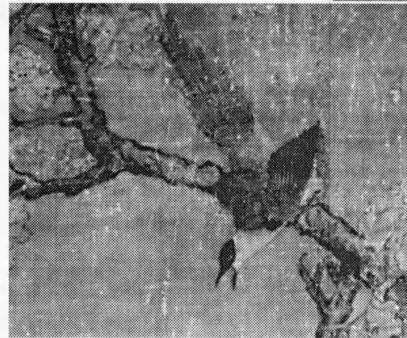
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FIGURE 10. Cui Bai, "Magpies and hare," Song Dynasty.

FIGURE 10(a). Details, "Magpies and hare."



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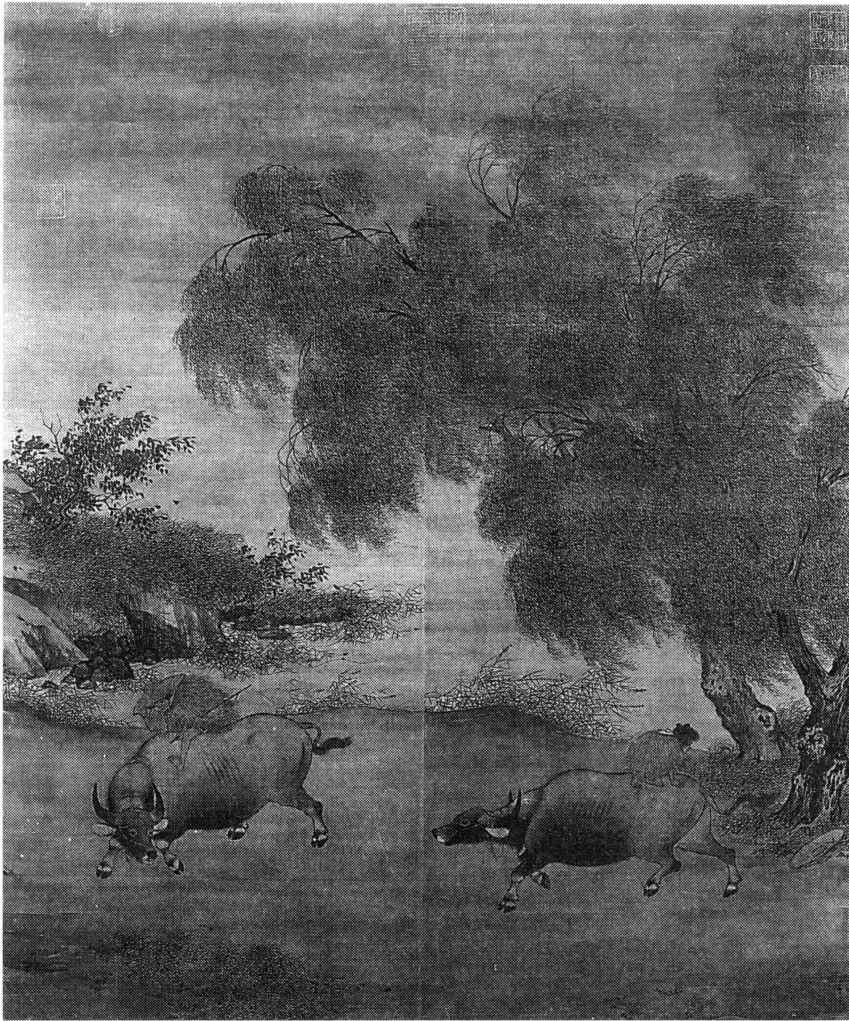
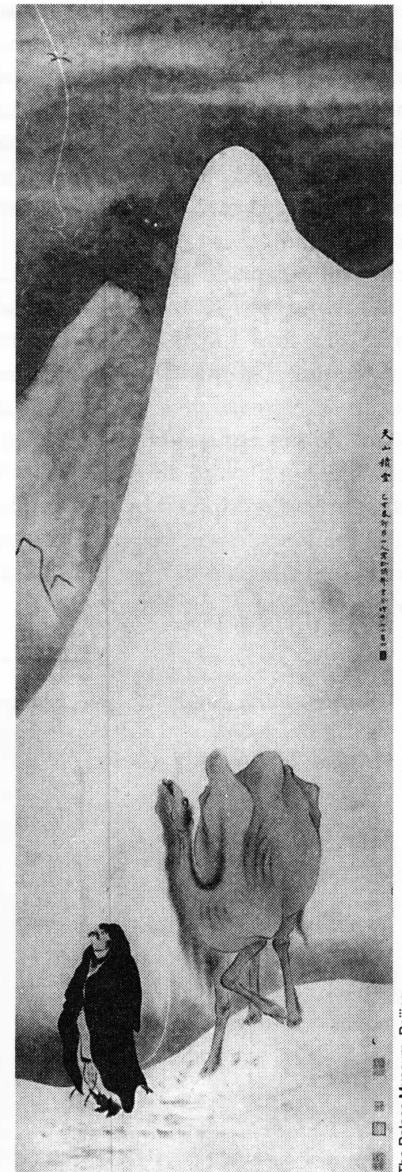


FIGURE 11. Li Di, "Herdsboys and buffaloes in rainstorm," Song Dynasty.

In "Herdsboys and buffaloes in rainstorm" by Li Di (Song Dynasty), the wind is also blowing [SEE Figure 11]. Big trees lean against the storm, their light (willow?) leaves bending graciously before the wind. They dominate a large part of the painting, creating a "power-line," or framing, to focus the viewer on the scene of the two plump, but very animated, buffaloes. One buffalo has half-turned his body, and is looking at the second buffalo, creating a line of sight between them, while the two boys are turned in opposite directions, creating a field of force. The boy in front concentrates on holding on to his hat and getting home, while the second one has completely turned his body around, looking for the hat that has just blown off his head. Through his compositional skills, the artist has created a painting full of *qi*, *shi*, and humor.

FIGURE 12. Hua Yan, "Snow on mount Tian," Qing Dynasty.



Compare these to "Snow on mount Tian," painted by Hua Yan in the Qing Dynasty [SEE Figure 12]. Here, a merchant is walking all alone with his camel through ice and snow in the northern wilderness of China. He has on a fur hat, a sword at his waist, and a bright red overcoat, which stands in stark contrast to the gray sky, the brown camel, and the white snow. The eyes of both the traveller and the camel are turned toward a wild goose in the upper left of the painting. It is a playful sort of painting, but it lacks the *qi* and *shi* of the previous examples. Try comparing it also with Figure 1. The mountains, the humps

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on the camel's back, and the merchant, all share the same curvilinear shape, and no interacting force lines, or "cross voices," have been created. The painting has no life—it is "dead."

Void and Substance

Many paintings of the Southern Song period are characterized by a profound lyrical quality, a "poetry realm." Often, the artist will highlight the painting's theme by emphasizing the foreground elements, leaving a large expanse of the area unpainted—but not empty. The painter is using the void to create space. In Mao I's "Swallows and willow trees," the void on the left side of the painting is filled with substance by the single swallow depicted there, and very simple compositional means have been employed to create *qi* and *shi* [SEE Figure 13 and inside back cover]. Imagine how lifeless the composition would be, if this single swallow were absent!

Courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



FIGURE 13. Mao I, "Swallows and willow trees," Song Dynasty.

Chronology of China's Dynasties

Shang Dynasty
1766-1066 B.C.

Zhou Dynasty
(including 'Spring and Autumn' and 'Warring States' periods)
1066-221 B.C.

Qin Dynasty
221-206 B.C.

Han Dynasty
206 B.C.-A.D. 220

Northern and Southern Dynasties
A.D. 220-580

Sui Dynasty
A.D. 581-618

Tang Dynasty
A.D. 618-907

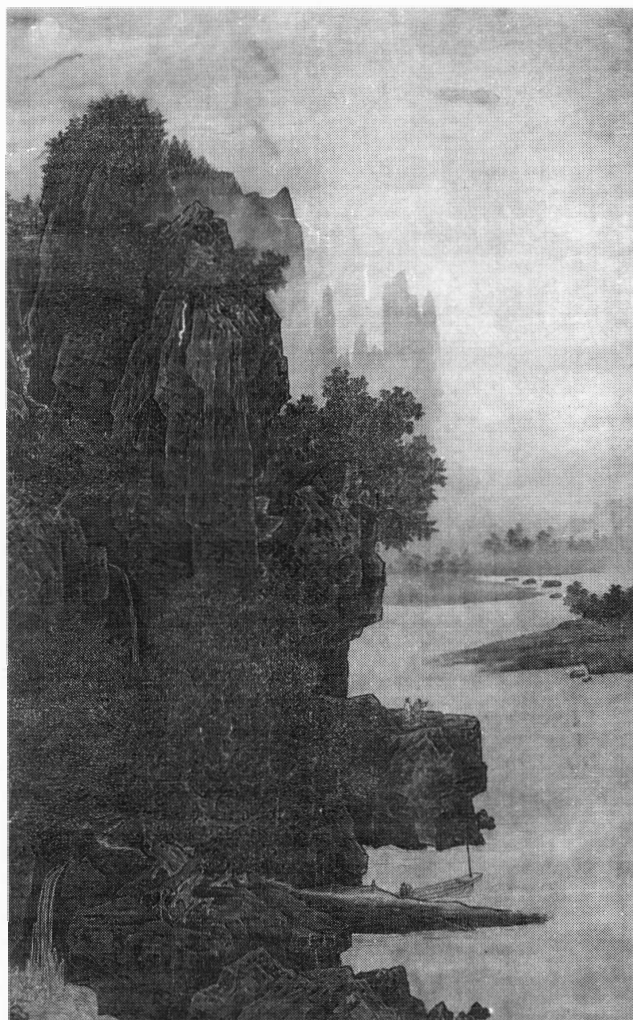
Five Dynasties
(including 'Ten Kingdoms' period)
A.D. 907-979

Song Dynasty
A.D. 960-1279

Yuan Dynasty
(Mongol occupation)
A.D. 1279-1368

Ming Dynasty
A.D. 1368-1644

Qing Dynasty
(Manchu occupation)
A.D. 1644-1911



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FIGURE 14. *Xiao Zhao*,
"Pavillions in mountains,"
Song Dynasty.

Another example of this is "Pavillions in mountains" by Xiao Zhao (Song Dynasty) [SEE Figure 14]. Here, the host mountain with the near world dominates the left side of the painting, while the broad area to the right functions as the expanse of the universe, providing the viewer the space for far-reaching thoughts. And, in "Herdboy returning home along a willow embankment," Xiao Chen (Qing Dynasty) creates a dialogue, not only between the delicate branches of willow and the boy and his buffalo crossing a crude bridge on their way home in the evening, toward which the branches stretch, but between this scene, and the world beyond that is indicated by the vast expanse in the painting's upper half [SEE Figure 15].



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FIGURE 15. *Xiao Chen*,
"Herdboy returning home
along a willow embankment,"
Qing Dynasty.

FIGURE 16.
Yan Liben, "Xiao-I
trying to steal scroll,"
Tang Dynasty.



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'Transmitting the Spirit,' *chuan shen*

As noted earlier, form is the basis of painting, but only by going beyond form and expressing spirit is art created. In painting figures and portraits, the Chinese artist lay emphasis on "transmitting the spirit"—by "letting the heart take the place of the eye to sketch ideas"—to express the essence or spirit of an object, much as the same concept is employed in the West by Rembrandt, for example.

A simple way of doing this is shown in Yan Liben's horizontal scroll "Xiao-I trying to steal scroll," from the Tang Dynasty [SEE Figure 16]. The story is the following: Tang emperor Taizong has sent Xiao-I (the man on the right) on a secret mission to steal the most famous work of calligraphy from a Buddhist monk (third from the right), who owns it. Look at Xiao-I: his body is tense and slightly bent forward, his lips are tight, there is a cunning glint in his eyes, and his hands are completely hidden in the sleeves of his robe, just as his motives are hidden [SEE detail, Figure 16(a)]. The monk seated to the left of Xiao-I has an unhappy look on his face, as if he senses that something is not right. The appearance of the owner of the scroll, however, is very relaxed and open. His body is relaxed and he is smiling and gesticulating as he talks [SEE detail, Figure 16(b)]. The attendants preparing tea at the far left seem oblivious to the unfolding drama.



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FIGURE 16(a). Details, Xiao-I (right) and Buddhist monk (left),
"Xiao-I trying to steal scroll."

FIGURE 17. Ren Renfa, "Zhang Guo having an audience with Emperor Minghuang," detail, Yuan Dynasty.



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In another handscroll, painted six hundred years later by Ren Renfa in the Yuan Dynasty, "Zhang Guo having an audience with Emperor Minghuang," the figures are all very animated—this is a "live" scene [SEE Figure 17]. This story goes: Zhang Guo is a Daoist magician who has supernatural powers. He can, for example, travel long distances using a magical mule. When resting, he folds up the mule and puts it into his hat box, and when he wants

to bring life back into it, he simply sprays it with water from his mouth. In this scene we see Zhang Guo showing his supernatural powers to the Tang Emperor Minghuang. A boy has released the miniature mule, which runs toward the forward-leaning, attentive Emperor. An attendant clasps his hands in total amazement, while the old magician laughs.

Figure 18 is a little masterpiece from the Song Dynasty, by an unknown painter. A



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FIGURE 18. "Portrait of a gentleman," anonymous artist, detail, Song Dynasty.

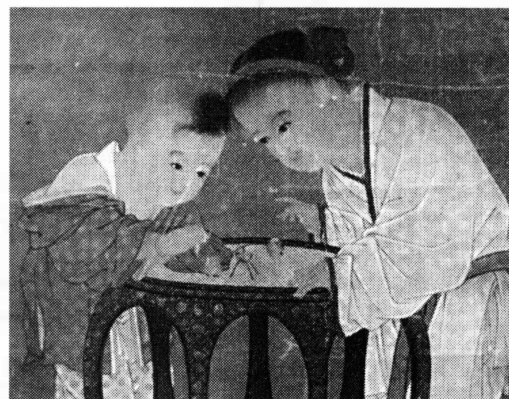
FIGURE 19. *Su Hanchen*,
“*Children at play in
autumn*,” Song Dynasty.

scholar, surrounded by his books, a zither, and paintings, is sitting on a couch with a paper scroll in one hand and a writing brush in the other, with a somewhat concentrated and tense expression on his face. Behind the scholar is a screen with a carefully executed painting. Most striking, however, is a second portrait of the main figure, which hangs over the screen to the left. It is painted from the opposite angle, the color of the robe is different, and, most important, the expression on this second portrait is peaceful and relaxed, very different from the expression of the scholar himself. Not only has the artist painted a painting within a painting, but he has also cleverly used an internal portrait to reveal a deeper layer of the painting as a whole.

A still higher level of “transmitting the spirit” can be seen in “Children at play in autumn” by the Song Dynasty’s Su Hanchen [SEE Figure 19]. The focus in this painting is clearly the two intensely concentrating children, their bodies forming a circle bending forward, so that their heads almost touch one another, who are caught in a moment of discovery. The artist carefully displays most of the children’s faces to convey this (look at the expressions on the faces of the children in the detail) [SEE Figure 19(a)]. Minute details of the children’s attire reinforce the sense of their concentration, for example, the girl’s hairpiece hanging down to the right of her face, or the way the boy’s red jacket has glided down his shoulder. Behind a second table, where clearly some other experiments have taken place, the children’s hats are lying on the ground—reinforcing the key idea, of a moment of concentrated discovery. The tall, rigid stone in the background adds, by contrast, to this overall effect.



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FIGURE 19(a). *Detail*,
“*Children at play in autumn*.”

FIGURE 20. "Portrait of Shen Zhou," anonymous artist, Ming Dynasty.

Figure 20 is a classical Chinese portrait, very reminiscent of works by Dürer, by an unknown Ming Dynasty painter. It is of the famous painter Shen Zhou, one of whose paintings from "Dream Journey" is shown in Figure 4, pictured when he was eighty years old. Directly above his head, Shen Zhou has himself added the following inscription:

Some consider my eyes too small. Others find my jaw too narrow. I wouldn't know, nor would I know, what might be lacking.

What is the point of comparing eyes and face? My only fear is that "virtue" be lost. So negligent, these eighty years, and now death is barely a step away.

Dated 1506. The Old Man of the Stone Field.

The text "Secrets of Portrait Painting," written in the Yuan Dynasty, explains:

One discovers the true aspects of a person in their various manners of speech. One seeks this in absolute quietude. Silent understanding takes place in the heart, so that even with eyes closed, the subject seems right there and when the brush descends, the figure appears.

Another treatise, "Secrets of Transmitting the Spirit," from the Qing



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Dynasty, says:

Spirit resides in the eyes, feelings in the smile. Combining these two will result in an excellent portrait.

With this as introduction, the portrait of Shen Zhou should speak for itself.

FIGURE 21. "Emperor Taizong," anonymous artist, Tang Dynasty.



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Chinese Paintings and Poetic Justice

Xie He, the creator of the Six Principles (*liu fa*) of Chinese painting, said:

All paintings stand for poetic justice; lessons about the rise and fall of ministers over the course of a thousand years can be drawn from paintings.

Since the Emperor, called in China the "Son of Heaven," reigned supreme, it is useful to see how some of them were portrayed, even without going into great historical detail.

Emperor Taizong reigned from A.D.

626 to 649 [SEE Figure 21]. He was the son of the founder of the Tang Dynasty, and is known to have been a great military commander, who expanded the Chinese empire to include Central Asia, and protected the caravan routes leading to the West. His capital, Xian, became a cosmopolitan center, with a population of more than a million. Taizong is shown garbed in the yellow robe of the Emperor, and comes across as a determined, impressive, even somewhat "macho-like" personality—he is definitely a "tough guy."

The following two paintings portray the founder of the Song Dynasty, Emperor Taizu (r. 960-975), in two different settings.

First, a delightful smaller painting, “Group of football players” by Su Hanchen, the painter of “Children at play in autumn” [SEE Figure 19]. Six men are standing together in a circle. The person on the right, a short and casual-clad man kicking a ball, is none other than Emperor Taizu. The man opposite to him with a beard and a tall hat, getting ready to kick the ball back by lifting his gown, is Zhao Pu, the Emperor’s principal counsellor of state. The person next to him in similar dress, but without a beard, is one of the Emperor’s military commanders, now also a state counsellor. The three figures in the back are, from left to right: a military commander, the Emperor’s younger brother (later to become Emperor Taizong, r. 976-997), and Dang Jin, an important military commander and confidant of the Emperor. This relaxed and somewhat intimate view of an Emperor’s private life, where he is enjoying himself in the company of his close colleagues, reflects a stability and outlook quite fitting for this dynasty, which was to usher in a renaissance of Confucian ideas and an excellence in the arts never before achieved in China, and never since surpassed.

In the Ming Dynasty (A.D. 1368-1644), following a century of foreign occupation by the Mongols, scholars and artists sought in different ways to revive the glorious achievements of the Song period, one of which was to portray wise and virtuous rulers and ministers of the past. Liu Jun’s “Emperor Taizu calling on Zhao Pu on a snowy night” is an example of this [SEE Figure 23]. Here, about 550 years after his death, Emperor Taizu, the founder of the Song Dynasty, is again portrayed, and, if you compare his face with that in the previous painting, you can see it is the same person. Emperor Taizu has asked Zhao Pu (the man to whom he was kicking the ball in “Group of football players”) to visit him in order to discuss affairs of state. Zhao Pu was himself no ordinary man. He became prime minister, and is known for bringing peace and prosperity to China by applying the teachings of Confucius.



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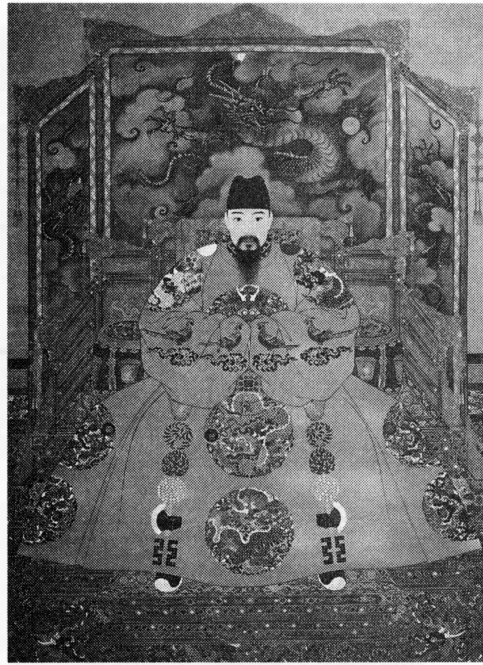
FIGURE 22. Su Hanchen, “Group of football players,” Song Dynasty.

FIGURE 23. Liu Jun, “Emperor Taizu calling on Zhao Pu on a snowy night,” detail, Ming Dynasty.



The Palace Museum, Beijing

FIGURE 24. "Emperor Hongzhi," anonymous artist, Ming Dynasty.



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A very different example is to be found in the formal portrait of the Emperor Hongzhi (r. 1488-1505), the second emperor of the Ming Dynasty [SEE Figure 24]. This is not so much a representation of the person, as of the institution of the imperial throne. The Emperor is dressed in an impressive yellow robe, which is fully garnished with symbolic images conveying his position. The institutionalization is so great, that it seems as if his robe has become part of the floor.

Then, there are many instances of Chinese paintings expressing an indirect, or, not-so-indirect, opposition to a repressive regime, conveyed, however, through scenes of landscapes, flowers (as in Figure 5), or animals. Because they are cloaked in heavy symbolism, the ideas communicated in these paintings are often limited. Here are several examples:

Emperor Minghuang (A.D. 712-756), already shown in Figure 17, is said to have had quite an indulgent lifestyle. Among his excesses, he filled his stables with more than forty thousand foreign horses. These horses were not for use in battle, but were trained to dance in front of the Son of Heaven—the emperor. "The Shining Light of Night," painted during the Tang Dynasty, portrayed, according to the title, one of the most beloved horses in Emperor Minghuang's stable—but look at it [SEE Figure 25]. The horse is not at all content and happy. He is struggling violently, stamping his hooves and lifting his head, turning an agonized eye toward the viewer, but all in vain. He is firmly tied to a thick pole, whose central position in the painting contrasts to the animated struggling of the horse. Although indirect, the painting seems to be quite a condemnation of the court.

Lastly, two examples of discontent with the foreign rule of the Mongols, oth-

FIGURE 25. Han Kan, "The Shining Light of Night," Tang Dynasty.



The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Dillon Fund, 1977. [1977.78]

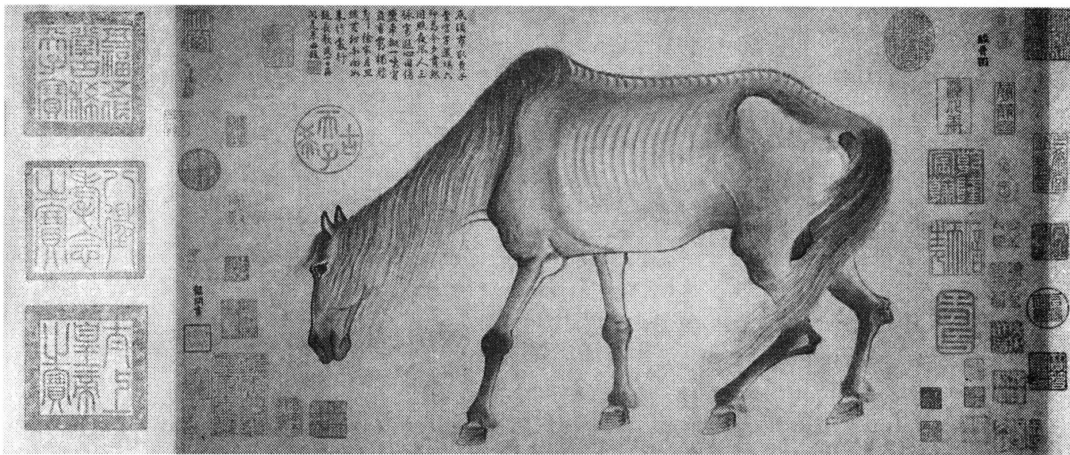


FIGURE 26. Gong Kai, "Emaciated horse," Yuan Dynasty.

erwise known as the Yuan Dynasty. In the first example, "Emaciated horse" by Gong Kai, the opposition is direct and harsh [SEE Figure 26]. This proud animal, a symbol of a noble man, has been starved and maltreated, but remains unbowed; here again, so as to emphasize the message, the eye of the horse looks directly out at the viewer. In a poetic inscription above the horse's head, the artist says: "An emaciated horse, which casts a shadow like a mountain on a sandy bank in the setting sun." A much more indirect opposition is found in "Jackdaws in old trees" by Luo Zhichuan, which depicts a barren winter landscape, enlivened by a group of circling jackdaws returning to roost in the evening—a symbolic representation of homesickness [SEE Figure 27]. A similar painting from the same period has an inscription with the lines: "The flock of circling birds has the appearance of hunger and cold, and they seem to be weeping sadly"—i.e., the condition of the entire educated class in the winter of Mongol occupation.

Let us end our our brief introduction to Chinese painting here. We have seen, that, although on first encounter Chinese paintings may appear strangely different, it turns out that Chinese artists simply employ different instruments and means to express familiar ideas, whether through painting, poetry, or musical setting (a subject for a new article!)—a wonderful example of the diverse richness and universality of mankind. And therefore, it is obvious that an unprecedented renaissance

could be achieved on the eve of the Twenty-first century, through a marriage of the most beautiful ideas of Chinese and Western culture. *It remains for us to make that renaissance a reality.*



FIGURE 27. Luo Zhichuan, "Jackdaws in old trees," Yuan Dynasty.

APPENDIX

‘The Brush Sings and the Ink Dances’

To fully appreciate Chinese painting, one must be aware of some of the technical means employed by the artist, which differ from those of the Western Classical painting tradition, such as the use of the brush, the use of color, the canon for stylized forms, and the function of seals.

The Brush—A Musical Instrument

The Chinese artist will paint on paper or silk, which lies flat on a table, while the brush is held perpendicular to the painting surface. The arm can therefore move freely and is not supported. The brushstrokes are determined much more by the free movement of the arm, than that of the wrist. [SEE Figure A1, “Model for the correct holding of the brush”]

Through centuries of practice and development, the method of the brush plays a central role in creating the best means to express ideas. In the handling of the brush, a Chinese painter will pay attention to “gathering and releasing,” strength, speed, pauses, turns, modulations, and folds. There are many technical terms related to brushwork, such as “reclining brush” (the side), “dragged brush” (the bel-

ly), “broken brush” (separated tip), and “trembling,” “smooth,” and “contrary brush.”

‘Wield the Ink, and the Colors Will Be Realized’

Differently from the West, where primarily oil-based pigments have been used, the Chinese artist primarily uses ink. Thus, the manners of expression differ greatly.

The Fourth of Xie He’s Six Principles regarding painting, is “application of color according to kind” (*sui lei fu cai*). “According to kind” means that color must be considered as one of the factors which expresses the subject’s spirit. For this reason, it is not the appearance of color that is important, but the subject’s nature. Rembrandt’s approach to the use of color, although he uses very different materials, is very similar. See, for example, how Ma Lin uses light to affect the colors [Figure 2 and footnote 10].

Following the principle of “applying colors according to kind,” a famous Song Dynasty painter, Guo Xi, gives some outlines of the nature of mountains and water, for example: “Spring mountains are lightly adorned and seem to be smiling. Summer mountains are richly green, dripping with moisture. Autumn mountains are bright and lucid, well-attired. Winter mountains are cold and desolate, as if asleep.” And: “Spring water is green, summer water jade-green, autumn water is blue, and winter’s is black.” What is the nature of the sky? “Dazzling in spring, brilliant blue in summer, clear in autumn, and dark in winter.”

The beauty of ink depends on the brushwork, wherefore the saying “the brush sings and the ink dances.” With masterful use of the brush, a full tonal range with unlimited flexibility between the six colors (dry, wet, thick, light, black, and white) can be created, or, as an ancient saying describes it, “Masterful use of ink

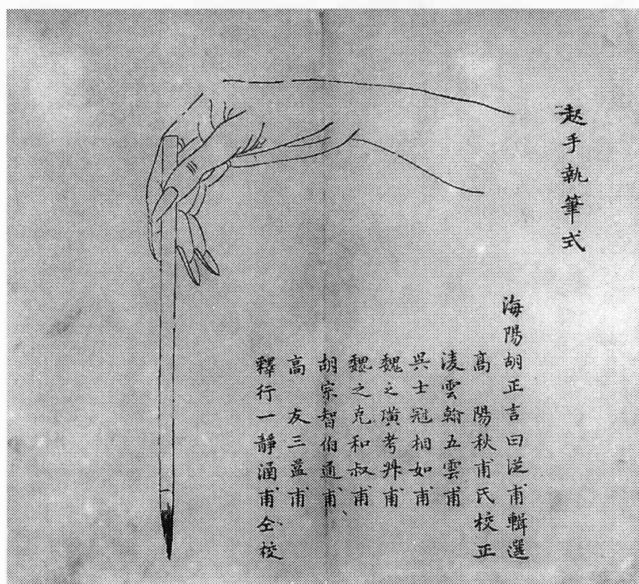


FIGURE A1.
“Model for the correct holding of the brush,” woodcut from “A collection of written and painted artworks from the Ten-bamboo-hall,” Nanjing, 1633.

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FIGURE A2. Shi Ke, "The two patriarchs harmonizing their minds,"
Five Dynasties period.

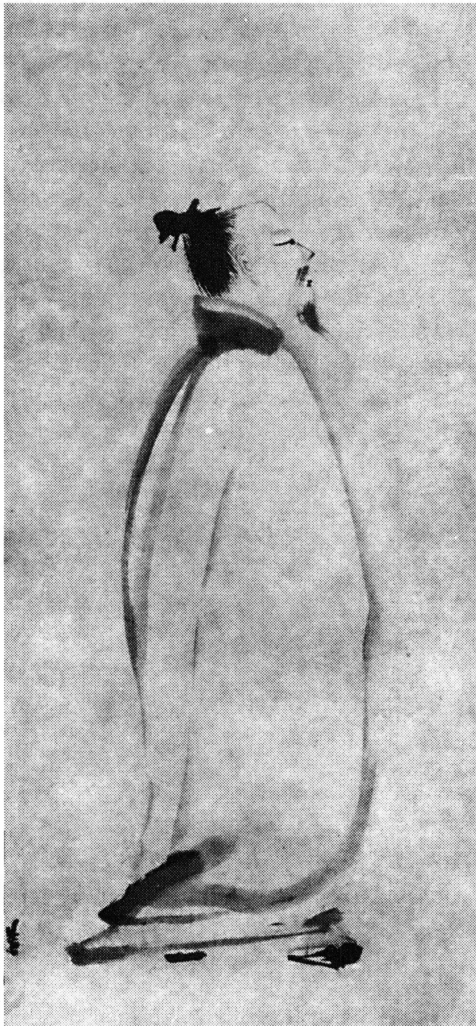
appears green; the lesser brush produces ochre—when neither hinders the other, the ink will appear in the colors and the colors in the ink."

In "The two patriarchs harmonizing their minds" by Shi Ke (Five Dynasties period), the differing characters of the two subjects is expressed through the use of the brush and variation in the "wetness" of the ink [SEE Figure A2]. A similar method is used by Liang Kai in "Li Bai chanting a poem," painted several hundred years later in the Song period—this time, even more simplified [SEE Figure A3]. With just a



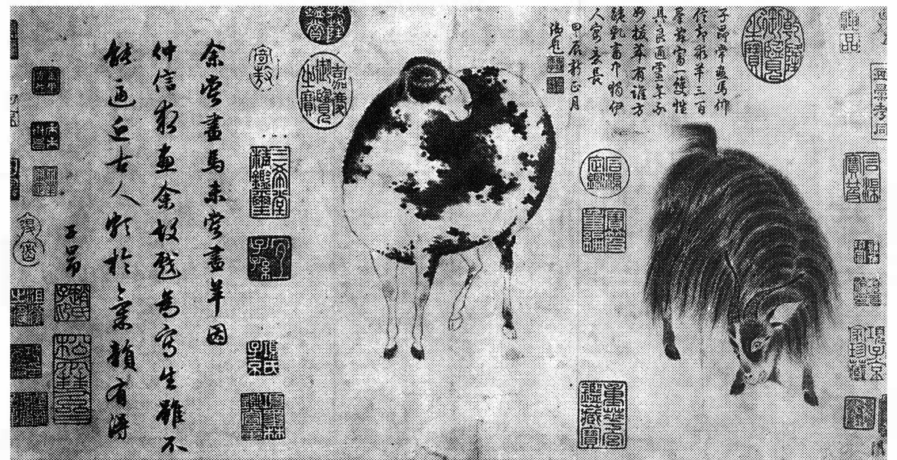
Tokyo National Museum

few, simple fast strokes, the artist has captured the spirit of the famous Tang poet Li Bai (see footnote 6). Another masterful use of ink is displayed in Zhao Mengfu's "Goat and sheep" (Yuan Dynasty), where the artist has used "dotted," soft, wet tones to create the woolly texture of the sheep's fleece, in sharp contrast to the long, needle-like hairs of the goat, created by the use of dry ink [SEE Figure A4]. As a last example, look at the beautiful landscape painting



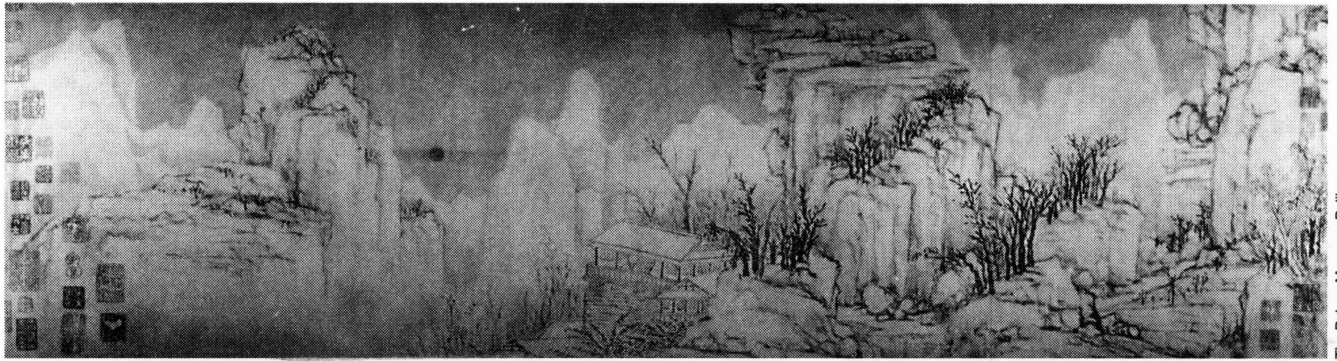
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FIGURE A3. Liang Kai,
"Li Bai chanting a poem,"
Song Dynasty.



Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

FIGURE A4. Zhao Mengfu,
"Goat and sheep," Yuan Dynasty.



The Palace Museum, Beijing

FIGURE A5. *Huang Gongwang, "Clearing after sudden snow," Yuan Dynasty.*

"Clearing after sudden snow," by Huang Gongwang of the Yuan Dynasty [SEE Figure A5]. With the exception of the red winter-sun, only ink is used. The execution of the mountains have been done with a very soft brush—almost feather-like—and yet, they appear monumental and substantial, the bare trees, in dark and pale ink in front and behind the house and on the distant mountain range marking the stages of depth.

Finally, two features regarding forms unfamiliar to the Western painting tradition: the stylization of specific items, and the use of seals.

Over the centuries, Chinese painters produced entire manuals on how to paint different elements, such as bamboo, leaves, branches, or plum blossoms, for example. Numerous handbooks were produced

printed with wood blocks [SEE Figure A6].¹⁷ Rules for the natural appearance of bamboo, for example, were specified, so as to portray its typical appearance as well as its innate characteristic. See, for example, the snow on bamboo in Figure 1 and Figure 23—paintings created more than five hundred years apart. These prescribed conventions were not regarded as a hindrance for the unfolding of creativity, but rather offered the artist greater freedom to convey ideas, rather than having to concentrate on how to represent the different elements as such. In his *Letters on the Aesthetical Education of Man*, Schiller writes that "the real artistic secret of the master consists in his annihilating the material by means of the form," and the Chinese painting manuals were regarded as a help to do exactly that.

FIGURE A6. *Sketches for the representation of leaves and persons, from "Sketches from the mustardseed garden," 1679.*



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Seals have been used in China since very early in its history. On paintings, they function as calligraphic inscriptions, or signatures, stamped in bright red colors. For the most part, the artist will sign his painting with one or two seals, which might contain his name, his home town, and perhaps a motto. (Some paintings, such as Figure A4, contain a large number of seals. These were not stamped by the artist, however, but by admiring owners, who added their own seals to the painting.) The carving of seals is regarded as an independent art and can play a role analogous to poetic inscription, enhancing the content of a painting. Figure A7 shows the seals from two different artists. One seal reads "Attaining immortality," and the other, which was stamped on a painting of spring flowers, "The mountain flowers at home bloom this time of year." So, if you are able to read the seals, it is not difficult to see how the painting, the writing, and the seal gain mutually from one another.



FIGURE A7. Impressions from carved seals. Top: "Attaining immortality." Bottom: "The mountain flowers at home bloom this time of year."

1. See, for example, G.W. Leibniz, "The Natural Theology of the Chinese," in *G.W. Leibniz: Writings on China*, ed. by Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont (Chicago and LaSalle: Open Court, 1994), and the following studies which have appeared in previous issues of *Fidelio*: Michael O. Billington, "Toward the Ecumenical Unity of East and West: The Renaissances of Confucian China and Christian Europe," *Fidelio*, Summer 1993 (Vol. II, No. 2), "The European 'Enlightenment' and the Middle Kingdom," *Fidelio*, Summer 1995, Vol. IV, No. 2), and "The Deconstructionist Assault on China's Cultural Optimism," *Fidelio*, Fall 1997 (Vol. VI, No. 3); Helga Zepp LaRouche, "China's Confucian Legacy in Today's World," *Fidelio*, Winter 1996 (Vol. V, No. 4).
2. Through the Civil Service examination system introduced in the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 221), the emphasis on education was maintained for centuries in China. In order for an individual to enter government service, he had to pass this examination, which required years of study of the ancient classics and philosophical treatises, combined with steeping himself in the moral principles of Confucianism. Passing the examination, however, provided a key to a life of privilege, social status, politics, and aesthetics. Anyone who wished could take the examination, and quite a few individuals from poor backgrounds did so, in most cases through a person from the educated class "adopting" the student. Through the centuries, the strength and coherence of

this elite of educated men proved as important as political centralization or economic integration, as a basis for the unity of Chinese civilization. Confucian officials, educated to view their obligation to the ruler in moral terms, would often make forthright criticisms of imperial policies, and, when disgraced or persecuted, would continue their work, at times far from the court, while they waited for better times. It is also of note, that similar to Italy's great Leonardo da Vinci, many artists performed important tasks for the state. Yan Liben's father [Figure 16], himself an artist, was an architect and engineer, who designed weapons and supervised the construction of sections of the Great Wall. Or, Ren Renfa [Figure 17], who was a specialist in hydraulic engineering, became assistant controller for the irrigation of the state.

3. Being raised in the tradition of Western Classical painting, this author some years ago began to discover the richness of Chinese painting, and some of the different ways in which Chinese painting communicates ideas. On many occasions, when viewing Chinese paintings, I would find myself enthralled and inspired, and the questions why, and how, do these seemingly foreign paintings convey such intensity, would invariably come to mind. It was the effort to answer some of these questions, and to ease the way for others to make the same discoveries, which prompted me to write this article. Many aspects of Chinese painting have necessarily been

- omitted—for example, the heavy Buddhist influence, or the history of Chinese painting as such. What is presented here is meant only as an opening door to the discussion of several of the key principles and ideas implicit in Chinese classical painting. For further study, the following texts are recommended: Richard M. Barnhart, *et al.*, *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), which includes an extensive list of further readings; and Wang Yao-ting, *Looking at Chinese Painting* (Hongkong: Nigensha Publishing Co., 1996).
4. In “Record of famous paintings of successive dynasties” (*Lidai minghua ji*), Zhang Yanyan (Tang Dynasty) writes: “The art of painting exists to enlighten ethics, improve human relationships, divine the changes of nature, and explore hidden truths. It functions like the Six Confucian Classics, and works regardless of the changing seasons.”
 5. Three main forms developed: the horizontal scroll, vertical scroll, and so-called “album-leaf.” The horizontal scroll is the oldest form, and has the same format as ancient Chinese manuscripts and books. It is rolled out in sections, one at a time, from right to left, at arm’s length. When one section has been “read,” it is rolled up, and the next section rolled out. By about the Tenth century A.D., the vertical scroll came to be widely used. Vertical scrolls are hung on poles, and the composition can therefore be seen as a whole. The third form, the album-leaf, developed from the horizontal scroll format. Leaves arranged in order, accordion-like, could be unfolded, like a book without a spine. All three formats were easy to transport and store.
 6. The first direct connection between poetry and painting is found in poems written by the Tang poets Li Bai (A.D. 701-762) and Du Fu (A.D. 712-770), who would write poems after having been inspired by a painting. In the Northern Song period, painter and poet Su Shi (A.D. 1036-1101), and others, promoted the merger of these two arts further, so that, over time, poetry and painting become so integrated that “soundless poem” developed into a common expression for a painting. A book on painting from the Qing Dynasty bears the title, “A History of Soundless Poems.”
 7. The translation of this and subsequent poems is approximate. Needless to say, much of the power of the original has been lost.
 8. The Imperial Painting Academy in the Northern Song court would test painters in poetry, poetry and painting, the Confucian classics, and paintings from the imperial collection would be made available for copying and further study.
 9. Ma Lin was from a famous family of painters, out of which, for at least 150 years, one painter in each generation received official appointment to the Imperial Painting Academy.
 10. Note the use of light. In Chinese painting, one finds no single source of illumination, and little difference is apparent in day and night scenes. Instead of darkening the setting, the painter will use different signs to illustrate that it is evening. In this painting the moon, the candles, the lake mists, and the glow from the eaves of the pavillion, together create a subtle suggestion of evening.
 11. In China, calligraphy is considered an independent art form, closely connected to painting. Painting and calligraphy use the same tools: brush, ink, and paper or silk. An artist of a calligraphic work will plan the entirety of his composition before he begins to work, very much as the painter does. As a calligrapher of the Tang Dynasty put it: “With a single dot, the pattern for a character is established; a single character becomes the standard for the entire text.” Let’s say the artist wants to make a calligraphic composition of a poem. He will choose the brush and the style (of which there are many) that will go best with the idea he is to express. The way he writes the characters can be loose or dense. The second column can “answer” the first column, by the way the characters are executed. The total assemblage in a work of calligraphy is called “the distribution of columns and arrangement of space.” For obvious reasons, Chinese calligraphic art can only be fully appreciated with an in-depth knowledge of the language.
 12. The other five Principles concern brushwork, shape, color, composition, as well as copying as a means of training. It should be noted, that copying old works of calligraphy and painting played a major role in Chinese painting. In the Chinese tradition, emphasis is laid on historic consciousness, and the preservation of tradition. This preservation of knowledge through the generations, with the copying of the old masters, served, at the same time, both to transmit this knowledge and tradition, as well as to give respect for the masters of antiquity. The point of copying, however, was not to achieve a direct resemblance, but to “inherit the spirit.” To encourage the student to outdo his teacher, the Chinese quoted the adage, “indigo blue is bluer than the indigo plant it is extracted from.”
 13. “Festival . . .” is a good example of what is called “blue-green” landscape, a complicated process, which involves multiple layering of colors, in which, after two or three applications of color, a transparent binder made of alum is applied to stabilize the colors and to prevent the various layers of washes from becoming muddied, a process called “three-alum, nine-wash.”
 14. The principle of “Breath-resonance generated by movement” was later discovered by great Western painters, and employed, for example, by Leonardo da Vinci in his “Mona Lisa.” See Karel Vereycken, “Some Remarks on Chinese Painting and Its Influence on the West,” *Fidelio*, Summer 1997 (Vol. VI, No. 2), and “The Invention of Perspective,” *Fidelio*, Winter 1996, (Vol. V, No. 4).
 15. Quoted from *The Wisdom of Confucius*, ed. and trans. by Lin Yutang (New York: Random House Modern Library, 1943), pp. 112-114. I have modified the translation as follows: (1) “*ren*,” translated by Lin as “moral sense,” has been rendered as “*agapē*”; (2) “*zhi*,” translated by Lin as “intellect,” has been rendered as “reason.”
 16. “Magpies and hare” has the Chinese title *Shuangxi tu*, a word play on the word *xi*, which can mean both “magpie” and “happiness.” Two magpies are therefore double happiness. Chinese paintings and poems abound with verbal and visual puns of homophonic sounds and interchangeable meanings.
 17. The 1679 manual in which these illustrations appeared has been published in English as *The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997).