

Elkins Text Preface

I inaugurate this new series of *Writings By Others* with an essay written by James Elkins around eleven years ago., He sent it to me for my comments, since he had relied on and quoted my writings heavily in it. (He had also taken, or sat in on, the courses in Chinese painting given by Father Harrie Vanderstappen at the University of Chicago, and through those had become more than casually engaged with the subject.) I responded with a lot of suggested changes, but also with a general expression of approval, since it was arguing in a direction that had been often in my own thoughts, and I had considered writings such an essay myself. He was obviously much more versed than I in Western art history and theory, and his essay seemed to me, preliminary and speculative as it was, a valuable contribution to studies of world art that would open up discussion. Alas, it was not to appear in print (until now): powerful people who disliked the kind of cross-cultural comparisons it represented prevented it from appearing in print.

How this happened, and what followed over the next decade, is detailed in the attached Elkins Chronology. It is meant as an indictment of the Big Theory people who blocked its publication, sometimes with spurious objections (as seen in one of the negative letters to a potential publisher quoted below.) And throughout they were TOTALLY WRONG, I believe, in preventing its publication. To write a negative review arguing against its main thrust or points of detail is OK; to keep it from being published is *not OK at all*. I am not going to name the people whom I suspect of being behind this, although I think I know who at least two of them were.

Over the decade plus since then, Jim Elkins and I have become good friends, corresponding frequently, even in a for-publication mode. We took part, and were the main subjects of, a conference organized at the University of Maryland by Jason Kuo in November, 2005; the papers of that conference appear in Jason C. Kuo, ed., *Stories From Other Mountains: Chinese Painting Studies in Postwar America* (Washington, D.C., New Academia Publishing, 2009.) My own paper for that conference can be found also on this website as CLP 176, "Visual, Verbal, and Global (?): Some Observations on Chinese Painting Studies." I recommend that seriously interested people read it together with the texts below.

I hope I don't need to add that for all the *Writings by Others* manuscripts that I will include in this series, I have the permission of the original writer to include it, if he or she is still living. Elkins's enthusiastic OK is in his last letter in this series.

James Cahill, Vancouver, September 2, 2011

Elkins Manuscripts: Chronology

- March 27, 1991: Letter to me from James Elkins introducing himself, accompanying his essay “Chinese Paintings as Object Lessons,” to be included in a book “on the ways historians have compared periods, specifically Renaissance and modernism,” with a working title “*Streams into Sand: Renaissance and Postmodernism*. The final chapter is a comparison between Chinese landscape painting and Western painting.” He adds that his essay is “almost entirely dependent on your [i.e. JC’s] writings,” and asks for “any advice you might have . . .”

- April 20, 1991. JC to JE, beginning “I read . . . the chapter from your book with great interest, even excitement. . . “ because, although the idea of making such a comparison was not entirely new, I hadn’t read anything of the kind that “does it so well, so convincingly.” Then on to six pages of comments & suggestions for change. (I also have pages of scribbled notes, and a scrawl at the top of Elkins I indicating that I shared the manuscript with Loren Partridge, our Renaissance specialist.)

- May 6, 1991. JE to JC, thanking me for a “generous reading” of his essay, saying he’s going to offer a “revised version” of the chapter to *Critical Inquiry*. Adds: “Perhaps if the essay is accepted at *Critical Inquiry* we’ll know why Svetlana Alpers—and other art historians—resist such comparative studies.”

- April 2, 1994 (three years later!) JE to JC: he has submitted it instead to *Journal of the History of Ideas*, which has finally rejected it as “too specific to the visual arts.” Asks for thoughts about where it could be published. “I’d like to get the essay out there; it seems odd to have it sitting on the shelf so long.”

- March 14, 1997. JE to JC: manuscript has been rejected once again. Asks whether I have any idea about an editor who might be interested. Attaches letter from editor at U. of Chicago Press turning it down, and negative reader’s report. JE writes below his note: “I know (name) and (name) would write positive reports—but U. of C. didn’t use them. . .”

The attached strongly negative reader’s report—of course I don’t know who its author was (although I can guess), but will call him or her “Prof. X”—the report is illuminating in itself. Prof. X appears to be a Chinese art specialist, a good writer (but he twice writes “proceed” when he means “precede”), and not completely honest: does he write outright “I oppose this book because it violates taboos I subscribe to?” No, he writes as if he thinks JE *should have done it better*—writing: “Other scholars have described the increasingly self-reflexive nature of [Chinese] landscape paintings of this time more evocatively than Elkins and in more detail, the work of James Cahill is just

one example.” (Thank you for the unwanted plug, Prof. X.) And he ends: “. . . but the endeavor fails, not so much because one can not [sic] compare art of the East to art of the West, but because after all we learn so little about Chinese painting from his argument.” Which is to say: a non-specialist in Chinese painting can’t get his book published because [we] Chinese painting specialists write better about Chinese painting than he does. . . Hypocrisy, thy name is (for convenience) Prof. X. I can’t, of course, judge how typical this is of the dozens of negative letters that Elkins’s manuscripts must have called forth, but I would place a [posthumous] bet that most of them are guilty of similar hypocrisies.

- April 4, 1997. JC to JE, commiserating. Adds: “I really liked your paper better in its earlier form—seemed to have more punch, more solid matter, less meta-art-history agonizing of the kind that made up the CAA session you were in (Stan Abe’s)”

- My undated handwritten notes on reading Elkins II, with this paragraph: “Whole first chapter: presented as methodological meticulousness, self-examination, agonizing, becomes kind of dance-like pussyfooting, one step forward, two backward—wheel-spinning. Where does it bring us? Debilitating self-reflexiveness.”

- April 28, 1998: letter to me from editor at Yale U. Press thanking me for agreeing to read & evaluate JE’s new ms.: *Chinese Landscape Painting as Art History*. Encloses 160-page manuscript.

- Oct. 6, 1996: six-page “Notes on Elkins manuscript” sent to JE by JC, with this crucial paragraph:

“In what follows you seem to work through the same line of thought, as though one could approach any body or tradition of art and find in it ‘versions of western art history.’ Which suggests that the narrative or account we come up with is like a reflection in a mirror, has no real truth to the material we work on, etc. I don’t believe that, and can’t see how you can; it seems too much an obeisance to the peculiar notion (French) that turns all observations about the world into purely cultural constructions, without any real correspondence to real phenomena in the world. That they are *affected* by cultural conventions is of course true; much as, I would think, representations of a real object or scene are affected by artistic conventions & style. But to go from that to saying (as Norman Bryson etc. do) that no representation is ‘truer’ than any other is pure lunacy. (I tell my class that I would like to see people who argue this way put in the middle of a treacherous terrain, with bogs & cliffs & ferocious animals, and given a choice of maps, one of which is a real representation that shows the true layout of the terrain and the way to get through it, the other of which acknowledgedly isn’t and doesn’t, and see if they have the courage of their

expressed convictions by choosing at random, in the belief that one representation is as true as another.)”

- JE to JC. Undated: “I’ve revised the talk as you suggested . . .” etc., arguing various points.

- December 15, 1999, JE to JC; begins by congratulating me on “amazingly clear and concise” Princeton lecture (the one dedicated to Wen Fong, revised and published as “Some Thoughts on the History and Post-History of Chinese Painting” in *Archives of Asian Art* for 2005), “You may be among the last art historians (in any speciality!) who dare to draw general conclusions from disparate material.” He adds: “You’re right that I don’t ‘entirely believe’ in the postcolonial theory I added to the most recent version of my MS, but here’s the crux: I *do* believe it is important . . . to try to reach the largest possible public, and that public is increasingly comprised of people whose sense of history begins, and sometimes ends, with some version of postcolonial theory. So while I don’t believe in the truth-value of some recent theory, I absolutely believe in its rhetorical *efficacy*. . . “
 (- Same date, but written later, another letter JE to JC, about “Riverbank” affair.)

- January 28, 2000. JC to JE: received his letter and the book (Chinese translation of his latest ms., published by China Academy of Art in Hangzhou).

- February 14, 2000, JC to JE, letter arguing at length (again) against main thrust of Elkins II as opposed to Elkins I. Long, interesting letter, important (for me) in setting out my thinking at that time. (I may reproduce this one on my website.)

- January 17, 2002, JE to JC. Responding to my American Academy paper (on authenticity etc., saying “Your realist criteria seem entirely persuasive to me. Gombrich would also have liked them. . .”
 Attached: 14-page text of lecture (“written December 1999”) to be presented at the Getty, March 14 2000, and Williams College, April 6-8 2000: “Why it is Not Possible to Write Art Histories of Non-Western Cultures.”

- june 26, 2003. Letter from editor at U. Wash. Press, thanking me for my willingness to read “Elkins’s new manuscript, ‘Chinese Landscape Painting as Western Art History.’”

- July 4, 2003, note from JE to JC, manuscript “now under review at U. of Washington Press. . .”

- June 26, 2003, JC to U. Wash. Press editor: yes, I'll be happy to review the Elkins ms; . . . "Looking through old correspondence, I see. . . I've been strongly of the opinion that it deserves publication, controversial though it may be; the opposition to it by some reviewers has been less directed at its merits, I think, than at the whole approach, which continues to believe that art can have a kind of history (or, at another period, can't have.)"

- Sept. 26, 2003, letter to editor at U. Wash. Press, beginning: "Poor James Elkins, shot down again. I warned you that there would be negative responses among reviewers; there always will be, and if these are enough to block publication, as they evidently are, the manuscript will never get published, and the people who want to block it will prevail. I've watched this for some years, and am sorry it happened again. Can a press never say: OK, you people don't like it, but we think it should be published anyway?"

(March, 2005, correspondence between JE and JC about Elkins's "Visual Literacy" conference)

- July 31, 2006. JE to JC, asking for letter to editor of another press --who, he writes, when she was at [great U.S. university] "the whole China establishment was breathing down her neck . . ."—to keep her from publishing Elkins's book.

- August 3, 2006. Note from me accompanying letter to this editor, supporting publication of that ms., noting that Jim Elkins and I "were together at a symposium and had a public 'conversation' a few months ago." This was the symposium at U. Maryland organized by Jason Kuo. My main contribution to it is on my website as CLP 176, "Visual, Verbal, and Global (?)" ; both mine and JE's published in Jason C. Kuo, ed., *Stones from Other Mountains: Chinese Painting Studies in Postwar America*, Washington D.C., 2009.

- October 11, 2007: group email from JE to JC and three others: "I hope you can pardon this group email. That MS of mine on Chinese landscape painting has been rejected again -- after nearly 2 years' wait -- by Helen Tartar at Fordham U. Press. I would really like to see this in print before I retire! It's been exactly ten years since I started sending this MS around. It's been rejected by Harvard, Oxford, Princeton, Chicago, Stanford, Yale, MIT, Washington, Duke, Reaktion, Hawai'i, and California - but some of those are years ago, under different editors."

JC responds with sympathetic note, not having much to suggest any more. Then:

- May 3, 2008, email from JE to group:

'Well, after all these years -- and 14 rejections -- my little book will be published by Hong Kong University Press. I am beginning my revisions now; the MS is due in August. As you can imagine, most readers were concerned with the fact that I spend so much time on "older scholarship" and literati painting. The general feeling, which I doubt I can counteract, is that the questions I raise are asked-and-answered because art history has moved on. As you know, I think art history has just evaded the issues.

"Jenny Purtle has written an introduction to the book, which I hope will increase its readership.

"It's a relief to see the end in sight, but also sad because I know how little chance I have of convincing China specialists that large-scale questions are still pertinent."

JC responds in an email to JE:

"Congratulations—maybe only for having the longest publication postponement of an important manuscript? Anyway, it's good news. Hong Kong U. doesn't have the best circulation & advertising system, but most people who matter will read it. Now you'll get some reviews, I hope, and even if they are of the dumb "art history has moved on" kind, they should arouse interested people to read it themselves."

(The rest is all email correspondence, not relevant to this big topic.)

All the above transcribed and written out on February 25, 2011 by JC, who adds:

So, to sum up: What have the Big Theory people (who include, surely, people I otherwise like and admire, such as Svetlana Alpers) done, collectively, to art history by all the blockages described in the foregoing? They have collectively done what disbelievers in global warming are doing to efforts to stop or slow that, and what Tea Partiers are doing to women's abortion rights: they are not merely saying "We believe otherwise, and will argue against this," but "We believe this is wrong enough that we mean to keep it from happening, or even being opened up for rational discussion." And that, I deeply believe, is not merely wrong, it is unforgiveable.

To give another example of Big Theory's power: One of my best students, through the master's degree, was Liu Heping. He wrote as a seminar paper, for (as I recall) a seminar on the late Ming landscapist

Dong Qichang, a paper comparing Dong's usages of past styles, in both theory and practice, with the Italian Mannerist painters' uses of the past. And he then—with my encouragement, alas—used this as a qualifying paper for his master's degree. And was promptly removed from serious consideration for entry into our Ph.D. program with support by the Big Theory people in our department—several of the biggest in the art history world—who made it clear that no student who made that kind of argument was going to get a Ph.D. from us. Liu Heping went on (with my encouragement and support) to take his doctorate at Yale, and is now one of the best Chinese painting specialists of his generation, holding the position formerly occupied by Anne Clapp at Wellesley College, publishing important writings, winning prizes, serving as department chair.

And: another example of the triumph of Big Theory over what I would take to be fair and honest practice: I myself taught for thirty years at U.C. Berkeley without ever holding a chair, which would have supported foreign and other grad students to come and work with me, as well as my own travel and other research expenses—I was, I think, the only major Chinese art specialist of my generation in the U.S. who *didn't* hold a chair, and even some of the younger ones do now. My years of giving docent lectures at the Asian Art Museum in S.F., spending large amounts of time going there to teach and be with them, had produced a body of enthusiastic supporters, most of them women and many of them rich, who would have, if departmental heads and others at UCB had made the effort, easily raised the money for a chair—but nobody made the effort. I kept raising the matter with department chairmen, the Graduate Division dean, Development Office people—none of them listened seriously or really tried to help.

However, when the time came for my retirement and the choice of my successor, the Big Theory people in the department strongly supported two candidates who, they felt, could Speak Their Language, and (my understanding—quite certainly true for one of them, less certainly for the other) they were offered chairs, newly created for them, if they would come to Berkeley. One of them gave a candidate's lecture that persuaded me that, brilliant as he was in other ways, he hadn't done his reading in the (new for him) Chinese painting field, so that his teaching in that field would be weak. I had a long session with the Theory people trying to convince them of this; none of my arguments mattered against the big one for them: He Speaks Our Language. Neither of these two candidates took the job, in the end, and the person who got it, Patricia Berger, has proven to be at least

the equal of either of them, certainly better than one, I think better than either. She got the job without much support from the Big Theory people—her strengths, for some of which I am responsible (she was once my student), lie elsewhere, although she can talk Theory when she chooses to.

I can only add, for all the above—as for other revelatory writings I am doing and making public in my old age: What I have written here is not merely a matter of one opinion against others, but can be documented in files I have kept, which will before long become part of the Cahill Archive at the Freer Gallery, and so open to reading by any qualified person. So I am only making public these matters a bit prematurely, not waiting until after I join my ancestors.

(JC writes JE attaching the above, asking his OK to copy first paragraphs of original manuscript, and to put all this on my website. He replies:)

Jim,

That is stupendous. Your postscript is a very strong statement, and I very much appreciate your honesty!

I would love it if you'd post it (the entire thing) on your website. I am, myself, in a bit more precarious position with this MS, so I wouldn't post it myself. (Maybe after a positive review or two!)

I'm hoping David Carrier takes the argument on board this time; I think he will. And, of course, I'm hoping that a specialist will review it in an open-minded fashion.

Best, Jim

Elkins,
original
1994
manuscript

**CHINESE LANDSCAPE PAINTING
AS OBJECT LESSON**

James Elkins

Chinese landscape painting can be an "object lesson," that is, an analogy for understanding the course of Western painting from antiquity to postmodernism and beyond. It is possible, I will suggest, to make a reading of the Chinese tradition, and specifically of its developing sense of its own history, that runs parallel to essential developments in Western concepts of the history of painting. Both cultures had periods in which partly lost traditions were rediscovered and experienced as "history." Both experienced a pivotal change brought about by a radical reevaluation and simplification of that past history. In both, these developments were followed by times marked by shorter-lived schools; and the emergence of the concept of "schools" is an essential component of this since it marks the moment in which artists realized that the stream of history does not contain only one possible course. Once such awareness had been achieved, history was no longer a closed, linear progression leading to static perfection or inevitable decline, but a collection of such movements, overlapping and combining, with no clear end in sight. In such an atmosphere experimentation on common goals tended to give way to purposely radical positions and eccentric or idiosyncratic styles outside of whatever mainstreams appeared at the moment. As schools multiplied and began to blur, eccentricities had to be more pronounced in order to be heard, and eventually brief loud bursts of invention from individual artists began to supplant the importance of the movements they helped launch. These are the elements, but not the substance, of the parallel I will propose.

The reason this abstract account is of compelling interest to an observer of Western art is that the Chinese reached the stage of diffusion and multiplication approximately three

centures *before* the West, and therefore their past offers itself as an analogy to one of our possible futures. To anticipate conclusions I will develop more fully enroute: what has happened in the last three hundred years of Chinese painting does not bode well for our fond hopes that Modernism and Postmodernism are changes on the order of the Renaissance, or that the twentieth century is somehow a major epistemological, scientific, and cultural upheaval that has delivered a kind of new beginning—a rebirth—for Western culture. Nor does the Chinese example support the Western concept (not often discussed, but fundamental to our self-descriptions) that our Postmodern pluralism will coalesce into a canonical freedom, or give way to some “resolution,” whether as a liberal “conversation” or something more unexpected. The Chinese experience has been one of continuing proliferation of schools and unabated increase in eccentric, short-lived and ever-more undifferentiated artistic statements: their “pluralism” did not heal or define itself, and the legacy of its diffuse confusion has been incorporated into social realism and other Western currents rather than clarified by them.

1

This is a messy argument, and we must begin by tying some laces. First I want to dispose briefly of an objection that will seem irrelevant to scholars of Chinese art: that the Chinese tradition is simpler or narrower than our own and hence an inappropriate comparison. On the contrary, it can be argued that the Eastern tradition is substantially more complex as well as longer-lived than our own. Its literature on painting is “far greater in volume and richness” than Western literature (Chang Yen-yüan’s ninth-century *Record of Notable Painting in Successive Dynasties* is said to excel Vasari’s later account “in scope and sophistication”), and the number of Chinese schools and movements easily rivals those of

the West.¹ If comparative “richness” is to be an issue—though I do not see how it could be maintained, nor how it could be useful in this context—it would appear that the onus of proof would rest on Western and not Chinese shoulders.

More serious problems arise with my own implication in a kind of Western art history and philosophy that continually suggests and guides comparisons such as the one I want to undertake here. The entire well of historical comparisons has been poisoned by Hegelian meliorism and Spirit-analogies. My defense here (as the scientism of my initial account indicates) would follow the lines of Karl Popper’s and E. H. Gombrich’s anti-Hegelian polemics: essentially, that it is not only possible but incumbent on historians to attempt to make better sense of historical change, and that rational standards of comparison are available that are distinct from Hegelian notions of cultural holism, “progress,” and the unified *Zeitgeist*. Though I am not unaware of the pitfalls of imagining that Hegel can be circumvented by paying closer attention to historical facts, I choose here to proceed as if Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics* could remain safely in footnotes. A later account might address the relations that will naturally spring up between my account and Hegelian historical sequences.²

The fact that I have no Chinese poses both a contingent and an apodictic limitation: contingent because the literature on Chinese landscape painting in European languages has now reached such a bulk that it could easily occupy a lifetime (or create a new specialization);³ and apodictic since I am sometimes forced to believe in the transparent

¹ J. Cahill, *The Distant Mountains, Chinese Painting in the Late Ming Dynasty, 1570 - 1644* (New York and Tokyo, 1982), 6.

² See my “Art History Without Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 14 (1988): 354-78.

³ Surveys of Chinese painting in Western languages include: R. Petrucci, *Encyclopédie de la peinture Chinoise* (Paris, 1918); N. Vandier-Nicolas, *Peinture chinoise...* (Paris, 1983), L. Bachhofer, *A Short History of Chinese Art* (New York, 1946), J. Cahill, *Chinese Painting* (New York, 1960), Cahill, *Chinese Paintings XI-XIV Centuries*. Series on Far Eastern Art

veracity of European texts—something that is precisely the worst thing to do in an inquiry such as this one. My only plea for that shortcoming is that I have made liberal use of the comments of specialists, themselves unverifiably implicated in various art historical schools, but more likely to be careful in transcribing concepts and categories from Chinese into European languages. In particular I have been heavily dependent on the unsurpassed histories by James Cahill, whose observations on historical change provoked this study and made its comparisons possible.

An issue that is more intriguing, in part because it is more easily argued, may be called the “weave of the net” problem. Each historical inquiry must cast a net with a certain fineness of weave, in order to catch its intended prey. If I am writing a conventional survey of Renaissance art, I will have neither space nor reason to include any number of fascinating

and Artists, vol. [] (New York, [c.]), Chen-to Cheng, *The Great Heritage of Chinese Art* (Shanghai, 1952), William Cohn, *Chinese Painting* (London, 1951), second edition, Otto Fischer, *Chinesische Landschaftsmalerei* (Munich, 1921), H. A. Giles, H. A., *An Introduction to the Study of Chinese Pictorial Art* (London, 1918), revised edition, Sherman Lee, *Chinese Landscape Painting* (New York, [c. 1970?]), Laurence Sickman and Alexander Soper, *The Art and Architecture of China* (Baltimore, 1960), second edition, O. Sirén, *Chinese Painting, Leading Masters and Principles* (London and New York, 1956-58), 7 vols., P. C. Swann, *Chinese Painting* (Paris, 1958), and Arthur Waley, *An Introduction to the Study of Chinese Painting* (London, 1923). More specific sources are listed below, under the individual dynasties.

Invaluable aid for a beginning student—particularly in view of issues of individual style particular to Chinese painting—is provided by the picture anthologies, for example S. Harada’s encyclopedia of images, *Shina meiga hokan* [*A Pageant of Chinese Painting*] (Tokyo, 1936); Beijing, Palace Museum (√√), *Ku-kung shu-hua-chi* [*Collection of Calligraphy and Painting in the Palace Museum*] (Peking, 1929-35), 45 vols., Taiwan, National Palace Museum, *Three Hundred Masterpieces of Chinese Painting in the Palace Museum* (Tokyo, 1959), 6 vols., Taiwan, National Palace Museum, *Selected Chinese Paintings in the National Palace Museum* ([], []), and Taiwan, National Palace Museum, [*Fifty*] *Masterpieces of Chinese Painting in the National Palace Museum* ([], []).

minor artists, since they will have to give way even to less important artists whose place is assured by some fortuitous circumstance. Jacopo Copi di Meglio and Girolamo Macchietti have won mention in Renaissance histories by their presence in the *studiolo* of Cosimo I, but Barbatelli, Girolamo Genga and thousands like them must be excluded because by luck their works and names are not associated with “essential” surviving monuments. We are supplied rules of exclusion and inclusion *in extenso* by the various genres in which we write. Surveys, monographs, catalogues, and specialized studies are Baedekers for these problems, since they define reasonably stable standards of inclusion and exclusion. The “weave of the net” problem only appears as such when the text is not in a clearly identifiable genre. What rules of inclusion should operate here? This problem touches on some fundamental issues regarding the constitution of the discipline (its continuity, radicalism and conventionality) and its philosophic strength (the definition of “masterpieces” by enthusiastic and convincing prose, and the promulgation of canons by dusty repetition of those same essays). All historical surveys are commensurately vulnerable to the charge of casting their nets too widely or too narrowly, and conformity to the Baedekers can hide a more dangerous—because unexamined—adherence to conventional lists of “first-,” “second-,” and “third-rate” masters, schools, monuments, and “masterpieces.” The argument I am going to pursue here depends on a coarse-woven net that will exclude vast amounts of information in order to secure the largest possible fish, and it is therefore open to the legitimate charge of boulderizing historical texture in favor of some dubious goal. I have tried to write in such a way as to invite and meet dissenting accounts, and I would only hope, if this version of what happened in Chinese and Western painting seems skewed, that readers will not need to deny it without offering alternatives.

It may also be worthwhile to dissociate this project from the tide of apocalyptic pronouncements that have been appearing more and more frequently as the second millennium approaches (in 1989 alone we read of the “end of art,” *The End of Nature*, and *The End of*

History). I do not find apocalyptic themes in my thesis, since it does not propose that we are near the end of anything. The difficulty lies in saying where we are, without being trapped into prophesying imminent change or paralyzing periodization. Eventually, I think, the lesson of history—what “history teaches us”—is that it is supremely difficult to say *anything*, much less to prophesy. The *Book of Revelations* itself is the best witness to this, since it has engendered a long historical succession of warring interpretations that recur predictably at the close of each year, each century, each half-millennium and millennium.

A further objection may arise in relation to the idea of comparing “traditions,” since it is arguable that “tradition” in China and in the West are two distinct concepts. The Chinese “tradition” has been described as more continuous than ours and less marked (or, in some accounts, unmarked) by important catastrophic renaissances and revolutions of the Western type. In part this claim is demonstrably true. At least the later Chinese artists had access to rubbings and other “shadowy copies” of their founding artists’ works, while Western artists had to rely on shadowy texts in Pliny, Philostratus, Lucian, Plutarch, and Pausanius. It is interesting to speculate on the effect on Western art if the Renaissance had had access to copies of, say, Apelles’ masterworks or Polygnotos’s *Iliupersis*.⁴ The presence of copies, it can be argued, rendered the Chinese at once more continuous and richer in historical nuance

⁴ Wang Wei’s *Wang Ch’uan Villa*, to take a prominent example, was known not only from rubbings taken from an anonymous worker’s stone monument made in 1617 (itself probably from a copy), but also in copies made by specific artists. Kuo Chung-shu’s (c. 918-78) copy was allegedly from the original, and later Chao Meng-fu (1309) and Li Kung-lin made copies from copies.

By contrast, Renaissance authors had to imagine Polygnotos’ painting from Pausanius’ description or, later, from various neoclassically-inspired reconstructions. See M. D. Stansbury-O’Donnell, “Polygnotos’s *Iliupersis*: A New Reconstruction,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 93 no. 2 (1989): 203 ff., and, for earlier reconstructions, C. Robert, *Die Iliupersis des Polygnot* (Halle, 1893), and L. Faedo, “Breve racconto di una caccia infruttuosa: Polignoto a Delfi,” *Ricerche di Storia dell’Arte* 30 (1986): 5-15.

and schools. In practice, although Chinese painters did not find it difficult to ignore certain earlier schools, the continuing presence of examples of those rejected schools helped sharpen the definitions and rules of the accepted styles in various periods, keeping them “purer” for longer than they might otherwise have been. “Tradition” was also alive in a more personal sense: the practice of copying older styles has remained strong in China, and it has sometimes absorbed a substantial fraction of artists’ lives. Its *literati* artists, the *wen-jen*, arguably possessed greater historical knowledge than their average Western counterparts, and spent more of their lives in what Westerners would call “apprenticeship.” Their studies were aided, especially after Tung Ch’i-ch’ang, with a vocabulary of emulation parallel to our words “copy” (*lin-mo*) “free copy” (*fang*), “imitation,” and “adaptation,” but possessed of wider currency and greater conceptual clarity.⁵ Wen Cheng-ming, for example, made more-or-less close copies, imitations, and adaptations of a wide range of works and styles throughout his long life: a condition unthinkable in the West after the Renaissance. The analogous situation, if such a thing is conceivable, would be if three-quarters of Rembrandt’s works were so successful in their emulation of Raphael, Leonardo, and other Renaissance masters that they could not be securely identified as Rembrandt’s unless they were signed. Even in the more strongly continuous traditions such as Renaissance Venice, it is not possible to imagine Titian devoting his work through the 1550’s to copies of paintings by Mantegna, Pordenone, Jacopo and Giovanni Bellini, and Giorgione, and only then striking out on his own.

This is an argument that can easily be overstated. Laurence Binyon compared the Chinese tradition to a hypothetical West that was not interrupted or “invaded” by the

⁵ See Cahill, *Distant Mountains*, 120-26. Tung Ch’i-ch’ang declared that in painting, unlike some other arts, “the familiar is essential.” Quoted in A. Waley, *Introduction to the Study of Chinese Painting* (New York, 1958 [1923]), 248.

OK - rather odd reading
but not incorrect.

NO,
NOT
TRUE.

2
Look
UP!

Renaissance, but “developed continuously from the art of the Middle Ages.”⁶ From a rhetorical point of view, the difficulty of claims such as Binyon’s is that they depend on the comparison of *relative* criteria such as “continuity” and “discontinuity.” One can argue that the Northern Sung was “relatively” continuous with the Southern, or one can look at the same events and see a strong “discontinuity.” As long as traditions are compared in such terms, no account can hope to define arguable criteria. The “conditions for the possibility” of the present comparison, to borrow Kant’s phrase, are the existence in Eastern China and Western Europe of a mutable sense of the historical tradition. The Yüan painters saw their past differently than the early Ming painters, just as Brunelleschi looked back on a radically different “Rome” than Piranesi knew only two centuries later. The changing landscape of the past is something we do not normally bear in mind, although the study of earlier historians easily demonstrates that our standardized narratives are a modern artifact. To understand a progression *of* history, as opposed to a progression *in* history, it is necessary to attend to these perspectival and conceptual shifts.

Shifts in historical perspectives are not a conventional strategy for cross-cultural contrast. Local comparisons to Western art are more common in European writing on Chinese painting, and they occur in three principal forms: comparisons of individual works, of artists, and of schools or periods. Each of these usually tells more about the aesthetic judgment of the author than of either term in the comparison. Sherman Lee’s introductory text *Chinese Landscape Painting* makes several such comparisons between individual painters.⁷ They are meant as pedagogical tools, to help Westerners see features of Chinese style, and Lee chooses pairs that have gestural and compositional similarities. The atmospheric, late Sung

⁶ L. Binyon, *Painting in the Far East* (London, 1923), 26.

⁷ S. Lee, *Chinese Landscape Painting* (New York, n.d.), 36-37, 69-69. Lee also illustrates Cézanne, Rembrandt, Breughel the Elder, one of the Banboccianti, Tchelitchew, Marin, Fragonard, and a further Lorrain. (*Ibid.*, 152.)

(COMPARASWAMISM)

or early Yüan *Landscape with Flight of Geese* in the Art Institute of Chicago has foreground trees, a misted expanse of water, and lightly washed background, as does a landscape study by Claude Lorrain in the Cleveland Museum of Art. Van Gogh's *View in Arles* in Providence shares "sudden and abrupt" ink marks with Shen Chou's *Oak and Hummocks with Three Figures at a Wall* from the *Scenes at Tiger Hill* album. Such comparisons, like the contrasts of artists and of periods, define and emphasize aesthetic, ahistorical traits, and it is to some degree unpredictable where a reader could go beyond the initial similarity. At some point in the student's study of Shen Chou, the name of Van Gogh will recede in importance; the difficulty is in knowing when and where the comparison is helpful or meaningful. Another kind of comparison draws parallels between periods rather than between individual works or artists. Chao Meng-fu's *Autumn Colors in the Ch'iao and Hua Mountains* in Taipei illustrates the tenuousness of aesthetic comparisons. The painting is in part a reaction against the Southern Sung, and Chao's "severity" has been contrasted with the "warmth" and "romanticism" of the earlier period. Cahill points out that an anti-naturalistic reaction against a romantic naturalism "has taken place only within the last century" in Western art.⁸ But period comparisons of this kind encourage open-ended debates about which Western periods are the best analogies. In this case, to name only two possibilities, one might wish to point out that elements of the High Renaissance offended the "colder," "anti-naturalistic" *maniera* artists, and that at the turn of the nineteenth century the "severe" and "abstract" group known as *les primitifs* also reacted against a "picturesque" and overly sensuous tradition by adopting archaic forms. As long as the criteria are aesthetic—the reaction of something "cold" and "severe" against something "warm" and "romantic"—too many periods are candidates, and the choices between them depend too unreliably on aesthetic characterizations of the works.

Good correction —

⁸ Cahill, *Hills*, 42, 46.

There are three reasons why kind of comparison of historical perspectives that I propose here avoids the pitfalls of these truncated comparisons. It does not depend on relative terms such as "continuity" and "discontinuity," or on specific compositional or formal traits; and it can be checked to some degree by the accounts in contemporaneous Chinese and Western histories. It is not that aesthetic evaluations are to be excluded (Chao has consistently seemed "severe," and the Southern Sung inevitably appears "romantic" to Western eyes), but that they can be adjusted and to some degree adjudicated by comparisons of historical perspectives.

2

The account must begin not where Chinese landscape painting begins, in the dim Six Dynasties, T'ang, and Five Dynasties, but where earlier paintings effectively became available as an articulated tradition for later painters: that is, in the Northern Sung. The earlier dynasties are populated by legends more than by surviving paintings, and even in the Sung few T'ang paintings survived.⁹ The legends of pre-Sung painters themselves have some parallels in Western art, though that parallelism is less important than the inaccessibility of the paintings themselves. China and the West share formative legends of mimetic excellence, and contests such as Apelles' contest with Protagoras¹⁰ are in this sense analogous to the stories told of Ku K'ai-chih and Wu Tao-tzû, whose paintings made their viewers "sweat" and "shiver."¹¹

⁹ Su Tung-p'o saw two original paintings by Wu Tao-tzû, and Mi Fei saw "three or four." See M. Sullivan, *The Arts of China* (Berkeley, 1973 [1967]), 131.

¹⁰ For an account of this "contest" see my "The Heritage of Apelles: On Theories of Realism."

¹¹ See Lewis Calvin, *Wang Wei*, 90. Reconstructing the work of Wu Tao-tzû (c. 700 - 760) is a nearly impossible task, since much of it was probably destroyed in the Buddhist suppression of 843, too early for copies to be widely disseminated. For stylistic hypotheses

By contrast Yüan and Ming painters had some original Sung paintings, numerous copies, and fixed concepts of style criteria with which to emulate them. There are exceptions: Sung painters whose work had vanished by the time of the Yüan revaluation, T'ang painters such as Wang Wei who were known through fair copies, or Chao Meng-fu's collection of the Five Dynasties painter Tung Yüan. But by and large the Yüan saw styles when it looked at the Sung, and only legends when it looked at the T'ang. The Sung therefore represents the body of art that could be discovered by the Yüan and Ming. Cahill begins his history of "later Chinese painting" with the Yüan, since it is "a new story, not merely a continuation of the old one (though of course some themes from the old do persist)."¹²

The Yüan is a renaissance, and to the extent that it corresponds with an emerging awareness of the concepts of historical development and style history, it is also a

see Binyon, *Painting in the Far East, op. cit.*, 77ff. Wu Tao-tzû has been compared to Michelangelo and Raphael; but the legends recorded about him are more like those told by Vasari of artists such as Cimabue and Giotto, or those by Pliny about Apelles and others. Other things said about him have their Western resonances: that his works had a "fiery swiftness of execution," that he used a broad brush in old age. (Binyon, *Painting in the Far East, op. cit.*, 77, 78.)

¹² J. Cahill, *Hills*, xiii. Cahill also makes an explicit connection: "Understanding the achievements of the Yüan masters... is as crucial to the understanding of later Chinese painting as is understanding the Renaissance to the study of European painting." (*Ibid.*, 3.) Other parallels to the Renaissance are also available, but the thematic of conscious archaeology and history is sufficient for my purposes here. Cahill notes that the Yüan (like the Renaissance) saw the elevation of painting from "acquired skill" to "expressive art." (*Ibid.*, 5.) Both Yüan and Renaissance were also in large degree negative changes, involving "powerful reactions[s]" against recent styles:

In the works of Ch'ien Hsüan and Chao Meng-fu this reaction takes two directions: an archaistic return to earlier modes of painting—those of the T'ang, Five Dynasties, and early Sung—and somewhat experimental attempts to incorporate references to this more distant past into essentially new styles [as in Ch'ien Hsüan]. [*Ibid.*, 21.]

Renaissance. Like the Western Renaissance, the Yüan found principally ruins, remnants, and stories when it looked to the admired past, and like the Renaissance, the Yüan renaissance was predicated not so much on simple renewal as it was on deliberate, politically and culturally motivated archaeology and well-considered modification and adaptation. It is this intention to renew, rather than an actual “rediscovery,” which is essential in both cultures. The Western Renaissance selected and redefined elements that had survived in transformed and unnoticed guises as much as it actually recovered elements that had been “lost,”¹³ and the Yüan did the same with a past that was even more consistently available.¹⁴ In the early stages of both renaissances, the artists were often concerned with *repudiating* a recent style than recovering an earlier one. The Yüan may be read—incompletely, but reasonably—as a reaction against the Southern Sung, just as the fifteenth century has to be understood in terms of a helpful dislike of the late medieval “stile gotico” or “tedesco.” However this initial, negative component eventually weakened as positive advances strengthened the periods’ self-definitions and expanded their “modern” vocabularies. The salient points are more fundamental, even rudimentary from our point of view: the inception of a self-reflexive historical sense (that is, a consciousness of one’s position in a narrative of historical styles), the perception of a recoverable past (the awareness that the past contains disused accomplishments that may be studied and “revived”), and the formation of codified versions of admired artists.

¹³ See for example J. Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* (New York, 1953), and E. Panofsky, “The First Page of Vasari’s ‘Libro,’” *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Chicago, 1972 [1937]), 169 ff.

¹⁴ Cahill, *Parting at the Shore, Chinese Painting of the Early and Middle Ming Dynasty, 1368-1580* (New York and Tokyo, 1978), 4: “We have spoken here of a ‘revival’ of Sung painting styles in the early Ming, although, properly speaking, they had never quite dropped into total disuse in the intervening Yüan dynasty.”

The last of these is easiest to define. The styles and achievements of pre-Yüan artists were both simplified and fixed in the minds of Yüan artists, who carried mental inventories of “crystallized styles” that they could bring to bear on their painting and connoisseurship. The “rediscovery” of the earlier traditions may have been more or less accurate than analogous rediscoveries in fifteenth century Italy: but the act of rediscovering initiated a sharpened awareness of the living artists’ historical positions, and at the same time fixed their versions of the earlier artists. From the vantage of the Yüan and early Ming, the Sung artists appeared as fossils, immobilized in the definitions they were given. An important early example is Wang Wei (701 - 761), who is an exception to the rule of near-total disappearance of T’ang paintings thanks to a tenuous but famous tradition of copies.¹⁵ His style was crystallized in part as formal conventions that could be transmitted by poor copyists and stone engravers: iterated recessions of tectonic formations leading from middle distance into background; handscroll-format views of continuous middleground; “framed” scenes in which buildings are set into corrugated hillsides.¹⁶ In common with other early artists, later generations remembered Wang Wei for only a most narrow set of genres: for winter landscapes (without any clear sense of what he had done with the genre) and “topographic paintings” (in which the artist records a specific landscape, as in Wang Wei’s masterpiece *Wang Chuan Villa*, which is a sequential “panorama” of his estate). Another conventional component of crystallized style concepts is technical traits—a fact that became

¹⁵ The handscroll *Wang Chuan Villa* was transmitted via a copy attributed to Kuo Chung-shu, which was in turn “preserved” as a stone engraving in 1617. A full genealogy devolves from those two, and from other copies attributed to Chao Meng-fu, Li Kung-lin, and others. Although forty of his works were listed in the Sung Imperial collection, it is safe to assume that many of those were copies and misattributed works.

¹⁶ Some of Tung’s work shows tectonic forms similar to those preserved in the tradition of copies. See Cahill, *Distant Mountains*, 92.

increasingly important to the later Ming and Ch'ing.¹⁷ According to the Ming artist Tung Ch'i-ch'ang, Wang Wei was first to use "wrinkles" (*ts'un-fa*) and "tinted wash" in order "to render the texture of the soil and the crusty character of stones and mountains," but it is dubious whether Tung attempted to make use of those alleged innovations.¹⁸ In any case it is probable that Tung appreciated not Wang Wei but a "debased" style transmitted through copies, and that he misread the weak brushwork of the copies as a political sign, "a manifestation of some unostentatious, poetic purity." Most later style crystallizations repeat these same components: the formal (compositional, tectonic, "perspectival," and object-specific), the generic (snow scenes, topographic views), the technical (*tien* or dots, "hemp-fiber" strokes, "axe-cut" strokes), and the political / aesthetic ("purity," scholarly detachment).

Sung originals were also rare in the Yüan, though not as fabulously scarce as T'ang works. Today Northern Sung painters are lucky to be known through one or two works, and anonymous masterpieces wait for convincing attributions. In the Yüan, and even as early as the end of the Northern Sung, the Northern Sung painters had already begun their disappearance. Li Ch'êng's authentic works (as opposed to the scores of copies and

¹⁷ This may be studied in the way the Tung Ch'i-ch'ang thought he recognized Wang Wei's style through the intermediary of a copy by Chao Meng-fu. See L. Binyon, " ," *Burlington Magazine* XVII (): 256 ff.

¹⁸ Sirén, *Leading Masters*, part 1, vol. 1, 128-29 and 130. The last quotation is Sirén's assessment of Tung's meaning. Tung thought of Wang Wei as his principal artistic ancestor: a variation on a "family tree" kind of revisionist history that happens occasionally in the West, and operates by imagining that the historical field narrows as it recedes in time, and begins ultimately in a single point (in Western art one thinks primarily of Vasari's codification of the singular position of Giotto).

forgeries) had become so rare a century after his death that Mi Fei (1051 - 1107) supposed that Li Ch'êng had never existed at all.¹⁹

In a sense, our own conceptions of the Sung painters' styles is fated to remain in an analogous kind of petrification, even if our picture is somewhat fuller than that of the Ming painters. Today we have paradigmatic, widely reproduced "masterpieces" such as Kuo Hsi's *Early Spring* in Taipei. On the other hand, we "know" such seminal artists as Chao Meng-fu by some five or six landscape paintings, and Huang Kung-wang by "a mere four or five."²⁰ It is helpful to distinguish three kinds of historical record: the history of works and styles by which a given painter was known to other Chinese painters (how Chao Meng-fu looked to the later Yüan, how he looked to the Wu school painters); the history of works by which a painter has been known to modern scholarship (for instance the effect of the rediscovery of Chao's *River Village, The Pleasures of Fishing*); and the history of modern speculations regarding the painter (in which one infers the existence of a late style from copies and echoes in later generations). This tripartite history helps to remind us that our own versions of the painters are also partly fossilized. It is as if we are studying the history of paleontology from descriptions of lost fossils.

To understand the ways that retrospective Yüan and Ming definitions worked, it is first important to note that the "polarity" Southern / Northern Sung was amplified in a fashion at once more codified and more ossified than we describe it today. The basic historical paradigm is a paired opposition between two Northern Sung artists, Tung Yüan and Chü-jan, and two Southern Sung painters, Ma Yüan and Hsia Kuei. This Procrustean pairing strategy, once in place, could be iterated but not softened. As Cahill has pointed out, "in addition to...

¹⁹ For the *wu-Li lun*, or "no Lis theory," see Sullivan, [], [], Sirén, *Leading Masters*, vol. 1, 197, and Cahill, *Distant Mountains*, 118 and 125.

²⁰ Cahill, *Hills*, 88.

Ma-Hsia and Tung-Chü there was a third tradition, the Li-Kuo, named after two of the greatest landscapists of early Sung, the northerners Li Ch'eng of the tenth century and Kuo Hsi of the eleventh...," and there were at least two further pairs and associated artists.²¹ The definitions of these styles have few parallels in the West, but they are of interest on account of what they reveal about how Chinese painters and theorists conceptualized their history.

Today the "Li-Kuo" pairing appears anachronistic, since Li Ch'êng (919 - 967) and Kuo Hsi (active c. 1068 - 78) are now imagined as quite different artists; and indeed, Li Ch'êng was separated from Kuo Hsi by Ming artists such as Wen Cheng-ming, and Su Chê, Su Shih's brother, thought Kuo Hsi had "made great progress" over Li Ch'êng.²² Yüan and Ming artists apparently did not concern themselves with the development, often cited in Western literature, from the "archaic" painting of Li-Kuo to the fantastic, even "grotesque"

²¹ Cahill, *Parting*, 4, 5. In the Ming other early traditions became important, such as the "Large and Small Generals Li," also called the "two Lis," Li Ssu-hsün (651 - 716) and his son Li Chao-tao (c. 670 - 730), and "Ching-Kuan," named for Ching Hao and Kuan T'ung (ninth - tenth centuries); and there was also the association of Li T'ang (1049 - 1130) with the Ma-Hsia tradition in the Che school. Li T'ang is today discussed as a transitional figure who left the court of Hui-Tsung to work at Hangchou, the new capital of the Southern Sung. This stricter historical placement allows scholars to emphasize the remnants of Northern Sung "monumentalism" in his works, where later Chinese painters saw economic and aesthetic complicity with the South.

These polarities did not present future generations with an entirely static field. Since the fundamental style polarity Tung-Chü versus Li-Kuo was fixed, it remained to experiment with ways of combining and separating its components. Its invention is credited to Chao Meng-fu, and it was dogma for Huang Kung-wang, but the ways it was utilized varied greatly. See Cahill, *Hills*, 45, and the same author's *Distant Mountains*, 4, 10.

²² Sirén, *Leading Masters*, vol. 1, 216; and see Sirén's own comments on the difference, 217-18.

creations of Hsu Tao-ning and Kuo Hsi:²³ for them “Li-Kuo” was a prototype, a kind of static perfection.

The traits by which Li Ch'êng is praised in this century (his “undertone of desolation and loneliness,” his “atmosphere of silent thought,” and his “bleak” emotional chill²⁴) do not correspond to early Chinese interpretations, and it is possible to argue they owe their rhetoric to the Western lexica of the romantic, the picturesque, and the sublime. The twelfth-century colophons invoke a mystic “immersion” or “forgetfulness” in the presence of Li's pictures, notions that have been connected with “Neo-Confucian cosmology” and with Chuang-tzu;²⁵ and later Chinese commentators spoke of him as a great realist. After Wang Wei, he was remembered as the second master of snow scenes, and praised for his rocks and gnarled trees, still visible in paintings such as the famous *Buddhist Temple Amid Clearing Mountain Peaks* in Kansas City.

To later generations, it did not always matter that Tung Yüan (937 - 976 or 960) and the monk Chü-jan were Southerners, and paintings from various regions were lumped with theirs.²⁶ What mattered was the *skiagraphic* quality of their works (“meant to be seen at a distance,” as an eleventh-century commentator wrote), their accurate versions of the low Nanking hills, and their evocation of a “harmonious atmosphere” of humid distance.²⁷ They

²³ “Grotesque” is from Sherman Lee, *Chinese Landscape Painting* (New York, n.d.), 24, referring to Kuo Hsi's *Trees on the Distant Plain* (private collection, New York).

²⁴ The phrases are from Sirén, *Leading Masters*, vol. 1, 198; and compare Mi Fei's description of Li Ch'êng the page before.

²⁵ Sirén, *Leading Masters*, vol. 1, 200, and J. Cahill, *Chinese Painting*, 32.

²⁶ Sirén, *Leading Masters*, vol. 1, 208-09. However, the local influence of Tung-Chü and Li-Kuo continued in their respective areas, as witness the Yüan artists Ch'en Lin, Sheng Mou, and Wu Chen, who were primarily allied to the Tung-Chü tradition, and the artists T'ang Ti, Chu Te-jun, and Ts'ao Chih-po, who were related to the Li-Kuo tradition. See Cahill, *Hills Beyond a River*, 50.

²⁷ Sirén, *Leading Masters*, vol. 1, 208, 214.

Yüan
Chü-jan
Cahill

were more apt to present “a roundness of contour and a sun-soaked atmosphere, in marked contrast to the angular rocks... of Fan K’uan and Hsü Tao-ning,” and a “soft, hazy sunshine” instead of the “precise and astringent detail” of Li-Kuo.²⁸

Ma Yüan (active c. 1190 - 1224) and Hsia Kuei (active c. 1180 - 1230) formed a pair for succeeding generations in part because of their exemplary but negative association with the Southern Sung. For the twentieth century they appear “less rational, more emotional and dramatic,” “infused” with “poetic sadness.”²⁹ Though Kano painters appreciated such qualities, later Chinese artists read Ma-Hsia as exemplars of a discredited politics, and their crystallized styles were therefore even more narrowly defined than Northern Sung traits. The political re-reading of their work effected a collapse in the appreciation of their technique, which came to be viewed as a devalued technical expertise—regardless of the rapid “expressionism” of Hsia Kuei’s *Pure and Remote Views of Rivers and Mountains* or Ma Yüan’s more gentle mists, as in the *Bare Willows and Distant Mountains*. *References to beyond?*

Most of the Yüan and Ming codifications of Sung artists appear to be in need of adjustment; in this context I would emphasize that it is not merely the progress of historical knowledge that makes such adjustment seem necessary, but rather the different purposes to which the Yüan wanted to put its past. In the West as in China, particularly severe schematizations were imposed on the past, both to enable the recovery of “lost” styles, and to facilitate the rejection of what were largely ongoing traditions of great complexity.

The second of the salient characteristics of the Yüan renaissance, the perception of a recoverable past, begins with Chao Meng-fu (1254 - 1352) and his teacher Ch’ien Hsüan (c. 1235 - after 1300), though Ch’ien was already approaching thirty when the Sung dynasty finally fell. Some Western texts on Chao have difficulty making a convincing case for his

²⁸ See Speiser, [], 44, and Sullivan, *Arts of China*, 159-60, and similar passages in Sirén, *Leading Masters*, vol. 1, 209.

²⁹ S. Lee, *Chinese Landscape Painting*, 35 and Sullivan, *Arts of China*, 166.

greatness in the eyes of later Chinese landscape painters, but his essential traits are still discernible: an anatomy of the history of Sung painting; a distancing from that same tradition (even though it extended, in effect, through his own generation); and, as we have seen, a stylistic essentialism that crystallized the Sung and T'ang styles. The dry bones and schematic clarity of Chao Meng-fu's paintings are markers of a consciously achieved triumph of classificatory historical evaluation, and it is here that his parallel to Renaissance artists is most apparent. Without insisting on names, we may recall Alberti's evaluation of ancient and medieval painting, Brunelleschi's simplified, elegant transformations of Roman and Tuscan Romanesque, or Masaccio's "disregard" for landscape and ornament in favor of *disegno* and *relievo*. Each of the Italians embarked on a largely unaided—if not entirely unprecedented—historical reevaluation, and each found it necessary to accompany classification with simplification.

Chao and artists close to him revived more traditions than any one of these Western artists: a further instance of the richness typical of Chinese painting. Some of Chao's preferred modes, such as the Tung-Chü style,³⁰ the Kuo-Hsi style,³¹ and a late Northern Sung style exemplified by the painter Ch'iao Chung-ch'ang,³² are ~~are~~ chronologically analogous to Renaissance revivals in that they involve a period of time—much shorter in China than in the West—in which the style in question had fallen into misuse or disuse.³³

³⁰ Evidence of interest in this style in Chao's circle and in the early Yüan is provided by copies such as the *Dragon Boat Festival*, done "by some artist close to Chao Meng-fu." See Cahill, *Hills*, 43.

³¹ This is adduced in relation to Chao's *River Village: The Pleasures of Fishing*, where it appears in the foreground pines, the "flat-topped banks and the bleak river plain." See Cahill, *Hills*, 44.

³² This painter is known by a single work; see Cahill, *Hills*, 42 and pl. 93. Cahill traces Chao's skeletal brushwork to late Northern Sung painters such as Ch'iao.

³³ The *Autumn Colors in the Ch'iao and Hua Mountains* has been described as an essay partly in the Tung Yüan manner. It has compositional similarities, including a "removed

However, Chao's remote, refined *Mind Landscape of Hsieh Yu-yü* "may have been meant as an imaginary re-creation" of a version by Ku K'ai-chih—a "revival" or remembrance over a gap of nearly 1,000 years, and therefore a historical gesture on the scale of Renaissance revivals of Roman architecture.

Other objects of Chao's attention are revivals in more complex ways. His interest in the Li-Kuo manner extended from his historical researches into its tenth and eleventh century origins into "its continuations in the later Sung and early Yüan."³⁴ In this instance, Chao was sifting and adjusting a tradition that was in no need of revival *per se*. Blue-and-green landscape, another of Chao's interests, is also a tradition without parallel in Western art, since it had already been revived before Chao took it up, and was destined to go through several more renaissances after him.

Each of these revivals, revaluations, and adjustments was done with a firm concept of historical differences in mind, and here we encounter the last of the characteristics of the Yüan renaissance, the inception of a self-reflexive historical sense. Although it is "unlikely" that Tung Yüan and Chü-jan "strove consciously" for the simplicity of their technique, Chao was "certainly" aware of an ideal of simplicity. We assume that the original blue-and-green landscapists did not possess a "modern" awareness that their large trees and small hills looked awkward, but Chao's exaggeration of that same trait in his surviving masterpiece

middle ground," and various "spatial and proportional inconsistencies" announce the archaist intention. See Chu-ting Li, *The Autumn Colors on the Ch'iao and Hua Mountains: A Landscape by Chao Meng-fu* (Ascona, 1965), and the same author's "Stages in Development in Yüan Landscape Painting, Parts 1 and 2," *National Palace Museum Bulletin* IV no. 2 (1969): 1-10, and IV no. 3 (1969), 1-12, and "The Development of Painting in Soochow in the Yüan Dynasty," *Proceedings of the International Symposium on Chinese Painting* (Taipei, 1970), 483-500. Li Chu-ting's analysis is partly followed in Cahill, *Hills*, 41-42.

³⁴ Cahill, *Hills*, 40.

Autumn Colors in the Ch'iao and Hua Mountains is entirely intentional. Chao's control of the possibilities and references to historical change is paralleled in his stylistic versatility. He was among the first—possibly the second, after Ch'ien Hsüan³⁵—to comprehend and embrace the idea that an artist could work in a selection of styles, some deliberately archaic and others intentionally refined. This momentous change accompanies the emergence of historical consciousness, since one has first to see that things change before one can adopt stylistic “stances” appropriate to different occasions. It may have been Chao Meng-fu who codified the choice between Tung-Chü and Li-Kuo (and concomitantly banned Ma-Hsia); but even in his few surviving works, the acceptable prototypes Tung-Chü and Li-Kuo are mixed within a single painting.³⁶ The same awareness, and the same capability for polystylistic painting, emerges in the Italian Renaissance in Masaccio's *Tribute Money*, where a “feminine” Christ surrounded by “masculine” apostles.³⁷ The act of mixing styles

³⁵ Ch'ien Hsüan's *Dwelling in the Floating Jade Mountains* may have precedence over *Autumn Colors in the Ch'iao and Hua Mountains* as the earliest deliberate archaism. See Cahill, *Hills*, pl. 7.

³⁶ See for example *River Village: The Pleasures of Fishing* (Cahill, *Hills Beyond a River*, color plate 2), in which a Li-Kuo middle ground is succeeded by a Southern background, or *Village by the Water* (*ibid.*, pl. 13), in which Li-Ch'êng trees are backed by a swampy Southern plain.

The question of combinations and erasures of the style polarity is a complicated one. See Cahill, *ibid.*, 50, for the idea that “[m]ost painters seem indeed to have followed one or the other tradition, and only a few, such as Shen Mou, attempted to combine them.” Tung Ch'ich'ang declared that “different styles must not be mixed”—indicating they had been. Quoted in Waley, *Introduction*, 248.

³⁷ This is assuming that the *giornata* including Christ's face was done by the artist who executed the surrounding figures. Roberto Longhi has argued that Masolino is responsible for the “feminine” head. See Longhi, “Fatti di Masolino e Masaccio,” []. Against Longhi it might be urged that other quattrocento paintings, e.g. Pollaiuolo's *Martyrdom of St. Sebastian*, show appropriate changes in technique between the martyr and his tormentors.

rarely obliterates the identity or meaning of the individual styles, but the result is distinct from conventional quotation in which cited passages are meant to remain sealed from one another. What happens in Chao Meng-fu, Ch'ien Hsüan, Alberti, Brunelleschi, and Masaccio, is more like weaving, and it shows that a certain distance from tradition has been achieved: the artists began to imagine themselves as masters of history and historical styles, instead of masters of a single craft.

3

Wu Chen, Huang Kung-wang, Ni Tsan, and Wang Meng, the "Four Great Masters" of the later Yüan, presented future generations with an apparently full spectrum of possibilities. They appeared, in other words, to encompass a stylistic universe, within which any artist could situate a style. Their diversity, in turn, was held together by the example of Chao Meng-fu, whose consciousness of his historical position itself helped form the subsequent tradition. Partly as a result, the Ming and Ch'ing saw the Yüan Four Great Masters as artists of the first rank, and "art-historically unconscious" followers of Sung styles as artists of the second and third ranks.³⁸ The ways that the Four Great Masters appeared to encompass the field of Yüan possibilities is telling both for the conceptual shape of painting as it appeared to the early Ming, and for its relative simplicity as compared to the possibilities presented to later generations.

Wu Chen (1280 - 1354), first of the Four Great Masters, presented later generations with the picture of unaffected scholarly simplicity. His "plainness and blandness" (*p'ing-tan*), inspired in large part by Chao Meng-fu, was accompanied by a much lighter, more whimsical

³⁸ See Cahill, *Hills*, 74-84. He names, as "art-historically unconscious" followers of the Ma-Hsia tradition, Sun Chün-tse and Chang Yüan, and as followers of the Li-Kuo tradition, Yao Yen-Ch'ing, Chu Te-jun and Ts'ao Chih-po.

mode of archaism.³⁹ Wu's *Poetic Feeling in a Thatched Cottage* in Cleveland renounces all but the most limited contrasts of wet brushstrokes. Huang Kung-wang (1269 - 1354) gave the tradition his improvisatory, "unfinished" *Dwelling in the Fu-ch' un Mountains*,⁴⁰ Ni Tsan (1301 - 74), the ultimate in "thinness, transparency, weightlessness," "loneliness and remoteness... without flavor and emptied of all thought."⁴¹ And Wang Meng (1308 - 85) provided a sense of the extreme of dense, dragonlike textures.⁴² In each there are elements of mannerism: meaning in this context a movement that has become conscious and disdainful of a recent perfection. The reaction that is precipitated does not involve striking new directions, but refinement, exaggeration, and attenuation of strategies previously held in check. Ni Tsan's behaviour and his sterile "remnants of mountains and residual waters" introduce the concept of monotonous restatement (a kind of theme without variations) to Chinese painting. (Cahill remarks that Ni Tsan's signature scene of foreground trees and hut, blank water, and distant rocky hills "argues... not for any obsessive attachment to that scene, but rather from a detachment from it and from all the rest."⁴³) The same was said of *maniera* artists by Carlo Dolce, and monotony became one of the watchwords for mannerism until the early twentieth century. Wang Meng apparently had only intermittent control over his obsessive *horror vacui*. In later life he "gives up the insistence on orderly structure [inherited from Huang Kung-wang], makes a virtue of unclarity, and eventually... allows no relief at all."⁴⁴ Some of his

³⁹ See Cahill, *Hills*, 70, 71. Cahill mentions Wu Chen's *Autumn Mountains* (his pl. 24), which is an ambitious imitation of Chü-jan. The painting "whimsically" and "playfully" imitates the conventional architecture of the early Sung.

⁴⁰ See Cahill, *Hills*, 112-13, for a discussion of the painting's *non finito* characteristics.

⁴¹ The first quotation is from Cahill, *Hills*, 119, and the second is quoted in *ibid.* from Juan Yüan (1764-1849).

⁴² See Cahill, *Hills*, 120-27.

⁴³ Cahill, *Hills*, 119.

⁴⁴ Cahill, *Hills*, 122.

paintings, such as the *Dwelling in the Ch'ing-pien Mountains*, are crows' nests of mountains and shrubs circling threatened clearings. This crowding of tumultuous forms is another mannerist trait, as is Wang's tendency to approach the "unintelligible or implausible" and the "disturbingly unnatural."⁴⁵ The overtones of personal eccentricity and mental illness that hang over discussions of Ni Tsan and Wang Meng are also relevant, since it was the generation of the mannerists that expanded the complex of ideas surrounding the Saturnine temperament and the limits of sociopathic behaviour. Huang Kung-wang's *Dwelling in the Fu-ch'un Mountains* is "unfinished" in the same ambiguous sense in which Parmigianino's *Madonna dal collo lungo* is "unfinished." The category of the *non finito* had yet to be formulated in both cultures, and the Parmigianino and Huang Kung-wang are more problematic, and more lastingly interesting, for that reason: there is no single answer to the questions of why and when each was "abandoned," or to what the nascent *non finito* meant to either.⁴⁶ The "unintelligible... presentation of space and form" in Wang Meng's *Dwelling in the Ch'ing-pien Mountains* is a kind of stretching or shearing of Huang Kung-wang's three categories of "level distance," "removed distance," and "high distance," just as Pontormo's *Visitation* is a topological deformation of Renaissance perspectival ludic space rather than a rupture, abandonment, or "destruction" of the Renaissance perspective box.⁴⁷ Many threads of mannerism and *maniera* come together here, but rather than attempt to weave them into an orderly pattern—or even to insist on a comparison of the "four great masters" and the later sixteenth century—I want only to note that there is a characteristic repertoire of strategies available to a generation that finds itself living after a decisive, perfected achievement. In the

⁴⁵ Cahill, *Hills*, 123. For the relevant traits see C. H. Smyth, *Mannerism and Maniera* (Locust Valley, New York, c. 1963).

⁴⁶ For the theme of the *non finito* see Elkins, "On Modern Impatience," forthcoming in *Kritische Berichte*.

⁴⁷ Cahill, *Hills*, 87 and 123. For a discussion of the deformation of stage space see my "Mannerism and the Deformation of the Stage," forthcoming in *Storia dell'arte*.

early Yüan, that achievement was Chao Meng-fu's positioning of himself in history as a "late" evaluator of partially lost traditions, and his historically-minded painting, in which a repertoire of styles became part of the artist's skills. The generations that followed, like the generations of the *maniera*, tackled whatever issues could be expanded without breaking the mold that had been set, and the deeper similarities between Yüan and mannerism lie in that direction. A theme (the canonical achievement) and its variations (the eccentric or mannerist experiments) together define a set of possibilities in relation to the past, and they do so in such a way that the topic seems closed: it seems that nothing more remains to be done.

This idea, the full occupation of a conceptual field, is the essential determinant of the way that the "four great masters of the Yüan" appeared to later generations. From the standpoint of the theorists at the turn of the seventeenth century, the Renaissance (together with its "degenerate" and "repetitive" mannerism and *maniera*) appeared as a territory that had been amply explored. This notion informs the Carracci's view of the earlier sixteenth century, Vasari's view of the third "period," as well as the view of the earlier and middle fifteenth century from the perspective of Northern Italy in the 1480's. All of these retrospective assessments also share an academic intent (the Carracci, Vasari, and Squarcione are all associated with art academies and schools) and an art historical awareness of the developments and possible ranges of styles. The later Renaissance, in particular, saw the disintegration of Vasari's monolithic meliorist history and the development of the concept of coetaneous schools. Both the rise of academies and the art-historical awareness of the concept of schools are essential to the formation of the idea that a previous period has made a thorough exploration of the possibilities of its position. That judgment, and its accompanying pedagogical and historical apparatus, are shared by the later Yüan and the later sixteenth century in the West.

In the Ming dynasty the emulation of the past took a different form.⁴⁸ This has been put best by James Cahill:

Yüan artists themselves, such as Chao Meng-fu and Wu Chen, had of course advocated and practiced the imitation of the past; but with them it was a matter of reviving and utilizing styles they admired either in a conscious evocation of the past or for the betterment of their own works and the cleansing (as they saw it) of their own tradition. In the Ming something different begins: the institutionalization of such imitation as a normal part of the activity of the scholar-painter, who could assume the personality of some earlier master for one work, then shift easily, as an actor changes roles, to another for the next work.⁴⁹

The early Ming imitators produced a kind painting that tended to eliminate “tensions and dissonances” and so to reduce “individual modes to more manageable stylistic systems.” Their detached, somewhat bloodless style was already at two removes from its models, since “the process of homogenization of Yüan styles had begun already in the works of secondary late Yüan masters such as Chao Yüan, Ma Wen, [and] Ch’en Ju-yen.”⁵⁰ The “secondhand” eclectics of the early Ming opened the way to the even more psychologically retiring, “formalist” painters of the middle and later Ming, inheritors of third- and fourth-hand

⁴⁸ For introductions to the Ming see, in addition to sources already cited, Yoshio Yonezawa, *Painting in the Ming Dynasty* (Tokyo, 1956), and H. Vanderstappen, “Painters at the Early Ming Court and the Problem of a Ming Painting Academy,” *Monumenta Serica* XV nr. 2 (1956): [] and XVI nrs. 1 and 2 (1957): [].

⁴⁹ Cahill, *Parting*, 57. The passage continues: “Wang Fu... was probably the earliest to exemplify this phenomenon.”

⁵⁰ Cahill, *Parting*, 57.

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traditions. Theirs was what Cahill has acutely called “art-historical art,” a kind of picture-making aware of its responsibilities and dependence on a richly layered past.⁵¹

From their vantage, the history we have been following was decisively removed, distant and intangible. The past, perceived as an “original” past, must have seemed farther and farther away, and to that historical disengagement there corresponded formal and emotional disengagements. The objects of study were increasingly taken from masters close at hand, and their codified responses to the earlier tradition mattered at least as much as the close study of Sung and Yüan originals. The history of Western academies replicates this from its inception, since the rigid pedagogical systems of the French Academy and related institutions were had the effect of delaying students’ encounter with important originals until they had imbibed a certain minimum of more recent responses to those models.

Shen Chou (1427 - 1509) and Wen Cheng-ming (1470 - 1559) together characterize a specifiable art historical position, stemming from their particular relation to their past: they were not so near to the admired past that their predecessors towered over them, nor so far that earlier works seemed irrelevant or impossible to capture by patient study. Their positions as or third- or fourth- generation “art-historical artists” (that is, their places roughly a century after an art-historical awareness had rendered naïve style choices impossible) placed them at a comfortable remove from their originals. That privileged position has both psychological / formal components and historical parameters, and both converge to suggest a particular Western parallel.

Wen Cheng-ming saw a different Chao Meng-fu than the Yüan artist’s contemporaries saw. Chao may have experimented late in life with a “poetic mode,” “concerned with... mood and feeling,” which may in turn have influenced Wen Cheng-ming more decisively than the handful of works by which we know Chao Meng-fu today. (Evidence

⁵¹ Cahill, *Parting*, 86.

of those paintings has almost disappeared, perhaps in part because they were not popular in the two centuries following Chao Meng-fu's death.⁵²) From the end of the 1480's Wen Cheng-ming was studying with Shen Chou, and Wen's work evinces a "poetic mildness of mood and slight nostalgia" in part due to Shen Chou's "human" warmth and perhaps in part to Wen's view of Chao Meng-fu and Ch'ien Hsüan.⁵³ Chao Meng-fu is also behind the "air of classical coolness" that accompanies and conveys Wen's "mildness."⁵⁴ These psychological and scholarly traits are connected to their positions in history. Shen Chou's imitations, and the original style he developed from his forties onward (from the late 1460's), helped demonstrate that "reverence for the Yüan masters... was compatible with stylistic inventiveness; that an art-historical art need not be art-historically static, but could develop in its own right."⁵⁵ Wen Cheng-ming's is particular kind of art-historical coolness, "methodical, sensitive, [and] reserved," "neither topographical nor very personal," and possessed of an intellectual edge, "a sense of severity, even harshness."⁵⁶ It is the mark of an artist deeply and sympathetically engaged in a variety of older styles. Wen's *oeuvre* is a remarkable instance of just how chameleon a Chinese artist can be, and it has been justly remarked that without seals and signatures, many of his works would be misattributed.⁵⁷ But in saying this it is important not to lose sight of Wen Cheng-ming's and Shen Chou's

⁵² See Cahill, *Hills*, 45, for this opinion. The two works adduced are *Gazing at the Stream* (1309, previously unpublished, Cahill's pl. 18) and *A Ch'in Meeting* (unpublished).

⁵³ Cahill, *Parting*, 213. "Warm" is often used in relation to Shen Chou; see for example M. Sullivan, *The Arts of China* (Berkeley, 1973 [1967]), 195: "Shen Chou is something of an extrovert, who cannot help infusing a human warmth into his paintings."

⁵⁴ Cahill, *Parting*, 213.

⁵⁵ Cahill, *Parting*, 86-87.

⁵⁶ Cahill, *Parting*, 213, 214, 215. The last quotation is in contrast with Shen Chou's "relaxation and amiability."

⁵⁷ Cahill, *Parting*, 214 and 263 n. 7, quoting and disagreeing with Anne Clapp in *Art of Wen Cheng-ming, op. cit.*, 47.

characteristic traits. Wen “seldom imitated directly,” and the styles of Tung Yüan and Chü-jan were “discussed without playing much part in the actual production” of Soochow artists.⁵⁸ To some extent, the Ming artists saw the Sung through the veil of the Yüan. Their “Li Ch’êng” was the “Li Ch’êng” of the Yüan *literati*, and not the one we recognize today, despite their efforts at scrupulous archaeology.⁵⁹

Wen Cheng-ming and Shen Chou “admired the simplicity and unpretentiousness” of archaic styles, reaching back to the Six Dynasties, the ninth- and tenth-century “Ching-Kuan” style, and the blue-and-green landscape style; but Wen Cheng-ming also favored “sophisticated and style-conscious” “poetic archaists” of previous ages—especially Mi Fu, Li Kung-lin, and lesser artists⁶⁰—in addition to his versions of the older masters. In short, he was an “artist’s artist,”⁶¹ he cultivated cultivators and embraced detachment. He preferred veils between himself and what we would call the power of past works, and he could afford his emotional retirement because of his historical distance.

⁵⁸ Cahill, *Parting*, 218, 219: “Li T’ang looms large at the outset of the period, and his conservative followers, later in the Sung, notably Liu Sung-nien, seem more important as stylistic models than Ma Yüan or Hsia Kuei in the same period. Chao Meng-fu is the commanding figure in the early Yüan and Ch’ien Hsüan a much lesser one. The Four Great Masters of the late Yüan are especially revered....” See also A. Clapp, in *Art of Wen cheng-ming*, *op. cit.*, 11: “Wen acquired the distinctive manners of Huang Kung-wang..., Wu Chen, Ni Tsan, and Wang Meng in the first decade of the 1500’s and continued to work in all of them thereafter, sometimes keeping the style fairly pure, more often as he matured, selecting and combining certain features in ways that eventually obliterated the source.” See further *ibid.*, 60 ff. for Huang Kung-wang’s influence.

⁵⁹ Cahill, *Parting*, 218. For an idea of just how far Wen could get from Li Ch’êng, see his *Awaiting Snow in Winter*, discussed in R. Edwards *et al.*, *Art of Wen Cheng-ming*, 156 ff.

⁶⁰ Such as Chao Po-chü, Chao Po-su, Ch’iao Chung-ch’ang, Chao Ling-jang, and Ma Ho-chih. Cahill, *Parting*, 219, and A. Clapp in *Art of Wen cheng-ming*, 11.

⁶¹ R. Edwards, *et al.*, *The Art of Wen Cheng-ming (1470-1559)* (Ann Arbor, 1976), 1.

I offer as comparison to Shen Chou and Wen Cheng-ming an artist such as Poussin—though in general, many early classicizing strains of the French, Dutch, English and Italian Baroque are equally interesting candidates.⁶² Part of my motivation is based on psychological traits: a commonly held ease, fluency, and intimacy couched in a quite controlled, consciously classicizing style. Both Poussin and the early Ming classicists can be warm, “poetic,” and “congenial,” and in the same breath intellectually intimidating in their rigorous mastery of historical themes and styles.⁶³ Both Eastern and Western artists combined “methodical, sensitive, [and] reserved” temperaments with a wide range of classicizing archaeological and philological historical research.

In the West, this sense of loose, amicable connectedness is characteristic of the seventeenth century; and in the East, it appears in the middle Ming, in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Speaking of the Chinese painters, Cahill puts this in a way that applies well to the school of Poussin:

The artist... is neither portraying his subject nor imitating the antique in a simple and direct way, but is regarding both from a certain distance and from a

⁶² A comparison to the Renaissance, based on “wealth, a love of the arts and a devotion to ‘classical’ truth” is suggested by R. Edwards, in *Art of Wen cheng-ming, op. cit.*, 1. The same comparison is made by A. Clapp, in *ibid.*, 13: “Wen’s position vis-à-vis his inheritance was the same as the later sixteenth century in the West vis-à-vis the High Renaissance.” The latter statement seems more nearly correct, but as I suggest below, the period of the *maniera* is not as apposite a parallel as the classicizing early Baroque.

⁶³ The quoted terms are from Cahill, *Parting*, 92. A major difference between the two artists is that Shen Chou’s sense of spontaneous intimacy was often achieved by his “arbitrary” cutting of the frame, as if he were “opening the window of a sedan chair in which he is escorting the viewer,” and his innovative device of letting the horizon disappear above the top border of the painting. (Cahill, *Parting*, 93.) Nothing in Poussin embraces that kind of apparent randomness, although both painters produced works that inspire an analogously liesurely, touristic seeing.

sophisticated, art-historical viewpoint. When these archaistic styles are in turn imitated in later periods, the distancing is compounded. It is this quality of remove that... [puts] stylistic quotation marks around the picture.⁶⁴

The “irony” and “antiquarian whimsy” of Wen’s art-historical awareness are more pronounced than Poussin’s serious, noble references to the past—to that extent, Wen’s “engaged detachment” is more advanced than Poussin’s. Other points offer closer parallels. Poussin belongs to the long line of French artists who gradually expanded the range of acceptable historical references (Ingres is an important later link in the chain, with his allusions to early Flemish painting, Van Eyck, Perugino, Botticelli, Holbein and Bronzino). Both Western and Eastern artists followed a period that followed a renaissance, and both devalued and ignored that immediate heritage. One of the few periods that Wen “passed over in silence” (in addition to the conventional devaluation of the Southern Sung after the middle of the twelfth century) were the generations just before his own,⁶⁵ and Poussin similarly dismissed the later sixteenth century before the ascendancy of academicism. Both singled out a master of the recent renaissance (in Poussin’s art as in Ingres’, Raphael holds the pre-eminent position; in Wen Cheng-ming’s art, it is the “oracular authority” of Chao Meng-fu), and in both that “old master” was an ideal of harmonious assimilation of the past, “a mediator between himself and ‘high antiquity’,” who offered “a more intellectualized and liberal outlook on the past.”⁶⁶

Wen Cheng-ming, Shen Chou, and Poussin lived in analogous moments. They did not feel the insistent fervour of the Four Great Masters, who vigorously explored what

⁶⁴ Cahill, *Parting*, 219.

⁶⁵ For Wen’s attitude to the Southern Sung see A. Clapp, in *Art of Wen Cheng-ming*, *op. cit.*, 12.

⁶⁶ A. Clapp, in *Art of Wen Cheng-ming*, *op. cit.*, 12: “A statistical survey of the surviving records and paintings indicates that Wen resorted to Chao as model far more often than any other old master....”

possibilities the early Yüan suggested to them; instead they saw their pasts as richly textured but psychologically distant collections of antiques. Theirs is an “intellectualized, art-historically conscious art,” and sense of responsibility and erudition accompanies their archaeological and antiquarian researches.⁶⁷ Often they are content to give full rein to the scholarly side of their work. The difficulty of maintaining this approach is that as generations accumulate, the past becomes not merely rich, but crowded, until finally it cannot be comprehended at all without radical revision.

5

So far I have begun to articulate a structure of comparisons by locating four analogous moments within each tradition: a “pre-historical” past, the inception of a desire to recapture parts of that past, a period of experimentation following the establishment of the new canon, and a more comfortable, detached response coetaneous with a proliferation of schools and styles. To continue and conclude the building of parallel structures, we need to locate an indispensable complementary event within that diffusion. In the West, the preeminent candidate is the “revolution” that launched modernism, and in the Chinese tradition, it is provided some three centuries earlier by Tung Ch’i-ch’ang (1555 - 1636).⁶⁸

Given that “abstraction” and its cognates have been assigned a wide range of apostrophic and polemic definitions in both cultures, it is nevertheless accurate to say that Tung Ch’i-ch’ang and the later Ming painters “exploited the principles of abstraction,” as did Western artists from Gauguin—who boasted he had made the “first wholly abstract

⁶⁷ J. Cahill, *The Distant Mountains, Chinese Painting of the Late Ming Dynasty* (New York, 1982), xv, in reference to late Ming artists.

⁶⁸ For Tung chi’i-ch’ang see Cahill, *The Compelling Image, Nature and Style in 17th Century Chinese Painting* (Cambridge, 1982), 36-69.

painting”—through the rise of International Abstraction.⁶⁹ If anti-naturalism in particular was to be the comparative criterion, Tung Ch’i-ch’ang would be the irresistible parallel with Picasso and Braque. (There would then be an intriguing specific parallel between Huang Kung-wang and Cézanne, since in Tung Ch’i-ch’ang’s eyes, the relatively stolid Huang was the important predecessor in abstraction, as Cézanne was for Picasso.⁷⁰)

It is entirely appropriate, as Cahill insists, to speak of Tung in terms of “analytical” interests, “abstraction” and “intense, conscious distortion,” in the way that we speak of Picasso’s tendencies from 1909 onward.⁷¹ This is true initially because Tung himself may

⁶⁹ “Abstraction” in the sense in which I will be applying it to Tung also appears in Ch’ing calligraphy. See for example Huang Shen’s *Thoughts about the Li Brothers*, reproduced in Shen Fu *et al.*, *From Concept to Context, Approaches to Asian and Islamic Calligraphy* (Washington, 1986), 56. Huang compressed columns and spaces between characters, and tilted the axes of characters, producing an effect in which the “whole composition” becomes “a pattern of rich variation.”

⁷⁰ Cahill, *Restless Landscape*, 5, makes the same parallel: “A pivotal figure among [Yüan] painters was Huang Kung-wang..., who, like Cézanne, accomplished a fundamental redirection of painting while ostensibly aiming at nothing more than conveying on a flat surface, more compellingly than anyone had done before, the physical presence of ordinary objects.” Cahill also speaks of Huang in Cézannean terms: as the inventor of a “mode of abstract construction.” (*Ibid.*, 115.)

But attractive as these specific parallels can be, I think the more general comparison is more apt; note for example that Cézanne and Tung Ch’i-ch’ang share a “technical inability to imitate closely the styles of old masters” (Cahill, *Compelling Image*, 37). That inability has integral relations to the painters’ mature styles in each case.

⁷¹ Cahill, *Distant Mountains*, 92, 125. The “abstraction” in Tung is related to an extra-human quality—often his landscapes are uninhabited—which the artist recognized he got from Ni Tsan, whose landscapes are often empty of habitation save for the stereotypical *t’ing-tzu*, the four-posted rest shelter. The relation between uninhabited landscapes and abstractionist concerns is interesting, and pertains both to psychological issues and to the limitations on figural abstraction.

have been the first Chinese painter to employ “formal analysis” “consciously and systematically,” and it is true specifically because Tung used his “formal” lexicon to describe his achievements in “abstraction” and “distortion.”⁷² Both Tung and Picasso were deliberate distortionists, and in both, formal experimentation led to “dissonant and uncomfortable constructions” and a kind of secondary and sometimes inadvertent expressionism.⁷³ The distortions were experienced as one end of a polar pair in which artifices of anti-realism opposed a simplified, artificially clarified realism. Both Picasso and Tung swung between clear, simple “stability and order” and “deliberate disruption of stability and intelligibility” with a remarkable degree of control.⁷⁴ The continuous presence of that choice abetted an art that was founded, to an unusual degree, on unresolved ambiguity and discontinuity.⁷⁵ Both artists exploited “the tensions between real and abstract space and form,” setting “anomalies” into contexts “familiar enough to make them more acceptable

However, while “deliberate distortion” and “creative distortion” are relatively unproblematic, we would not want to go much further toward naming the psychological content of that distortion. Hence I think “expressive distortion” is already problematic. Certainly Tung’s distortions are not “fantastic distortions” in the sense that Wu Pin’s are. (The three phrases including “distortion” are from M. Sullivan, *Arts of China*, 222, 198 and 199 respectively.)

⁷² Cahill, *Distant Mountains*, 115.

⁷³ Cahill tentatively suggests that Tung’s “paintings must have been felt, at least by the more perceptive, as visual analogues for a widespread loss of faith in an intelligible order in the world, in the stability and permanence of the Confucian state, even, to some degree, in the continuing efficacy of the practice of validating the present through values transmitted from the past.” (Cahill, *Distant Mountains*, 128.) This social—aesthetic connection has become more common in recent scholarship; it is reminiscent of the (partly unreliable) speculations we encountered in Mannerist scholarship (chapter xx).

⁷⁴ Cahill, *Distant Mountains*, 128.

⁷⁵ See the discussion of “discontinuity” in L. Steinberg, “The Algerian Women and Picasso at Large,” *Other Criteria* (Oxford, 1972), 159-60.

than they otherwise would be,” breaking free “of all but the most minimal requirements of adherence to natural appearances.”⁷⁶ Neither artist would have given up a measure of realism, and Picasso made several acidic comments on the futility, weakness, and impossibility of pure abstraction (Tung had no such abstract *avant-garde* to contend with). In Tung, the ambiguation of “orderly structure and disarrangements of it” is echoed by the choice “between adherence to tradition and extreme departures from it,” “between paintings as... presenting an image of nature and... as embodying a separate reality,” and “between the mastery of forms... and [an] awkward, ‘raw’ quality.”⁷⁷ The last is a particularly strong match in Picasso’s primitivism of technique and form: as Picasso gave up the mimetically versatile academic training he associated with his father in favor of a limiter repertoire of stronger gestures, so Tung produced overly strong, almost crude, paintings that rely on a handful of the Chinese lexicon of brushstrokes.⁷⁸ The motion of primitivism is distinct here from that of archaism that we saw first in Chao Meng-fu. The latter is technically sophisticated; the former is technically unaccomplished, and prefigures the narrowing of the repertoire of techniques that marked later generations.

As the paintings show, the principal emphases remained on “volumes of nondescript matter arranged in a disarrayed space.”⁷⁹ Sometimes their solutions were intricate beyond precedent (Picasso’s 1909 - 1910 *Portrait of Vollard*, Tung’s 1617 *Ch’ing-pien Mountain* in Cleveland) and other times reduced to bare bones (Picasso’s 1909 *Reservoir at Horta de Ebro*, Tung’s *Hills on a Clear Autumn Day, After Huang Kung-wang*, also in Cleveland). An

⁷⁶ Cahill, *Distant Mountains*, 98, 101, 102.

⁷⁷ Cahill, *Distant Mountains*, 128.

⁷⁸ See Shujiro Shimada, “Concerning the I-p’in Style of Painting,” translated by Cahill, *Oriental Arts* 7 (1961): 66-74, 8 (1962): 130-37, and 10 (1964): 19-26, and Cahill, *Distant Mountains*, 137, for discussions of the related *i-p’in* or “untrammelled style.”

⁷⁹ M. Loehr, “Phases and Content in Chinese Painting,” *Proceedings of the International Symposium of Chinese Painting*, 291, quoted in Cahill, *Distant Mountains*, 94.

“uncompromising elimination and reduction” operates throughout, and forms are “ruthlessly subordinated” to “strongly integrated design.”⁸⁰ Tung Ch’i-ch’ang and Picasso both painted illogical bridges through space (the most amazing, in either artist, occurs in Tung’s *Landscape* in Taipei, where mountaintops bend and fuse into a vast natural bridge⁸¹), as well as ambiguous disjunctions between near and far, and there are imbricated “facets,” single forms anatomized into intricate structures, “surprisingly illusionistic” forms side by side with insubstantial or unreadable ones,⁸² forms “not meant to be understood at all,”⁸³ horizontal planes—as of water—that will not lie flat,⁸⁴ and compositions of uncertain, “unstable and unintelligible” depth.⁸⁵

Interesting as these similarities are, they are prey to the ambiguity of all formal parallels. They are partially recovered for our inquiry by considering them in terms of their historical motivations. There is a sense in which cubism and Tung’s innovations are not from “nature” as much as they are “diagrammatic expositions” of art historical positions. “Abstraction” for Tung, Picasso, and Braque was not simply a matter of reducing nature; it was also a matter of working “from an earlier style,” by “reducing it to its bare bones.” Tung was “demonstrating to the viewer, as a lecturer on art history might do, what he ‘understood’ of the Huang Kung-wang style.” In cubism this is not as pronounced, since—in keeping with Western concepts of innovation—Picasso did not seek to tie himself to past

⁸⁰ Cahill, *Distant Mountains*, 115.

⁸¹ Cahill, *Distant Mountains*, *op. cit.*, pl. 41.

⁸² Cahill, *Distant Mountains*, 95, speaking of the possibility that Tung was influenced by Western art. That possibility, it seems to me, need not “take away” anything from his achievement: and in this context, it raises his status still more, since he then pushed Western illusionism to places it was not to occupy in the West until Cézanne and Picasso.

⁸³ Cahill, *Distant Mountains*, 100.

⁸⁴ Cahill, *Distant Mountains*, 116.

⁸⁵ Cahill, *Distant Mountains*, *op. cit.*, 116.

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styles; but the references are nevertheless clear, and become progressively more important components of reading as familiarity with the pictures increases. In Tung's art, "abstraction" is in part the name for a pictorial strategy that mirrors an historical strategy.

Tung's "dogmatic and severe pronouncements" have "little nostalgia for the past."⁸⁶ It is significant that he, instead of some earlier painter, felt the need to codify the theory of the Northern and Southern schools. His position in the late Ming placed him after a period of increasing diffusion of styles and multiplication of manners, and his theory allowed him to propound a simpler version of that past. Being able to look back upon a simpler history freed him for a radical departure, since his own project could be cast into artificially high relief. It appeared particularly important, both in Western modernism and in Tung's day, to choose decisively and quickly, and to be thorough in rejection: "[a]rtistic allegiances were like political and intellectual allegiances, to be asserted and defended; styles functioned like ideas in intellectual history."⁸⁷ Discarded alternatives were not merely useless, they were "aberrations." (This attitude, I find, is especially rare today, to the point that students tend to disbelieve the urgency with which Picasso made his choices.)

The styles of the earlier Ming were reconceived as stagnant, "decadent academicism,"⁸⁸ echoing the valuation of late-nineteenth century academies made by artists of Picasso's generation and the revulsion felt for example by the artists of the *Brücke*. Tung's models included a number of artists (Ni Tsan, Wang Meng, Wu Chen, Tung Yüan, Chü-jan), but increasingly he looked to only two: Wang Wei and Huang Kung-wang.⁸⁹ The inscriptions on Tung's work show that he meant viewers to think of earlier artists, but they

⁸⁶ See G. Fulder, "Achievements of Late Ming Painters," *op. cit.*, 19.

⁸⁷ Cahill, *Distant Mountains*, *op. cit.*, 118.

⁸⁸ See L. Lo-hua Yang, "Late Ming Painting in the History of Chinese Painting," in J. Cahill, editor, *The Restless Landscape: Chinese Painting in the Late Ming Period* (Berkeley, 1971), 11, and G. Fulder, "The Achievement of Late Ming Painters," in *Ibid.*, 19-21.

⁸⁹ Cahill, *Distant Mountains*, *op. cit.*, 94, 101.

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ultimately “cannot account for much of importance” in his painting.⁹⁰ That constriction of influence is typical also of Picasso, who faced a bewildering diversity of choices, passed through a period of eclectic experiments, and arrived in the second decade of the century with a narrow pantheon of past artists. The young Picasso echoed and copied at least as many artists and styles as Tung studied (the list would include Francisco Torrescasana, Antonio Casanova y Estorach, Isidro Nonell, and Santiago Rusiñol, Goya, Gauguin, Redon, Munch, Denis, Toulouse-Lautrec, Beardsley, Denis, Whistler, Puvis de Chavannes, Théophile Steinlen, Daumier, Japanese prints, El Greco, Velasquez, Ingres, Van Gogh, Greek vases, and possibly Bellange, Callot, Holbein, the portal figures of Chartres, Zorn, Greuze, and the Pre-Raphaelites). By 1909, however, Picasso had winnowed those influences into one overwhelming example: Cézanne, perhaps accompanied by the Douanier Rousseau. Tung, too, occupies one of the pivotal positions in Chinese art, and his achievement is still narrated as that of revolutionary, dogmatic revisionist, and problematic simplifier and polarizer of the tradition.

The specific comparisons between Tung Ch’i-ch’ang, Wang Wei, and Huang Kung-wang on the one hand and Picasso, Cézanne, and Rousseau on the other is heuristic rather than essential. Any number of fortuitous correspondences could present themselves if we considered particular works or searched among the texts for parallel terminology. But the “style periods” including, in the West, the increasing complexity of cultural currents that funnelled into cubism and, in the East, similar movements leading toward Tung’s synthesis, are comparable for several reasons: their desire to make radical excisions from a bewildering recent history, their exclusion of extra-academic styles and corresponding exaggeration of anti-academic elements, their “primitivism” and intentional lack of finesse, and above all

⁹⁰ Cahill, *Distant Mountains*, *op. cit.*, 100, speaking specifically of the influence of Wang Meng and Tung Yüan.

their radical solutions, which continued—and this is especially clear in the case of China—to be debated centuries after their lifetimes.

6

We have now reached the period where Chinese art experienced historical perspectives that are analogous to those our own century sees. To look for a Chinese “Postmodernism” would be both overly specific and treacherous. Postmodernism is located in the last twenty years, a span too short to be noted here, and it is the subject of vigorous and unstable debate. Instead I want to briefly note several traits of Chinese painting from the end of the Ming (1644) through the end of the Ch’ing (1912), at which point Western influence became irresistible in the dual forms of social realism and late romantic kitsch. It is not irrelevant that Chinese art was undermined and then overwhelmed with Western influence: in fact the problem of how to work has been paramount in the minds of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean artists for generations, and it is a profound and nearly insoluble dilemma. It is still almost impossible to say under what circumstances Western and Eastern modes may be mixed without forcing viewers’ readings to collapse into attempts to name (and thus to separate) those influences. But for this inquiry, the Western cultural invasion of later Chinese art is too anomalous to have a parallel, and it is best to say only that some such catastrophe—or to redescribe it in a positive way, some such enrichment—remains a possible event of the Western future. What is more important here is the later history of the native tradition, with its succession of schools and historical perspectives.

The followers of Tung, known as the Sung-chiang school, included few artists who “pushed” his innovations (to use that telling modernist word, which always signifies anxious interest in an avant-garde). It is significant that these artists are also known as “Ming individualists,” and the term “individualists” recurs with increasing prominence in the later Ch’ing. The ways that the artists addressed Tung’s challenge varied widely. Some were

attracted by the idea of “fantastic scenery” in general, without specific understanding of Tung’s accomplishments. There was also an ongoing, parallel development associated with an interest in Northern Sung vistas—for example in Wu Pin and related artists such as Fu Shan, Tai Ming-Yüeh and Chang Jui-t’u.⁹¹ Much of their experimentation appears today to be involved with a reassessment of the Northern Sung “integral image” and it may be that it is a kind of echo, in professional circles, of formal concerns similar to Tung’s. Ch’eng Cheng-kuei, a pupil of Tung’s, “specialized” in studies after Huang Kung-wang, and even numbered his works to distinguish them:⁹² a strategy curiously reminiscent of modern practice, in which artists such as Picasso, Kandinsky, Mondrian, Beuys, Duchamp, and Arman numbered their “researches” or “multiples” to underscore their uniformity.

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 The rarity of the “individualists” in the generations immediately following Tung is partly attributable to the undertow of a great artist, who has the effect of producing a generation or two of weak painting “in the manner of” (Picasso used the phrase “in the manner of...” to denigrate his contemporaries’ works and imply that he, Picasso, was the one who was being imitated). But part is a genuine, ongoing dilution of tradition despite Tung’s clarifying dogmas. The situation is analogous with late twentieth-century pluralism, which has produced a startlingly large number of movements (as witness the table of contents in any textbook of twentieth-century art) and a corresponding increase in individuals who do not entirely fit those movements.

(The Ch’ing has at least as many “isms” as the twentieth century, although they are named differently—usually by place or number. There are the “Four Masters of Anhui,” “The Eight Masters of Nanking,” “The Eight Masters of Chin-ling,” “The Eight Strange Masters of Yangchou,” “The Four Small Wangs,” “The Four Jens,” “The New Academy School,” “The New Literati,” “The School of Shanghai,” and so forth.)

⁹¹ Cahill, *Distant Mountains*, *op. cit.*, 165, 177.

⁹² Lee, *Chinese Landscape Painting*, *op. cit.*, 93.

The most interesting developments in this context are those that took Tung's radicalism and assimilated it into the perpetual agendas of academicism. The "Four Wangs" (Wang Shih-Min, Wang Chien, Wang Hui, and Wang Yüan-ch'i) were "consummately skillful" workers whose works were often, from the twentieth-century perspective, small variations and homages on the newly defined academicism.⁹³ The Lou-tung school, embracing the Four Wangs and painters such as Huang Ting and his pupil Chang Tsung-ts'ang, "formed the basis of conservative scholarly painting of the period": in other words, Tung's radical works of a century before had already been defused and made to serve a polished academic technique of which he would not have approved.⁹⁴ Wang Yüan-ch'i (1642 - 1715), the grandson of Wang Shih-min (1592 - 1680), shows most clearly the experimentation with form practiced by his grandfather's teacher Tung, but as a whole the redescription of Tung's radicality took place relatively quickly.

It is not yet conceivable that Picasso, Braque, and Cézanne might be integrated with earlier academy works—we still perceive them as opposites. Even so, that is exactly what did happen in the Chinese tradition approximately one hundred years after their most radical figure. It seems to me that in the next century we can expect academicism—that is, the engine of art education, which is now the nearly universal vehicle of artist training—to produce "monstrous" hybrids of Gérôme and Cézanne, Flandrin and Courbet, Kokoschka and Meissonier, Clemente and Boldoni. We already have the beginnings of that in Pop art and in painters such as Sandro Chia, but they still preserve the essential integrity of the modern. We do not yet conceive a full *rapprochement* between the *Académie Française* and the early modernists.

⁹³ Lee, *Chinese Landscape Painting*, *op. cit.*, 97.

⁹⁴ Lee, *Chinese Landscape Painting*, *op. cit.*, 102.

As the Ch'ing progressed, schools became shorter-lived, individualists more prominent, and styles more diverse. It was an unstable ecology in which competition forced diversification. Each artist needed to accentuate or exaggerate the markers of his style in order to survive. Eccentrics and more-or-less independent masters sometimes experienced the field of painting as a network of narrow paths: that is, instead of developing broadly referential, catholic styles, they embarked in specific directions, carefully restricting and underscoring their innovations. This led to a constriction and simplification of the crystallized style definitions that we considered in relation to the Yüan versions of Sung artists. In the Ch'ing, the traits by which styles were known were sometimes further limited to those susceptible of hyperbole. Thus Ni Tsan's skeletal articulations continued to be important, while his sense of what we call "plasticity" and three-dimensionality were de-emphasized. This restriction of personal style did not always mean that artists worked in only one style, but rather than they chose eclectically among a number of possibilities, each strongly exaggerated and narrowed. In Cahill's ^m formulation, 'style became idea'—that is, the artists sought and adopted styles in the way in which ideas have been transmitted in the West, as essential and sometimes exclusive carriers of meaning.⁹⁵ In broad terms, this inflated economy of styles marks the current art world in the West, where it is embraced under the name "pluralism" and seen as a healthy alternative to the apparently restrictive, canonical restrictions of earlier art.

Not all elements of the crystallized style definitions were susceptible to the kind of hyperbole or extreme purification that the Ch'ing artists desired. The class of traits "susceptible of hyperbole" includes principally reductionist historical strategies (appropriations, archaisms, simplifications of previous styles), global mannerisms (paintings

⁹⁵ Cahill, "Style as Idea in Ming-Ch'ing Painting," in M. Meisner and R. Murphey, editors, *The Mozartian Historian: Essays on the Works of Joseph R. Levenson* (Berkeley, 1976), 137 ff.; the concept is also adumbrated in Cahill, *Compelling Image*, 184 ff.

done entirely in wet brush or dry brush), and compositional formulæ (the overhanging scholar's retreat, the Ni Tsan motif). Examples of each of these are available in the four principal "priest-hermit-individualists," Chu Ta (Pa-ta-shan-jen), Kung Hsien, Shih-t'ao (Tao Chi), and K'un-ts'an (Shih'ch'i), and the nearly contemporaneous "Four Masters of Anhui" (Hung-jên, Hsiao Yün-ts'ung, Ch'a Shih-piao, Mei Ch'ing, along with Tai Penhsiao). Mei Ch'ing (1623 - 1697) "invented some six or eight motifs and varied them ad infinitum."⁹⁶ One of his "motifs" is a "rolling, rococo movement" "not unlike" Fragonard. The slightly later "Eight Strange Masters of Yangchou" (including Hua Yen, Chin Nung, Huang Shên, Li Shan, Lo P'ing, and Kao Hsiang) also produced instances of these strategies, in some cases taken to further extremes. Chin Nung's (1687 - 1764) compositions were called "most peculiar" and "quite startling,"⁹⁷ but at the same time they paid for their eccentricity by a restriction on versatility; to one scholar, the "Eight Strange Masters" were somewhat predictable since "the scope of their painting themes was narrow."⁹⁸ Huang Shên (1687 - 1768) had an "exaggerated," "nervous, flying touch," which "evidently puzzled his countrymen who called him 'too extravagant'."⁹⁹ The traces of his beginning in Huang Kung-wang, Ni Tsan, and Wu Chen have been almost burned away in his fiery, skittish brushwork.¹⁰⁰ The same three kinds of choices have been made by Western artists in search of distinctive "motifs," "stances" or "strategies." Western artists such as Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, Jeff Koons, Christian Boltanski, Leon Golub, Nancy Spero, Andy Warhol, Francesco Clemente, and any number of others have chosen highly distinctive personal

⁹⁶ Lee, *Chinese Landscape Painting*, *op. cit.*, 124.

⁹⁷ Lee, *Chinese Landscape Painting*, *op. cit.*, 129.

⁹⁸ Yonezawa, *Painting of Sung and Yüan Dynasties*, *op. cit.*, [].

⁹⁹ Lee, *Chinese Landscape Painting*, *op. cit.*, 129.

¹⁰⁰ The sources are suggested by Yonezawa, *Painting of Sung and Yüan Dynasties*, *op. cit.*, [].

“styles” based on analogous—and sometimes more far-reaching—appropriations, “mannerisms,” and repeated formulae.

In China ^{there} were at least three prominent models available for thinking about reductionism in general: the archaizing of Chao Meng-fu, the anatomizing of Ni Tsan and the structural *fantasie* of Tung Ch’i-ch’ang. To Western eyes, early landscapes by Kung Hsien (active c. 1655, died 1689) are “strange, silent” and “ominous,” and they may owe those qualities to a personal encounter with Western *chiaroscuro*.¹⁰¹ That possibility, if true, strengthens the possibility that Tung Ch’i-ch’ang learned from Western engravings, since Kung’s forms can sometimes be read as details of Tung Ch’i-ch’ang’s “chiaroscuro” modelling. Kung’s leaden “close-ups” are also a form of exaggeration, and they possess an intentional lugubriousness made possible by the perception that Tung’s forms could be anatomized or “magnified” into a compositional principle. Hung-jên (1610 - 1633) practiced a “bare bones” style based on the style of his teacher Hsiao Yün-ts’ung,¹⁰² but derived theoretically from Chao Meng-fu’s strategy in relation to *his* past: “Hung-jên does to Hsiao [Yün-ts’ung’s] style what Chao Meng-fu did to Li Ch’êng’s.... He depletes the color and flesh and leaves only the bare bones.”¹⁰³ The “gentle renunciation” and “mournful loneliness” that has been seen in his works is a benefit of the style: exaggerate the style of Ni Tsan, and you increase the pathos of the result.¹⁰⁴ The style that is “an essence of an essence, refined to the breaking point and always on the verge of disappearance” became a stock-in-trade for later painters. Ch’a Shih-pao (1615 - 1698), another of the “Four Masters of Anhui,” practiced a “global mannerism,” a hyperbolic extension of Wu Chen’s wet brush technique, in which the Chinese landscape nearly became a “full [Western] water-color

101 See Cahill, *The Compelling Image*, *op. cit.*, 146-83.

RIGHT: 102 Speiser, [], [], thinks Hsiao Yün-ts’ung may not have been Hung Jên’s teacher.

103 Lee, *Chinese Landscape Painting*, *op. cit.*, 123.

104 Speiser, [], 145.

technique.”¹⁰⁵ Other mannerisms address themselves to iconographic conventions. Chu Ta (1624 - c. 1705) is an instance of the expansion of pictorial wit and irony that also characterizes Western art since the late middle ages.¹⁰⁶ As far back as Wu Chen, elements of older traditions (especially the formulaic architecture inherited from the Northern Sung) had been treated lightly or humorously by archaists.¹⁰⁷ Chu Ta’s painting explores the possibility that many other forms might be susceptible to ironic “mistreatment.” The fact that scholars can disagree on assessments of his wobbly birds and fish (some seeing them as humorous, others as “angry-looking”¹⁰⁸) is readily comprehensible given the hyperbolic nature of his wit.

Along with these models for radicalism and the strategies for hyperbole was an increasing sense of the distance and irrelevance of history itself. Shi-t’ao (born c. 1630, died after 1707) the more radical of the “Two Stones,” Shih’ch’i and Shih-t’ao, marked his independence from history by a preference for the album leaf format, experimentation with color, and a loose, “Western,” “no-method” brushstroke,¹⁰⁹ and it may be that those strongly circumscribed sources of inspiration, and the telescoped sense of the past they entail, contributed to his sense that he was free of history, with no predecessors and no followers.¹¹⁰ This, too, is characteristic of recent Western art, in which the world of the

¹⁰⁵ Lee, *Chinese Landscape Painting, op. cit.*, 124, and pls. 98 and 99 facing p. 116.

¹⁰⁶ See Elkins, “Uccello, Duchamp: The Ends of Wit,” forthcoming in *Zeitschrift für Aesthetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*.

¹⁰⁷ This is said of the architecture in Wu Chen’s copy of *Autumn Mountains* after Chü-jan (Taipei). See Cahill, *Hills Beyond a River, op. cit.*, pl. 24.

¹⁰⁸ Sullivan, *Arts of China, op. cit.*, 222.

¹⁰⁹ Lee, *Chinese Landscape Painting, op. cit.*, 111-13.

¹¹⁰ Quoted for example in Torao Miyagawa, *Chinese Painting*, trans. A. Birnbaum (New York, 1983), 147.

Renaissance and its pictorial concepts is largely divorced from current concerns, and in which artists make statements declaring their absolute independence from aspects of the past.¹¹¹

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Western histories of Chinese painting typically end with the late Ming or simply summarize developments after the early Ch'ing. Most historians use the word "decline" or its cognates when describing middle and later Ch'ing art, and often the question is not whether or not there was a decline but what caused it. James Cahill wrote a moving peroration to his *Chinese Painting*, in which he describes how "very sophisticated" aesthetic values replaced simple ones, and "awkwardness" was "sublimated into a kind of skill," and "straightforward feeling" was expressed in "oblique allusions." All of these traits are connected to a withdrawal from nature and a growing fascination with what the West called *fantasia* or invention.¹¹² Most of these traits are acceptable and even sought after in modern and Postmodern art criticism: but here they are linked with a negative valuation. Few Western art historical explanations are as nuanced as this, but they tend to share Cahill's conjunction of description and valuation.

Some explanations are demonstrably impelled by Western expectations of artistic direction and the *avant-garde*. Thus ^{OR} historian thinks that "pictorial schemas" in the Ch'ing "degenerate into the most threadbare of clichés," causing the decline of the tradition,¹¹³ and another finds that the tradition unravelled because Ch'ing painters after the first generation

¹¹¹ A recent example is Barbara Kruger's dissociation of herself from the Western male tradition of "genius." See the statement in the "Picturing 'Greatness'" exhibit (Museum of Modern Art, 1988).

¹¹² Cahill, *Chinese Painting* (Switzerland: Skira, 1960), 192, 194, and Cahill, "Afterword: Hsieh-i [as opposed to *kung-pi*] as a Cause of Decline in Later Chinese Painting," *Three Alternative Histories of Chinese Painting* (Spencer Museum of Art, 1988), 100 ff.

¹¹³ Willetts, [], 305-6.

had nothing to rebel against.¹¹⁴ Other explanations depend on the “biological fallacy,” the notion that historical movement “grow” and then “decline” the way people or plants do. In this vein one historian writes that the artists “seemed to have lost contact with any sources of creative energy,”¹¹⁵ and to another, “all painting had run dry in theme, technique, and mood” by 1800.¹¹⁶ Arthur Waley’s history ends with Kung Hsien, whom he calls a “tragic master,” whose pictures have a “blank, tomb-like appearance,” and he concludes “hactenus dictum sit de dignitate artis morientis.”¹¹⁷ Some Western scholars mix the biological fallacy with a moral judgment in favor of youthfulness. This is more explicit in earlier sources; thus Binyon speaks of “pedantry and conservatism” and “the ingrained weakness of the Chinese genius,” and reserves his highest praise for the “lofty idealism” of the Sung.¹¹⁸ E. Fenollosa, too, spoke of degeneration from the “worthy” Sung to the “decaying” later dynasties.¹¹⁹ When Fan K’uan’s *Travellers Among Streams and Mountains* is praised as a “great picture,” with an “overwhelming grandeur of conception,” it is necessarily implied that later works fail by the same standards.¹²⁰ Only one historian that I know sees a positive light in the middle Ch’ing, though it is not described in detail: Jung Ying Tsao notes that the period is “not usually considered outstanding,” but might be an “important transitional style” leading to new discoveries.¹²¹

114 Sullivan, *Arts of China*, *op. cit.*, 224.

115 T. Miyagawa, *Chinese Painting*, *op. cit.*, 149.

116 S. Lee, *Chinese Landscape Painting*, *op. cit.*, 132.

117 Waley, *Introduction*, 251.

118 Binyon, *Painting in the Far East*, *op. cit.*, 189.

119 E. Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese & Japanese Art* (New York, 1963 [1912]), vol. 2, pp. 51-52, 141, 144, 147. To Fenollosa, the Southern Sung was the epitome of Chinese painting, and the *wen-jen* were “pedants,” “Confucian atheists,” who clung to their “simple and uniform” ideal of the past (*ibid.*, p. 140 ff.).

120 Sullivan, [], *op. cit.*, [].

121 Jung Ying Tsao, *Chinese Painting in the Middle Qing Dynasty* (San Francisco, 1987), 20.

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It is necessary to take these accounts seriously, despite the one-sidedness of the idea that the Ch'ing is simply a time of "decline." The dissenting voices, who claim that those who find a decline in the Ch'ing can do so "only by ignorance," retain remnants of these judgments.¹²² Because this is so, it may be too soon to declare the end of the devaluation of later Chinese landscape painting. The many attempts at explanations may well reflect an ingrained feeling in Chinese and Western scholarship, one shared in some measure by the artists themselves.

Though Western artists acknowledge the twentieth century's "fragmentation or heterogeneity" that was also "the rule in later Chinese painting,"¹²³ one does not usually hear Western artists or historians speaking of a tradition in decline. Even though postmodernism is imagined as a period of pluralism, there is also a sense that we are living through a *fin-de-siècle* of multiple possibilities that will somehow be subsumed under a solidly codified Postmodernism or else decisively replaced by whatever is to come. In place of this confident and proud meliorism, the later history of Chinese art implies a possible future of brief, "expressive," "eye-catching" and idiosyncratic schools, and artists distinguished by single hypertrophied traits or monomaniacally repeated tricks. China's past three centuries have seen a continual simplification of narratives of the past, together with a disintegration of versatility and historical connectedness. Their artists have had to try ever harder to obtain notice, resulting in an economy of improvised ideals, idiosyncrasy, exaggeration and eccentricity, and a concomitant shift away from conventional canons, normative ideals, serious purpose, and prolonged labor on single works. It is at least possible that these traits, which we recognize in the current Western art world, may be typical of a state of "postmodernism" that may continue for centuries into the dim future—and it may be, too, that we will come to increasingly see them under the rubric of "decline." I hope it does not

122 Speiser, [], [].

123 Cahill, *Distant Mountains*, 118, speaking of the late Ming.

need to be emphasized that I do not say this with any intention of “revealing” a “truth,” predictive or otherwise: instead I offer it as an intriguing conclusion, one that is strongly tempered by the many generalizations and speculative comparisons I have been entertaining. Its most interesting aspect, I think, is not its incipient valuation of the current state of the art world, but its suggestion that our Postmodernism may be an ongoing, potentially endless “end game” rather than a period in progress.¹²⁴

As an “object lesson,” Chinese landscape painting is a monumental, extended example of a continuous tradition that is older and more historically intricate than Western painting. To my mind its presence has three salutary effects: it is a reminder that our post-Renaissance culture is still young (and that a rich disintegration rather than an impoverished unification might await us “after” Postmodernism); it is a heuristic indication that we tend to stress revolutions over continuities (and therefore that we hope too much, that we valorize our own century in historically improbable ways); and finally—though I cannot justify this here—it bolsters my conviction that it is necessary to continuously rethink the largest cultural concepts in order to make sense of the smaller ones.

¹²⁴ Yve-Alain Bois, “Painting,” in *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture* (Boston, 1986).