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春山餘夢祥
見圖畫清風猶
添到候閑今日
雨過晴雲薄溪

CAHILL



Hills Beyond a River

*Hills
Beyond a
River*

CHINESE PAINTING OF THE

YUAN DYNASTY

1279-1368





HILLS BEYOND A RIVER



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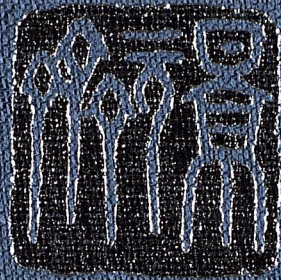
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YÜAN DYNASTY,
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Does the surpassingly beautiful world of Chinese painting welcome everyone or is it the exclusive preserve of the specialist? The present book, in its fresh, practical approach and its eminent readability, is a resounding vote in favor of art lovers everywhere, laymen and scholars alike.

This is the first in a projected series of five books by James Cahill on the later history of Chinese painting, one of the world's most enduring art traditions. The story, as recounted here, begins in the thirteenth century, during the Mongol conquest of China and the ensuing Yüan dynasty, and has continued, with an amazing vitality that will be traced in future volumes, into the twentieth century. It is a new story, not just more of the old: those turbulent Yüan days saw a complete break in painting traditions, a decisive revolution in art values. Now the artisan-painter was largely supplanted by the scholar-painter; the romantic styles of preceding centuries were discarded, and along with them went much of what has often been mistakenly regarded as the essence of all Chinese painting. But once the new styles are understood as such, rather than as a weakening of the old styles, they prove to be strangely compelling in their own right and surprisingly modern-looking. Indeed, the new developments offer a parallel to the revolution against representational styles that took place in Western painting beginning about a hundred years ago.

Too often, in the past, has Chinese painting been treated from the viewpoint of aesthetics alone, devoid of all human background; also, scholarly studies, based upon much invaluable research, have necessarily tended to be narrow, resulting in a spotty history that examines the trees but ignores the forest. Here, however, the reader finds a synthesis of recent research together with a well-rounded integration of artistic materials with social, political, and intellectual history. The broadly humanistic approach provides a new perspective on Chinese art as a whole, treating it as a living entity and revealing the vigor and strong physical presence that it so richly possesses.

The author's technique is also worthy of note. Presenting over 30 painters of the Yüan period, he

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 1977



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HILLS BEYOND A RIVER

Chinese Painting of the
Yüan Dynasty, 1279–1368



New York · WEATHERHILL · Tokyo

A NOTE ON THE DECORATIONS. The seal on the front cover shows the author's studio name in Chinese characters reading Ching Yuan Chai. The title page shows a section from Huang Kung-wang's "Dwelling in the Fuch'un Mountains" (Plates 41-44) reproduced with high-contrast effect.

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You can go home to it and cultivate it.
But what of me? From where shall I return,
And to what place?

Finally, a poem composed shortly before his death:

For ten days I've lain ill, the door to the mountains closed,
Shut up in this oppressive cave, like a tortoise buried in mud.
My mortal flesh is but mist drifting across flowing water.
My only occupation is boiling beans, a dried-up basket my fuel.
The red calabash and curled green leaves are hard to separate;
White-haired, wrapped in autumnal sadness, I can no longer sustain myself.
No one could turn away from the wine bottle on such a moonlit night as this!
I chant a long poem, as the shadows of the cassia tree form eyebrows expressive
of grief.

Nothing is recorded about how Ni Tsan learned to paint, but we can safely assume that it was by copying and imitating works in his own collection and by watching, perhaps receiving some instruction from, older artists he knew, such as Huang Kung-wang. His extant dated works indicate that he began by doing river landscapes in a fairly orthodox Chiang-nan style and later, profoundly influenced by Huang Kung-wang, moved gradually into that transcendental thinness and purity of style that assured him his place among the most revered masters. Most of his works were occasional creations, done for hosts with whom he stayed on his wanderings or produced spontaneously at parties and other gatherings and given to friends. The long inscriptions he wrote on his paintings usually include a dedication and often tell us the circumstances under which they were done.

"When exhilarated [inspired], he would seize a brush and sketch a misty grove of trees or a branch of bamboo as a small painting," writes a contemporary. "But if by chance one of these came up for sale in the market place, collectors would pay a thousand pieces of gold to get it." Shortly after his death, we are told, the ownership of his paintings carried so much prestige that the status of Chiang-nan families was determined by whether or not they had one. These are no doubt exaggerations of the kind Ni Tsan accumulated around him—his very aloofness and reticence invited extravagant stories. But the demand for his paintings was indeed huge and was supplied, as the limited quantity of genuine works scarcely could do, by a correspondingly huge production of forgeries, which continued through the centuries. Separating "the jade from the stones," the true works of his hand from among the thousands of paintings ascribed to him, is a difficult and unfinished task;⁵ the choice made here may not be quite stoneless, and the outline of Ni Tsan's stylistic development proposed will surely need refinement or correction as studies advance.

Representing Ni's early style is a painting titled "Rustic Thoughts in an Autumn Grove" (Pl. 47), dated 1339, in the Crawford Collection, New York. No painting is known that can positively be dated earlier; but some striking similarities between it and the landscape in the screen in the anonymous portrait (Pl. 46)—the formation of the river banks out of repeated mound-shaped masses heavily shaded at their bases, the bare or thinly foliated trees and the stunted-looking willows below, the placing of the figure in the building and the building beneath the trees—suggest that the screen painting may itself be a work by Ni Tsan, a miniature rendering of an actual screen that stood behind his *k'ang*. The portrait is undated but seems to portray Ni as a fairly young man; it presents him as the wealthy master of the Ch'ing-pi-ko Library and was inscribed by Chang Yü, who died in 1348. If this does indeed reproduce a work by Ni from the time of the Crawford painting, or even earlier, it corroborates the evidence of that painting in suggesting conservative, tradition-rooted beginnings for Ni's landscape style, which, except in

the dryness of its execution, does not depart markedly from the Chiang-nan river-landscape mode treated in the previous chapter.

The Crawford painting has been badly damaged and is heavily retouched; it was found in a near-ruined state and restored by Wu K'uan, a fifteenth-century scholar whom we will encounter in a later volume as a friend of the painter Shen Chou. The subject is a fairly conventional river scene. A contemplative scholar sits in a thatched shelter beneath trees on the shore with his boy servant standing behind. These two are the only human figures that appear in surviving works of Ni Tsan (unless the screen painting is indeed by him) and, if we accept the reports of early Chinese writers, among the very few he ever painted. The group of trees, some with fairly dense leafage and others sparsely foliated or bare, belongs to that large family of tree groups of which the protogenitor appeared in the central section of Chao Meng-fu's "Autumn Colors" (Pl. 12); closely similar groups are to be seen in some works by Sheng Mou. The rotund earth masses strongly modeled with "hemp fiber" texture strokes and the "alum stones" that appear in a cleft or on a crest agree with Huang Kung-wang's "River and Hills Before Rain" (Pl. 38-39), which must be contemporaneous or older by a few years. Both features are fairly conservative renditions of the Tung Yüan manner. Both artists later move away from this relatively heavy and tactilely rich style into others that render more elaborate and dynamic structures in lighter brushwork. What distinguishes Ni Tsan's painting immediately from others of the type, and establishes his individual expressive mode at once, is the determined plainness of the scene—there is no vegetation apart from the trees, no attempt at variety in the hills and rocks, nothing at all that breaks the quiet—and the sense of loneliness and seclusion achieved by placing the figure in middle ground, dwarfing him against the scale of the trees and turning him away from the viewer, who is moreover forced to move past rocks and trees and under the roof to reach the human figure.

In this early work, near and far shores are closely situated, and the level of view is fairly flat, with the crowns of the trees silhouetted against the sky. This plan has not altered markedly in a landscape dated 1354 in the Palace Museum, Taiwan,⁶ but there the figure has disappeared, leaving an empty shelter, and the composition is sparser, looser.

By 1363, when Ni Tsan painted for Ch'en Ju-yen his "Mountains Seen from a River Bank" (Pl. 48), he had left behind this early landscape plan to arrive at his ultimate formula: a foreground bank with a few trees and a four-posted shelter; a broad expanse of water separating the two land masses; hills marking a high horizon. Landscapes of this type had of course been painted earlier by other artists (cf. Wu Chen's "Fisherman," Pl. 26) and by Ni Tsan himself. The stylistic change of direction to be marked between the 1339 and 1363 paintings reflects most of all an acceptance of the new landscape mode created by Huang Kung-wang, who now plainly replaces Chao Meng-fu and his followers as Ni Tsan's principal model. While the subject is essentially unchanged—and was virtually never to change in Ni Tsan's landscapes—the composition here follows Huang's lead in being made up of more discrete units, blocklike masses separated by expanses of water. The steep, round-topped hills, and their juxtaposition with horizontal shoals topped with rows of dark, simply-rendered trees; the long, dry-brush ground contours; and the distinctively sparse tree group all seem to have been taken fairly directly from the final section of Huang's "Fu-ch'un Mountains" (Pl. 41d), merely rearranged into a vertical format. The gradual building up of the forms with dry-over-wet, darker-over-lighter brushwork and the earthy, crumbly textures thus created are similarly derived from Huang's style.

The strong vertical and horizontal emphases, and particularly the flat bases on which all the earth forms rest, make the composition extremely stable. They are responsible also for one of its weaknesses (the picture is by no means Ni Tsan's best)—the awkward transitions from land to water to land, especially at the base of the cliff, which seems cut off by, instead of resting securely upon, the horizontal beach. A principal problem posed by this compositional type was



90. Tung Yüan, attributed to: "Wintry Trees by a Lake." *Hanging scroll, ink and light colors on silk, 178 × 115.4 cm. Kurokawa Institute of Ancient Culture, Ashiya, Hyōgo Prefecture, Japan.*



91. Tung Yüan, attributed to: "Dragon Boat Festival." *Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 156 × 160 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.*

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first discusses their times and lives and careers and then proceeds to detailed analyses of specific examples of their work as seen in the accompanying plates, thus providing concrete, visual examples of important developments in artistic styles and theories; the reader is, as it were, led through a gallery of masterworks in the company of a master guide. The generous selection of 8 plates in color and 94 in black and white (many of the originals having themselves been rendered in ink monochrome) includes a number of significant paintings never before reproduced, as well as many more-familiar works that are viewed in a new light. There is also a selection of pre-Yüan painting to give a vivid demonstration of the far-reaching shift in values that was achieved by the Yüan masters.

The book has an unusually broad appeal. For the specialist and student it offers a masterly summation of research and theory together with the original insights of a foremost expert. For the layman it provides an invaluable new approach, written with great felicity of style, to the appreciation of Chinese painting. If there ever was a book on "How to Look at Asian Art," this is it.

JAMES CAHILL, Ph.D., is Professor of Art History at the University of California at Berkeley and also Curator of Oriental Art at the University Art Museum. He was born in California in 1926, received degrees in Oriental languages and art history from Berkeley and the University of Michigan, and was for a time Curator of Chinese Art at the Freer Gallery, Washington, D.C. Through his teaching and writing, he is recognized as a leading authority on Chinese art, with an uncommon gift of making it intelligible to the non-specialist. To mention only one of his many books and articles, his *Chinese Painting* (Skira, 1961) is a much read and highly respected general survey; it is sure to have whetted the appetite of many readers for the monumental work he embarks upon in the present book.

Jacket design, reproducing Ch'en Lin's "River Landscape" (Plate 22), by Yoshihiro Murata. Printed in Japan.