

CHAPTER SIX

The Artist-Entrepreneur



You know that originally my work was not associated with the general run of painting, and that I should not have to paint screens. I only do it because my household is so large, and my old illness is getting worse all the time.

Shitao, in a letter to Jiang Shidong (letter 15)

With these words, in a letter to one of his most important customers, Jiang Shidong, probably written in the 1700s, Shitao acknowledges the change in his status as a painter in his late years. He was regularly painting screens – the most decorative of decorative items, which monks and literati painters in principle avoided – because they brought high prices. Shitao, no longer a monk who also painted, was now a literati entrepreneur active in the territory of the artisan and the merchant. The price of finally acquiring his own home was that his Dadi Tang was also a place of business, and that his work came to be associated with the “general run of painting”: It became available on demand. While this, the fact of Shitao’s professionalism in Yangzhou, has long been known, the facts, one might say, have not. We know remarkably little about his professional life or, for that matter, that of any individual Chinese artist, despite a growing number of studies in this area.¹ This chapter and the next, together forming a case study of Shitao’s painting business, put one artist’s professional practice under the microscope. Leaving the socioeconomic analysis of his output to

Chapter 7, the focus in this chapter is on Shitao’s life as a professional artist.

THE MONK-PAINTER AS PROFESSIONAL

Shitao’s professional history did not so much begin as culminate with the Dadi Tang business, and may in fact go back to his teenage days. In the “Biography of Dadi-zi,” Li Lin writes of his 1657 southern journey that “he traveled from Wuchang to Jingmen, then crossed Lake Dongting, and went on to Changsha and Mount Heng before coming back. Talented and stubborn, when he encountered injustices he always found a solution. Any money he acquired, he spent, saving nothing.” Given his well-known aversion to liturgy, it is logical to speculate that he would have acquired money by taking advantage of the fact that he had already learnt to compose poetry, write calligraphy, and paint. If so, then Li Lin’s account suggests that at this stage he sold his work on an ad hoc basis. In his early base, Wuchang, his painting activities seem to have had a particular connection with the Yellow Crane Tower (Huanghe Lou). He executed paintings there in both 1657 and 1662, the latter a handscroll from 1662 depicting the pavilion itself.² As the city’s most famous historical site, the Yellow Crane Tower would have been a center for commercial activities of many kinds, of which painting no doubt was one.

Chen Ding, another biographer, maintains that by the early 1660s Shitao's reputation was already inspiring lucrative offers:

By the time he was twenty he was skilled in calligraphy and good at painting and poetry. People from the Guangdong-Guangxi region treasured every scrap of his writings and paintings, esteeming them like luminous pearls, yet he did not give away his work lightly. A man of high character would receive it without asking, whereas faced with a vulgar person, even one who offered him a hundred taels, he would simply close his eyes and turn his head away without paying the least attention to the offer. Consequently, he was much loved by superior men and loathed by the vulgar. Even when grossly slandered, he paid no attention to it.

Chen is not suggesting here that Shitao did not sell his work; rather, the biographer is specifying Shitao's chosen public, as well as particular professional status, through a shared attitude toward money. It was not money per se that was unacceptable – only the idea that money was enough in itself to command his services. Despite the ring of clichéd hagiography, there is no reason to doubt the general accuracy of Chen's account.

Shitao's first known patron of note was the Huizhou prefect, Cao Dingwang (a northerner), whom he met when in his mid-twenties – around the time he first ascended Huangshan in 1667, as described here in "Song of My Life":

I met a prefect who enjoyed whistling through the mountains (the prefect of Xin'an, the honorable Cao Guanwu).
He welcomed me as guest with surprise and delight.
Every day he asked me to write down the poems I composed,
Not a single word was allowed to be lost among the peat and the moss.³

Cao also makes an appearance in the "Biography of Dadizi": "At the time the Huizhou prefect, a Mr. Cao, had a liking for 'originals' [*qishi*]. He heard that [Shitao] was in the mountains and wrote to request an album of seventy-two paintings, each one to represent a different peak. [Shitao] laughed and agreed."⁴ This album, which probably partly survives in the form of a group



85. "The Peak of First Realization and the Cloud Sea," *Views of Mount Huang*, album of 21 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, each leaf 30.8 x 24.1 cm, leaf 8. Palace Museum, Beijing. Source: *Shitao shuhua quanji*, pl. 217.

of twenty-one leaves in the Palace Museum, Beijing (Figure 85), was one of two equally ambitious commissions for the prefect, the other being the first version of his *Sixteen Luohans* handscroll that he completed in 1667 after more than a year (see Figures 155, 156).⁵ Much later, the artist made reference to his work for the prefect in a section of his autobiographical handscroll *Hermits* (Figure 86). The reference comes in an illustration of the biography of the Man Clothed in Animal Skins, who

was a native of Wu. His Excellency Ji of Yanling was out traveling when he noticed some money left on the road. He looked at it, then turned [to the Man Clothed in Animal Skins] and said: "Why don't you pick it up?" The man

grasped his sickle, his eyes full of anger, shook one hand, and said: "How can you occupy such a high rank and yet judge men so badly? I wear animal skins and carry firewood (?). Why would I want to pick up this money?" His Excellency Ji was amazed and asked the man his name. He replied: "I am just a superficial person. What point would there be in giving my name?"

A brief annotation by the artist associates this section of the scroll with Shexian's Taiping Monastery and the year 1668; it must refer, therefore, to Shitao's relationship to Cao Dingwang. The implication is that the prefect expected to pay for the paintings he commissioned from the artist; Shitao, however, would not allow their relationship to be defined in this way, and by spurning the money underscored his independence. Assuming that this episode or one like it actually took place, one (admittedly cynical) interpretation would be that Shitao cultivated his commercial profile with great care and knew that there were occasions where a timely invocation of the ideal of the high-minded amateur was a better investment than the acceptance of a cash commission; but this must surely have been the exception rather than the rule. When in 1671, for example, he painted a birthday set of twelve landscape hanging scrolls on silk, each in a different style, for presentation as a gift to Cao Dingwang, surely he was handsomely paid for such immense effort by whoever commissioned the work (see Figure 159).⁶

In fact, all the signs are that Shitao's accomplishments as a painter, calligrapher, and poet were fundamental to his economic well-being during his Anhui period. He regularly painted for members of wealthy Huizhou merchant families, both in southern Anhui and during his visits to Yangzhou, where Huizhou merchants dominated the salt trade. The documented commissions include works for the important Xi'nan branch of the Wu clan (Wu Erchun and his son Wu Zhenbo);⁷ the brothers Wang Ji (1636–99) and Wang Jie, from a prominent Shexian family in Yangzhou;⁸ and Min Shizhang, a Shexian merchant in Yangzhou known for his spectacular acts of philanthropy.⁹ Since Shitao is not known to have

stayed with any of these men, he was undoubtedly remunerated in some fashion. Contemporary practice would suggest that he was simply paid in silver, and if not in silver then in objects of value. The fact that by 1680 Shitao had amassed a collection in Xuancheng of books, calligraphies, paintings, and antiques would seem to confirm that he had been actively selling his work.¹⁰ Cao Dingwang's patronage, on the other hand, can be understood as a special case, since a relationship with a local Qing official was profitable in ways that did not involve money at all. Above all, Cao's protection and consideration c. 1667–71 (followed by Deng Qifen's c. 1676–7) must have been beyond price for a monk concealing a dangerous identity.¹¹ As described in Chapter 4, Shitao regularly used painting to cultivate Qing officials, and eventually he employed this as a strategy in his pursuit of imperial patronage.

The asceticism of Shitao's initial years of religious study in Nanjing in the early 1680s, announced by the symbolic act of disposing of his accumulated possessions before leaving Xuancheng, may have temporarily slowed his involvement in the commerce of painting, especially given his involvement with Buddhist monk circles around that time. However, in 1683 we find him painting another (now lost) birthday screen on silk for a wealthy patron.¹² Moreover, two years later an unusually explicit inscription to a handscroll painted in 1685 for a young admirer (Figure 87) confirms that he was using painting as a regular source of income:

Mr. Ma Yuzi is a content and unaffected gentleman. He seeks out originality [*qi*] and elegance, has a love of brush-and-ink works, and takes pleasure in spending time with me. Whenever he happens to see a calligraphy or painting of mine in the market, in the end he is always unable to leave it behind. Although his family is poor, still he feels compelled to spend any money he has left over to buy the work: Only then is he happy.¹³

Though this may conceivably mean that the artist's past works were finding their way on to the market, the fact that the account concerns Nanjing, where he had been



based only since 1680 (or, less formally, since 1678), suggests that Shitao himself was supplying the market. Ma Yuzi was not the only patron who acquired several works from him in Nanjing. On the eve of his departure from the city at the end of 1686, he painted for one of his Nanjing friends, Zhou Jing, a long landscape handscroll, *Streams and Mountains without End*, at the end of which Zhou noted: "I have spent more than six winters and summers in the company of Mr. Shi from Qingxiang. Of his gifts to me, seventy percent have been Buddhist teachings, and thirty percent have been poetry and other writings, while no more than ten percent have been paintings."¹⁴ Here as elsewhere, the word "gift" is likely to be a polite euphemism, like "donor" in a colophon from his Nanjing years cited by Wen Fong: "Liv-

ing in the temple in the summer, the heat was intolerable. Trying to persuade people to give the building a grass shade, I painted this album and waited for a donor. But no one was interested."¹⁵ Shitao continued in Nanjing to provide paintings to Huizhou patrons like Wu Zhenbo, now joined by his son Wu Chengxia.¹⁶ He also had patrons in government. Notably, in 1684 he was either a frequent visitor to, or artist-in-residence at, the official residence of the Provincial Education Commissioner, Zhao Lun (another northerner), painting several works both for him (see Figure 164) and for his son, Zhao Zisi (?-1701).¹⁷ At the same time, Shitao's chosen mode of professionalism continued to entail keeping the market at a distance through a certain exclusiveness or inaccessibility. His attitude is summed up in his reported



86. "The Man Clothed in Animal Skins," *Hermits*, handscroll, section 2, ink on paper, 27.5 x 314 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.

87. *Energies of the Four Seasons*, dated 1685, handscroll, ink on paper, 19 x 242 cm. Xubai Zhai Collection of Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, Hong Kong Museum of Art.



explanation (in Chen Ding's biography) of why in the 1680s he took as one of his names Blind Arhat (or Blind Abbot): "My eyes are naturally different; when they come across money they go blind, they don't get bright like ordinary men's."

Following his aborted first journey northward in the third month of 1687, Shitao based himself in Yangzhou – by the late seventeenth century a more important center of Huizhou merchant patronage than Huizhou itself. With a new trip to Beijing in the offing, it is likely that Shitao had to raise money, and there was no better place than Yangzhou for a well-connected artist to sell his work. Whereas in Huizhou itself a certain culture of frugality prevailed, in Yangzhou the opposite was true, as merchants used conspicuous consumption to establish their relative standing. Although dated paintings from this period with identifiable recipients are rare, there is enough evidence concerning his associations with Yangzhou merchant circles to make it virtually certain that Shitao was selling within this milieu.¹⁸ This is not to say that he painted only on condition of payment, but it must have been rare for him to give away a painting – at least a painting of any significance. When in the summer of 1687 he made a present of a landscape hanging scroll requested by a certain Zilao (probably his painting student and Buddhist "nephew," Donglin), he used the inscription to ensure that the recipient appreciated his good fortune: "In the several decades that I have been splashing ink, I have never lightly made a present of a landscape painting."¹⁹ Later in the same year a native of Nanjing by the name of Hu Renyu, who had ranked first in the triennial *juren* examination held in Nanjing in 1681 (and subsequently would cap this rare achievement by ranking first in the 1694 *jinshi* examination in Beijing), sent a gift of highly valued Yinshan tea to accompany his written request for a painting. Was the tea, then, sufficient payment in itself, or on the contrary just a polite addition to (or prelude to) an unmentioned monetary payment? There is no one logical answer; presumably everything depends on how much tea was sent. Delighted by the gift, in any event, Shitao complied with a landscape in which a pungent, rain-soaked atmosphere becomes a metaphor for the fragrant liquid (Figure 88).

During the three years Shitao spent in Yangzhou at the end of the 1680s, his economic practice was undoubtedly affected by his association with the Spring River Poetry Society, which served to introduce him to the city's cultural elite. The society brought literati in need of support into contact with sophisticated wealthy philanthropists such as Yao Man, recipient of an unusual hanging scroll of plum blossom in which Shitao seems to take his cue from a particularly chiseled form of standard script calligraphy (see Figure 13);²⁰ and cel-

ebrities such as the society's founder Wu Qi (1619–94), a former magistrate and leading poet and playwright from the Wu family of Xi'an, for whom the artist in 1687 painted one of his finest landscape fans (see Figure 46). In calling upon his memories of Mount Heng in Hunan from thirty years before, the artist not only found a way of escaping, as he writes in his inscription, the oppressive lack of mountainscapes in the Yangzhou area (and his continuing depression following the theft of his *Sixteen Luohans* handscroll), but perhaps also had in mind the fact that Wu Qi, too, had visited Mount Heng in his youth.²¹ Another Qing official among the members was the playwright Kong Shangren, future author of the great play on the fall of the Ming, *The Peach Blossom Fan*. Kong was then in the northern Jiangsu area as a water-control official on the staff of Sun Zai-feng (1644–89). A surviving letter from Kong to one of the society's poorer literati, Zhuo Erkan, enlisting his aid as an intermediary to acquire a substantial work from Shitao, reveals how the artist could use the society to attract a new patron:²²

[Shitao's] poetry and paintings are like the man himself. We met briefly at the poetry gathering, but I was unable to express my hopes. When we parted, he presented me with a beautiful painted fan which I showed to my friends. . . . I wanted to request an album of paintings from him which I might look at when composing poetry, but I feared making such a direct request and hope you might convey it for me.

Having been introduced to Kong Shangren at the gathering, and knowing, perhaps, of the latter's interest in painting, Shitao did not let the opportunity slip. On the one hand he imposed himself on his own terms (bold poetry, a certain aloofness); on the other, he was careful to have a fan painting ready before Kong took his leave. While the gift of a simple fan could have been insignificant, the visible effort he had put into it served to indicate both his esteem for Kong Shangren and the achievements of which the artist would be capable in a more ambitious commission. His prior aloofness, meanwhile, saved the gesture from seeming merely obsequious or self-interested. As neutral territory, the society's meetings facilitated contact between artists and patrons, and provided any number of potential intermediaries for follow-up contacts.

Shitao's circumstances changed again with his move to the North in 1690. Almost all the surviving paintings from his stay in Beijing and Tianjin are dedicated, suggesting the intense importance of social connections as he pursued his ambitions. As discussed in Chapter 4, some paintings clearly discharged a debt owed to the individuals who offered him hospitality or support, while



88. *Drinking Tea*, dated 1687, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 126 x 55 cm. © Christie's Images.

others were speculative bids for attention. However, as always, Shitao also used painting to support himself. As wealthy amateur painters, Bordu and Tu Qingge would have expected to pay the artist for his services as a teach-

er; and when the salt merchant Zhang Lin and his cousin Zhang Zhu brought Shitao into their circle in Tianjin, social custom dictated that they be generous.²³ Shitao himself, in the inscription to one of his paintings for officials at the capital, a 1691 landscape for Vice Minister Wang Zehong, raises indirectly the issue of painting's material value, citing an earlier writer's comparison of literary reputation with the market value of objects: "Mr. Ouyang said that prose is like fine silver or beautiful jade: Its value is fixed on the market and can't be haggled over. He knew what he was talking about!" (Figure 89). There also survive from this period, as from the 1680s, a number of relatively impersonal commissions, including at least one facsimile copy of a Ming composition painted at the home of Wang Fengrong (Figure 90) and several occasional improvisatory works, which in both cases represent types of painting that for both social and economic reasons he probably could not afford not to do.

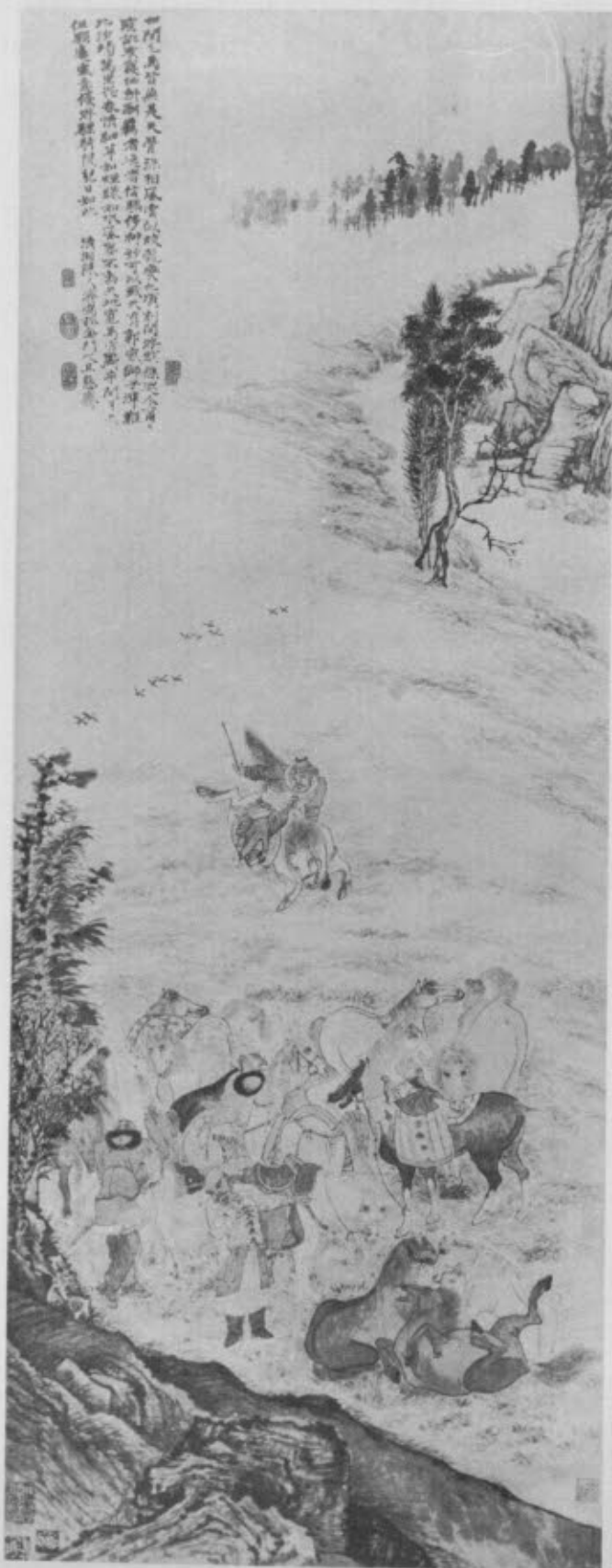
From the age of fifteen to fifty, therefore, Shitao painted professionally under a variety of circumstances. He might be described as a semiprofessional artist during this period; as a monk, he already had a primary "profession." It was Shitao's estrangement from the Buddhist church that enabled and (since he had no other marketable skills) effectively determined a full-time artistic career. In this process Daoism seems always to have been associated with the abandonment of institutional religious ambition. He took a first step in the direction of full-time professionalism after his return to the South, earning his living in the Yangzhou area for several years on a different basis from before. During 1693–6 he spent much of the year in Yangzhou itself, living (and painting) in temples, but also accepted the hospitality of wealthy patrons at their estates outside the city. These stays at private homes cast him in the role of a painter-in-residence, under a common patronage arrangement of which poets and scholars also took advantage, and with which he himself was familiar from his stay at Wang Fengrong's home in Beijing, if not before.

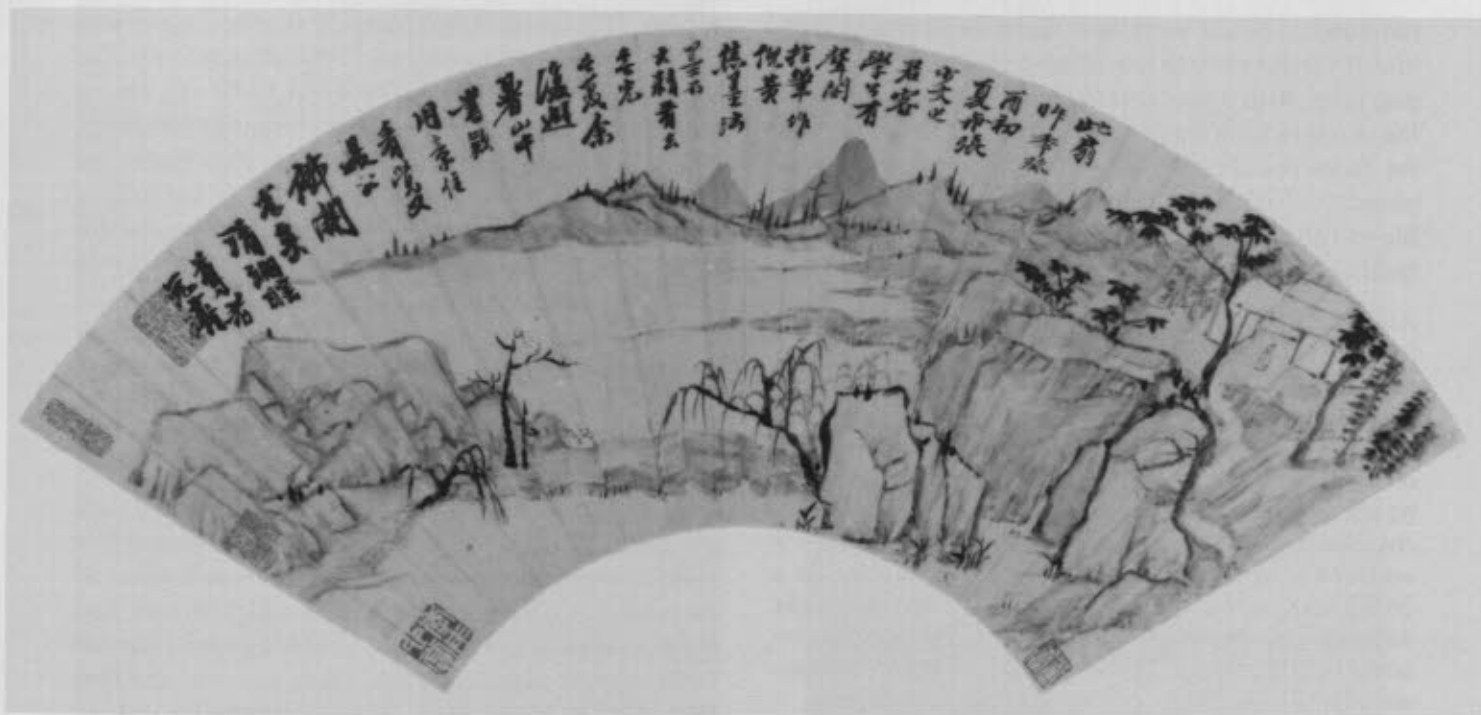
He spent the summer and autumn months of 1693, as proposed in Chapter 5, as the guest successively of two wealthy members of the Spring River Poetry Society, Wang Xuechen and Yao Man. At Wang's Yousheng Ge studio "in the mountains," Shitao was not the only guest: A Chinese bannerman based in Zhenjiang (site of one of the few banner garrisons in the South) across the Yangzi from Yangzhou, Zhang Jingjie, also spent the summer there, acquiring two works from him (Figure 91; see Figure 174).²⁴ Likewise, Shitao was not the only recipient of Yao Man's hospitality at Wu Mountain Pavilion when he moved there later in the summer; there his fellow guest was an old friend, the poet Du Cheng



89 (left). *Shadows of Old Trees*, dated 1691, hanging scroll, ink and light color on paper, 174 x 50.7 cm. Liaoning Provincial Museum.

90 (below). *Hunting in Autumn*, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, dimensions and whereabouts unknown. Source: *The Selected Painting and Calligraphy of Shih-t'ao*, vol. 1, plate 52.





91. *Landscape in the Style of Ni Zan and Huang Gongwang*, dated 1693, with an inscription added in 1694, folding fan, ink on paper, dimensions unknown. Shanghai Museum.

from Nanjing.²⁵ On the final leaf of the album that he painted in the autumn for Yao Man, Shitao acknowledged the society's help. For the dedicatory inscription, he chose a poem that he had written at one of the society's meetings (see Figure 6): "Three thousand paths taken by this stranger, [now] dreams in the river mist. / In the ninth month, my journey has reached an end, and I am deeply touched: / I can count on you elders of the Society - / Everyone chants my dark poems."²⁶ The poem overlays an image of the West Garden of Tianning Monastery, overlooking the canal that ran along the city's northern perimeter. In light of the poem, it is perhaps to be taken as the place where the society held its meetings.

In the summer of 1694, Shitao and Zhang Jingjie returned to the mountains, staying once more at Wu Mountain Pavilion; but in the following summer, Shitao found new hosts. In June 1695 he accepted a joint invitation from a former grand secretary, Li Tianfu, and the magistrate Zhang Chunxiu, a noted amateur painter in his own right, to join them in Hefei in northern Anhui.²⁷ Li's flourishing career at the Qing court had been temporarily halted by the death of his mother. Since 1693 he had been living in retirement, welcoming guests from the world of the arts. The playwright Hong Sheng (1645-1704) from Suzhou, author of *The Tower of*

Myriad Mirrors (*Chang sheng dian*), is one of those who preceded Shitao in making the journey to Li's rather out-of-the-way home. Shitao is not known to have been previously acquainted with either of his hosts, but it is suggestive that Zhang Chunxiu, like Zhang Jingjie, was a Chinese bannerman, the two men sharing a surname and conceivably a family connection. In Hefei, Shitao was lodged in grand style in the former mansion of the celebrated poet and official Gong Dingzi (1616-73). When he decided to return to Yangzhou after a stay of only a few weeks, it was clearly not due to any pressure from his hosts. The paintings he executed for the minister have not survived; however, we can still see the work by which he demonstrated his gratitude to the magistrate, a superb topographical view of the lakeside ferry point at Lake Chao where he found himself stuck on his way home, rendered more elaborate by several poetic inscriptions (Figure 92). Shitao begins his inscription with his customary frankness: "No matter how happy, when one has no home, it is easy to don one's hat."

Returning from Hefei, Shitao based himself for the remainder of the summer at the estate of Xu Songling in Yizheng, near Yangzhou. Xu Songling was a highly cultured man from a notable Huizhou family long established in Yizheng.²⁸ He had a long-standing interest in contemporary painting; notably in the 1680s he had maintained a close connection with the Nanjing-based painter Gong Xian. As early as 1682, using the Jiangxi painter Luo Mu (1622-1708) as an intermediary, he approached Gong Xian for a handscroll, and after bringing Gong to Yangzhou and Yizheng later in the year,

obtained a second work that Gong had brought with him.²⁹ He then effectively offered to provide the Nanjing artist with a guaranteed income for the rest of his life in return for a regular supply of paintings. Gong was far from scandalized, recording the offer in a colophon.³⁰ A letter from Gong Xian to Xu Songling datable to 1682–4 has survived that suggests the close relationship to which his offer led:³¹

As regards the large *zhongtang* hanging scroll you ordered for Wu Xinlao: I obtained old paper from Baixia and completed one painting that is one *zhang* high and four *chi* wide, and another that is eight *chi* high and four and a half *chi* wide. I don't know which one I should use. Please let me know. Would it be suitable if I sent it together with the paintings for you? Did you send the calligraphy to Wu Yeren [Wu Jiaji, 1618–84]?³² Why don't you commission a scribe to copy out your writings and compile them as a book? You could correct the lines that are not quite right and then have it printed and distributed. There would certainly be admirers. . . . Would you like to have a meal together?

In Shitao's case, at least five separate paintings and calligraphies can be associated with Xu Songling, including one existing landscape handscroll of Mount Huang that rivals any of the handscrolls painted for Xu by Gong Xian (see Figure 16). While this particular work was commissioned by his friends as a gift, the others are likely to have been commissioned by Xu Songling himself, including one of Shitao's patented depictions of bamboo combining unruliness, strength, and immediacy as much in the image as in the materiality of the ink-brushed surface.³³ Taking into account the hospitality that Xu offered him, Shitao's association with the Yizheng merchant appears to have had something of the same character as Gong Xian's; in other words, Xu played a role closer to that of a patron in the fullest sense of the word than that of a simple client.³⁴ In Shitao's 1695 circumstances, the opportunity for such an association must have seemed irresistible. Although he returned to Yangzhou after the summer, Shitao remained in close contact with Xu Songling and even before the end of the autumn returned to the Xu family estate, staying in the same study retreat where Gong Xian had been housed in 1682. Indeed, he may have lived there continuously until late in the spring of 1696.

Xu Songling is not known to have been active in the Spring River Poetry Society in Yangzhou. He was an independent cultural patron of immense wealth, and in this resembles the Huizhou-based Cheng Jun, whom Shitao first met in the late spring of 1696, going on to spend the summer of that year at the Cheng family estate in Shexian. In his younger days Cheng had made several attempts to pass the *juren* examination, without

success. The many biographies of eminent merchants that he contributed to the 1693 official gazetteer of the southern salt trade, the *Liang-Huai yanfa zhi*, reveal him to have been a more than competent prose writer, a serious economist, and an articulate spokesman for the role of merchants in civic leadership.³⁵ In his later years, after he retired to Huizhou, he was a prominent figure, acutely aware of social standing. So, too, was his family: After his death, his sons quickly gathered the many names required to petition for permission to erect a shrine to him as a local worthy.³⁶ The handscroll that Shitao painted for Cheng Jun during his stay, introduced in Chapter 5, is a tour-de-force sequence of paintings, calligraphies, and poems that was clearly intended to display the full range of his skills (see Figure 72). It does not diminish the scroll to acknowledge its function of self-advertisement, which is made even more explicit by the texts Shitao includes. He presented his northern stay, for the needs of the occasion, as having taken him into the highest national circles. Then, to depict the Pine Wind Hall of his host, he drew upon the style of Huizhou's most famous painter, Hongren (1610–64), whose handscroll in Cheng Jun's collection he had inscribed in the spring. In the inscription accompanying his own handscroll, Shitao made the Cheng family the representative of all the Huizhou, and specifically Shexian, merchant families with which he had been connected over a period of decades, and on whose support he now depended as he prepared to establish his painting business. All is of a piece in this scroll as Shitao artfully presents himself to his new friend and patron as a painter for the elite, and no less skillfully associates Cheng, who "liberally lays out money to bring people from the four quarters of the world," with eminent and appropriate predecessors in patronage. Shitao's strategy was successful: The Cheng family did prove to be important supporters of Shitao from this time on.

Of the several patrons whose hospitality Shitao accepted from 1693 to 1696, most were important merchants of Huizhou and specifically Shexian origin: Wang Xuechen, Yao Man, Xu Songling, and Cheng Jun. Customers of Shexian background similarly predominate among the other recipients of his paintings.³⁷ In the autumn of 1693, for example, he sent paintings to his old friend Wu Zhenbo in Shexian, among them a vivid evocation of the pleasures of gentry life in Huizhou against which, as we have seen, he sets his own anxieties of the moment in the inscription (Figure 93).³⁸ The recipient of the 1694 *Landscapes for Huang Lü*, though a visitor from Nanchang, was again from a Shexian family (see Figure 63); and in the summer of 1695 Shitao visited the celebrated Yizheng estate known as River Village amid White Sand and Verdant Bamboo, belonging to an im-



92 (above). Lake Chao, hanging scroll, 1695, ink and light color on paper, 96.5 x 41.5 cm. Tianjin Municipal Art Museum.



93 (right). Thoughts of Xi'nan, dated 1693, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 135.9 x 41.3 cm. C. C. Wang Family Collection, New York.

portant salt merchant, Zheng Zhaoxin. Zheng is also known for having restored a Daoist temple in Yizheng and for his 1711 publication of a printed edition of a work of classical scholarship by a Yuan dynasty ancestor.³⁹ Shitao's visit gave rise to at least three works. One, a now-lost handscroll entitled *Boating at the River Village*, documented a boat trip at the estate in the seventh month together with other guests, including the writer Xian Zhu, who by then had been living on the estate for over a year.⁴⁰ The second, surviving work is a superb album of paired calligraphies and paintings that includes, in lieu of a dedication, a farewell poem entitled "Taking Leave of the White Sand River Village Estate," addressed to an unidentified "friend" – possibly Zheng Zhaoxin but perhaps more likely Xian Zhu (Figure 94):

The despondent visitor from Qingxiang
 Passes by, looking for old friends.
 He lacks the means to buy a mountain on which to
 live [i.e., a house]
 So he sleeps pillowing his head on his fist.
 His gaze is directed beyond the rivers and sky
 But he has set his heart on an inch-sized thatched
 hut.
 In a light skiff you and he toured together,
 Not even a boatman present to distract you.

The poem was brushed, in fact, during a tour of the estate in Xian's company – perhaps the same one depicted in the lost handscroll. In the painting that accompanies the poem, Shitao depicts himself in a skiff moving on from the River Village toward a new destination; but as he hunches over his oar, he also bows and salutes the viewer. By confiding his desire to settle down, and his straitened circumstances, Shitao may have been soliciting more than just his friend's sympathy, since Xian was in a position to act as an intermediary to attract Zheng's patronage for Shitao's art. He did at any rate paint for Zheng a second handscroll depicting thirteen views of the estate, unfortunately also now lost.⁴¹

During the same busy summer of 1695 Shitao began his long association with the traveler Huang You, yet another patron from a Shexian family whose "generosity with wealth" he mentions in the inscription to an album leaf from this time. Over the next several months Shitao supplied Huang with at least three albums, and at the beginning of 1696 he painted for Huang's younger friend and relative Huang Jixian the important album *Reminiscences of Qin-Huai*.⁴² No wonder, then, that the artist vaunted his Shexian connections in the summer of 1696 in his handscroll for Cheng Jun, writing: "Those who come [from these parts] are generally proud as dragons; they have supplied half the friendships of my life." Finally, although almost all of the

works I have cited are relatively small in scale, it is unlikely that Shitao's work for Shexian customers was confined to such commissions. Several large hanging scrolls datable to this period, as well as one twelve-scroll continuous composition of a garden painted for an as-yet-unidentified recipient in the winter of 1693–4, suggest otherwise (Figure 95). The owner of this last work maintained a residence that was large enough to accommodate a painting six meters wide (or somewhat less if the twelve paintings were originally mounted as a folding screen).

In hindsight, Shitao's peripatetic activities between 1693 and 1696 may appear with false clarity as straightforward stepping stones toward the establishment of a business. Certainly they allowed him to build up a network of customers in Yangzhou and elsewhere, while at the same time accumulating capital to be used in the acquisition of a home cum studio. Seen from the vantage point of 1693, however, the establishment of a full-time city business must have seemed daunting, both psychologically and practically. Establishing a painting business, like any other urban enterprise, was a complex affair requiring capital reserves (and perhaps backers), a settled place of production and sale, established relationships with agents, extensive correspondence with customers, and constant effort to ensure that the product remained responsive to (or created) the market. I have already cited one statement from this period that reveals his great ambivalence about the course he was taking, and the compromises that it imposed.⁴³ Another such statement is found on Shitao's twelve-scroll garden scene, where he confesses, "I have a difficult temperament and, to be truthful, mix little with laymen. It is only in art [that I mix with them], expressing my feelings and ancient ideals of virtue" (1693–4, winter).⁴⁴ The ambivalence is echoed in the aesthetic of a work that, unlike most decorative works on this scale, was painted in ink on paper, without added color. The rejection of further sensualism served to advertise the artist's status as a monk-painter, even as he put his monk-painter's skills at the service of a decorative commission – an aesthetic compromise that reveals something of the social tensions inherent in his move toward full-time professionalism. Quite quickly, however, as demand for his work grew Shitao overcame the ambivalence, redefining his desire for independence in secular terms: "I don't know how to argue Chan, and I wouldn't presume to teach the [Buddhist] Law; all I do is use my free time to paint [pictures of] mountains for sale!"⁴⁵ Finally, toward the end of 1696 he felt secure enough to leave the monastic community and move into the Dadi Tang, committing himself entirely to the open market and gambling his independence on his brush alone.

潦倒清湘客因尋故舊過
買山無力住就枕宿奉寧
放眼江天外餘心才小亭扁舟
偕子顧而且不算丁
白夢江柳留別
校下人作

LITERATI PROFESSIONALS IN THE EARLY QING PERIOD

Shitao's professional history was not unusual for an educated man in the later seventeenth century.⁴⁶ It was part of a larger phenomenon, first studied in a pioneering article on Gong Xian by Jerome Silbergeld, that saw literati entering the painting profession in great numbers after the fall of the Ming.⁴⁷ Dispossessed of their normal possibilities of official employment, literati after 1644 accentuated a late Ming trend and turned to painting and calligraphy as ways of earning a livelihood from the cultural knowledge and skills that defined them socially. Some of these "professionalized literati," as Silbergeld terms them, practiced a form of the recently invented literati painting, with its rhetoric of cultural exclusiveness; others gradually incorporated artisanal skills into their



94. "Taking Leave of the White Sand River Village Estate," *Returning Home*, album of 12 leaves of painting, ink or ink and color on paper, and 12 facing leaves of calligraphy, ink on paper, each leaf 16.5 x 10.5 cm, leaves 5 and 5a. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, from the P. Y. and Kinmay W. Tang Family Collection. Gift of Wen and Constance Fong in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Dillon, 1976 (1976.280).

armory. Some worked semiprofessionally, not allowing painting to define their career goals but using it to support themselves on an ad hoc basis. Most, however, established painting businesses, selling for fixed prices, whether they worked peripatetically or in their own homes, and whether they sold to their customers directly, through an agent, or through a mounting shop or bookshop. Many if not most of them exploited a variety of professional modes according to circumstances and at different times in their life. This adaptability ensured







石文自清湖層繡古芳
幾令人目朗極得米
公顯全貌之未也豈讓
米之畫每畫一石必結
本應眼更不使人知身破
古畫大誰能袖得之墨
幻真身馬前若清之井
爾可同筆一畫得之
呼如製此 張翥 印

95. *Garden Vista*, dated 1693 and 1694, set of 12 hanging scrolls, ink on paper, each 195 x 49.7 cm. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taiwan, Republic of China. Gift of Mr. Zhang Yuejun.

their ability to earn a livelihood – albeit often meager – as painters (and calligraphers and seal carvers) without abandoning their commitment to wilderness themes, or even loyalism. Indeed, that special moral stance was the basis of their appeal and their market; yet, if not always at the level of subjects and themes, then at the level of formats and materials, the vast majority adapted themselves to the demands of a market that placed a high value on display. A simple index of this is the number of surviving screens and multiscroll sets by artists who can be termed wilderness painters.

There was much demand for wilderness painting both among merchants, especially the Huizhou families, and the gentry, among whom Qing officials were particularly prominent. The two categories, it should be underlined again, overlapped significantly, and Shitao, like other wilderness painters, cultivated both throughout his career. The demand can be seen not only from the numbers of such painters supported by the market but also from the existence of contemporary forgeries of works by the most prominent artists, as well as ghost-painted works by “substitute brushes.” The special interest shown by merchants of Huizhou background not only for wilderness painting generally but for loyalist painting in particular resulted from a combination of factors. They often had strong Ming loyalist sympathies, as an outgrowth of their generally conservative Confucian ideology. At the same time, their awareness of the prejudice against them as merchants led them to pursue education and cultural activities with great intensity in the hope of mitigating the stigma of commerce. The collecting of painting – both old paintings and works by contemporary educated artists, whether in the “literati” mode or not – was part of that agenda, and had been since the late Ming.⁴⁸ Their painting collections have not been reconstructed as yet, but there is already enough fragmentary evidence to allow us to infer their existence.⁴⁹ The emergence under merchant patronage of a Huizhou school of painting in the early Qing is another index of the intensity of their interest in painting. The proliferation of screens and multiscroll compositions, however, speaks to a second aspect of Huizhou merchant culture, its immediate context lying in the impressive merchant residences that were to be found both in their ancestral villages and in their adopted cities. Like the construction of gardens, these were expressions of a social milieu in which status was closely tied to consumption and its visible expression as display – above all in Yangzhou.

The gentry, including serving and retired officials, also often occupied impressive residences. Like the Huizhou merchant clans, local gentry were often extremely sympathetic to loyalists and wilderness figures who, despite

their marginality, were among the most prestigious literati of the time. This prestige also made them attractive to Chinese officials (often northerners) serving the Qing, for whom providing patronage to these impoverished individuals was a means of reaffirming their cultural loyalty to the Chinese community. In the polarized social circumstances of the early Qing, culture often served to bring together men whom politics separated. The most notable examples are undoubtedly those of Zhou Lianggong, whose vast and ecumenical collection of paintings amassed in the first twenty-five years of the Qing dynasty contained works by almost every significant artist of the day,⁵⁰ and Song Luo, governor-general of Jiangxi (1688–92), then of Jiangsu (1692–1705), who, despite his own glorious official career under the Manchus, was fascinated by those who distanced themselves from Qing power.⁵¹

Finally, Shitao's long connection with Yangzhou is symptomatic of the appeal that literati modes of painting, in particular wilderness painting, had in that commercial city. Many literati professionals from all over the Jiangnan region gravitated toward Yangzhou in the early Qing period – a phenomenon that still remains to be fully measured,⁵² though it is possible to give some sense of its importance at the price of an unavoidably dense presentation of names. The market for the most characteristically literati forms of painting, particularly landscapes, bamboo, flowers, and so on, was partly satisfied by those local literati artists who worked professionally. Among these the best-known today, perhaps, are the landscapists Zong Yuanding (1620–98), Zhang Xun (a former official, active through the early 1680s), and Gu Fuzhen (1634–1716 or later).⁵³ Specialization seems to have been the rule, with further examples being Wen Mingshi (orchids), Jiao Run (orchids, bamboo, and rocks), Wu Qiusheng (bamboo), Huang Jun'an (rocks), Shi Yuan (donkeys), and the female artist Wang Zheng (flower-and-bird), who in late life was the first teacher of the eighteenth-century Yangzhou Eccentric Li Shan.⁵⁴ However, the market demand for literati paintings far outstripped the capacity of local artists to supply it. As early as 1645–6, when Zhou Lianggong served as Liang-Huai Salt Commissioner, he was visited by some of his Nanjing painter friends. By the 1650s at latest, an impressive number of wilderness painters from elsewhere were making their way (or sending their work) to Yangzhou. Whereas most of the outside artists visited the city for a only brief period, if at all, the Huizhou artists Cheng Sui (1607–92) and Zha Shibiao (1615–98) are two who stayed for decades (Cheng during the 1650s–1670s,⁵⁵ Zha from the late 1660s to his death in 1698)⁵⁶ and can almost be classified as Yangzhou painters. Zha Shibiao, it should be noted, had a

large number of students, not all of whom were necessarily amateurs.⁵⁷ The outside artists tended to come from a limited number of places, notably Nanjing (Gong Xian [sojourned 1647–58; several return visits],⁵⁸ Shi Lin,⁵⁹ Gu Zixing,⁶⁰ Wang Gai,⁶¹ and Dian Daoren [Hu Da]);⁶² Xuancheng (Xu Dun [Banshan]⁶³ and Tang Zuming [1601–?]);⁶⁴ Huizhou (Wang Zunsu,⁶⁵ Wang Jia-zhen,⁶⁶ Ye Rong,⁶⁷ Jiang Yuan⁶⁸); and Nanchang (Luo Mu⁶⁹ and Bada Shanren⁷⁰). It is worth noting that these various centers were linked by a single communication route. From the same general western direction came Shi Pang (c. 1676–c. 1705), a native of Taihu in Anhui.⁷¹ Artists from the southeast were less in evidence, but Wang Hui came to Yangzhou from Changshu in southern Jiangsu in the 1660s and 1670s;⁷² the Suzhou-based Jiang Shijie painted for a number of Yangzhou patrons in the 1690s and 1700s;⁷³ and both Yun Shouping (1633–90)⁷⁴ in Wujin (southern Jiangsu) and Wu Shantao⁷⁵ in Hangzhou had Yangzhou clients.

THE DADI TANG ENTERPRISE: ARTIST AND PATRONS

Zhang Chao's *Shadows of Secret Dreams* includes one exchange that speaks volumes about the intersection of class, culture, and money in Shitao's Yangzhou:

Zhang Chao: Literati always like to scorn the rich. Why, then, do they constantly liken fine poetry and prose to gold and jade, pearls and gems, brocades and figured silks?

Chen Heshan comments: It is like the rich man who hangs up a painting of barren trees and a desolate village by an old recluse of the wilderness.

Jiang Hanzheng comments: In the rich I only look down on stinginess and commonness; I don't look down on their pearls, jades, and figured silks!

Zhang Zhupo comments: If a person has no culture, I scorn him even if he is poor, and if he has culture, I respect him even if he is rich.

Lu Yunshi comments: Zhupo's words are truly the declarations of someone who practices the way of tolerance!

Li Ruojin comments: What is to be scorned in the wealthy is stinginess, or a dislike of the Classics, or a fear of making friends, or pursuit of men of influence, or scorn for impoverished scholars. When this is not the case, the wealthy have great potential to benefit people. How could we do without them?

Zhang's commentators did not miss the pointed insinuation of his opening remark: that independent literati entertained a hypocritical attitude toward wealthy pa-

trons, whose money they took while withholding respect. In the unruly exchange that follows, the literati defend and deflect attention from themselves in a series of more or less aggressive ways until the final commentator, Li Ruojin (Li Gan, whose remarks on Yangzhou fashions appear in Chapter 1) – perhaps mindful of Zhang's own “wealthy” status – qualifiedly gives patrons their due, though not without reaffirming the literati as the cultural standard. More interesting than any single wry comment, however, may be the general assumptions underlying the exchange: that literati were condemned to sell their cultural skills, and that the market for those skills was centered on the wealthy (who in Yangzhou terms were largely, though not exclusively, merchants or members of merchant families).

The social elite of the Yangzhou area – including but not restricted to the wealthy – comprised several distinguishable populations, of which the most important were the Huizhou, Shenxi, and Shanxi commercial families, the local gentry, and (a tiny but powerful group) government officials. The merchant families, even those that had been established in the Yangzhou area for generations, had a strong sense of regional lineage identity and often intermarried among themselves on a regional basis. Similarly, local gentry families, such as the Wangs and Lis of Xinghua and the Xiangs and Wangs of Baoying – among each of which Shitao counted friends and customers – were deeply attached to their localities and formed a relatively tight-knit society. However, the barriers between these two broad social groups were eroded by the integration of merchant families, such as the Qiaos of Baoying (originally from Shenxi), into the local gentry.

Shitao's professional life in Yangzhou was very much affected by these groupings. Both before and after 1697 his customers there were often drawn from merchant families of Huizhou, and more specifically Shexian, background. (The only certain identification of a Shenxi or Shanxi customer is a certain Qiao Baitian from the above-mentioned family in Baoying.) Over time Shitao developed a significant public among the local gentry as well, including the families listed above, and as always he also cultivated local government officials. It is important, however, not to reduce his market to a purely local one. Just as the Yangzhou painting profession drew upon artists from far afield, so too did Shitao sell to clients in other areas. Sometimes it was a client's visit to Yangzhou that made this possible, but Shitao also undertook commissions sent to him by patrons in Huizhou, Nanchang, and Beijing. In this way his public extended to include government officials more generally, merchant families in Huizhou itself, and the Manchu aristocracy in Beijing.

Some of Shitao's more important Dadi Tang-period patrons are known to us through the large number of surviving and recorded works dedicated to them. This is the case, for example, for a certain Huang Ziqing, for whom Shitao painted several works during the 1700s.⁷⁶ However, the most vivid evidence for Shitao's day-to-day life is the twenty-five surviving letters from Shitao to various friends and acquaintances, several of them published here for the first time. (Transcriptions and full translations of all the letters can be consulted in Appendix 2.) While some of these letters are very short, and do not necessarily mention painting, others provide extraordinarily explicit and detailed information on his professional life as an artist. The nineteen letters translated below (numbered according to Appendix 2) are effectively business correspondence, of a kind that survives for many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century painters but largely remains uncollated and unstudied. With the caveat that the letters' recipients have not all been identified, it appears that none of the correspondence concerns any of the major Dadi Tang-period patrons who have come into this study so far.⁷⁷ In the case of four others, however, letters do exist. When the complementary evidence of surviving and recorded paintings and colophons is taken into account, it becomes possible to reconstruct something of Shitao's relationship with these men.

Zheweng

The largest group of surviving letters were sent to a customer whom Shitao addresses only as Zheweng. Zheweng means, roughly, "old Zhe" or "my friend Zhe," and is a familiar form of address: The "Zhe" is likely to be one half of a two-character style name, as yet unidentified. As is the case for Shitao's letters in general, none of the Zheweng letters are dated; but on internal evidence of seals and signatures, they can be attributed as a group to the Dadi Tang years. They take us vividly into Shitao's life:

5 So far I have finished three of the hanging-scroll calligraphies for you. They are all in the style of Song and Yuan masters. I did not enjoy doing them, as true connoisseurs will be able to see, but they will find them interesting. For the past few days I have been kept busy, and have not [two characters unclear]. I'm having someone take you the thank-you painting.

6 The Luo family shop has not moved. As for Mr. Zhou Baoye, I still don't know where he went. I have not known his whereabouts for a long while now. I was delighted to hear that you are well. Due to the collapse of the room, I haven't been out.

7 I received the loquats. [But] I didn't know what day they would be ripe. What a shame one cannot apply alum to your painting.

8 Yesterday while it was raining I finished the large hanging scroll painting you commissioned earlier, but I have not yet added an inscription. I will be writing an inscription at some point; after the text is drafted it would be worth your while checking it over.

9 Recently, because the road to your father's home has been flooded and I have been kept busy at home, I have not been able to thank him in person. Now I have a guest about to arrive, and I wondered if I could borrow a bed from the family residence to use temporarily. I would return it around the fifth or sixth of the month.

10 Ever since autumn arrived it has been hotter and drier than ever: I can neither sit nor stand. I was hoping that you might be able to come by for poetry in time for the evening breeze. I have finished with the sheets of paper [for calligraphy?] you recently sent me, and am sending them up to you.

11 I left home this morning. Now it's sundown and I have just got back. I received your message yesterday to visit [your?] studio. But a visitor from afar suddenly arrived and wants me to go with him straightaway to Zhenzhou [Yizheng]. I am afraid of losing [character unclear]. I will do as I hear from you. Thank you.

12 I finished hastily the portrait of your sixth brother [or cousin], and [am sending it up to you]⁷⁸ for your approval.

13 This year the heat has defeated me. Since autumn arrived [two characters unclear] daily higher. If it is like this here, I know it must be even hotter in your residence. I often think of you, but I do not dare visit. I am afraid of making a sudden movement. . . . [remainder of the text missing].

The evidence of letter 11 is that Shitao expected, when the customer was important enough, to have to make himself available at short notice for commissions to be executed at the customer's house, even when the customer (possibly Xu Songling?) lived as far away as Yizheng. As was the case with Xu, Shitao's relationship with Zheweng was not only commercial but social. Shitao apparently visited Zheweng's family residence with some regularity (letters 9, 11, 13), and entertained Zheweng at his own home (10). Their shared interest in poetry is reflected in a surviving calligraphy handscroll, in which Shitao has written out some of his early poems.⁷⁹ Two of the letters show Shitao keen to keep his customer up to date with the progress of the current commission: He reports on a set of calligraphies three scrolls into the project (5), and on a hanging scroll that was now ready to have the inscription added (8). The first of these letters demonstrates that, for the set of calligraphies, there was discussion beforehand in which the customer had prevailed. In letter 8, Shitao seeks Zheweng's

input, giving him the opportunity to review the text of the proposed inscription, and in letter 12 he is clearly expected to reject the portrait if dissatisfied. Inscriptions, of course, because they incorporated a dedication, and portraits for other obvious reasons, were socially delicate matters. However, not all of Zheweng's suggestions were accepted. In letter 7, which probably concerns a painting on silk (not necessarily painted by Shitao), Shitao turns down Zheweng's suggestion for the final application of a coat of alum.⁸⁰ Finally, it should be noted that not all the paintings were for Zheweng himself. The portrait for his brother or cousin was probably to be a present, and the "thank-you painting" he mentions in letter 5 sounds like a relatively anonymous social or business gift.

Jiang Shidong

To judge by his letters, Shitao's relationship with Zheweng was a smooth and even close one; there is an unmistakable air of true friendship. By contrast, his four surviving letters to a Shexian businessman (as Zheweng may also have been) and important customer, Jiang Shidong (born c. 1658), are fraught with tension. By virtue of this fact, they are all the more revealing, exposing to view some of Shitao's deepest difficulties in making the transition to the role of a full-time professional painter. Jiang Shidong belonged to one of the most cultivated of the Shexian merchant families in Yangzhou, a family that would produce numerous officials, writers, artists, and cultural patrons in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century, among them Jiang Shidong's son, Jiang Xun, who would become known as one of the leading art collectors of the Jiangnan region. The father was himself a poet and calligrapher, perhaps influenced by his uncle, Jiang Kai, a well-known writer with a *juren* degree who had a short career as a low-ranking provincial official and took part unsuccessfully in the 1679 *boxue hongru* examination.⁸¹ However, Jiang Shidong seems not to have been active in the literati life of Yangzhou; his name, like Cheng Jun's and Xu Songling's, is not found in the countless records of outings and poetry gatherings that have survived in literary collections of the time. Perhaps his business activities left him little time for such pursuits.⁸² Since Shitao's letters to Jiang are only available in transcription, it is difficult to date them, even approximately.⁸³ Only Shitao's use of his princely name, Ji, in letter 15 points to a date of 1702 or later. However, on the evidence of recorded works (see later in this section), Shitao's association with Jiang lasted several years, starting in 1699 if not before.

In the longest of the letters (15), Shitao can barely suppress his anger as he finds himself forced to tell his

customer precisely what he is and is not prepared to do, and precisely what remuneration and treatment he expects. Part of his evident anger and frustration must have come from the fact that, in his earlier years, the conventions of literati decorum would have spared him the need for (in literati terms) such unpleasant directness:

15 I went to see you yesterday because I had something to discuss. When I saw that you had a lot of guests and that I wouldn't be able to speak with you, I left. You know that originally my work was not associated with the general run of painting, and that I should not have to paint screens. I only do it because my household is so large, and my old illness is getting worse all the time! When I exhaust all the *xuan* and *luowen* paper on the market, and connoisseurs cannot find more, only then do I turn to satin and silk for my calligraphy and painting; and it is after silk that I turn to screens. When I get a [folding] screen, it has twelve [panels for] paintings. The first and last ones are useless [i.e., because they are much narrower than the others], but the middle ten are fine for painting. I split the screen into its individual sections and paint it that way, which means I can't paint it as a [continuous] screen. I know that none of you gentlemen can be as free with your finances as before, so I charge twenty-four taels for the whole screen. But if someone wants a continuous scene, it means standing on a scaffold or a bench, stretching my arm and craning my neck to reach the painting, up and down, always moving about or standing. For painting in these conditions I charge fifty taels per screen. Now that I'm old I don't have the energy I used to. It is difficult for me to move the brush around vigorously, and even if I can complete the screen there is still no point. I may ruin one of the panels, then the other eleven will all be worthless. It is better if I just paint twelve separate panels. That is what I have been doing for some years now for the Wu, Xu, Fang, Huang, and Cheng families. Wenxiong has five screens at home that I painted, and all of them are of that kind. I painted one at the beginning of this year, and it was also like that. The screen you ordered yesterday was to be for your master bedroom, according to the majordomo, Huang. [Then] yesterday I met your brother, who said that you were going to offer it to a relative. But you are nothing if not a true friend of mine; for a dear friend I will paint it even for nothing. Eight or nine out of ten people judge by what they hear from others. My whole life depends on my brush, so I cannot but exhaust my art for a true friend. Either I don't ask those close to me to pay, or I take my distance and let my work compete with what is generally available. Soon half of the silk and alum will arrive; since you go out early I am writing to ask how I should proceed. This letter has been rude and I beg your forgiveness. I have not yet dared to touch the silver you sent me.

The cause of the problem becomes clear only toward the end of the letter. Jiang Shidong had commissioned a

screen, sending his majordomo to arrange it with Shitao. The majordomo, bringing silver to pay in advance, had told Shitao that the screen was for no ordinary location but for Jiang's own bedroom. The implication was that Shitao should try to do an especially good job. In fact, Jiang had a specific request, for a *tongjing* (continuous-view) screen, in which the composition would extend over the full twelve panels of the screen. Moreover, the screen was to be painted in the difficult medium of pigments on silk. Shitao apparently discovered two problems, however. The first would have been clear to him as soon as he opened the package of silver, probably after the majordomo's departure: The sum offered was simply inadequate for the importance and difficulty of the commission; there was no financial recognition of its special character. Then, to add insult to injury, Shitao later discovered, through a chance encounter with Jiang's brother, that the screen was not destined for his bedroom at all but was to be used as a gift to someone Shitao did not know. Jiang, or perhaps his majordomo, had traded on the value Shitao placed on friendship in order to obtain the best quality work for the (already inadequate) payment.

Shitao's response moves through a series of points. First, appealing to the social dimension of their relationship, he reminds Jiang that he is no ordinary artist, and the commission, being typically artisanal, is already unpleasant for him. In the process, he reveals his dislike not only of the screen and multiscroll formats (the same word *ping* is used for both) but of silk and satin as materials. He even seems to be trying to educate Jiang away from the decorative commissions that employed these formats and materials by hinting that this is not where his best work is to be found. Second, moving on to purely commercial terrain, he laboriously explains why a continuous-view screen represents a different kind of commission from an ordinary screen, and why its price is therefore double that of the latter. He does not forget to point out that he is keeping his prices low, forestalling the objection that since times are bad for the customer, he should be prepared to lower his prices.⁸⁴ Third, perhaps partly in order to avoid asking Jiang to send more money, which would have caused his customer to lose face, he tries to persuade him to settle for a screen with twelve separate screens. He backs up his argument by citing a previous commission from Jiang, as well as all the other sales of such screens he had made to customers whom Jiang would have considered to be his social equals (the surnames he cites, with the exception of Fang, are common Huizhou surnames that we have already encountered repeatedly).⁸⁵

Only after this long preamble does Shitao finally raise the embarrassing issue of the true destination of the

screen, which becomes the springboard for an attempt to define the ground of their relationship. He draws a clear boundary in their dealings between the friendly and the contractual. If a painting is to be a token of friendship, money has (in theory) no place in the transaction, no pains are too great to take, and a good reputation is sufficient reward; but if a painting is viewed by a customer simply as an available commodity, as has proved to be the case here with Jiang, then Shitao has to set the price by reference to "what is generally available," that is, the work of his workshop-trained competitors (such as Li Yin or Yuan Jiang). The opposition is sharply drawn – more sharply in fact than Shitao's economic practice justifies. Most commissions inhabited a gray area somewhere between these two poles. The concepts of friendship and the market that Shitao has pried apart in his letter were in real life bonded together. In fact, it is the relationship between the two that defined the specific socioeconomic practice of the professionalized literatus (versus the workshop-trained career painter), and offered by its flexibility a solution to the internal social contradictions inherent in the very notion of a literatus-entrepreneur. If Shitao reacts so badly to Jiang's attempt to exploit the ambiguity of their relationship, it has as much to do with the breach of etiquette and consequent loss of face as with lost income. At least, this is how Shitao presents it; but the disagreement over the pricing of the artist's work was an understandable one, where arguments could be made on both sides. Shitao wanted to set the economic value of his work at the same level as competitors like Yuan Jiang, whose paintings conspicuously displayed the artist's investment of labor. Paintings of this kind did not depend so heavily for their value on the artist's reputation; they were highly crafted objects that represented solid investments. Jiang Shidong (or the majordomo) apparently considered that the combination of Shitao's reputation, skills, and labor did not give him nearly as much for his money as those other screens. Naturally, the artist's letter was intended to persuade him differently.

Independent of its significance for this particular incident, what Shitao has to say on prices is precious information, meriting a slight detour from the question of patronage. To make sense of the information one needs to know that the tael (*liang* or *jin*) was a standard weight of silver (just over an ounce), equal to ten *qian* (or *xing*) of silver. (The *qian* can also refer to copper cash coins, with the ideal being one hundred). A twelve-scroll continuous composition in pigments on silk must have been close to the most expensive type of painting one could buy. Shitao's reference to his competitors suggests that

he had set his price of fifty taels according to the prices charged for such commissions by other painters in the city. His twenty-four-ael price for a screen made up of independent paintings, meanwhile, offers a basis for inferring his prices for the more usual, smaller-scale commissions, since it is calculated on the basis of two taels per individual scroll or panel. This is probably toward the low end of his prices for hanging scrolls, since any independent hanging scroll would have required its own inscription, which was not always the case for the individual scrolls from larger sets. The only hanging scrolls likely to have come cheaper are "obligation paintings" (*yingchou hua*), which were dashed off. At the other end of the scale, given that many of Shitao's large hanging scrolls (*zhongtang*) were much more elaborate than a single scroll or panel from a screen, it seems likely that their price could easily have reached several taels.

However, it is possible to extract a great deal more information from the prices in Shitao's letter by comparing them to early Qing artists' price lists. The formal price lists of at least four late-seventeenth-century painters survive today, examples of a practice that began as early as the second half of the sixteenth century and lasted well into the twentieth.⁸⁶ One drawn up by Wan Shouqi (1603–52), a prominent loyalist painter working in Huai'an in northern Jiangsu during the years immediately following the fall of the Ming, has prices for calligraphy and seal carving as well as painting.⁸⁷ The painting prices are as follows:

Figures: 5 taels, down to 1 tael (I don't paint [figure] fans).

Large landscapes: 5 taels, down to 1 tael.

Small pictures and landscape fans: 3 taels, down to 0.5 taels.⁸⁸

The other prices for painting were recorded by Lü Liuliang (1629–83) at a slightly later date, in the 1660s, in a group of price lists belonging to six of his impoverished literati friends in eastern Zhejiang who variously offered their services as seal carvers, calligraphers, painters, and writers.⁸⁹ Although three of the men offered paintings for sale, only one of the three price lists for paintings is extensive enough to be really helpful.⁹⁰ The landscapist Huang Zixi (1612–72) painted both in the calligraphic Southern School mode and in the carefully crafted Northern School mode:

Southern or Northern School landscapes: 0.3 taels per fan.

Album leaves: 0.3 taels [each].

Single hanging scrolls [from a set]: 0.5 taels [each].

Independent hanging scrolls: 1 tael.

Handscrolls: 0.3 taels per [Chinese] foot.

Large-scale hanging scrolls: 2 taels.

These price lists are helpful in two different ways. First, they offer a point of comparison for Shitao's hanging-scroll prices. Huang Zixi calculated the price of his largest-scale and most expensive hanging scrolls at four times that of his least expensive ones; Wan Shouqi calculated the ratio at 5:1. The bottom-level price (0.5 tael and 1 tael, respectively) effectively functioned in both cases as a unit price for hanging scrolls. There also exists a 1759 price list for a later Yangzhou painter, Zheng Xie, in which the price ratio between large and small hanging scrolls is only 3:1 (6 taels as against 2).⁹¹ Applying the same principle to Shitao's production, with a very conservative unit price of 1 tael, one arrives at a price of 3–5 taels for his most expensive hanging scrolls; but in the context of the 5 taels sought by the lesser-known Wan Shouqi and 2 by the only locally known Huang Zixi, this seems improbably low. A unit price of 1.5 taels is perhaps more likely, giving a top price of 4.5–7.5 taels, and even a 2-ael unit price is not out of the question, giving a top price of 6–10 taels. Obviously, far more would have to be known about general price levels and the cost of living during the respective periods of these artists before any firm conclusion could be drawn about the relative level of Shitao's prices in real terms.

Second, the price lists offer a basis for extrapolating prices from the hanging-scroll category to other formats. Huang Zixi's prices provide the best point of departure, not only because his list is the most complete and explicit but because he standardized his unit price across three different formats, charging exactly the same price for a single fan, a single album leaf, or one (Chinese) foot of a handscroll. Wan Shouqi, it would seem, grouped these three formats within a single category of "small pictures and landscape fans," the "small pictures" presumably referring to handscrolls and album leaves. Although his list is less explicit than Huang's, the information he provides is consistent with use of the same unit principle. If Wan's unit price is taken to be his lower-limit price of 0.5 tael, then his 0.5 as against Huang's 0.3 parallels the roughly similar difference in their hanging-scroll prices; 0.5 tael would in that case have paid for a fan, a single album leaf, or a one-(Chinese)-foot section of a handscroll by Wan Shouqi. Wan's upper-limit price of 3 taels, meanwhile, would correspond to a six-(Chinese)-foot handscroll; although this is relatively short for a handscroll, Wan is not known for the long handscrolls that others often painted. It is striking that a hundred years later Zheng Xie priced both fans and album leaves at 0.5 tael, the same price as Wan Shouqi. There is a hint here that this may have been a standard unit price for small-format works by prominent artists. At 0.5 tael per leaf, a twelve-leaf album or long handscroll by Shitao would have cost the not-insignificant sum of 6 taels.⁹²

In addition, the price lists also shed some light on the pricing of calligraphy, an important issue given that a significant proportion of Shitao's production took the form of calligraphy rather than painting. Not only was he in demand as a calligrapher, but many of his handscrolls and albums in particular gave calligraphy and painting equal billing. In Wan Shouqi's case, the unit price for calligraphy using small or middle-sized characters was significantly lower than for any of his categories of painting; only his large-character calligraphy had a unit price equivalent to painting, and even then it was only comparable to painting in small formats. On the other hand, one of the artists discussed by Lǚ Liuliang, Wu Zhizhen, sold his calligraphy at prices roughly equivalent to his small format paintings. As for Zheng Xie, who was first and foremost a calligrapher, he seems to have charged the same price for both, when the format was the same. Although Shitao, unlike Zheng Xie, was primarily a painter, his common use of several script types and styles within a single artwork may have justified higher prices for his calligraphy than would otherwise have been the case, perhaps allowing him to price his calligraphy at the same level as painting in the same format.

Shitao's prices, c. 1700, had the potential to provide him with a considerable annual revenue. In the second quarter of the eighteenth century, the most important Qing court artists received an official annual salary equivalent to about one hundred and thirty taels, although this was of course supplemented by occasional imperial rewards for good work and revenue from private commissions.⁹³ In the mid-eighteenth century, Zheng Xie noted that leading independent artists like himself who were popular in the Yangzhou area (including Wang Shu, Jin Nong, Li Shan, Gao Xiang, and Gao Fenghan) were taking in anywhere from several hundred to a thousand taels annually.⁹⁴ What would Shitao have had to do in order to take in, say, the very high gross of a thousand taels a year? Calculating his prices relatively conservatively (i.e., with scrolls available at 1.5–6 taels, small formats at 0.5 tael per unit, and screens at 24 taels), he would have had to produce and sell, for example, the monthly equivalent of three twelve-leaf albums, three six-leaf albums, three large hanging scrolls, six small hanging scrolls including "obligation paintings," one long handscroll, four short handscrolls, and a half-dozen fans, for an annual total of around three hundred and twelve paintings and calligraphies of widely varying sizes – plus an average of one screen commission every two months.⁹⁵ How many works did in fact emanate from Shitao's studio is, of course, another matter, which may be easier to resolve once a consensus is reached on the number of surviving genuine works from

the Dadi Tang period; but it does seem quite possible that his earnings were in the same general range as those of Zheng Xie and others. Moreover, there is no reason not to take seriously his repeated complaint that he was obliged to work constantly. This must have had much to do with the fact, as he points out at the beginning of the letter to Jiang Shidong, that he was not the only person involved in the Dadi Tang: His business had a staff that had to be paid, and there were no doubt other overheads as well, such as materials and mounting, agents' commissions, the entertainment of important clients, formal gifts, and taxes, that would have made for a far inferior net income. In addition, the worsening health that he also mentions meant long periods without working, high medical bills, and an uncertain future to be confronted without the normal support of family relations.

The other three letters from Shitao to Jiang Shidong do not necessarily postdate letter 15. Two, however, were clearly written against the background of a strained relationship, and it is tempting to read them as an attempt to patch things up after the screen incident:

¹⁶ When you came to see me the other day, I was out. And when [your] person came to get the painting, I could not add the inscription, because I had a client there. During this end-of-the-year period it has been consistently cold, and I haven't often ventured out. But on the first day of New Year I will visit you with a friend, to wish you all the best for the new year. Apart from this lotus, I had a sheet of *xuan* paper that I used today to paint an ink landscape. I'm having a student take them to you immediately, partly to seek your opinion, and partly to make our relationship a little easier in the future.

¹⁷ This *tie* is one that I have always appreciated, one that people today don't know about at all. This is the true appearance of the methods [*fa*] of the Ancients. You should keep and treasure it. It would give me pleasure to have the chance to see it from time to time. As soon as the roads are better, I will visit your residence. Whenever you have the chance, keep a small place for me in your thoughts, otherwise my livelihood will gradually be lost.

Shitao's three "gifts" – two paintings of his own, a lotus painting, and a monochrome ink landscape, together with a rubbing (*tie*) of an ancient calligraphy – conform to Jiang's reported literati accomplishments. They demonstrate that Jiang Shidong's interest in screens did not prevent him from appreciating either Shitao's wilderness production or the relatively rarified and antidecorative genre of calligraphy rubbings. This literati-oriented taste is confirmed elsewhere. A hanging scroll published in Japan in the 1930s, for example, is another monochrome



96. *Orchids and Rock*, dated 1706, hanging scroll, ink on paper, whereabouts unknown. Source: *Shina nanga taisei*, vol. 2, Juan 1, p. 134.

painting, depicting orchids and rocks (Figure 96). The fact that Jiang arranged a “collaboration” between Shitao and Bada in 1699 is indicative of a specific interest in Ming loyalist art.⁹⁶ In the same vein, a surviving landscape fan by Shitao dedicated to Jiang bears an explicitly loyalist poem.⁹⁷ Also, it was at Jiang’s home in 1699 that Shitao saw, and inscribed with a long, theoretical text, a copy of a fourteenth-century masterpiece, Huang Gongwang’s *Rivers and Mountains without End*, by a calligrapher and sometime painter, Wang Jun.⁹⁸ In the letter’s mention of the calligraphy rubbing, it should be noted, there is a hint that Shitao may also have been dealing in artworks.

The final letter to Jiang Shidong speaks to the normality (or normalization) of their commercial association:

14 After I and Shucun [Xiang Yin]⁹⁹ said goodbye to you at your residence at midautumn, I fell sick at home, to the point that you would have thought Bitter Melon’s root was going to break [i.e., the artist was going to die]. On the Double Ninth I felt better and a friend sent a palanquin to fetch me at dawn so that I could write a *bafen* script birthday *ping* [screen or set of scrolls]. I went each morning and came back each evening for four days until the commission was completed. When I was home again I fell ill once more. I have often wanted to speak with you, but the distance makes it difficult for me to go to see you. I have still not started work on the three pieces of paper [for hanging scrolls] and the album that you gave me before. Yesterday I received the gold paper [for a fan].

This letter is revealing for its account of Shitao’s willingness to work at an unidentified customer’s home, on a commission where for once the occasion – a birthday – is perfectly clear. We learn that the *ping*, written in a form of the formal clerical script, took four full days to complete; unfortunately, he does not specify how many panels or scrolls the *ping* comprised, but other recorded birthday screens of this period had twelve panels or scrolls.¹⁰⁰

In this last letter, he mentions one commission for three hanging scrolls and an album, and another for a fan, with Jiang in each case supplying the materials. This brings to fourteen the number of documented commissions for Jiang. While he, like Zheweng, was undoubtedly a collector of Shitao’s work, it would probably be a distortion of these men’s patronage of Shitao to reduce it to collecting alone. Some proportion of their commissions would have been ordered for use as gifts. One context for the use of artworks as gifts was the etiquette of social intercourse in wealthy families, where gift giving was one of the central means by which kinship relations in the extended family were reaffirmed.¹⁰¹ Zheweng’s portrait of his brother or cousin and Jiang’s screen for his relative would have functioned in this way. However, gifting was also an established part of doing business with other people, in contexts that could be commercial but might also be political or administrative. A late Ming description of a famously wealthy Huizhou merchant in Yangzhou is probably valid for his early Qing counterparts as well: “Each year he [Fan Hao] would purchase various kinds of silks and cotton fabrics, different styles of hairpins made of tortoise shell, rhinoceros horn, ivory, gold, and jade in quantities of hundreds and thousands. . . . He used these as gifts in social intercourse and for rewards for his servants.”¹⁰² Clearly, the gifting here went beyond a familial context. The “thank-you painting” mentioned by Shitao in letter 1 to Zheweng is perhaps an example of a functional gift of this kind. The practice of gifting may help to explain the im-

portance of certain iconographies in Shitao's work and in Yangzhou painting more generally, since vegetables, fruit, and flowers were all commonly used as presents.

Cheng Daoguang

A third group of letters is addressed to a man named Tuiweng who is most plausibly identified as Cheng Daoguang (*hao* Tuifu). Cheng played a key economic role in a tight-knit circle of friends and relatives that, in addition to Shitao, included Huang You, Huang Jixian, Li Lin, Li Guosong, Wang Xiru, and Wang Zhongru.¹⁰³ Shitao painted a large number of works for these men from the mid-1690s onward, several of which bear colophons written by other members of the circle. The circle was probably the core of the group of men that met at the home of Cheng Daoguang in the winter of 1699 to see off Huang You on his travels to the South, a gathering that Shitao later depicted in his album illustrating Huang's poems from the journey (see Figure 34).¹⁰⁴ Cheng, Huang You, and Huang Jixian (Cheng's brother-in-law) were the patrons of the group, all three being men of independent means from Huizhou families.¹⁰⁵ Both of the Huangs, as noted earlier, eventually obtained posts as local magistrates, probably by purchase. The other members of the circle were professionalized literati. Like the now familiar cousins Li Lin and Li Guosong (1684 *juren*), the brothers Wang Zhongru (1634–98, Li Lin's uncle on his mother's side) and Wang Xiru (1684 *gongsheng*) came from long-established gentry families in nearby Xinghua. Both Wang brothers were famous not only as poets but as professional writers, and Wang Xiru also sold his calligraphy.¹⁰⁶ Of the two Lis, meanwhile, Li Guosong was certainly the more successful professionally, in his case through the writing of examination essay manuals; he was also a famously skilled and productive poet.¹⁰⁷ All four men had strong loyalist sympathies, and not only Li Lin's *Qiufeng wenji* but Wang Zhongru's *Xizhai ji* as well later fell foul of the Qianlong literary inquisition for that reason.¹⁰⁸

Within this circle, Li Lin's relationship with Cheng Daoguang offers an instructive parallel to Shitao's own. It was Cheng who paid for the incorporation of Li Lin's earlier literary collection of 1691 into the more complete 1707 collection, and paid for the bulk of the new blocks as well. (Other members of the circle also contributed, Huang Jixian donating thirty taels, and Shitao giving Li an album of his paintings to sell.)¹⁰⁹ Li could provide something in return. He wrote, for example, several formal essays to celebrate the construction of new buildings in Cheng's residence, which are, of course, included in Li's collection. Beyond this, Cheng is a recurrent presence in Li's book as a participant in outings and as a

host for literary gatherings. This afforded Cheng, who wrote little himself, an indirect literary identity to which he must have been sensitive.¹¹⁰ Painting similarly contributed to establishing or confirming his cultural persona, as seen, for example, in a hanging-scroll depiction by Shitao of an outing to Yangzhou's northern suburbs in the company of Huang You and Cheng Daoguang. A prominent bridge there stands for the famous Red Bridge, evoking by its iconic presence one of the founding events of literati culture in Qing dynasty Yangzhou, the gathering of poets at Red Bridge in 1662 organized by a man with whom Huang You could later claim a friendship, Wang Shizhen.¹¹¹ That painting went to Huang You, but Shitao's five letters to Cheng reveal that he too was a faithful customer:

18 I completed the screen long ago and dare not hold on to it too long – I fear you must be thinking about it more and more each day. I am sending someone to deliver it. If you have any medicine, my servant will bring it back. When the weather improves I will come to thank you in person.

19 For the past few days the weather has been truly fine. In the days to come I would like you to come to my home for lunch, and I hope that your second brother will come, too. There will be no other guests. I haven't had a conversation with Su Yimen [Su Pi] for a long time. It would be wonderful if you could come soon.

20 Recently I have spent every day and every minute toiling with brush and ink. It is all my fault that little Youde did not turn out well and caused you trouble. He has already been back here for two days. Your gift of honey tangerines was truly wonderful. Who am I to have this pleasure? Yet since it is you who offer them, I do not dare refuse. For several days I have been thinking that Ruolao must certainly be discouraged. How can he leave once again to be a sojourner?

Many thanks. My body is constantly troublesome and depressing. I will never be well.

21 My appetite is still not back to normal, and the weather is bad. Yesterday's medicine was wonderful: please send some more today. Will a small painting do to take care of the matter you mentioned?

22 My regards to the old gentleman on this rainy day. Although I enjoy this sort of thing beyond measure, I have no capacity for it. Many thanks! Ruolao agrees to write the characters on the box. My painting spirit hasn't been good for several days, and the results are not satisfactory. With good weather I will try again.

Letters 19 and 20 show the artist keeping the boundaries between a commercial and a social relationship safely blurred, extending hospitality to his client, apparently lending him a servant, and sharing news of mutual friends.¹¹² Letters 18 and 21 provide evidence



97. Plum Blossom and Bamboo, dated 1705, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 68.3 x 50.1 cm. Shanghai Museum.

for commissions that belong to the context, respectively, of display (a screen) and perhaps gift giving ("a small painting to take care of the matter you mentioned"). Letter 22, however, reveals Shitao's concern for quality in work more likely to be intended for private enjoyment. The letter also shows Shitao collaborating with another calligrapher, no doubt in order to give further prestige to the contents of the box mentioned – perhaps one of his own paintings or calligraphies. Cheng, it appears, was a customer who inspired a certain respect in Shitao, and if this is the same Tuiweng to whom Bada Shanren dedicated the celebrated *Anwan* album in 1694, one could say the same of Cheng's relationship with the Nanchang painter.¹¹³ At the same time, Shitao's concern for quality is also inseparable from his fear that illness and aging were weakening him. Cheng was one of those

who supplied him with medicine, but this is less likely to mean that he was a physician than that he paid the artist partly in money and partly in the form of medicines, which could be extremely expensive.¹¹⁴ As pointed out by James Cahill, medicine and other gifts were a not-uncommon form of payment for paintings.¹¹⁵ It is probably a measure of the social ease existing between the two men that on the one surviving work dedicated to Cheng, a hanging scroll of plum blossom and bamboo from 1705, Shitao has inscribed a poem that, by its explicit reference to the sale of the painting, anticipates the painting inscriptions of Yangzhou artists of the mid-eighteenth century: "If it matches [what you want], don't match it with bamboo, / Just leave a coin on the table" (Figure 97).

Yiweng

The last group of letters to be discussed, a pair, are of special interest because one of them is addressed to "Your excellency the honorable Yiweng" (*Yiweng xian-sheng daren*), an appellation that suggests the recipient was a government official:

23 My grateful thanks for thinking compassionately of me. I can see your excellency as early as tomorrow or the next day. For a long time now a herd of lions has been terrorizing my heart. With the weather humid and hot day after day, it is indeed not easy to bear. Yesterday Su Yimen [Su Pi] asked after you. The inscription on the bamboo painting is finished.

24 May your journey go smoothly and lead to great success. When it is over, should you see the honorable Mr. Wenting [Bordu], could you tell him that it is only once in a while that I can get up straightaway, and that I am shaky on my feet. Once you have seen the paintings, if any last-minute corrections are necessary, they can be done. If I have the strength tomorrow morning, I will certainly come to send you off.

The letters are largely self-explanatory. One notes again the social references (Su Pi, Bordu) that keep their commercial dimension in tension with a claim to a shared sense of community. From the second, one infers that this was a Yangzhou-based official, bound for the capital on government business, and that he had commissioned paintings from Shitao for use as gifts.

THE DADI TANG ENTERPRISE: PRODUCTION STRATEGIES

How did Shitao deal with the twin pressures on his business of his own uncertain health and the pressing demands of clients? Ill health is a constant theme in the

letters. Writing to Zheweng, he speaks of being unable either to sit or to stand, and of being afraid of making a sudden movement. In one letter to Jiang Shidong he writes that his "old illness is getting worse all the time," while in another he describes rising from illness to execute a demanding screen commission at a client's home, only to fall ill again immediately after. To Tuiweng he writes: "My body is constantly troublesome and depressing. I will never be well." He informs Yiweng that "a herd of lions has been terrorizing my heart," and wants Bordu to know that "it is only once in a while that I can get up straightaway, and that I am shaky on my feet." There even exists one letter (24) to his doctor, a certain Yujun: "The illness is already eight or nine tenths receded. I am grateful for your divine powers. I would like to ask for another two doses, which should complete the process. There is no need for you to come in person." Though the letters are all undated, there also exist several dated inscriptions to paintings from which Shitao is known to have been chronically ill, seemingly through a disease of the stomach or kidneys (*yao*), in early 1697, the winter of 1697–8, spring 1698, early summer 1699, early 1701, autumn 1701, and the summer and autumn of 1707.¹¹⁶ The letters and inscriptions together tell a sad story, all the more so because obviously incomplete; Shitao may increasingly have had only short periods without illness. It is not hard to imagine that the disruptive effects of illness magnified the pressure of work in the periods when he was fit, further threatening his health; and yet he could not afford to turn away clients, with the ironic result – as he noted in certain inscriptions – that illness and bad weather came to offer precious respites from his commercial obligations.¹¹⁷

If clients could sometimes be made to wait (Cheng Daoguang seems to have been especially patient), many commissions had to be satisfied more or less immediately. As his letters show, customers often arrived in person at short notice, or with no notice at all. One can also speculate that clients who used his paintings as business gifts would sometimes have been in a hurry. Shitao's logical response was to keep on hand a reserve of paintings suitable for use as gifts, from which the unanticipated customer could choose. The existence of paintings for stock is nowhere explained, but we can infer its existence from the evidence of surviving works and their inscriptions. A few examples will confirm the practice. When Shitao's bannerman friend Zhang Jingjie passed through Yangzhou on his way from Suzhou, he visited Shitao at the Great Cleansing Hall, as Shitao puts it, "to see my albums." Having chosen one, Shitao then added a long dedication on the final leaf to personalize the work (Figure 98). An eight-leaf album illustrating Tang

poems curiously has careful, formal inscriptions on seven of the eight leaves (see Figures 84, 119), but only the single character "Ji" on the final leaf that would normally have carried the dedication. Since the use of the name "Ji" postdates the likely date of the album, it is almost certain that the album was originally painted without a specific client in mind. Behind these few examples that betray their calculated origins lies a much more extensive practice, to which I shall return in the next chapter's discussion of paintings as commodities. Less calculated, but additions to stock nonetheless, were the paintings that Shitao painted in moments of leisure for his own enjoyment. Shitao's inscription to the *Landscapes Painted during Leisure from Illness*, for example, makes it quite clear that the album was ultimately destined for the market, since "Only the wealthy can practice literature, calligraphy, and painting for pleasure alone."¹¹⁸

Shitao's second strategy was to develop a shorthand mode of painting that allowed him to turn out work at short notice. It would also have justified his participation in a market for less expensive paintings, where quantity compensated for lower prices. This putative market for "obligation paintings" (*yingchou hua*) is demanded by the very large number of cursory, often undedicated works by Zha Shibiao and Shitao. A vivid example of this second-tier production process can be seen in the survival of two rather similar hanging scrolls bearing the same inscription (Figures 99, 100). Only one has a specific dedication, and the subject matter economically evokes the pleasures of eating associated with a city like Yangzhou. Works such as these would only have taken a short time to paint, and given the *visibly* limited investment of labor, they are likely to have been less expensive. In the same way, albums that have a similar cursory character are often accompanied by a single line or couplet of poetry rather than a whole poem (see Figure 116). Out of this commercial compromise, however, came new artistic possibilities, not least a form of visuality that spoke to the hurry, aggression, and sensualism of big-city life – one that was to be further exploited by the next generation of Yangzhou artists.¹¹⁹ This was the shorthand mode that in Shitao's time was associated with the terms *xiaosa*, "bold and free," and *linli*, "drenched moistness," as well as, sometimes, the more general term of *xieyi*, "the sketching of ideas."¹²⁰ The *xiaosa* mode was particularly useful when, out of choice or necessity, Shitao painted in front of others. His common annotation that he was painting after getting drunk provided a further alibi for a performance that was not likely to be perfect (see Figure 202). *Xiaosa* painting was probably one of the first things he had learnt to do as a painter, since the calligraphic orchid and bamboo paint-



98. "Traveler Arriving at a River Town," *Landscapes*, album of 10 leaves, ink and color on paper, dimensions unknown, leaf 8. Shanghai Museum.

ing he studied as a teenager with Chen Yidao in Wuchang lent itself to this purpose. Later, following the lead of other monk-painters, he also learned to turn out exuberant, ink-laden Xu Wei-like compositions of plants, fruit, or vegetables, as well as heroic calligraphic landscapes of the kind that he improvised on several occasions during his stay in the North. During the Dadi Tang years Shitao drew on all of this long experience and more. When Tu Qingge visited Yangzhou in 1701 during his stint as a water-control official at nearby Shaobo, and Shitao went to see him at his lodgings at Tianning Monastery, it was a *xiaosa* album of orchid and bamboo that he painted for his Beijing student.¹²¹ Likewise, when a friend brought him a fan to be used as a gift and "asked me to paint a mountain in a few brushstrokes," it was an abbreviated version of his bravura

landscape improvisations that he produced, writing afterward in his inscription that "the person who gets it should hold on to it" (Figure 101).¹²²

A third strategy was the recycling of earlier images. It was common for Shitao, like other painters, to recycle poems in calligraphies, some of them virtual manuscript editions of his poetry, and in painting inscriptions. Images too could be reconstructed and reworked at a later date. The fact that Shitao, just prior to his move into the Dadi Tang, formally identified his handscroll for Cheng Jun as a manuscript (*gao*) of his calligraphies and paintings suggests that at least some of those paintings fall into this category.¹²³ This seems all the more likely given that in two of the poems accompanying his painting of locks on the Grand Canal he speaks of doing paintings at the time in 1692 (see Figure 72, section 2). Shitao's reuse of images during the Dadi Tang years can be solidly documented if not always fully explained. A case in point is the tightly constructed and powerfully painted landscape hanging scroll *Clearing Mist in Wild Ravines*, dedicated to Wang Zhongru, who died at the be-



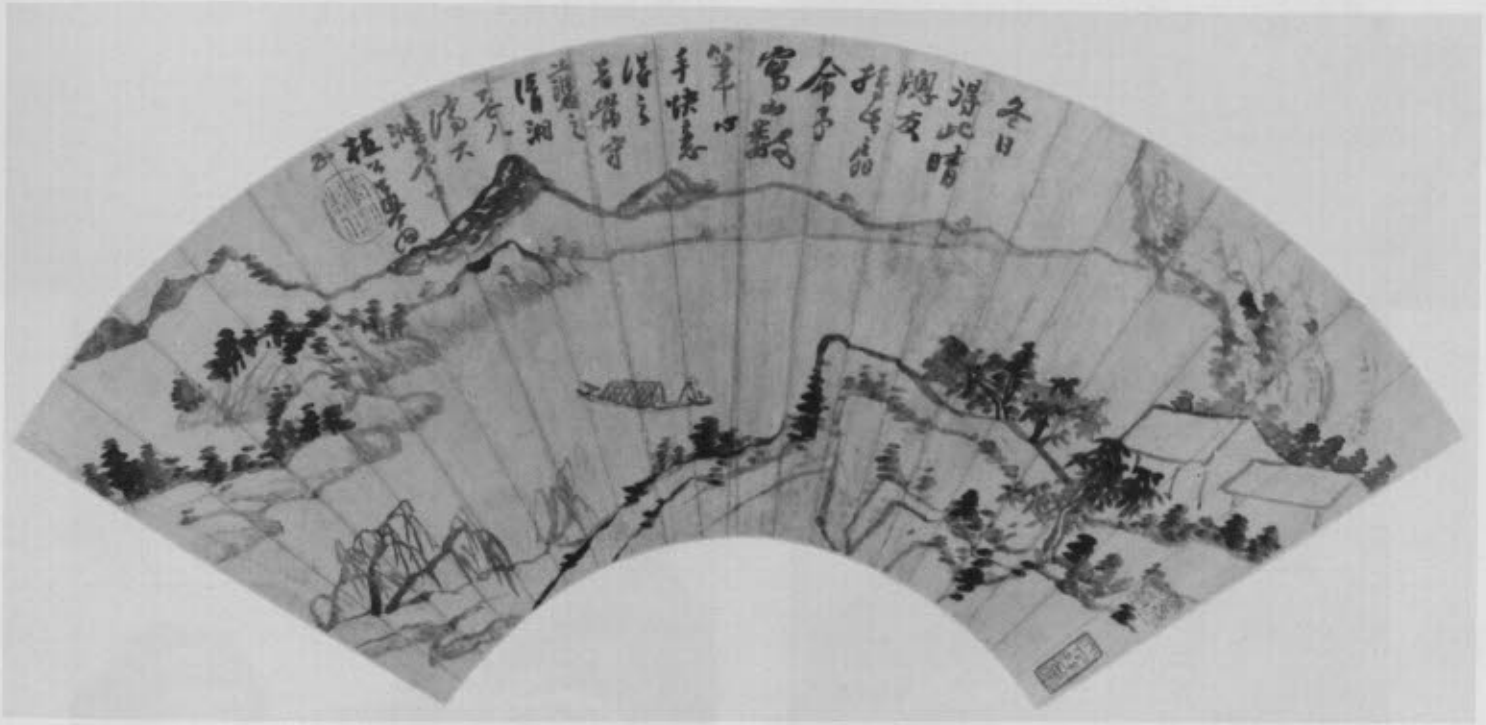
99. *Bamboo, Vegetables, and Fruit*, dated 1705, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 108.4 x 45.8 cm. The Art Museum, Princeton University. Museum purchase, gift of the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation.



100. *Loquats, Bamboo-root, and Melon*, dated 1705, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 85.6 x 41.4 cm. C. C. Wang Family Collection, New York.

ginning of 1698 (Figure 102); this has a sister painting, the much looser, harder, and undedicated *Visiting Dai Benxiao* dated in the fall of 1698, which recalls a Nanjing-period friendship (Figure 103). In the former, Shitao depicts himself painting while Wang Zhongru and another figure (his brother, Wang Xiru?) look on, which suggests that the painting itself was an on-the-spot improvisation; on the other hand, given the careful attention it has received, this may simply be a fictional conceit. The latter may be a recycling of the composition of *Clearing Mist*, or both paintings may use a previously worked-out composition, or both may have been painted at the same time; in any event there is a sufficient dis-

crepancy of quality to raise the possibility that *Visiting Dai Benxiao* was painted by an assistant.¹²⁴ Along the same lines, in 1699, an old acquaintance to whom he had promised an album twelve years previously, came to Yangzhou from Shexian. Taking the obligation seriously, Shitao painted a superb miniature album of landscapes for his visitor.¹²⁵ Both the album's tiny size and the format of the leaves, resembling miniature handscrolls, are extremely unusual, indeed unique within Shitao's oeuvre. It looks as if he took a sheet of paper and folded it to make nine smaller pieces. These presented a difficult compositional challenge, which he seems to have taken a delight in meeting. The degree of success



101. *Landscape*, folding fan, ink on paper, dimensions unknown. Shanghai Museum.

can immediately be appreciated by comparing its miraculously spacious leaves with the slacker but still charming versions existing for five of the same compositions in another Dadi Tang-period album of quite different proportions.¹²⁶ Devoid of inscriptions in the 1699 album, the second work uses these compositions to illustrate – or rather matches them with – couplets by the Tang poet Du Fu. Moreover, the composition of the miniatures' sixth leaf (Figure 104) also exists in an alternate version in an album painted in 1702 (Figure 105). There, it is inscribed with a classical couplet that Shitao cites in his treatise on painting as an example of the kind of poetry from which one can derive paintings.¹²⁷ Given the span of time separating these last two alternate versions, Shitao may not have depended solely on memory, perhaps drawing on a sketchbook of draft compositions.

This raises the further possibility that Shitao resorted to a fourth and very common production strategy: the use of “substitute brushes” (*daibi*), for whom draft compositions by the master would probably often have been necessary. Did he do so? Could some of the less impressive paintings surviving from this period (see, e.g., Figures 103, 118) be examples of work ghostpainted by substitute brushes in the Dadi Tang? The practice was so common at the time that it cannot be ruled out for a busy professional artist like Shitao, but we await the kind of meticulous study that would unqualifiedly estab-

lish its existence and extent. Even the artist's most explicit statements are inconclusive on this point, perhaps out of necessity; but they remain intriguing, as in this excerpt from a 1701 inscription: “Only the wealthy can practice literature, calligraphy, and painting for pleasure alone. In recent years the calligraphies and paintings I have sold have included fish eyes mixed with the pearls, to my own regret. It's not that I don't want [my works] to be hung in the studios of others, but just that I am not up to this profession.”¹²⁸

THE DADI TANG ENTERPRISE: STUDENTS AS PATRONS

Shitao's edgy mention of painting as an amateur pursuit of the wealthy indirectly points up another facet of his own professionalism. Because painting was highly respected as a cultural accomplishment, a significant contribution to the income of professional artists could sometimes come from teaching.¹²⁹ It is now known, from a recently published poem that lists his students as of 1701, that Shitao had previously taught painting not only in Beijing but earlier in Nanjing and Xuancheng as well.¹³⁰ His establishment of a business in Yangzhou seems to have stimulated him to take on more and more students, all from families of Shexian ancestry.

The teaching itself, and the range of his students, are discussed in Chapter 8. What matters here is that some of these men (he had no female students) doubled as important patrons, while others reinforced his links with



102. *Clearing Mist in Wild Ravines*, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 164.9 x 55.9 cm. Nanjing Museum.



103. *Visiting Dai Benxiao*, dated 1698, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 162 x 57 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



104. "Boat Hauling," *Miniature Landscapes*, dated 1699, album of 8 leaves of painting and one leaf of calligraphy, ink on paper, each leaf 6.8 x 33.8 cm, leaf 6. Private collection, Japan.

105. "When the Road Is Endless, the Brush Precedes [the Traveler]," *Landscapes Painted at Wanglù Tang*, dated 1702, album of 8 leaves, ink and ink and color on paper, each leaf 18.6 x 29.5 cm, leaf 4, ink and color on paper. Östasiatiska Museet, Stockholm.



wealthy families, no doubt favoring the acquisition of his work by the student's relatives. In the case of the family of Cheng Jun, for example, Shitao gave lessons in painting to all four of his sons. By Shitao's own account, the three elder siblings did not study very seriously, although the youngest, Cheng Ming, was extremely assiduous and managed to make a name for himself as a painter. In terms of patronage, however, their relative importance for Shitao is reversed: Whereas the only known work dedicated to Cheng Ming is a calligraphy fan,¹³¹ four paintings for his brother Cheng Zhe are known, including an affectionate portrait in a landscape (Figure 106; see also Figure 109). Cheng Zhe, it should be noted, was wealthy enough to be able to publish a forty-juan anthology of poetry edited by the great Wang Shizhen, and to publish a work of his own in twelve juan with a preface by Wang.¹³² The Wenxiong whom Shitao cites in letter 15 as having commissioned five *ping* from him may be another of the siblings, Cheng Qi (*zi* Yiwen), since the reference immediately follows a mention of the Cheng family.¹³³ The father, of course, continued to acquire paintings from Shitao after he moved into the Dadi Tang (see Figures 74, 112). A more straightforward example of the student as patron is Hong Zhengzhi. Hong, too, came from a prestigious Shexian family; and in later years, as he became active in the family business, he personally attained a commercial prominence comparable to Jiang Shidong in the previous generation. In addition to the huge album of orchids discussed in Chapter 5 (see Figures 77, 79), the works he is known to have acquired from Shitao include the portrait discussed in Chapter 2 (see Figure 27), a landscape hanging scroll, an album of plum-blossom paintings – there said to be Hong's speciality – and a plum-blossom fan (see Figure 130).¹³⁴ Shitao's teaching probably had a set price like his paintings, but it is also conceivable that the payment for lessons was effectively included in the price of paintings such as the last two, which he executed for his students as teaching tools.

During these late years, Shitao also remained in contact with several of his earlier students.¹³⁵ From a commercial point of view, the most important of these was Bordu in Beijing, who after Shitao's return to the South in 1692 continued to acquire paintings from him, the best-known being a *xiaosa* hanging scroll of *Plantain in the Rain*.¹³⁶ He was himself a painter of landscapes in a restrained, elegant manner, including one that is now mounted together with a 1706 colophon by Shitao.¹³⁷ Bordu, like other aristocratic Manchu amateur painters such as Yueduan, collected both contemporary and antique paintings.¹³⁸ Combining the two interests, he commissioned from Shitao several copies of decorative paintings and tapestries in his collection. Bordu's first

commission of this type after Shitao established the Dadi Tang business occupied Shitao from the spring to the autumn of 1697; that is, during what were probably the first six months he spent in his new home. The painting was an enormous handscroll on silk, a copy of Qiu Ying's (c. 1494–c. 1552) copy of *One Hundred Beauties*, attributed to the Tang artist Zhou Fang.¹³⁹ In his colophon, Bordu explains the circumstances of the commission:

When I followed the Emperor on his Southern Tour [in 1689] I happened to obtain Qiu Shifu's [Qiu Ying's] *Competing Splendors of the Hundred Beauties*, an object originally from the Inner Palace. At the time I obtained the painting I was afraid that it might [later] be appropriated by some dignitary of the court, so I asked the gentleman Qingxiang [Shitao] to make a copy. I sent him a bolt of old silk from the palace reserves, and three years later he finally completed the tracing copy. After I received it I requested various gentlemen in service at court to inscribe their appreciations, and there was no one who did not praise it highly.

Shitao himself had something to say about the difficulty of the task in the inscription he wrote when he finished:

During the Tang dynasty plumpness and rich attire were admired in court women, so Zhou Fang simply depicted what he was used to seeing. [Qiu] Shifu was able to completely capture their life and feeling, and paint them as if they were real, without letting his artifice show. Such meticulous copying is not easy to master either. I started the tracing at the beginning of spring 1697, but it has taken until autumn to complete the work. Happily I achieved a ten-thousandth of a likeness.

According to Bordu the project took three years, by which he probably means that it spanned three calendar years, from the time he sent the materials and Qiu Ying's original painting to Shitao to the time he received the completed work. Since Shitao finished the copy toward the end of 1697 and there was possibly mounting still to add, Bordu may well not have taken delivery of it in Beijing until into the next year. Taking 1698, then, as the latest date of delivery, Bordu would have initiated the commission no later than 1696.

To judge by recorded inscriptions, Bordu initiated a number of other copying commissions following the *One Hundred Beauties* project. Shitao's inscription to one recorded painting ends with this explanation: "The Master of Baiyan Tang [Bordu] has in his collection a picture of *Minghuang Setting Off on an Outing*, a work of the divine class by a notable painter of the Southern Song dynasty. I have boldly copied it [*lin*] in the Gengxin Caotang."¹⁴⁰ The mention of the studio Gengxin Caotang points to a date c. 1703 or later. On another



106. *Sitting on a Bridge*, folding fan, ink and color on paper, dimensions unavailable. Palace Museum, Beijing. Source: *Gugong bowuyuan cang Ming Qing shanmian shuhua ji*, vol. 3, pl. 81.

occasion Bordu sent Shitao one of a set of four long handscrolls to copy, not paintings in this case but Song dynasty woven-silk pictures that he had acquired on the Beijing art market. In the recorded, undated inscription to the first of the scrolls, depicting mythological birds, Shitao states that the work on this single painting had taken him three months. We can get some idea of the scale of the work from a later owner's testimony that, at the time he acquired it, it had already been divided into two smaller scrolls.¹⁴¹ The commission probably came very late in his life, since Shitao's inscription to a second copy of a scroll from the set, depicting the island of Penglai, is dated to the spring of 1707. Not surprisingly, given his failing physical powers and the raw aesthetic he had come to prefer, he seems to have been able to produce only a rather free copy.¹⁴²

Did Shitao, like Bada Shanren in Nanchang and Zha Shibiao in Yangzhou, regularly sell his work through agents? Were paintings of his to be found for sale in mounting shops or bookshops? Did his assistants or students act as "substitute brushes," as some undistin-

guished paintings might suggest? These are some of the questions to which I cannot easily respond at this point, though I suspect that the answer to each is "yes." What one can say is that Shitao's very survival as an entrepreneur at the relatively high economic level he chose has to be counted a success. Shitao never became wealthy, at least by the standard of a Zha Shibiao,¹⁴³ but he more than staved off poverty, maintaining a sizable household at a time when friends of his – Li Lin, for example – were in close to desperate circumstances, at times dependent on charity. In order to survive, however, he was condemned to constant hard work. "Like a workhorse, like an ox, I just turn out paintings." With clients, he had to be permanently available, ready to make last-minute corrections, travel to a client's home, or paint a work on the spot. Commissions had to be fulfilled promptly, and if pressure of work, or illness, held up the process, he was careful to acknowledge and explain the delay. It was also necessary to cultivate his clients socially, put pressure on established clients to keep placing orders and, as in the case of his dealings with Jiang Shidong, resist pressure to cut his prices. Still, it was not enough simply to be prepared to produce paintings in quantity. As will become clear in the course of Chapter 7's discussion of his output, Shitao maximized his market by diversifying his production, creating further opportunities by tapping the market of his competitors and taking over the market of painters who died, until he could satisfy almost any kind of commission.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Paintings as Commodities



Although estimates will vary, by almost any count a very large number of works from the Dadi Tang business has survived. Because a sizable proportion of these are albums comprising anywhere from four to eighteen images, the oeuvre of surviving individual paintings and calligraphies from the last eleven years of Shitao's life (easily the most productive part of his career) runs into many hundreds.¹ To the surviving works can be added many more that he is known, through reliable records in catalogs and other texts, to have painted but that are not currently known to have survived; and still, no doubt, this leaves us far short of the artist's actual output. For the purposes of this chapter's brief discussion, which analyzes artworks restrictively as commodities, I exclude calligraphic artworks in order to focus on Shitao's pictorial production, and draw quite largely on the more tangible evidence of the surviving pictorial oeuvre. In commodity terms the pictorial oeuvre offers a narrow but illuminating record of the socioeconomic relationship between Shitao and his public. The evidence assembled in Chapter 6 offered fragmentary insights into the complementary practices of the art buyer and the art maker. Shitao's oeuvre, on the other hand, is the most tangible meeting point between his public's needs and desires and his own needs and capacities; it also has the further advantage, due to the large number of works available, of revealing a more systematic picture. As one might well expect, it partly

exemplifies and partly modifies the broader trends of the Yangzhou market for painting.

THE YANGZHOU MARKET FOR PAINTING

Despite a few pioneering studies and the publication in recent years of an increasing number of paintings, the full range of Yangzhou painting in the second half of the seventeenth century has remained relatively obscure in comparison to its eighteenth-century counterpart.² One aspect of the phenomenon – the demand in the city for work in literati modes by literati professionals – was summarized in Chapter 6's preliminary list of twenty-seven such artists who worked in the city at one time or another. These artists supplied their Yangzhou patrons both with the standard literati genres and, in their role as remnant subjects, with the themes of the interdynastic wilderness. Here, I fill out the picture with information on other kinds of painting that were popular in the city and were produced not only by workshop-trained painters but also, often, by literati professionals like Shitao.

One step away from traditional literati modes, there was a large market for paintings in genres that had a humanistic character but also demanded artisanal skill. In the early decades of the Qing, figure-in-landscape compositions depicting cultural figures of the past were

popular; and though some of these were didactic Confucian narrative paintings with a clear moral purpose, others were more humorously conceived. A local artist, Xiao Chen, was the acknowledged master of this genre, but a painter from Huizhou, Wang Jiazhen, joined in satisfying the demand.³ Portraiture constituted a separate and thriving market. Reading Yangzhou literary collections of the late seventeenth century, one gets the impression that any educated person of means was likely to have more than one portrait, less to record the sitter's appearance than to bring out different aspects of his life and personality by means of the rhetorical setting.⁴ In the 1660s and 1670s, prior to his court appointment in 1681, the local painter Yu Zhiding was a leading portraitist in Yangzhou,⁵ as was Dai Cang,⁶ a Hangzhou follower of another of the great seventeenth-century portraitists, Xie Bin (1602–?). As noted earlier, Shitao himself collaborated with a Zhenjiang portrait specialist, Jiang Heng (see Figures 27, 28; see also Plate 14). A third intermediate genre was topographic painting, much in demand among clients who wished to be reminded of their ancestral homes far from Yangzhou.⁷ Xiao Chen and Gu Fuzhen, based in Xinghua, were two of those who produced topographic works. Although Gu's roots clearly lay in literati genres – one source describes him as a “painter recluse” – the demands of a Yangzhou-area business led him to cast his net more widely than most literati professionals from his own area.⁸ In a broader perspective, however, his diversification was not at all untypical of the period: Literati entrepreneurs were so well-integrated into the early Qing art market that they now competed for commissions such as screens and portraits, which had previously been the territory of the workshop-trained painter.

Shitao, by establishing the Dadi Tang business as a full-time commercial concern, chose to accept this competition as the defining fact of his economic life, stepping beyond the relatively genteel world of wilderness painting, and even the “intermediate” genres just discussed, to engage in the wider Yangzhou market for painting. There was a huge demand in the city for what might be called paintings with entertainment value: either figure paintings, landscape paintings with a decorative appearance or anecdotal narrative content, or lively flower-and-bird compositions. This strain of Yangzhou taste – still alive and flourishing in the mid-eighteenth century – can be traced back to the end of the Ming at least, when the Nanjing career painter Zhang Chong established his workshop in Yangzhou. Zhang, who has for the most part escaped the attention of modern art historians, was superbly inventive in all the genres listed above; and if his brushwork lacks “scholarly spirit,” his interpretations of popular themes are almost always

visually ingenious and entertaining.⁹ His followers included Zhang Gong¹⁰ and, to judge by the evidence of style, Xiao Chen, who emerged in the 1660s as a specialist of figure paintings and anecdotal landscapes; in the latter genre, Xiao, like Zhang Chong, tended to subordinate the landscape setting to the figures. Landscape was increasingly popular in its own right as a decorative subject, however, partly under the influence of merchant patronage, as argued in Chapter 8. Lan Ying (1584–after 1664) came to Yangzhou from Hangzhou in the early 1640s, sojourning briefly in the city before the fall of the Ming dynasty; he later visited the city again under the Qing.¹¹ Li Yin from the 1670s onward took landscape to new prominence (see Figure 128), soon joined by his followers Yuan Jiang (1680s onward; see Figures 8, 20), Yuan Yao (1690s onward), Yan Yue (1690s onward), and Yan Yi (1690s onward). This last group of artists represents a Kangxi-period Yangzhou school of painting specializing in large-scale decorative paintings on silk depicting legendary, historical, and genre themes in complex landscape settings.¹² Alongside their larger works, the Yuan and Yan workshops also produced small works on silk and paper, including flower-and-bird paintings in the tradition of Zhang Chong.¹³ Yangzhou had other artists who approached painting even more entirely as a luxury craft than did the Yuan workshop, privileging meticulous manufacture over brush display. Of these, the best-known was the Yangzhou painter Yu Yuan, known for his conservatively crafted pictures of birds, flowers, and animals;¹⁴ nor should one forget courtesan-painters such as Guxiu, who made insect paintings.¹⁵ It would certainly be a mistake to associate this entertainment-oriented tradition of Yangzhou painting with only the less sophisticated (but monied) section of Yangzhou's elite. Like related forms of urban entertainment, such as novels and the theater, this attracted interest from even the most highly educated people.¹⁶ Shitao rose to this challenge too, and within a few years of 1697 was boasting, “I paint landscape, trees and rocks, flowers and plants, religious icons, sea animals and fish; it is only figure painting that I do not often dare to attempt.”¹⁷

In analyzing Shitao's production, it may be useful to think of him as operating between two poles of artistic practice. As a wilderness painter, a remnant subject in the narrow sense, and an “original” or *qishi*, Shitao always to one degree or another placed on offer a painting of self in the literati tradition of humanistic communication. While there are works for which this in itself is a sufficient description, there are also many others that combine this literati dimension with, or even subordinate it to, quite different elements (of format, materials, genre, or style) that derive from his move into the



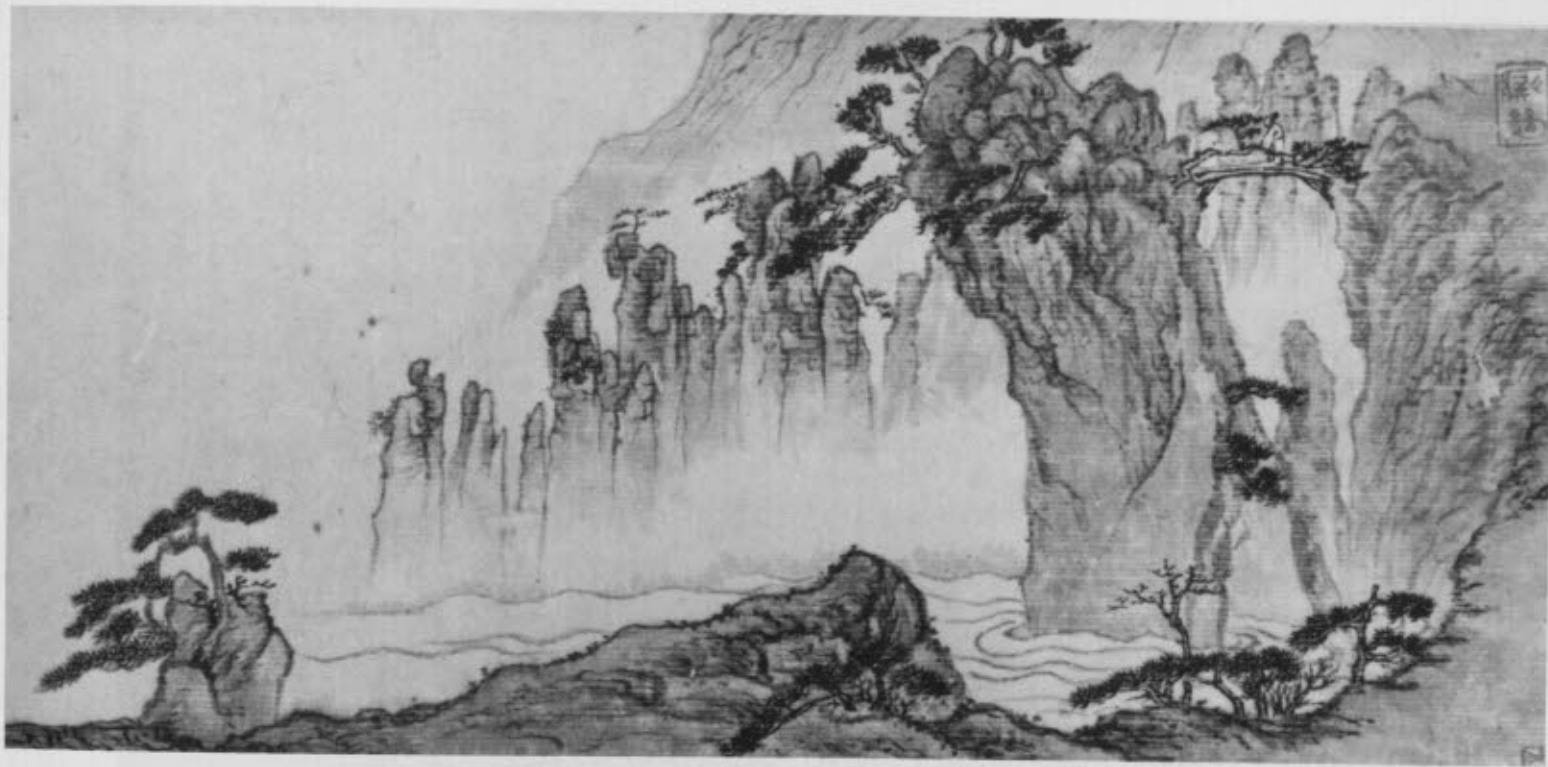
territory of the workshop-trained career painter. The conventions of the distinction between the two kinds of element are not always obvious to the modern viewer, even the specialist, in part because in the seventeenth century barriers were beginning to crumble. Nonetheless, as his remarks on screen paintings in his letter to Jiang Shidong make clear, the conventions existed and were meaningful to Shitao himself, and part of my purpose in this chapter is to expose their institutionalization in the genres and subgenres of Shitao's production. At the same time, though, one must also confront another question: What was the economic basis of the distinction? That is, what, beyond the specific object, was being offered for sale at each end of the spectrum – "pure" literati genres at one pole and traditional workshop-trained painter genres (in Shitao's highly personalized versions) at the other?

THE PAINTING OF SELF

Shitao's rich painting of self is by now familiar territory. In the literati context, a painter created his own range of, sometimes, idiosyncratic genres, from which he generated what then became his effective "catalog" and "inventory." The commercial topography of Shitao's wilderness production, therefore, follows from the topography of his thematic exploration, or shaping, of self. But how can one define its economic value? One type of explanation would look to functional context,

particularly as revealed in subject matter: Some paintings belonged to the rituals of social intercourse (gift giving), others commemorated events of personal significance (friendship, hospitality), and yet others shaped the recipient's domestic environment (hanging scrolls) or physical self-presentation (fans); but since the (overlapping) functional contexts of this kind were by no means unique to painting by literati, this explanation does not account for the specific desirability of work of literati character. A second level of explanation would locate the economic value of literati painting in its visible display of literati cultural accomplishments, and the painting's ability, most concretely through a dedication, to confirm the recipient's sense of belonging to that cultural world. This type of explanation is particularly germane when the recipient had reason to think that he or she might be suspected of not belonging, and so it has often been applied to the merchant market for literati painting; but one could argue that it was always a factor, even where there was no special anxiety. In economic terms, however, it still leaves untouched the personal investment of the painter, implying that the component of self-cultivation was not part of the economic equation – that it, in effect, allowed the painting to transcend its economic context.

While Dong Qichang would readily have agreed with this, in practice the painter's investment of self – his *pin*, or "moral quality" – was on the contrary the single most important determinant of economic value in literati painting. The collector Zhou Lianggong (1612–72)



107. *Journey to Mount Huang*, dated 1700, handscroll, ink and color on paper, 130 x 56 cm. Zhile Lou Collection, Hong Kong.

cites an old saying: "Poems and paintings are valued for their moral quality [*pin*]." ¹⁸ Another leading collector, Song Luo, once wrote to explain his admiration for Zha Shibiao's art: "I do not particularly esteem his painting; rather it is his moral quality [*pin*] that I value." ¹⁹ Such remarks become understandable only at a third level of explanation: The literati self was a fund of moral capital, accumulated through action, suffering, or self-discipline, that, given aesthetic form in painting, paid an economic dividend. There was, in other words, a market for moral achievement, and the attraction of painting was that, by virtue of the aesthetics of the brush trace, it could give tangible, visual, and marketable form to the moral person. For this reason, literati painting was hedged around by a vast biographical framing mechanism in the form of colophons and artists' biographies, in which the moral character of an artist was a central concern. At the most fundamental level, the economics of literati painting was therefore not contextual but inscribed in its very aesthetic character as self-representation. From this point of view, the economic viability of wilderness, loyalist, and *qishi* painting after the fall of the Ming is not surprising, any more than that of painting by scholar-officials. In the case of Shitao and other related painters, the moral quality was indissociable from the artist's "strangeness" or "originality," his *qi*, and was acknowledged in the important critical category of *yi*. Defining *yi* as "untrammelled, or spontaneous and individualistic expression," Wai-kam Ho and Dawn Delbanco have noted that by the late Ming, "*yi*

[the untrammelled] and *qi* [strangeness] were parallel concepts." ²⁰

Shitao's "wilderness" inventory falls into three broad categories. First, to a degree unmatched by any other painter in later Chinese history, Shitao put the narrative of his life on display. If Bada Shanren relentlessly exposed his inner life as he lived it, Shitao treated his past virtually as a parallel reality, on which he drew endlessly. Other wilderness painters might return again and again to a few highpoints of their earlier experience, as Mei Qing did with his two trips to Mount Huang, or Dai Benxiao with his ascent of Mount Hua; Shitao's mining of his past was absolutely unpredictable. Aside from the elision of his Beijing ambitions, there is no discernible pattern to Shitao's memory paintings, which seem always to respond to the thoughts of a given moment. An entire album may be devoted to a single period of his life, or range over different places and times from the past, or mix past and present. Certain specific experiences are recurrent subjects, such as crossing Lake Dongting (see Figures 81, 82), or his ascents of Mount Huang (Figure 107; see Plate 15, Figure 16), or his three visits to the Marbled Cliff on the Yangzi (see Figure 210), or certain trips to sites in the environs of Nanjing, such as East Mountain (see Figures 209, 219). However, he was just as likely to recollect, suddenly, some long-

forgotten experience such as looking down on Lake Poyang from Mount Lu,²¹ or come across an old poem that spoke of a moment such as visiting Dai Benxiao in Nanjing and took his fancy again (see Figure 103). The consistent underlying theme, in these many paintings, is the displaced, wandering self – a theme that inspired respect and sympathy at a time when the Great Chaos of the dynastic changeover was still within living memory. It was all the more potent, of course, in the case of a wandering orphan prince. By his Dadi Tang years Shitao could be sure – it was part of his self-marketing – that the immediate recipient of such a painting would have at least a vague sense of the larger narrative in which the fragments of any given work had their most meaningful context. That narrative, extraordinary in its richness of experience, recorded in the poems of a lifetime and intermittently present to memory, was Shitao's most precious capital.

With the exception of certain pilgrimage sites such as Mount Lu and Mount Tiantai, the landscapes through which Shitao explored his life had moral potential (on this, see the final chapter of his treatise on painting) without having a defined moral character: It was his personal experience that gave these landscape images their specific moral charge. Alongside landscape, however, he also had at his disposal – this was the second aspect of his “wilderness” production – a vast established iconography of moral achievement in the form of imagery of plants, flowers, fruit, and vegetables. Shitao's claims on this iconography came from several different areas of his experience. His engagement with a given theme was sometimes relatively stable, as in his lifelong involvement with bamboo painting (Figure 108; see also, e.g., Figures 59, 60, 75, 97), summed up in a seal quoting the patriarch of bamboo painters, Wen Tong (see Figure 75): “How can I be a single day without this gentleman?” We can take this engagement as an affirmation of his commitment to the scholarly moral values of integrity. Other themes, however, such as the orchid, are less easily pinned down (see Figures 77–79, 96, 202). Shitao's orchid painting went back to his first studies of painting as a teenager in Wuchang, under the supervision of a former official whose own claim to the iconography of virtue was assured by his *jinshi* status. Orchids, however, were also part of Shitao's birthright as a painter from southwest China. As Hong Jiazhi wrote in a colophon to Shitao's album for his nephew, *Orchids for Hong Zhengzhi*: “Qingxiang Daoren was born in the region of the Xiao and the Xiang rivers, so everything he saw was the same as *The Songs of Chu*.” Moreover, as we have seen in connection with that same album, Shitao had other claims he could make in his late years. His return to loyalism allowed him to lay claim



108. Plum Blossom, Bamboo, and Rocks, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 172.5 x 88.3 cm. Shanghai Museum.

to the moral authority of orchid iconography as *yimin* symbolism in the tradition of the Song loyalist painter Zheng Sixiao (1241–1318). And, like other prince-painters of the day such as Bada Shanren, Guofeng, and Lanjiang (literally, “Orchid River”), Shitao was exploiting the orchid as a symbol of his high-born origins.

His claims on other, related themes, if not quite so multilayered, were also subject to change. Because vegetables and fruit, for example, were fundamental to the monk's diet, Shitao like other Buddhist monk-painters had used them to symbolize his asceticism and spiritual



109. *Love of Lotuses*, horizontal hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 46 x 77.8 cm. Guangdong Provincial Museum. Source: *Shitao shuhua quanji*, vol. 2, pl. 372.

commitment; yet, as we shall see in Chapter 9, after 1697 Shitao used the same iconography, with the addition of color, to symbolize his Daoist commitment and his liberation from asceticism (see Figures 178, 179). In the painting of plum blossom, Shitao began with the general claim of the man of the wilderness who encountered these wild flowers in the course of his wanderings, or even sought them out; but following his move to Nanjing he also adopted the common association of these flowers with the Xiaoling mausoleum of the Ming founder and more generally with the lost dynasty, as seen in the practice of planting Ming loyalists' graves with flowering plums (see Figure 56). Later, as his political stance changed in the 1690s, he increasingly identified with this symbolism (see Figures 68, 213, 220), presenting the flowering plum self-referentially as "a leftover thing from a previous dynasty, its trunk like iron."²² Even Shitao's paintings of the cultivated flowers of urban and suburban gardens could incorporate a moral claim in their acknowledgment of human weakness faced with the overwhelming feelings of desire (see Figure 194). In the open moral tradition that descended from Su Shi in persistent opposition to current orthodoxies, the recognition of feelings was the affirmation

of one's humanity. If the lotus pond was an obvious subject for this interpretation (see Figures 12, 197), it was also open to quite different readings. On one occasion a restrained metaphor of Confucian purity illustrating Zhou Dunyi's (1017–73) "Love of Lotuses" (Figure 109), on another it becomes an ethereal symbol of Buddhist faith and image of transcendence (see Figure 172).

For any literati painter, the expressive character of his painting – the painting as trace of the act of his being – was the manifestation of his moral quality. This opened the door to the improvised performances that represent the third main aspect of Shitao's wilderness inventory. These improvisations were not, for the literati, primarily displays of skill (though they were often that as well); rather, they were revelations of character that carried authority by their spontaneous, theoretically unpremeditated character. Improvisations (*caogao*) of several different kinds have already been noted: demonstration works for teaching; the improvised paintings that he sometimes executed in moments of relaxation; shorthand, *xiaosa* paintings in response to commercial pressure; and extemporaneous performances in front of others. Also part of this performance aesthetic are works of a kind that was new to his practice in the late 1690s: paintings from a "drunken brush" (*zuihou bi*) (see Figures 202, 203). The performance dimension is sometimes reinforced by deliberately provocative inscriptions or seals such as "What is this? Nothing but clumsiness!" or "Daubs to the east, smears to the west." The vision



110. Zha Shibiao (1615–98), *Landscape in the Style of Ni Zan*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 204.4 x 75.4 cm. Yale University Art Gallery. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Cheney Cowles (1992.3.1).

of the untrammelled Daoist painter performing magical feats of pictorial alchemy under the influence of wine or inexplicable divine inspiration had once been central to the public image of Zhe School painting, but Shitao made it his own, using it to cater to the long-standing Yangzhou interest in paintings as entertainment. This takes us back to the questions of theatricality and the staging of literati life discussed earlier in relation to *Drunk in Autumn Woods*, an extremely ambitious and considered painting that rhetorically invokes the drunken-brush mode without actually being an example of it (see Plate 5, Figure 29).

The fact that the Dadi Tang business was preceded by half a century of commercialization of wilderness painting in Yangzhou created further opportunities for the painting of self that followed an intertextual (or better, intervisual) logic. Shitao's works in the manner of Bada Shanren were introduced in Chapter 5 (see Figures 74, 76). With Huizhou merchants dominant in Yangzhou, one might have expected to see more works by Shitao in the austere style of Hongren along the lines of his 1696 depiction of Cheng Jun's Pine Wind Hall (see Figure 72, section 4); or attempts to evoke the deliberately awkward aesthetic of Cheng Sui, as in a 1702 *Landscapes* album notable not only for the reminiscences of Cheng's approach to composition and brushwork in the paintings but also for the calligraphy of the final two leaves, in which Shitao experiments with an aesthetic inspired by stone inscriptions – Cheng Sui's forte.²³ In the event, Shitao's production was far more affected by the art of another Huizhou artist, Zha Shibiao, who was Yangzhou's most popular wilderness painter at the moment when Shitao established his business (Figure 110). A contemporary writer notes that "In painting he excels in using sparse and saturated brushwork to express the manner of Ni [Zan] and Huang [Gongwang]. People from everywhere buy this to embellish their screens, above all in Yangzhou mansions."²⁴ While Zha was still alive, Shitao responded to his popularity as "the only man after Huating [Dong Qichang]" in works such as the 1697 *Landscape after Ni Zan* (Figure 111). However, the older painter's death the next year left open a market that Shitao went on to plunder. From the 1701 *Autumn Landscape* for Cheng Jun (a former Zha Shibiao patron), with its allusions to Dong Qichang via Zha's more stable mode of composition (Figure 112), to an even wetter landscape of the same year after Mi Fu²⁵ – in these and many other works, several of them in a "Ni-Huang" mode, Shitao appropriated for himself the stable market for classicizing Southern School landscape paintings in the city. The softly sculptural hanging scroll *Walking toward a Mountain Retreat* of 1703, while owing its slight austerity to Huizhou taste (it was painted

for Wu Chengxia), otherwise demonstrates Shitao's ability to find his own, unique voice within the world of classicism (see Plate 11). Building an overall compositional harmony from forms that locally are slightly unstable, to similarly dynamic effect he allows the materiality of the brush traces to vie for attention with the illusion of a spacious landscape that they create.

DECORATIVE PAINTING

The two staples of the professional painter's business were paintings with a decorative value and works that commemorated an occasion; often, the two overlapped. The painting of self had no necessary place here, but neither was it excluded. Where better to begin an overview of Shitao's decorative painting than with the multipanel folding screens and multiscroll sets that he complains about in his letter to Jiang Shidong? Other letters men-

111. *Landscape after Ni Zan*, dated 1697, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 47 x 32.2 cm. The Art Museum, Princeton University. Carl Otto von Kienbusch, Jr., Memorial Collection.



112. *Autumn Landscape*, dated 1701, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 277.5 x 94.6 cm. Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts, Charlotte E.W. Buffington Fund (1960.9).

tion a set of four hanging scrolls using the styles of four different Song and Yuan calligraphers, and a birthday screen written in clerical script that took four days to complete, suggesting that this must have been a folding screen. Shitao's one surviving multiscroll painting from his later career, the *Garden Vista* of 1693–4, is a monochrome ink work on paper that draws upon the iconography of virtue: bamboo, rocks, orchids, banana, and so on (see Figure 95). A recently published fragment from another continuous-view composition suggests that this continued to be a staple of his production, as one would expect, given the large number of undedicated large-scale (*zhongtang*, literally “central hall”) hanging scrolls with this subject matter from the Dadi Tang years.²⁶

Shitao also indicated to Jiang Shidong his aversion to silk as a painting surface, which again was associated with decoration. Almost all of the relatively few surviving works on silk by Shitao are large *zhongtang* landscapes, and it is notable that in style and subject as well, these works make concessions to the market. The stylistic expectations for decorative landscapes on silk in Yangzhou had largely been set by Li Yin, Yuan Jiang, and their followers, exponents of the Song-derived Northern School tradition. Shitao, in choosing for his own work on silk a Northern School approach, or alternatively an ostentatiously Southern School style, or yet again a self-conscious mixture of the two, was always responding in one way or another, whether positively or negatively, to established Yangzhou taste. Another aspect of this response is his practice of illustrating Li Bai's famous songs describing his travels to mountains, such as Mount Emei (see Figure 175), Mount Tiantai (see Figure 183) and Mount Lu (see Plate 12, Figure 129). Li Bai's songs were among the best-known and most popular poems of the Chinese canon, just as the three mountains were an integral part of the cultural idea of China as a nation, even if relatively few people in Yangzhou would have visited any of them. They were, to put it bluntly, sure sellers, and it is perhaps significant, therefore, that none of the three paintings is dedicated to a specific recipient.²⁷

In a Yangzhou context, these probably also constituted a sophisticated alternative to the very popular representations of the landscape of interregional trade, on which the city's prosperity depended (see Figures 20, 128). Li Yin and Yuan Jiang, but also the more conservative Gu Fuzhen, catered to this market in a straightforward way, supplying “planked road” (*jiandao*) pictures (e.g., *The Journey to Shu* theme) and depictions of the dangers of river transportation (e.g., the Yangzi gorges). Both themes had seen an upsurge in their popularity from the mid-sixteenth century onward. The established Yangzhou complement to “planked road” pic-

tures, evocative on the contrary of sedentary gentry life, was depictions of idyllic farming communities (see Figure 126), sometimes identified with the legendary land of peace reached through the Peach Blossom Spring. All the leading Yangzhou painters treated this theme, Shitao notably in his handscroll illustrating Fei Xihuang's poems (see Figure 32).²⁸ From an early catalog record, we also know that Shitao painted a continuous-view version on four large pieces of silk early in 1698 for a member of the prominent Qiao family of Baoying. Perhaps for the very reason of the client's respectability, Shitao's inscription to this lost work is a complex and subtle attempt to preserve his social standing in the face of a standard workshop-trained painter's commission. He begins by citing Dong Qichang's espousal of calligraphy-based craft as the way to avoid “the hell of the painting master,” and then evokes Su Shi's inimitable calligraphy as a precedent for his own idiosyncratic aesthetic. He goes on to present his painting as a response to five or six very large paintings by earlier masters that he had seen in Qiao's collection. He does not forget to mention that Qiao's request had been accompanied by a poem, and concludes with a paean to painting as a practice of self-cultivation. Shitao's status anxiety, a year after moving into the Great Cleansing Hall, is palpable.²⁹

In expanding the range of his decorative flower painting, Shitao here too often presented his images as illustrations of poems by well-known poets. Two undedicated hanging scrolls, the very large *Peonies, Bamboo, and Rock* from 1700 (Figure 113) and a later painting of hibiscus, illustrate poems by the Southern Song poet Yang Wanli.³⁰ One customer, the Yizheng-based Luo Qingshan (b. 1642) had specific requirements, commissioning Shitao to transcribe and illustrate some of the poems solicited at the beginning of the Chongzhen period by an uncle of Cheng Sui, the prominent Ming official Zheng Yuanxun (1598–1645), to celebrate the yellow peonies in his Garden of Shadows and Reflections (*Ying Yuan*) in Yangzhou (Figure 114). An album, once in the Nagano Collection but apparently destroyed during World War II, depicted flowers of different kinds to go with a set of semierotic poems written by the Ming artist Shen Zhou at the end of his life on the theme of “fallen flowers”; several poems exploit the metaphoric equivalence between flowers and courtesans.³¹ Several surviving hanging scrolls of lotus ponds illustrate well-known poems by Xu Wei on the theme (again erotic) of “lotus-picking” (Figure 115). Famous poems were not essential, however. Lotuses in a vase provided the sensual subject for a wedding gift, probably commissioned by the Cantonese official Liang Peilan (it illustrates his poem) to give to the husband (see Plate 22). Lotuses similarly splash across a fan commissioned, once more, as

a gift (see Figure 193), and in the artist's albums of flowers, rich visual effect, whether of ink or of color, fuses decoration and desire (see Plates 16–17).

Although I have introduced Shitao's illustrations of Shen Zhou's poems as part of his production of flower paintings, they also belong to a distinct group of albums illustrating classical poems and having the character of *objets de vertu* – that is, luxury versions of something that would otherwise have been available in a simpler, less prestigious form. These albums might be described as artists' editions, unique individualized counterparts to such late-Ming illustrated books as the *Illustrations to Tang Poems* (*Tang shi huapu*, early seventeenth century). It was during the late Ming, in fact, that Suzhou-based artists in particular, such as Sheng Maoye (active c. 1594–1640) and Shen Hao (1586–1661 or later),

113. *Peonies, Bamboo, and Rock*, dated 1700, hanging scroll, ink and light color on paper, 209.5 x 107.4 cm. Shanghai Museum.



114. *Yellow Peonies*, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper. Formerly Shanghai Museum. Source: Zheng Wei, *Shitao*, fig. 50.

popularized this album genre. In this regard, it is worth noting that in several cases Shitao's transcriptions of the texts have a standardized, almost booklike quality.³² His contributions to the genre include not only three albums illustrating Du Fu's poems (Figure 116) but others illustrating the poems of Tao Qian (Tao Yuanming; Figure 117), Su Shi (see Figures 207–208), and Zhu Yunming (Figure 118) as well as an *Illustrations to Tang Poems* (Figure 119, and see Figure 84) and two albums of *Illustrations to Song and Yuan Poems* (see Figure 14).³³ Shitao may sometimes have been illustrating the cus-



115 (left). *Lotuses*, hanging scroll, ink and light color on paper, 119.2 x 35 cm. Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Vancouver, Mr. and Mrs. R.W. Finlayson Collection.



116. *Illustrations to Poems by Du Fu*, album of 10 leaves, ink and color on paper, each leaf 27 x 35.9 cm, leaf 9. Shoto Museum of Art, Tokyo, Hashimoto Collection.

117. "Although I Have Five Sons, Not One Likes Paper and Brush," *Illustrations to Poems by Tao Yuanming*, album of 12 leaves, ink and color on paper, each leaf 27 x 21 cm, leaf 9. Palace Museum, Beijing. Source: *Shitao shuhua quanji*, vol 1, pl. 187.





118. "Peach Blossom Spring," *Illustrations to Poems by Zhu Yunming*, album of 10 leaves with facing leaves of calligraphy, ink or ink and color on paper, each leaf 27.3 x 20.3 cm, leaf 2, ink on paper. © Christie's Images.

tomer's favorite texts but, as argued earlier, at least one album, *Illustrations to Tang Poems*, was painted for stock. On the other hand, customers on occasion commissioned illustrations of poems of personal significance, as Wu Yuqiao did with Zhu Yunming's set of eight poems on the Wu family estate in Huizhou (see Figure 26). A customer might even put forward his own poems, as in the case of Huang You after his travels to the South (see Figures 18, 34–40, 45). Finally, the concept of an artist's edition is also applicable to other works with no connection to poetry. Another album, *Scenes of Mount Luofu*, is an unabashed reworking of the twelve illustrations from a seventeenth-century guidebook to the Guangdong mountain site, accompanied on the facing pages by Shitao's transcriptions of selections from the printed text (Figure 120).³⁴

COMMEMORATIVE PAINTING

The commemorative painting was often highly personalized, providing either a visual record or a metaphoric

representation of a person, place, or occasion. It was usually intended to serve as the catalyst for literary responses, though any aesthetic merit it possessed in its own right was of course all to the good. Shitao had always produced paintings of this kind, but in the Great Cleansing Hall they accounted for a more significant part of his business. In the specific realm of portraiture, the departure of Dai Cang and Yu Zhiding from Yangzhou left room for other painters, of whom Shitao was one, though in his case he seems to have preferred to enlist the help of a portraitist proper (Jiang Heng from nearby Zhenjiang) for the likeness, restricting his own contribution to the setting. The surviving examples, as we have seen, show Hong Zhengzhi as an aspiring official in a Huangshan setting (see Figure 27), Huang You as a heroic traveler crossing a mountain pass (see Figure 33), and Wu Yuqiao as a Daoist fisherman (see Figure 28). In addition, there are the now lost but well-recorded portraits of Zhang Jingjie as the Hermit of the Lotus Bank in allusion to his ancestral home in Liaoning, and of the Yangzhou cicerone, Xiao Cuo, seeking out plum blossom in the snow-covered suburbs of the city.³⁵ Presumably the portrait that Shitao mentions in a letter to Zheweng incorporated some similar visual conceit related to the sitter.³⁶

A related form of commemorative painting depicted the customer's home. Shitao painted pictures represent-

ing (metaphorically) the studios of Li Lin in Yangzhou and Li Pengnian in Nanchang, and the home of his old friend Wu Zhenbo in Huizhou.³⁷ It was a picture of this kind, *Dadi Cao-tang tu*, that he himself requested from Bada Shanren (see letter 3 in Appendix 2). The handscroll *Pavilion of the Twin Purities*, portraying one of the smaller temples around Yangzhou's Baozhang Lake, is probably another such residence picture, since the supervising monk of the temple was Shitao's painting student Gengyin. Sometimes, as we saw in the case of his depiction of the family residence of Wu Yuqiao in Huizhou, the landscape incorporated a reference to the owner's name, such that the painting became an indirect portrait – the so-called sobriquet picture (*biehao tu*) (see Figure 25).

Shitao's more strictly topographic paintings also tended to be caught up with a commemorative purpose. Among his depictions of Yangzhou sites, *Drunk in Autumn Woods* is an outstanding example, with its visual record of a specific outing (see Figure 29). The handscroll *West of the Bamboos*, on the other hand, although its poems record another such outing, is rather unspecific in its human reference (see Figure 3). Here, one can perhaps think of the commemorative dimension as being supplied by the owner, for whom such a painting would have served well to commemorate a sojourn in, or visit to, Yangzhou. Among Shitao's many paintings of Mount Huang, his 1699 *Landscape of Mount Huang* handscroll was commissioned by Xu Songlin's friends as a gift to commemorate Xu's visit to the mountain for the first time earlier that year (see Figure 16).³⁸ If Shitao was particularly known for paintings of Yangzhou and Huangshan, however, he also capitalized on his own wide travels to make himself available as a limner of far-flung landscapes. His illustrations of Huang You's travel poems are a tour-de-force imaginative "record" of southern landscapes that he had for the most part never seen; nor did he hesitate to provide a topographically specific image when the sons of Fei Mi commissioned a picture of the family's ancestral tombs at Xinfan in Sichuan, furnishing Shitao with their fa-



119. *Illustrations to Tang Poems*, album of 8 leaves, ink and color on paper, each leaf 23.3 x 16.5 cm, leaf 6, "Illustration to Wang Wei's 'On the Double Ninth, Remembering My Brothers in the Mountains.'" Palace Museum, Beijing.

ther's sketch from memory as a basis for his painting (see Figure 31).

The painting of the Fei family tombs was occasioned by Fei Mi's death, one of the many specific occasions and events that Shitao was called upon to commemorate in the course of his life. A wedding gift was noted earlier: the artist's painting of lotuses in a vase, illustrating Liang Peilan's poem (see Plate 22). Also wedding-related may be the very fine *Portrait of Magu*, now marred by the addition of a later inscription where empty space



120. "Solitary Blue-Green Peak," *Scenes of Mount Luofu: Paintings and Calligraphy*, album of 4 leaves of painting, ink and light color on paper, with facing leaves of calligraphy, each leaf 28.2 x 19.8 cm, leaves c and cc. The Art Museum, Princeton University. Museum purchase, gift of the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation.

originally suggested the mist out of which the goddess manifested herself; paintings of this subject were popular presents for couples celebrating their wedding anniversary.³⁹ In his *Lingzhi and Pines* of 1697, Shitao provided a twist on the longevity symbols associated with birthdays by using them as illustrations to poems on the same subject, one by Xu Wei on *lingzhi* and the other by Du Fu on a painting of twin pines (see Figure 180). Two years later, Shitao's student Wu Jixian commissioned from him a painting to record the sudden appearance of a rare and auspicious eight-flower orchid in his garden on the fiftieth anniversary of his mother's chaste widowhood. This lost painting was originally accompanied by poems and essays by local writers, and it should be noted that all the subgenres of painting of visual record and commemorative painting noted here can be paralleled in contemporary Yangzhou literature, which was no less commercialized than painting.⁴⁰ Although such

paintings largely commemorated events in individual lives or family histories, we have also seen Shitao engage with events of broader significance for the community, in the case of the floods of 1705 (see Figure 41).

Parting pictures recorded the send-off of an individual on a journey and came in the form of hanging scrolls or handscrolls, the difference being that handscrolls existed in large part in order to be inscribed by the man's friends either prior to its presentation, or at the moment of his departure, or in the course of his travels. When it was an acquaintance who was leaving, Shitao was sometimes prepared to paint a painting on the spot, as he did on the boat that was to take Huang You to Suzhou in 1700.⁴¹ The rather slapdash, improvised character of *Baoweng's Return to Huangshan* suggests that it too may have been an extemporaneous performance.⁴² On the other hand, a landscape hanging scroll of Yangzi Bridge to the south of Yangzhou, commemorating Wang Xian's journey to Fujian in 1697 was clearly a more considered piece of work (Figure 121), as was the hanging scroll that marked Cheng Jun's journey to Nanchang in 1698 (see Figure 74) and the portrait handscroll of the same year sending off Huang You on his first journey to the South (see Figure 34). However, his farewell paintings could occasionally have a quite anonymous char-



121. *Beside Yangzi Bridge*, dated 1697, horizontal hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 39 x 52 cm. © The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1996, John L. Severance Fund, 1954.126.



122. *Willow Branches at Pingshan*, dated 1706, handscroll, ink on paper, 24 x 124 cm. Shanghai Museum.

acter. In 1706, for example, friends of a man leaving Yangzhou to enroll as a student in the National University in Beijing commissioned a parting painting from Shitao to send him off on his journey (Figure 122). Judging by the tone of his inscription, Shitao did not know the person in question; not surprisingly, perhaps, the painting is unusually conventional. Although the title

identifies the place as Pingshan Tang, the artist has fallen back on the standard waterside scene with a waiting boat, followed by a gradual fade into unfathomable distance in the left part of the painting.

Finally, commemorative in a different way, as the material trace of an occasion, are the works that Shitao painted as an immediate response to a request at parties, on boats, at temples, at famous sites, or in friends' homes. Other occasional works were painted in the opposite circumstances, to commemorate the visit of a

friend to Shitao's Great Cleansing Hall. The miniature album for his Huizhou visitor, Wu Qipeng, is of this kind (see Figure 104).⁴³ Likewise, when a certain Cangzhou, an official whom Shitao had similarly not seen for many years, arrived unexpectedly on the Double Ninth of 1705, Shitao painted a landscape for his friend to mark the bittersweet reunion (see Figure 212). All these occasional works, whether sold to the customer, or painted in exchange for hospitality, or simply offered as a gift, were vivid testimony to the friendship between the painter and the recipient, and thus also reaffirmed one of the principal institutions of moral value within literati culture.

In addition to decorative and commemorative paintings of their own imagining, professional painters were also in demand for facsimile copies. Shitao, as previously discussed, received several important long-distance commissions of this type from Bordu in Beijing, including the now lost *One Hundred Beauties* after Qiu Ying and Zhou Fang, *Minghuang Setting off on an Outing* after a Southern Song artist, and the handscrolls after Song *kesi* tapestries; but the interest in copies was strong in the Yangzhou area too.⁴⁴ Li Lin records a copy of a work by Mi Fu (1052–1107) for a member of the Wu family, a commission that before Zha Shibiao's death might have been directed to the older artist.⁴⁵ The surviving examples by Shitao include his highly colored but otherwise accurate copy of Shen Zhou's (1427–1509) topographic handscroll, *Visit to Master Zhang's Grotto* (see Figure 176); a faithful copy of a history painting by Shen Zhou, *The Bronze Peacock Inkslab*, in which he shows his skill at psychological characterization (Figure 123); and a richly colored version of a well-known early handscroll composition traditionally attributed to Li Gonglin (1049–1106), *The Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden*, with twenty-six lively and differentiated figures (Figure 124).⁴⁶ Each one of these copies is, in fact, at the same time a reinterpretation in which Shitao took up the challenge of creating a new painting with a life and personality of its own – in short, a “Shitao” in the fullest sense of the term.

It should also be noted that in the same way that he sometimes clothed himself in the styles of other wilderness painters to enter the Yangzhou market, Shitao borrowed shamelessly from his career painter competitors. This sometimes led to unlikely conjunctions of refer-



123 (right). After Shen Zhou's "Bronze Peacock Inkslab," hanging scroll, ink and light color on paper, 119.5 x 42 cm. The Art Museum, Princeton University. Museum purchase, gift of the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation.



ences. In the last year or two of his life, Shitao painted a number of monochrome albums of mixed flower, fruit, and vegetable subjects in a drastically simplified style (Figure 125). On the one hand, these owe an obvious debt to Bada's *xiaosa* mode, but there are good reasons to think that Shitao was equally affected by the bold treatments of these themes by Yuan Jiang and Yan Yue. Several album leaves echo the characteristically thick effects that came from their use of heavy pigments, and in the album illustrated here his inscriptions have a deliberately popular character.⁴⁷ The diversity of Yangzhou landscape painting inspired several pictorial responses from Shitao. In *Repotting Chrysanthemums*, for example, he reinvented Xiao Chen's characteristic fusions of foreground domestic space with landscape (see Figure 23). *Mount Emei* (see Figure 175) is, on one level, a radical reworking of the journey to Shu theme as formulated by the leading Yangzhou painter of decorative landscapes, Li Yin. Li is also the unexpected reference point for *The Waterfall at Mount Lu*, where his fascination with the name of Guo Xi (c. 1010–90) in the famous inscription marks the painting as a challenge to Li Yin on Li's own territory (see Figures 128, 129). This same context of adaptations to Yangzhou decorative taste helps to explain the otherwise utterly uncharacteristic *Gazing at the Waterfall at Cuijiao Peak* (Figure 126); for the model here is, unmistakably, the jeweled, archaistic craft of Gu Fuzhen, which Shitao has personalized through a monochrome execution that contrasts sharply with Gu's customary use of pigments (Figure 127).

ILLUSION AND VALUE

The concept of a painting of self provided one paradigm for the commodified relation of economic and aesthetic value, through its capacity to translate moral capital into the physical terms of the artifact; but the range of paintings just considered (decorative, commemorative, reproductive) shows Shitao's necessary engagement with a second paradigm based on the investment of skill. This was the traditional model of the economic-aesthetic val-

ue relation for the painting profession, with which literati entrepreneurs had to come to terms if they were to survive in the marketplace. The skill involved took various forms: It could be a skill of *making*, like an artisan making an object; of *physical performance*, like an actor performing onstage; or of creating a fiction, an *illusion*, like an actor again, or a storyteller.

The necessary specialization of skill, as well as its umbilical connection to physical labor, made it an artisan value that in principle was alien to the antispecialist and labor-phobic literati. In practice, however, the situation was far less clear-cut. The social makeup of career painters as a group was quite diverse: From at least the fifteenth century onward, many were themselves of literati background and demurred from the literati prejudice against pictorial skill as a matter of choice. The influx of wilderness literati into the early Qing art market included many more artists who were not in the least prejudiced against the display of pictorial skill, notably in Nanjing and Hangzhou. As this would suggest, the respect for and display of skill in painting did not necessarily conflict with the incorporation of moral achievement. Shitao could enter the economic territory of the workshop-trained painter without necessarily endangering his literati credentials. The fashioning of a public commercial identity was overlaid upon the bedrock of moral achievement.

Perhaps because the economic value of self-expression was covered by a taboo – How could he be seen to put a value on his own moral achievement? – Shitao's own remarks on painting's value as a commodity tend to start from the side of labor and skill. He broaches the issue in his first letter to Jiang Shidong, defending the screen's unnegotiable price by the twin criteria of the labor required (itself affected by the difficulty of the commission) and the citywide market price for such commissions. However, in the end this begs the question, since an artist with no reputation or little skill could not have hoped to charge fifty taels for such a work. The specific value of Shitao's painting as a manufactured object (as opposed to the trace of an event) lay on another level. Shitao approached the question in a text that he



124. *The Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden*, handscroll, ink and color on paper, 36.5 x 328 cm. Shanghai Museum.

had first used during his Beijing sojourn but inscribed again in 1702 on a gold-paper fan to accompany a landscape:⁴⁸

Painting has an ultimate principle: It does not just provide a superficial vision [of things]. It shrinks the heavens into a foot-square space; the Yangzi River into an inch-long flow; ten thousand precipices into a fist-sized rock. Buildings and people are reduced [to scale]; the wind's influence and the shadows too. If the painter cannot put this principle into practice, there can be no hope for his mind and wrist, and they will end up blocked and unable to move freely. [His painting] will end up as a labored effort of no consequence at all. He may want to win out in the art world, but he had better be able to put up with people bursting out laughing! Mr. Ouyang said that prose is like fine silver or beautiful jade: Its value is fixed on the market and can't be haggled over. He knew what he was talking about!

125. "Gardenia," *Flowers and Fruit*, album of 9 leaves, ink on paper, each leaf 25.5 x 20 cm, leaf 3. Shanghai Museum.



Although it is artistic reputation that Shitao compares to the fixed value of silver or jade, by isolating illusionistic skill as the basis of reputation he indirectly establishes a link between illusionism and economic value. This is a striking definition of painting's value but one that was well-suited to the Yangzhou market. Not only was what might be called "conspicuous illusionism" fundamental to the Li Yin–Yuan Jiang school of landscape painting, but Li made a practice of boasting of the illusionistic marvels he supplied. In the inscription to his remarkable *Landscape after Guo Xi*, Li Yin asks: Why should the flat ground always appear at the bottom of the picture and the mountain at the top? (Figure 128). He goes on to claim to have invented a new "distance," different from the classic "three distances" by which Guo Xi defined the space-time system of landscape representation of his day.⁴⁹ It is tempting to associate Shitao's attempt to attribute a commodity value to illusionism with the larger commercial context in which Shitao and his Yangzhou colleagues operated, selling much of their work to families engaged in the interregional commodity trade. For silver and jade one might substitute the salt they sold, or the antiques they bought with the profits.



126 (left). *Gazing at the Waterfall at Cuijiao Peak*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 114.8 x 37.7 cm. Xubai Zhai Collection of Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, Hong Kong Museum of Art.

127 (below). Gu Fuzhen (1634–after 1716), *Quietly Farming in a Mountain Villa*, dated 1705, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 181.3 x 91.8 cm. Collection of Roy and Marilyn Papp. Courtesy, Phoenix Art Museum.



Because those purchased antiques included paintings bearing the names of old masters, there was an even more direct way of linking illusionistic mastery with economic value. Li Yin's inscription to another, highly mannered landscape after Guo Xi, from 1702, uses the name of the early master to establish a rhetorical opposition between the ever-tempting antique market, with its untrustworthy attributions, and the marvels of realism associated with Guo Xi's name that now, Li claims, are reinvented in his own art:

Of all the Guo Xi paintings I have seen, about half were genuine and half fakes. The genuine ones that I happened on, I genuinely studied, and the fakes I studied as fakes. But from the time of my boyhood, my understanding has not been too profound, and it is easy to confuse the two. Altogether, I must have come upon some hundreds of thousands. All of those who esteem me take me to be a genuine Guo Xi, and I am not above considering myself a genuine Guo Xi. Because of this, people compete in offering me money and gifts to get my paintings, afraid they will be too late. At such times, I am struck by self-doubt. But about this painting there needn't be any doubt at all.⁵⁰

This is much the same discourse that one finds, albeit in much more sophisticated form, in Shitao's inscription to his own landscape after Guo Xi, *The Waterfall at Mount Lu* (Figure 129; see Plate 12).

It is said that Guo Heyang painted in the tradition of Li Cheng [919–67] and that he captured the aspects of clouds and mists as they form or fade away, and of summits and peaks as they hide or emerge. He dominated his era. In his early years his work was ingenious and consummately skilled; in his late years he wielded the brush with increasing virility and power. In my lifetime I have seen more than ten of his paintings, most of which were praised by everyone. I was the only one to say nothing, for I did not see in them any surpassing mastery of the hand and eye. Today I remember my own travels of long ago. I have taken Li Bai's poem *A Song of Mount Lu: To Attendant Censor Lu Xuzhou* and made a painting of it, combining my own methods with what I have seen over the years. One could almost take this



128. Li Yin (active c. 1679–1702), *Landscape after Guo Xi*, hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 133.5 x 73.5 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.



as Xi's own vision [*guan*]: What need is there for the works of old!⁵¹

There are, of course, many differences between the inscriptions: Shitao's is art-historically informed, claims a strict and confident connoisseurship, and incorporates further questions of poetry and memory.⁵² Nonetheless, it is the same discourse of professional pride, invoking Guo Xi as a patriarch of landscape painters and defending the market for contemporary painting against the market for old masters.⁵³ Shitao cedes nothing to Li Yin in the bravado with which he, too, presents himself as a Guo Xi for the present day.

129 (left). *The Waterfall at Mount Lu*, hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 209.7 x 62.2 cm. Sen-oku Hakkokan, Sumitomo Collection.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Painter's Craft



There is nothing out of the ordinary in the fact that Shitao systematically exploited painting as a business activity and that Dadi Tang was, in effect, the studio of an independent artisan producer, this being typical of the practical circumstances of literati professional artists from the sixteenth century onward. More unusual is the wealth of documentation, visual and textual, that permits a systematic reconstruction of these circumstances in this one specific case. If a reconstruction of this kind can be illuminating in itself – one becomes aware that each artwork is embedded in contingent circumstances and occupies a precise position in the “map” of the artist’s production – it is also important because it reveals the social stakes of being a painter. Artists like Shitao could survive only by becoming entrepreneurs and independent artisans, yet they were bound by their literati status to deny that they were either merchants or artisans. This was a predicament to which they, naturally enough, actively responded by developing a discourse that would legitimize their position – a discourse in which the specificity of pictorial craft occupied a central place. The present chapter, then, is devoted to Shitao’s claims in favor of the painter.

As was the case for other artists as well, these claims – embodied in theoretical writings and in certain associated artworks – often had their immediate context in the pedagogy of painting. Although Shitao’s most ambi-

tious pedagogical contribution, the *Manual of Painting*, eventually reached an anonymous public through its printed edition, during the artist’s lifetime it circulated in the more intimate form of manuscript versions and was, in any event, the fruit of many years of one-on-one and small-group teaching. In late life Shitao listed with evident pride in a long poem the seventeen men who had studied painting with him in the course of his career.¹ He notes four names for his Xuancheng period and another three (all Buddhist monks) for the years he spent in Nanjing.² While he acknowledges no new students for his first Yangzhou sojourn at the end of the 1680s, in Beijing on the other hand he was sought out by Bordu and Tu Qingge:

I also admire Yanjing’s [Beijing’s] Tu Yuebo.
With the elegant shadows of lonely orchids and
bamboo,
The son of a minister studies the art of painting.³
Donggao Yuzhe (General Bo Wenting) is more
inclined to poetry.

Following Shitao’s return to the South, his first new student was one of the monks at Jinghui Monastery:

One who transmits the true reality with sweeping
calligraphy and painting,
Who considers sensual pleasures and fame
worthless,

Who dots the foreheads of fish and dragons, and
strikes a broken bell,
Is the old monk Gengyin of the South Garden,
Explaining the [Buddhist] Law through poetry, a
true paragon.⁴

A few years later, in 1696, Shitao made the acquaintance of Cheng Jun and his four sons, among whom Cheng Ming was a source of pride:

Yousheng [Cheng Ming] has gained a reputation in
Jiangzou [southern Anhui, i.e., the Huizhou
region].
At the beginning he presented a *ding* ritual vessel;
he is just like me,
And recently he has made more progress, becoming
even more of a wizard.

The poem also lists three other students from Shexian families in the Yangzhou area:

Wu Wenye [Wu Jixian] from Xi'nan is bright;
He has works that are above the average, and comes
from a poor family.

Wu Jixian lived in Yizheng; in his case, as is also true for Tu Qingge and Gengyin, there survives a demonstration work: an album of clearly improvised paintings designed to reveal all the more clearly, by their sketchlike quality, the principles of pictorial craft (see Figure 201).⁵ Another such album is dedicated to Wang Jueshi, whose brother was one of Shitao's clients.⁶

Wang Jueshi lodges in Mengyang's [Cheng Jiasui,
1565–1644] nest.
Sometimes he goes in for broad transformations,
giving birth to high, rugged peaks,
While in his orchid and rock paintings he enters
Bada's realm.

The last of these students from Shexian families was Hong Zhengzhi, of whom Shitao says only that he specializes in plum blossom, though one may imagine that Shitao's *Orchids* album (see Figure 79) was intended in part as a demonstration work. A recently published plum-blossom fan that was painted for Hong Zhengzhi shows the teacher at work (Figure 130):

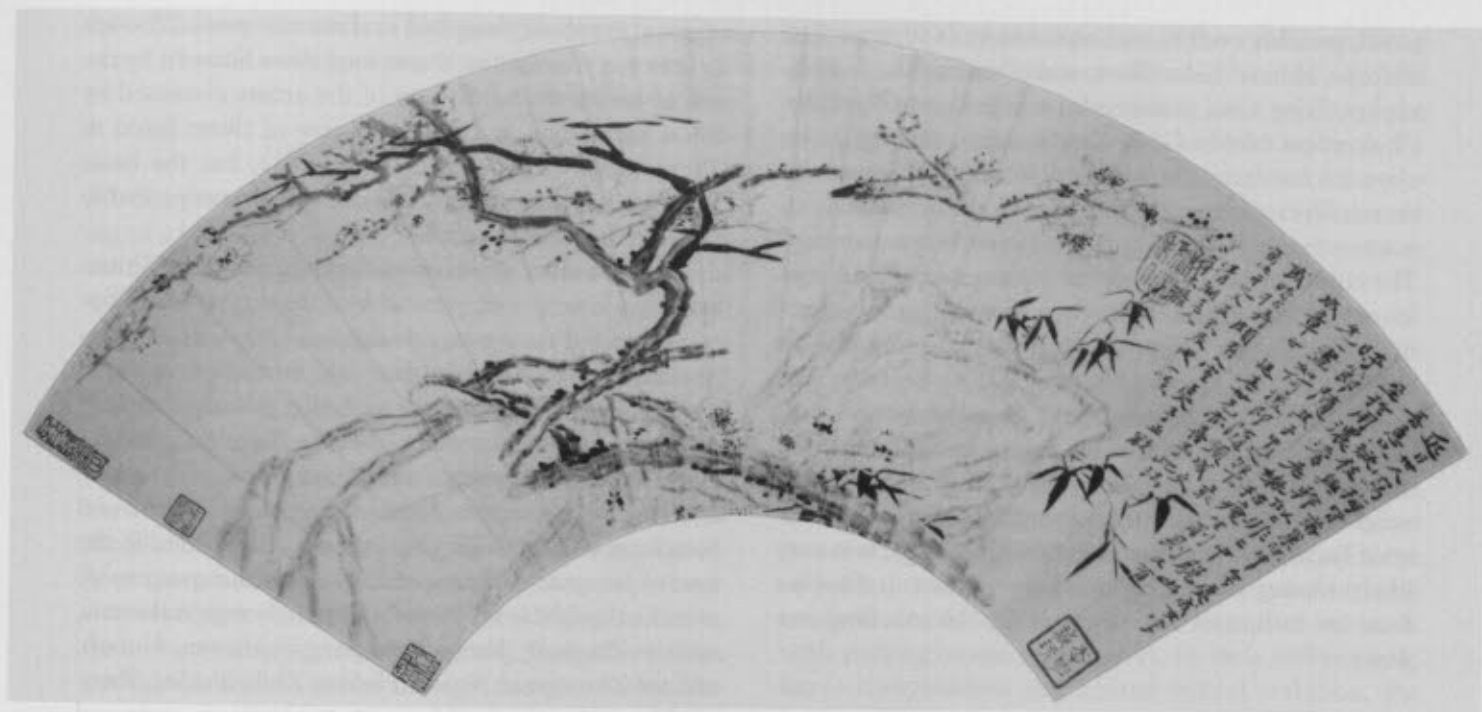
These days ordinary painters of plum blossom all fall into mediocrity with branch-joins like the "woman" character 女. In my view, it only needs the branches and trunk to lie between resemblance and nonresemblance to be able to escape from this. As for whether to seek [effects of] dark or light, aged or young, withered and thin, or raw and smooth, these all have their moment. Depending on how the very first brush stroke turns out, one develops the composition from there. Today my old friend Mr. Yan also takes pleasure in this method of mine, sometimes using it himself with real success. I painted this to give to him, but it turned out not to measure up to his own. Alas!

Shitao's teaching was not restricted to the students acknowledged in his poem.⁷ He also tutored other aspiring painters on an ad hoc basis, sometimes by writing out an excerpt of his treatise on a fan, sometimes by painting one-off demonstration works with helpful inscriptions.⁸ Moreover, his teaching of pictorial principles was not always directed at practitioners, but also served to educate the painting connoisseur, as exemplified by Mr. Liu (Liu Shitou, Liu Xiaoshan).⁹ Liu's interest in the theory and practice of painting rivaled that of any of Shitao's acknowledged students (indeed, it is possible that Liu did become one of his students but after the above-cited poem was written). Not only did he own a complete manuscript copy of Shitao's treatise,¹⁰ but he was the recipient of an extraordinary group of two or perhaps three albums that Shitao executed for him in the course of 1703. The entire group is discussed later in this chapter; here, I want to draw attention to the fact that several leaves bear theoretical inscriptions on the practice of painting and others are improvised sketches clearly designed to reveal certain pictorial principles. In an inscription to one leaf, which shows the sort of Ni Zan-style landscape that amateur painters favored (see Figure 152), Shitao alludes to an artistic reputation (as calligrapher and painter). It seems certain, therefore, that Liu was a sometime practitioner of painting and that the albums were, on one level, demonstration works; but whether or not Shitao considered him to be one of his students as well as an important patron remains to be established.¹¹

If Shitao's pedagogy provides the immediate context for his discourse on the craft specificity of painting, two other, much broader contexts also molded the claims he made for the painter's importance: The first is the early Qing art world and more specifically the *qishi's* position and role within it; the second is a functionalist social ethos that had widespread currency in Kangxi society and culture.

THE EARLY QING ART WORLD

The ongoing efforts of Shitao and others to theorize their craft and defend painting as a profession were not simply directed at fellow artists but spoke to the larger discursive community represented by the art world at large, which mediated Shitao's relationship to the market and gave his professionalism its immediate context.¹² Not a single, closed system, the early Qing art world was a highly differentiated and fluid interaction of local, regional, transregional, and national contexts for artistic production. Shitao's experience of these various contexts was impressively wide-ranging.



130. *Plum Blossom, Bamboo, and Rock*, folding fan, ink on paper, dimensions unknown. Shanghai Museum.

Local Art Worlds

Shitao began his career in the main center of the middle-Yangzi regional art world, Wuchang, and his earliest travels took him to other parts of that region (i.e., Hubei, Hunan). After he moved east and settled c. 1664–5 in the more densely populated cultural macroregion of Jiangnan, he moved around among the three regional art worlds of southern Jiangsu (particularly Songjiang and Suzhou), northern Jiangsu (particularly Yangzhou and Nanjing), and southern Anhui (particularly Shexian, Xuancheng, and Jingxian). His three years in the North (1690–2) were spent in the cities Beijing – where the art world had its own special character, determined by its capital status – and Tianjin. Finally, after his return to the South, he rejoined the art world of northern Jiangsu (Nanjing, Yizheng, and above all Yangzhou). Shitao's involvement in each of these local and regional contexts cannot be properly assessed simply on the basis of direct contacts with other painters, for which the evidence is fragmentary though nonetheless impressive. For the pre-Xuancheng period, we have the names of four mentors, all of them obscure figures: Chen Yidao, Pan Xiaochi (unidentified), the monk Chaoren Luzi, and Liang Hong.¹³ For Xuancheng, on the other hand, one can reconstruct a circle of painters including Mei Qing, Mei Geng, Xu Dun (Banshan), Gao Yong, Cai Yao, Lü Hui, and Wang Zhichu, not to mention such visitors as

Hongren's nephew, Jiang Zhu.¹⁴ In Nanjing, he was friendly with Cheng Sui, Chen Shu, Dai Benxiao, and Wang Gai (active c. 1677–1705), but also with numerous monk-painters who are forgotten today.¹⁵ In Beijing, as we have seen, he had indirect contact with Wang Yuanqi and Wang Hui.

In Yangzhou, meanwhile, arbitrary but perhaps collectively representative slices of the art world that Shitao knew can be glimpsed through artworks to which different artists contributed, usually over an extended period of time. Particularly successful examples are the two surviving albums painted for Huang You in 1695 (see Figures 64, 65, 80; 192, 204, 206), where Shitao's paintings gradually came to be matched on the facing pages by colophons from such noted local artists as the calligraphers Huang Sheng (1622–96), Li Guosong, and Wang Xiru and the painters Sang Zhi and Wang Suiyu. Other contributors who were visitors to Yangzhou included Shitao's friends Wu Sugong (1626–99, Xuancheng), Wang Yangdu (b. 1647, Shexian), and Cheng Jing'e (Nanjing), all of whom were well-known calligraphers, and the painter Tang Zuming (Xuancheng).¹⁶ An example of a different kind is a small hanging scroll painting by Gong Xian that, some years after Gong's death, was the catalyst for several colophons mounted above and below the painting. The painting appears to have belonged to Huang Kui, the writer of the first, jocular poem that follows Gong Xian in imagining the boat in the painting to be laden with wine: Huang, a respected *yimin* writer, was also a famous drunk.¹⁷ Among the artists who followed him in adding colophons to the

scroll, possibly on the same occasion in 1697, were Zha Shibiao, Shitao, Xiao Chen, and a leading local calligrapher, Song Cao, author of a treatise on calligraphy. Zha's poem evokes Gong Xian's earlier visits to Yangzhou (in his early years he had worked professionally there); Shitao in turn salutes Zha as the contemporary master of the Ni-Huang mode of landscape painting. The colophons also include an incisive piece of art criticism by Zhuo Erkan.¹⁸ Finally, a more limited conjunction of talent can be seen in a birthday painting of a cat eyeing a butterfly from 1704, originally painted by Shitao's own student, Cheng Ming, in collaboration with an artist identified only by his surname, Xie, before the master himself "dotted the eyes [of the dragon]" at the recipient's request.¹⁹ The recipient, a Mr. Huang, owner of Facing-the-Verdure Hall (Wanglü Tang), was very likely Huang Ziqing, whom I introduced in Chapter 6 as an enthusiastic patron during Shitao's final few years.

The Transregional Art World

Shitao's evolving community of artists is a prime example of the connections that mapped out a larger, transregional art world in early Qing China. Embodying that world in a different way are the many commissions that he fulfilled during the Dadi Tang years for patrons based in other regions, whether they ordered the work from a distance or during a personal visit to Yangzhou. His inscriptions and colophons for works by recent and contemporary artists such as Hongren, Zheng Min, Gong Xian, Yizhi, Bada Shanren, Puhe, and Wang Jun are further traces of his interest in developments outside the Yangzhou area.²⁰ A relatively comprehensive picture of the transregional art world at a slightly earlier date is available in Zhou Lianggong's (1612–72) *Notes on Viewing Paintings* (*Duhua lu*), published in 1673 or soon after.²¹ *Notes on Viewing Paintings* presents biographical and critical assessments of seventy-seven painters from different regions; unfinished at the time of Zhou's death, it was based on a lifetime of collecting contemporary painting by artists "who were from as far as Yunnan, Guizhou, Shenxi, and Sichuan, and as near as Hebei, Yangzhou, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang."²² Zhou's collection was made possible not only by his own wide travels but by the mobility of painters in the early Qing period. The travels of artists, and their congregation in cities such as Hangzhou, Suzhou, Nanjing, Yangzhou, and Beijing, were probably the main factors in creating the kind of transregional awareness that informs both Zhou Lianggong's book and the Qing dynasty section of an almost contemporary compilation of notices of artists, *Precious Mirror of Painting: Continued* (*Tuhui baojian xuzuan*).²³ Shitao began his career within the trans-

regional art world described in these two works, though he was too young to be mentioned there himself; by the end of his career, hardly any of the artists discussed by Zhou Lianggong and relatively few of those listed in *Tuhui baojian xuzuan* were still active, but the basic structure of the transregional art world was probably not significantly different.

Like a number of other early Qing painters, Shitao made his own, more personal comments on developments around the country. Notably, in a 1699 colophon to a Huizhou painter's landscape handscroll (translated in part below), he listed local and regional schools.²⁴ The local art world centers he notes there are Nanjing and Yangzhou (northern Jiangsu region), Xuancheng and Huizhou (southern Anhui region), and Suzhou and Songjiang (southern Jiangsu region) – all located in the part of Jiangnan he knew well. Outside this geographic area, he thought in far broader, explicitly regional terms, such as Zhejiang, Jiang-Chu (Jiangxi, Hunan, Hubei), and the Zhongyuan region (Henan, Zhili, Shanxi, Shenxi). However, it is clear from patterns of patronage and artist migration that the literati-professional part of the Yangzhou art world maintained especially close ties with the cities of Nanjing, Xuancheng, Shexian, and Nanchang, which together with Yangzhou constituted a sort of circuit of five interconnected centers. One notes in this regard that Shitao's roster of outstanding masters in his 1694 album for Huang Lü – who was of Huizhou ancestry, lived in Nanchang, and commissioned the album in Yangzhou – includes artists from all, and only, these five centers:²⁵

Those who enter through the gate to reach the *Dao* of painting are nothing special. But to achieve resounding fame for a time – isn't that difficult to accomplish? For example, the lofty antiquity of the works of gentlemen like Baitu [Kuncan], Qingxi [Cheng Zhengkui], and Daoshan [Chen Shu], the pure elusiveness of Meihe [Zha Shibiao] and Jianjiang [Hongren], the parched leanness of Gou Dao-ren [Cheng Sui], the drenched moistness and rare antiquity of Bada Shanren from Nanchang, or the untrammelled expressiveness of Mei Qushan [Mei Qing] and Xuepingzi [Mei Geng]. These are all men who in their generation were ones who understood!

Yet this was also a specifically aesthetic grouping (corresponding to what we now think of as Individualist painting), of a kind that came naturally to a transregional awareness. Similarly, one contemporary writer, who happened to have an interest in painters working in the expressionistic *xiaosa* mode, linked Shitao's name with those of Bada Shanren in Nanchang, Wu Shantao (from a Huizhou family) in Hangzhou, "Taro-monk" Fang (probably Fang Yizhi, 1611–71) in Tongcheng in northern Anhui, and the bannerman official and finger painter Gao Qipei, as well as two lesser-known artists, one

from Wujiang in southern Jiangsu (Gu Zhuo), and the other from Shandong (Kong Yanshi).²⁶

The National Art World

Finally, the transregional art world, constituted according to a logic of mobility and long-distance communication, should not be confused with the national art world with its necessary connection to the state and the court, which conformed instead to a more static, hierarchical logic of center and periphery. Shitao began his career at a time when there had for some decades been little national art world to speak of, so that legitimizing power was largely located in the transregional art world.²⁷ However, following its suppression of the Rebellion of the Three Feudatories, the Qing court moved aggressively to reestablish court patronage and to impose classicism as a pictorial equivalent to the ideological orthodoxy increasingly promoted by the Kangxi emperor, with visible success by the 1690s.²⁸ As noted earlier, Shitao arrived in Beijing just when Kangxi was pressurizing Han Chinese intellectuals at court to move toward an ideology of orthodoxy. His "collaborations" with the nationally established Wang Hui and Wang Yuanqi, brokered by a court patron, were unsuccessful interventions in the newly reconstructed national art world; and his bitter attacks on Beijing taste were in part reactions to his exclusion from it. A remark made by Wang Yuanqi (perhaps at a somewhat later date) – "I cannot know all the painters in the country, but south of the Yangzi one must recommend Shitao as the greatest. He has achieved aspects which both Shigu [Wang Hui] and I cannot attain" – implicitly relegated Shitao to the periphery, allowing him outstanding status only within the transregional art world.²⁹ Conversely, one way of reading Shitao's 1694 canonization of admired masters is as a defensive attempt to promote the transregional over the national art world as the arbiter of cultural legitimacy: "Those who enter through the gate to reach the *Dao* of painting are nothing special. But to achieve resounding fame for a time – isn't that difficult to accomplish?" Resounding fame, as the hard-won acknowledgment by a general public, was the nonconformist artist's alternative to the preestablished and controllable gates of orthodoxy; but it was also the rejected artist's consolation for lack of success at court. Still, it would be misleading to suggest that the relationship between the transregional and national art worlds was always, or even characteristically, antagonistic. There is no reason to doubt Wang Yuanqi's admiration for Shitao, for example, or Shitao's for Wang Yuanqi and Wang Hui as seen in his willingness to collaborate with them on several different occasions. Similarly, if Wang Hui was consecrated as the greatest painter in the empire by his se-

lection to be the master-painter of the scrolls recording Kangxi's Southern Tours, on the other hand he returned to the South after the project was over, rejoining the transregional art world in which he had long been one of the major figures.³⁰ From the point of view of the successful professional painter, the two systems represented alternative and complementary paths to social and material independence.³¹

The Development of Shitao's Craft

Shitao's development as an artist was, needless to say, strongly affected by his passage through different art-world contexts. If little can be said about Wuchang at this point, it is on the other hand quite clear that when he arrived in southern Anhui c. 1666, he was an artist of limited technique but exceptional imagination who compensated for the technical deficiencies of his work with striking imagery. Moreover, by their rather stark, linear compositions and limited spatial ambition, the few surviving paintings that may predate his arrival in Xuancheng (see Figures 47, 48, 173) suggest that he was initially much inspired by woodblock illustrations. Although some art historians have underlined his debt in the later 1660s and 1670s to the dry-brush technique of Huizhou painting, his Xuancheng-period craft owes a still greater debt to local Xuancheng painters, most notably Mei Qing, with whom he appears to have discovered a real kinship of artistic goals. Mei's bold late work has overshadowed his more careful early paintings (see Figure 51), but he was already a highly accomplished artist when Shitao first met him. The boldness of Shitao's work of the late 1660s in comparison with his one likely pre-Anhui album (*Landscapes, Flowers, and Bamboo*) suggests that Mei and other Xuancheng artists did more than simply confirm Shitao in his basic orientation toward striking imagery but in a sense liberated him to let loose his imagination. Transregional art-world connections can also be seen in Shitao's Anhui-period work, in its idiosyncratic responses to Chen Hongshou's figure painting and Dong Qichang's landscape painting and art theory.³²

By the time of his formal move to Nanjing in 1680, Shitao's craft mastery had improved immeasurably: He was no longer dependent on the force of the image but had developed the ability to summon up an atmosphere as well; moreover, alongside his more careful mode of painting, he had also begun to work in the *xiaosa* mode. Painting in early Qing Nanjing was, on the whole, more atmospheric in its orientation than painting in southern Anhui, accompanied by an interest in the vastness of the space that could be created. Certainly, Shitao responded to these characteristics of Nanjing painting in many works from his sojourn in the city. Overall, however,

there is no sharp shift; instead one gets the sense of an artist who was adding new craft possibilities to his armory, expanding his range all the time while never completely abandoning approaches that had been more important for him in the past. Doubtless he was influenced in this by his Chan training as a second-generation follower of Muchen, who had espoused the mastery of multiple kinds of *fa* (meaning “dharma” in a Buddhist context, but “method” in painting theory) as a way of liberating oneself from the local constraints of any one kind of *fa*.³³ One of the curious but characteristic results of this process of accumulation is that some of his most typically Anhui-style painting was produced in Nanjing. Simultaneously, during the 1680s another transregional figure began to loom large for Shitao – Xu Wei, in whose somatically visceral *xiaosa* painting he found the model for his own performance mode.

If, at the time of his move to Yangzhou, Shitao’s “painting Chan” was already impressively rich, he was still learning all the time; dating from the time of this first Yangzhou sojourn in the late 1680s are Shitao’s earliest responses to the great decorative painting workshops of Yangzhou, with their baroque and artificial mountain structures. Similarly, as noted in Chapter 4, the artist’s subsequent stay in Beijing was the period when he began to feel it necessary to come to terms with a Dong Qichang-derived classicism that was taking all the honors in the national art world. In contrast, the years following his return to the South saw him begin to define his art in more thoroughly transregional terms, recognizing his broad kinship of goals with a wide range of *qishi* painters, among whom Gong Xian, Kuncan, Zha Shibiao, and Bada Shanren stand out; yet at the same time he was renouncing nothing, be it woodblock-like imagery, Xu Wei-style performance painting, or a subdued *shidaifu*-influenced classicism.

In the Dadi Tang from 1697 onward, we see Shitao responding once again to a local art world, expanding his craft to accommodate the demands of the Yangzhou market. Beyond the specific responses to Yangzhou colleagues already noted in Chapter 7, the first seven or eight years in the Dadi Tang were the period of his greatest interest in illusionism, in response to the decorative painters of the city. Nonetheless, as one would expect for an artist whose reputation and client base extended far beyond the boundaries of even Jiangnan, his concerns were far from narrowly local. For sheer diversity of pictorial craft and demonstration of technical skill, the work of this period far outstrips any other. In this was a statement of transregional ambition: to be recognized as one of greatest painters of his day, if not the greatest. Moreover, if he was not himself a player in the national art world, this did not, as we shall see shortly, prevent him from rising to the challenge of the work

of Wang Hui, which had received the legitimation by Kangxi denied to Shitao. At the same time, however, his virtuosity demonstrated the continuing power of a fundamental orientation toward the pursuit of a personal freedom of method through the mastery of multiple methods, originally learned in a Chan context from Muchen. Finally, by 1705 if not already by 1704, his deteriorating physical powers brought about one last transformation of his pictorial craft, in the direction of a visceral immediacy bound up, as never before, with the raw characteristics of his materials. For this there is no obvious art world context, unless one is to see it as an indirect response to the brute physicality of epigraphic calligraphy or Gao Qipei’s finger painting. Together with these two contemporary developments, Shitao’s final craft legacy was to become a point of reference for the next generation of *qishi*, known today as Eccentrics.

The complexity of Shitao’s itinerary through different areas and levels of the art world highlights one of the problems of modern interpretation of Shitao’s stylistic development and achievement; for, without a concept of the mediating role of the art world, it is easy to oversimplify the relationships among craft, the *qishi*’s pursuit of difference, and the market. Some have argued, for example, that Shitao’s late work represents an overall decline of quality, betraying the pressure of overproduction.³⁴ Similarly, commentators on Shitao’s treatise have generally sought to explain the changes in the late *Hua pu* version as evidence for pressure on Shitao from his editor to tone down his text. In both cases Shitao’s purpose is interpreted essentially in terms of self-expression, and the artist’s engagement with the broad range of pictorial craft is devalued. The aesthetic values of the iconoclastic, expressionistic Shitao are naturalized as higher “quality” than those of the less obviously exciting dialogic Shitao, said to be in decline;³⁵ the market is seen as a distraction at best and, at worst, the cause of damaging compromise. Underlying this is an assumption that the artist’s art came first – that it somehow already existed somewhere else – before the market intervened to threaten its integrity. (A similar assumption underlay the early Qing conservative view that literati professionalism was theoretically deplorable, yet the compromise with the market could be excused as a necessary [but corrupting] tactic of survival.) However, my discussion of the Dadi Tang enterprise may have gone some way toward showing that, on the contrary, the market to a significant degree created the idiosyncratic experimentation of *qishi* artists. It was precisely “compromise,” or one might better say complicity, with the market that made Shitao’s individual achievement possible (including its complex response to the psychological alienation caused by the marketing of self). In effect, the rhetorical position of the *qishi* was one of several available posi-

tions in the socioeconomic game of positioning and differentiation that defined the early Qing art world. Only when the contemporary (and unnamed) points of art-world reference are reconstructed can one properly assess any given work's negotiations of the relationship between the artist's particular rhetorical position and the market. The case of Shitao's 1703 albums for Mr. Liu, to be considered later in this chapter, shows these negotiations at their most complex and ambitious.

To anticipate briefly one part of my argument: Shitao's *qishi* position, with its self-conscious pursuit of difference, flexibly accommodated a wide range of approaches to pictorial craft, from a calligraphy-based expressionism to an expanded interest in crafted illusionism; yet one result of this very flexibility was that it led Shitao eventually to find his art-world role as a *qishi* too constraining and to trade that position for another – which brings us to the question of functionalism.

THE FUNCTIONALIST ETHIC

Literati artists were already selling their paintings at least as far back as the Northern Song dynasty, and by the second half of the fifteenth century the phenomenon of the literati painter as full-time urban entrepreneur, marketing his literati culture as a market commodity, was a common one. In the still clearly codified society of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, however, the literati's involvement in business was not yet caught up in an uncontrollable social fluidity, so that the engagement in commerce of Suzhou literati artists such as Tang Yin (1470–1523), Chen Shun (1483–1544), or Wen Zhengming, did not threaten their literati status.³⁶ The same patrons acquired works both by these artists and by others with an artisan training, who held each other in mutual respect and influenced one another's work. From the second half of the sixteenth century onward, though, as literati entrepreneurs became increasingly numerous and artisans became upwardly mobile, the breakdown of hierarchical sociomoral distinctions, of which these developments were a part, inspired a hardening of social attitudes among those whose cultural privileges were most threatened.

At the end of the sixteenth century, as increasing monetization of the economy intensified the trend, a section of literati led by Dong Qichang reacted to the muddying of distinctions inherent in the new social fluidity by pioneering a "literati painting" (*wenren hua*) aesthetic – that is, a socially specific craft of painting – that served to resurrect and reconstruct the fading difference between literati, on the one hand, and artisans and merchants on the other. In a famous statement, Dong located the roots of literati craft in calligraphy:³⁷

Scholars who paint should use the methods of strange characters in grass script and clerical script as their guide. Only with trees like bent iron and mountains like painted gauze, and no sweet and vulgar paths, will they have the scholarly spirit. If not, even if the result looks satisfactory, they will already have fallen into the hell of painting masters [*huashi*], where no medicine can save them. He who is able to free himself of conventions is the fish who escapes the net.

The amateur resonances of this craft in no sense implied a rejection of the commodification of literati culture; on the contrary, it reinforced the specificity of the literati "product," allowing the literati artist to continue to function as an entrepreneur at the same time as he reaffirmed a hierarchical sociomoral superiority.³⁸ However, what worked well for socially secure gentry painters was fraught with tension for independent literati dependent on the market for their survival; witness Shitao's discomfort at the beginning of his troubled letter to Jiang Shidong. It was not commercialism per se that bothered him but the fact that his work was now "associated with the general run of painting" through his need to work in the decorative format of multiscroll screens. The paradox for Shitao and others in his situation was that they needed to exploit commercially the myth of a "pure" literati identity in order to take advantage of urban social mobility; yet in so doing they ran the risk of losing the social standing to which they were entitled by virtue of their *shi* status. Out of this came the need for a justifying discourse.

The need was answered by a discourse of survival that portrayed *wenren* professionals as victims of an unfortunate destiny who had been forced into selling their work in order to survive.³⁹ After the fall of the Ming, the Yangzhou-based writer Sun Zhiwei (1620–87), for example, having seen works from Zhou Lianggong's collection of contemporary painting and calligraphy in the company of Cheng Sui, commented: "While painting may be a minor skill, facing the conflagration one can stand the sadness of it. Many lofty gentlemen with artistic skills have had to use their talent to become painting masters [*huashi*]."⁴⁰ At the end of the century, this was still the frame of reference within which Li Lin assessed Shitao's situation: "Born into this generation, his courage and energy found no use. Unable to do anything else, he lived as a monk, and [now] lives out his old age on the reputation of an artist. Alas!" Shitao himself, as we have seen, wrote in his *Gengchen Manuscript* poems: "Seeming to be mad or drunk, I have been passed over by my times; / Like a workhorse or an ox, I just turn out paintings." The discourse of survival was one, conservative view of professionalism; but when it is set against the economic practice that I documented in Chapter 7, there is an obvious disjunction. Shitao's engagement

with his professional status was too active, too considered, too *normal*, to be accounted for simply as enforced compromise. In fact, he was far from content to conceal his professionalism behind a justifying discourse of survival. Shitao belonged to a generation of literati professionals who had a sense of professional responsibility and pride, actively defending their position within the painting profession as a whole. They initiated, in other words, a legitimizing discourse of professionalism in a modern, functionalist sense, that contributed to a more general process of autonomization of artistic production.⁴¹

While the discourse of survival served to suppress and repress the normality of Shitao's situation and that of other artists like him, this normality could not be kept out of art-world language. In the Ming-Qing period, the usual term denoting the workshop-trained painter was the one we have seen used by Dong Qichang and Sun Zhiwei: *huashi*, or "painting master." For Dong, "literatus" and "painting master" were mutually exclusive concepts. All entrepreneur that he might be, the literatus remained a *shi*, whereas the workshop-trained career painter could not escape his *huashi* status, which placed him in the camp of the artisan (*gong*). In Shitao's time, there were still literati painters for whom "painting master" continued to be an unacceptable term. Gong Xian, for example, invented the term "painting scholars" to distinguish himself and others like him from "painting masters" (defending his professional territory in the process, it might be noted).⁴² Other literati professionals, however, were more sanguine about their situation. Xiao Yuncong (1596-1673) describes himself in one poem as an aged painting master, and Mei Qing in 1693 could write on a continuous ten-scroll landscape, "Who says that a wandering immortal cannot also be a painting master?"⁴³ Zha Shibiao, writing about Hongren, was able to use *huashi* without any pejorative connotations: "I have heard that only when one has read ten thousand books and traveled ten thousand miles does one merit the name of painting master. Now that I see Master Jian's pictures of Huangshan, how can I not agree!"⁴⁴ (Ironically, Zha is here quoting another of Dong Qichang's remarks on literati painters.) Shitao, writing in 1699, uses the term *huashi* to encompass painters all over the country:⁴⁵

If one considers the painting masters of the world today, those from Wu [southern Jiangsu] have their Wu mannerisms, and those from the two Zhes [Zhejiang] have their mannerisms, too. No matter what the place – Jiang-Chu [Jiangxi, Hunan, Hubei], the middle region [Honan, Zhili, Shanxi, Shenxi] or the southern capital and Qin-Huai [Nanjing], Hui [Huizhou], or Xuan [Xuancheng], or Huaihai [the northern Jiangsu region] – any area after a period of time develops its own mannerisms.

Although Shitao is certainly taking his distance from other artists, it would be a mistake to interpret this text as a literati rejection of *huashi* professionalism. On the contrary, from the list of places which Shitao provides – one thinks of Huizhou and Xuancheng in particular – it is clear that literati professionals like himself must be included in his usage of the term *huashi*.

In short, *huashi* could be used with two different meanings by professionalized literati: either in Dong Qichang's sense, in order to allow them to keep their distance from painting as a career ("we who are not artisan specialists"), or with a sort of professional pride ("we painters"). Shitao, like other literati entrepreneurs, used the term in both ways, though he often avoided the problem by using more neutral terms such as *huajia*, *huaren*, or *hanmojia*, which simply mean "painter." Ultimately, however, the term was unavoidable because nonpainters in any event commonly described artists in Shitao's situation as *huashi*. The willingness of literati professionals and their admirers to embrace the term *huashi* as applicable to them was from one point of view a means of recuperating socially the pejorative term that had traditionally been applied to the role that they were now to fulfill. At the same time, however, the broadening of *huashi*'s meaning brought language into line with the fact that painting was emerging as a profession in a new and more modern sense. A *huashi* painting career had begun to provide a separate basis for a social identity independent of the divisions of the sociomoral hierarchy of occupations.⁴⁶

A leading spokesman for this development prior to Shitao was Gong Xian. In one of his many relevant declarations, Gong espoused a third approach to painting for professionalized literati like himself (as previously noted, he used the term "painting scholars") between the approaches of artisans (career painters) and amateurs (scholar-officials), making his case on the basis of compositional craft:⁴⁷

"Mountains-and-valleys" is a common term for composition. A composition should be stable [*an*]. But it must be strange and imaginative [*qi*] as well as stable, for if it is not, then what would be the value of its stability? If it has stability but it is not strange, this marks an artisan's hand. If it is strange and imaginative but not stable, this marks an amateur's hand. Today there exist two schools, that of professional production and that of the scholar-official [amateur]. Paintings that are stable but not imaginative are called artisan, and how can they be considered as highly as the work of an amateur? But if a painter [Gong Xian is now referring to "painting scholars"] is capable, then the more antique his work is, the more it will be luxuriant, the more luxuriant the richer, the richer the more strangely imaginative, and the more strangely imaginative the more stable. This, then, is the highest class of painting, derived

from the heights of Heavenly beauty and the depths of strenuous effort. If among these qualities there is also poetic conceptualization, literary principle, and the spirit of the Great Way, then how could this be a minor art?

Shitao would no doubt have recognized in this a description of his own lifelong position as a painter. However, his position did evolve, and with it his own thinking on the matter of the painter's status. During his earlier, semiprofessional days he found it easy to identify his status as a painter with the broader social position of the *qishi*. In his late years, on the other hand, he came to frame the issue of professional identity somewhat differently, as seen in his inscription to a fan painting probably intended for a student of painting:⁴⁸

Painting by men of talent [*cairen*] is high-minded and far-reaching. Painting by poets [*shiren*] is refined and evocative. Painting by "originals" [*qiren*] is uninhibited and has the flavor of the past. Painting by painters [*huaren*] seems real but is a fiction. It surpasses the painting of men of talent, poets, and "originals," and is the true road to sagehood in painting. All professional practitioners of painting [*shihuzhe*] should themselves know to which category they belong.

The men of talent, poets, and "originals" are particularized examples of what Dong Qichang would have called literati, who import their own expressive craft into the practice of painting. For the painter (*huaren*), on the other hand, painting has its own craft rooted in the pictorial, the creation of a visually believable world. Arguing for the autonomy of pictorial craft, Shitao privileges this craft over the others as his theoretical response to the craft heterogeneity of the painting profession. If painting was a profession, it needed a center, a basis, and for Shitao, now a full-time professional, this could lie only in the autonomy of a specifically pictorial craft of fictionality – which to judge by his many-sided practice could take many different forms.

Taken together, these two inscriptions by Gong Xian and Shitao break with the conservative rhetoric that painting was only a minor skill (*xiaoji*) to which the literatus should not devote too much time, or to which he should turn only for purposes of survival. They attempt to resolve the conflict between the pursuit of painting as a livelihood and the constraints of the sociomoral hierarchy of occupations by affirming the moral integrity of painting itself. Shitao, particularly, aligns himself here with a functionalist ethic characteristic of the Kangxi period in which positive value was attributed to the pragmatic fulfillment of social function.⁴⁹ There is every reason to think that Shitao's thinking on this issue was in line with social theory in the Yangzhou milieu that he frequented. The writings of Shitao's patron Cheng Jun and others in the 1693 *Liang-Huai yanfa zhi*, for ex-

ample, follow late Ming writers such as Wang Daokun (1525–93) in arguing strenuously for the social worth of commerce.⁵⁰ The merchant is presented, again along functionalist lines, as a social actor performing an essential role in society. By taking control of the distribution of goods, he compensates for the natural unevenness of production on a nationwide scale. Profit, meanwhile, is the motor that powers this social mechanism, and as such is equally essential and valuable. The same authors insisted, moreover, on the social responsibilities that commercial success entailed. They pointed out that a significant proportion of mercantile profits was returned to the state through taxation and collective contributions to the state treasury, and they were able to provide extensive evidence of the civic activism of individual merchant philanthropists. Cheng Jun and his merchant colleagues were writing against the anticommmercial prejudice institutionalized in the sociomoral hierarchy, but they wrote without embarrassment and with a visible pride in their social ethos.⁵¹

Functionalist thinking was not always so narrowly tied to economic issues. The late sixteenth century announced a radical rethinking of the principles of social action, which were often redefined in line with the social changes of the period.⁵² Particularly striking is the emergence of the ideal of "practicality" (*shi*), a concept that recurs in every kind of writing. Benjamin Elman and others have shown that the "practical learning" (*shixue*) that was first espoused by progressive sixteenth-century officials was later taken up by remnant-subject scholars in the early Qing, and eventually more generally by scholars working privately and professionally within networks of academies and research groups, until the Hanlin Academy itself became massively involved in the late eighteenth century.⁵³ Independent of this, however, "practicality" was equally a keystone of statecraft, most obviously from the Kangxi reign onward; there was on this point no disagreement between the Manchu state and even those most opposed to it.⁵⁴ Moreover, the functionalist orientation was not at all restricted to amenable fields of activity such as statecraft, or science and technology.⁵⁵ On the contrary, its influence was felt in every area of culture. The seventeenth century saw an explosion of how-to manuals: not just route books, guidebooks, and medical handbooks, but also manuals of taste, of examination-essay writing, of poetic composition, and of painting.⁵⁶ Relevant here is the social theory of another of Shitao's friends and clients in Yangzhou, Fei Mi. Although most of his philosophic writings are lost, enough remains to give him a prominent position among the early Qing proponents of *shixue*.⁵⁷ This practical orientation leads him, in some of his philosophic work, toward explicit social analysis, as, for example, in his advocacy of "the way of central-

ity and practicality" (*zhongshi zhi dao*). For Fei Mi, the individual's pursuit of the Way was "central" when it was relevant to the whole of society, which he denoted by the fourfold *shi min gong shang* categorization of the sociomoral hierarchy. By contrast, self-cultivation that had only personal meaning was described by Fei Mi as *pian*, "prejudiced." Pursuit of the Way could be said to be "practical," meanwhile, when it had a social function in daily life. Self-cultivation that dealt only with the mind was conversely described by him as *fu*, "superficial." From one point of view his theory expanded the functionalist view to provide an analysis in which scholars, farmers, artisans, and merchants were each recognized to have their necessary function in society. To fulfill that function was already to practice "the way of centrality and practicality." It followed that all social roles were equally worthy of respect: Fei Mi was arguing, in other words, against the stigma attached to artisanal labor and commerce, and for teaching and research, his own professional occupation.

Within the art world one of the major expressions of a functionalist ethic was the explosion of interest in codifying and transmitting the craft of painting, seen in the large number of pedagogical paintings from the period that survive today, as well as in Wang Gai's *Mustard-Seed Garden Manual of Painting* (1680) and theoretical writings by Wang Gai, Gong Xian, Wang Yuanqi, and Shitao, among others.⁵⁸ This codification began in the polemical circumstances of the "invention" of literati painting at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Since *wenren hua* was to be defined in terms of craft, it became necessary to explicate the specific characteristics of the literati craft of painting and its differences from other forms of painting craft. The efforts of Dong Qichang and others to do this stimulated a reaction among career painters, who provided their own, different definitions of pictorial craft, with rather less reliance on textual explanations. By the late seventeenth century a kind of pluralism had emerged, within which many different positions were defended but also mutually respected. Zhou Lianggong's *Duhua lu*, with its catholic selection of painters and critical tolerance, is vivid evidence of the emergence of this pluralism.⁵⁹ So, too, is Shitao's above-cited fan inscription, with its recognition of the diversity of craft in the painting profession. In this new situation, the real question was now the one underlying Shitao's inscription: What made painting different from other activities? Behind this lay the further question: What made the category of "painter" an adequate social definition? Since specialization ran contrary to the literati ethos, only the literati influx into the ranks of career painters in the early Qing could have provoked the emergence of these questions.

With its context in a functionalist social ethos restored to it, Shitao's deep involvement in theorizing and teaching the practice of painting recovers the vivid social relevance that it surely had for the artist himself. While his prolific theoretical writings often have a philosophical and religious purpose that will be examined in Chapter 9, they also incorporate a sustained practical and philosophical engagement with the *métier* as such, matched only by the slightly earlier writings of Gong Xian. Here, in the interests of a more focused treatment, I shall center my discussion on two great monuments of Shitao's pedagogy. One is, naturally, the systematic treatise on painting that he composed and revised during the Dadi Tang years. In modern times this treatise has circulated in printed editions under a Chan title, *Recorded Remarks on Painting by Monk Bitter Melon* (*Kugua heshang huayu lu*) – thus the common name, *Huayu lu* – which appears to have been the invention of a later eighteenth-century editor. The treatise likely began life around 1697 under the more prosaic title of *Primer in the Methods of Painting* (*Huafa beiyuan*) and was finally published in 1710 in a facsimile of a manuscript version, three years after Shitao's death, under the still more prosaic title *Manual of Painting* (*Hua pu*) (see Figure 186).⁶⁰ Aware that his presentation of pictorial craft was more conceptually oriented than was customary, Shitao insisted in the printed text on its practical purpose:

Someone said, "Painting manuals and theoretical treatises should illuminate things clearly, chapter by chapter, explaining in detail every point of brush-and-ink technique. Never has anyone spoken to fellow devotees about the art of landscape in such an abstruse manner. But it seems that Dadizi's nature is entirely too exalted. He sets forth a method beyond his contemporaries, refusing to start from what is simple and accessible!" Strange words indeed! What we perceive from a distance is realized in terms of what is near at hand, and the knowledge we gain from that which is near is utilized in dealing with distant things. The One-stroke is the simplest, most accessible practice when commencing calligraphy and painting; transforming such brushstrokes is the simplest, most accessible guide to brushmanship and ink control. Mountains and oceans are depicted by such simple, accessible schemes as a mound and a ditch. Dynamic forms are organized by the simple, accessible principles of outline and texture.⁶¹

Shitao also took a firm stance on the ethical value of painting, arguing in another chapter that the born painter has a responsibility to paint. By not doing so, he fails in his responsibility to heaven, which endowed him with his talent, and to landscape, which depends on his capacities of visualization to express itself. Ultimately he fails himself because he has not understood his own function in the order of things:

He who has received a talent for painting should respect and preserve it, strengthen his abilities and employ them. Striving outwardly without a break, he should remain inwardly constant. The *Book of Changes* says, "Heaven moves firmly. The Superior Man constantly strengthens himself." This explains what I mean by "venerating receptivity."⁶²

In a straightforwardly functionalist argument, Shitao offers a view of the world as a self-regulating system, within which it is man's role to be receptive – to heaven, to landscape. This receptivity also implies the assumption of the responsibility of one's talent; indeed, the culminating chapter of the treatise is entitled "Assuming One's Responsibilities" and elaborates a monumental vision of painting as an ethical imperative. The implications here go well beyond painting itself and bear on the larger question of the individual's relation to society. Shitao insists that painting is in no sense a second-best practice but instead is an indispensable one. His treatise elevates the practice of painting above the level of a "minor skill"; rather, the painter is an essential member of the community. The individual is encouraged to follow the imperatives of his talent, based on his self-knowledge. The unspoken but unavoidable premise of such a philosophy is that the barrier between commerce and painting with a high moral purpose does not hold; painting as a profession supplies its own social definition.

On the evidence of Chapter One of the *Primer*, the *Primer* and *Manual* versions of the treatise were very different. Shitao also produced a number of other recensions in between that today are generally associated with the anachronistic title *Recorded Remarks on Painting* (*Huayu lu*), which show only minor variations from one another and represent an intermediate stage of writing much closer to the *Manual* than to the *Primer*. My citations come from the *Recorded Remarks* family of recensions – long known and intensively studied, for which fine translations by Pierre Ryckmans (French) and Richard Strassberg (English) are available.⁶³ All or most of the recensions probably circulated in manuscript form during Shitao's lifetime. Among the known owners of the manuscripts was Mr. Liu, for whom Shitao painted the set of two (or perhaps three) teaching albums in 1703 that are the other great monument of his pedagogy. The thirty outsized leaves of these albums represent a comprehensive treatment of pictorial craft; in addition, a dozen of the paintings are accompanied by theoretical inscriptions.⁶⁴ Some of these texts, as is often the case in Shitao's teaching paintings of the Dadi Tang period, are drawn from a pool of theoretical statements that he had accumulated over his career; others were composed more recently, perhaps even for the purposes of this commission. These two sustained reflec-

tions on painting – one textual, one visual *and* textual – share several themes that form the basis of the discussion of Shitao's pictorial craft in the next section.

SHITAO ON CRAFT: THE INTEGRITY OF PAINTING

The seventeenth-century theorization of the craft of painting was on one level an attempt by professionalized literati to find an alternative to the master career painter's transmission of professional craft through model works that the apprentice copied faithfully, and through involvement of the apprentice in a collective process of production. Although both these modes of transmission had some currency in literati practice as well, they were offset there by an even stronger emphasis on the transmission of underlying principles. Stimulated by the public demand for such teaching, a number of artists – notably Dong Qichang, Wang Gai, Gong Xian, Shitao, and Wang Yuanqi – used a combination of visual and theoretical means to lay out their approach to the craft of painting. Both Shitao's treatise and the 1703 albums consciously operate within this wider discursive field.⁶⁵

They also intervene within the breakup of the existing epistemological field that John Hay has recently argued lay at the center of the late Ming transformation (from the third quarter of the sixteenth century onward). Using pictorial representation as his site of inquiry, Hay's argument is complex, but part of his point is that earlier hierarchical structures of order gave way to a sort of epistemological experimentalism as the authority of the political-cosmological center was usurped by the subject.⁶⁶

Once beyond specific rhetorical positions, whether on the side of "individualism" or "tradition," they . . . all acquire meaning from the gap that has opened up in the epistemological field. This gap provided a site for enduringly active perceptions of subjectivity to establish a new and critical authority in all cultural processes. In terms of painting, whereas the Yuan period had made it possible for subjectivity to impregnate, so to speak, the traditional structure, in the late Ming it became possible for the subject as the central authority to act upon the world, even if only experimentally and, as it turns out, within spatial and chronological limits.

Among the most commonly remarked changes in late Ming painting are a series of structural innovations. The viewing subject, who had previously been situated in locations relative to the world of the picture long established by convention, was now introduced to viewpoints never before known. The authority of the cardinal axes was undermined, and disjunctive relationships between

the constituent space-time "views" (*jing*) became routinely accepted. Conventions of placement, proportion, and narrative were all challenged, as were those governing symbolic relationships such as that of foreground tree to background mountain. Nonetheless, there is no lack of order: Simply, the order was now often clearly located in the painting surface, that is, in the material component of the pictorial sign, whereas artists had previously respected established compositional matrices that institutionalized pictorial order in an even-handed balance between surface (the "brush-and-ink," *bimo*) and illusion (e.g., the landscape, *shanshui*). So radical and widespread were these changes that one can legitimately speak of a new understanding of representation and a new visuality paralleling the emergence of a social cosmology of the independent individual (to be discussed in Chapter 9). For these innovations the language of *li* (structural order) and *ch'i* (energy) provides one pertinent set of terms of description.⁶⁷

Perhaps the key development in this period was the erosion, in the thought of many of the most interesting philosophers, of *li*'s previously undoubted autonomous power and precedence as a structuring agent over *ch'i*.⁶⁸ By numerous different routes, *ch'i* came to be identified as an agent and site of ordering structuration, despite its unhierarchical and fluid character. This entailed a revision in the understanding of *li*: Multiple *li* were now imaginable, as was *li* without hierarchy. The parallel between metaphysics and the cosmology of painting goes beyond compositional innovations, for in the late Ming the materiality of the pictorial representation, the painting *in* surface, increasingly became a privileged and very obviously energized site of structuration. Elsewhere Hay has argued that it was in the thirteenth- to fourteenth-century period that the frontier of surface was opened up to the painter, and that surface was at that time identified with *li* as the being of the picture.⁶⁹ In these terms, one might suggest that part of the epistemic shift in representation in the seventeenth century (whether or not one considers this to have been fulfilled) was the reinvention of surface as *ch'i*. Without this the new visuality of *qi* would have been unimaginable. As Wai-kam Ho and Dawn Delbanco have written: "*Qi* (strangeness) was the new Ming criterion for naturalness, replacing the old literati concept of *ya* (refinement and elegance) as *zheng* (orthodoxy). . . . By the late Ming . . . *qi* was . . . a basic ingredient for *ya*. . . . Thus, *qi* and *zheng* were no longer oppositional but synonymous."⁷⁰ However, as Hay points out, the implications of the epistemic transformation were general and not restricted to the different varieties of individualism. In particular, the new authority of subjectivity was associated with an acknowledgment of personal feelings (*qing*) that lies be-

hind the intense lyricism of much seventeenth-century painting, including Shitao's.⁷¹

In the following schematic reconstruction of Shitao's theorization of pictorial craft, the impress of these more general developments on Shitao's thinking will often be visible. In the interests of concision, I have chosen to highlight seven craft issues (to which I have given modern names) that particularly concerned him. At the same time, wherever possible I have chosen to let the artist speak for himself. The next several pages are thus pretty technical and have their own tone and rhythm, rather different from the rest of the chapter.

Energy

As early as the late 1680s, Shitao insisted on the importance of energy (*ch'i*) in the inscription to a large Xu Wei-like hanging scroll of rocks and plantain; the same text reappeared in 1699 in an utterly different context, at the end of the miniature album of landscapes for Wu Qipeng (see Figure 104):

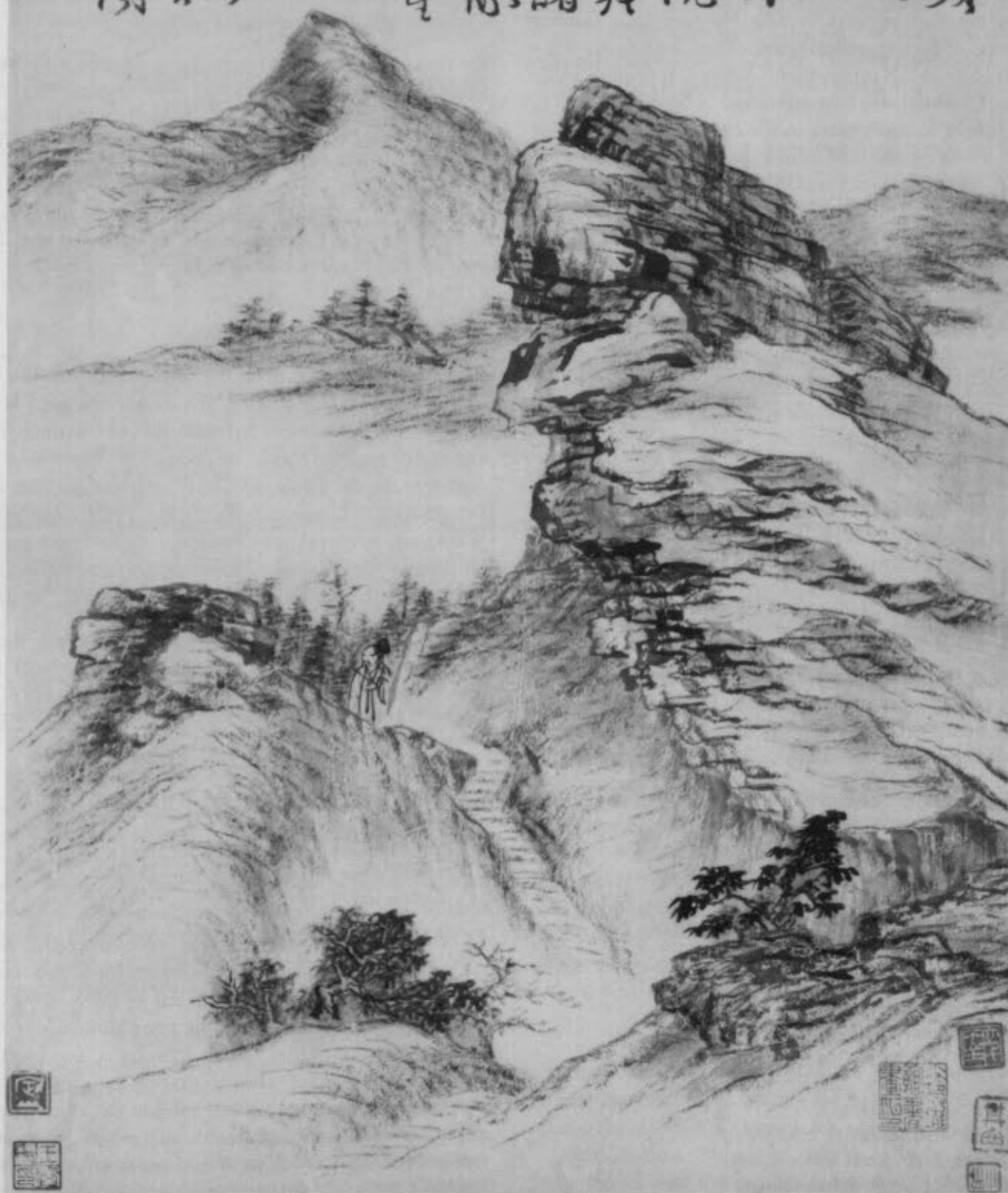
In the execution of calligraphy and painting, no matter whether [one is talking about] early masters or later students, the goal has always been to triumph through energy. When one's spirit [*jingshen*] is sparkling, this comes out on the paper surface; when one is lazy about the conception [*yi*], the result is superficial. Without spirit [*shen*] it cannot succeed.

Energy, in this formulation, is immanent in the vitality of execution and the quality of the pictorial idea (here *yi* is the layered formulation of subject matter that organizes the creative process). Shitao returned to these ideas in less conceptual language in his inscription to one of the dedicatory leaves of the 1703 albums for Mr. Liu (Figure 131). Again, this was an older text, composed no later than his time in Beijing:

This way [painting] requires penetration. By means of free brushwork in sweeping manner the thousand peaks and the ten thousand valleys may be seen at a glance. As one looks at [the painting], fearsome lightning and driving clouds seem to come from it. With which [of these great names], Jing [Hao] or Guan [Tong], Dong [Yuan] or Ju [ran], Ni [Zan] or Huang [Gongwang], Shen [Zhou] or Zhao [Mengfu], could such a picture be associated? I have seen works of many famous masters, but they all follow certain models or schools. How can I explain that in both

131 (*facting*). "Walking on a Rocky Path," *Landscapes for Liu Shitao*, dated 1703, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, 47.5 x 31.3 cm, leaf 12, ink on paper. William Francis Warren Fund. Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

出道見地透脫只須
 放筆直掃千岳萬
 壑縱目覽胡楚若
 驚電奔雲屯自
 起荆關耶董巨耶倪
 黃耶沈趙耶誰與
 安名余嘗見諸諸
 名家動輒倣某家
 法某派書與画天生
 自有入職掌一
 代之事終何處
 說趙大條子與為
 翁年當先生一嘆
 癸未三月青蓮州園



writing and painting, nature endows each individual with peculiarity and each generation with its own responsibility?⁷²

The verve of the text is echoed in the calligraphy of the inscription, which itself picks up on the energy of the massive but fluid rock outcrop that dominates the composition. It adds spice to one's reading of the inscription to realize that the image is based on an illustration of Xiao Zhao's (active c. 1130–50) methods of form and texturing that appears in *The Mustard-Seed Garden Manual of Painting*, illustrated, edited, and partly written by Shitao's Nanjing friend Wang Gai (Figure 132). Wang's manual was first published in Nanjing in 1680, just before Shitao's move to the city; more to the point here, it was republished in an expanded edition in 1701/1702. Shitao's invocation and negation of orthodox-lineage theory situates his text within a post-Dong Qichang world, yet his emphasis on the energy of the act of painting and its immanence in pictorial structure is reminiscent of Dong's earlier emphasis on the dynamic force of forms (*shi*), itself an embodiment of *ch'i*:

When an old master worked on a large scroll, he accomplished it with only three or four large divisions and unitings. Although there will be a great many small parts within these, the main requirement is to capture the dynamic force of forms and make that the basis of the design.⁷³

Though Shitao from the beginning rejected the emphasis on hierarchy, and by the Dadi Tang years had also rejected the subordination of ink to brush control, the attention to energy was one part of Dong's legacy that always remained central to his theory and practice. Indeed, it underlies and is immanent in the principle of the *yihua* – the One-stroke, Primordial Line, or Holistic Brushstroke – that unifies the entire argument of Shitao's treatise on painting. In the opening chapter, he characterizes the energetics of the One-stroke in somatic terms:

If the wrist does not move freely, then the entire painting will seem wrong, and when a painting seems wrong it is because the movements of the wrist are uninspired. Activate it in circular motions, ease it by twisting and turning, and bring it to rest with a feeling of spaciousness. Thrust as if attacking; return as if tearing something off. The movements of the wrist should be:

round, angular,
direct, meandering,
raging upward and downward,
shifting with equal facility to the left or right.
It should soar and dip, acting suddenly.
It should cut incisively,
extend horizontally or obliquely.
Flowing deep down like water
or shooting upward like flames,

the wrist should move naturally,
without the slightest bit of coercion.

When every movement is animated, any method can be mastered. The natural order of things will be captured and their outer appearances fully depicted.⁷⁴

So important was this point to Shitao that he included a separate chapter devoted to wrist movements. He also returned to the theme of energy in other contexts, for example, in a chapter dealing with basic compositional schemae, which he concluded with this injunction:

If you use these three [formulae] you must be sure that a single force of energy infuses the whole [composition] and that you don't let yourself be inhibited. With the boundary line, three layer, or two parts [formulae], you just give free reign to your hand – only then will the force of the brush come out, and even if you tackle a thousand peaks and ten thousand cliffs, there will be no trace of banality anywhere. If you bring these three [formulae] to life, small mistakes here and there will not detract [from the whole].

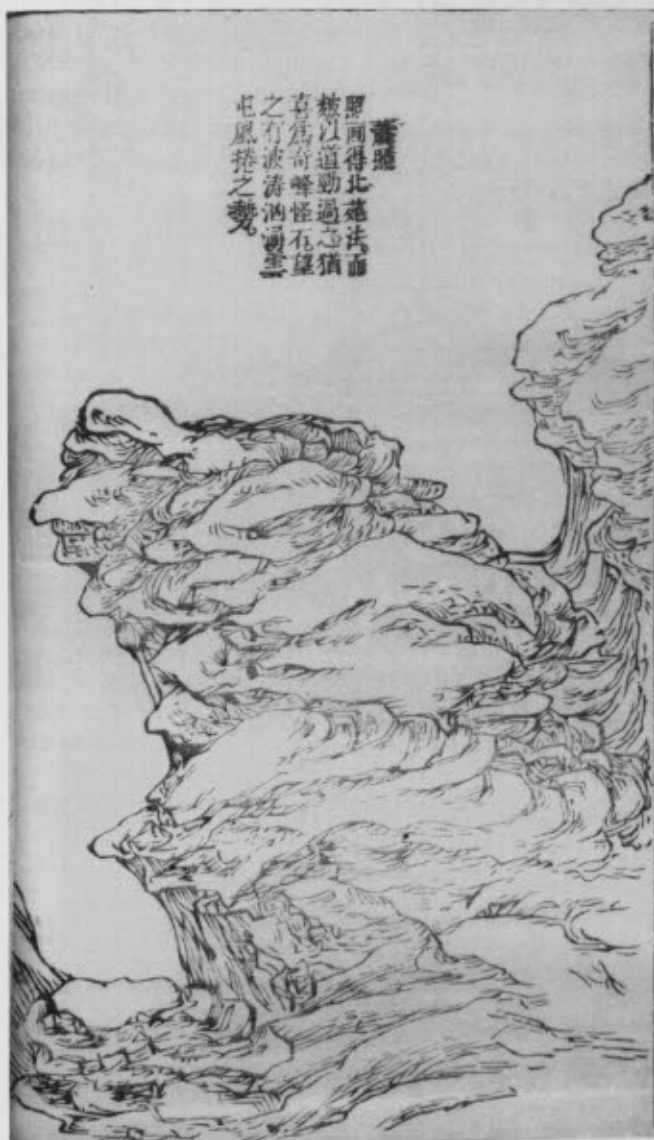
Materiality

As an active participant in the seventeenth-century reinvention of surface as *ch'i*, Shitao often argued for a visuality that privileged the materiality of surface. His arguments took several forms, however. Where his concern was for the autonomy of the picture surface, the key term was “brush-and-ink” (*bimo*), referring to surface as an energized presentational (rather than representational) environment, structured by the trace. One chapter of his treatise is devoted to the ideal “fusion” (*yinyun*) of brush and ink:

Do not carve at it or use a still and lifeless touch, or one that is heavy and clumsy. Do not become entangled, or abandon coherence, or lose sight of the natural order of things.

Establish spirit amid a sea of ink tones;
Create vitality with the point of the brush.
On a simple piece of paper,
Bring about a complete metamorphosis;
Let light shine forth through Primordial
Confusion.⁷⁵

At other times, however, he was more concerned with surface as the interface of the presentational and representational. This is the case for one of the longest and most technical inscriptions in the 1703 albums, devoted to the *dian*, a term that covers dots, dabs, and blots of all kinds (Figure 133). The calligraphic inscription itself is remarkable in this case for echoing the edges of the paper, as if to underline their function as frame and make the viewer conscious of the fundamental arbitrariness of the picture surface:



132. Wang Gai (active c. 1677–1705), "Xiao Zhao's Method of Painting Rocks," from *The Mustard-Seed Garden Manual of Painting*, I, 3/25b.

In depicting tree leaves and moss colors, the Ancients used dots, sometimes in light ink and sometimes in thick ink, in shapes like the characters *fen* 分, *ge* 个, *yi* 一, *jie* 介, *pin* 品 and *[si]* 厶, and arranged them in threes and fives, like those in *wutong* trees, pine, cypress, and willows, sometimes hanging down and sometimes slanting down, to show different kinds of leaves and various types of trees, mountains, and winds. However, I am different. For dots, I have dots for rainy, snowy, windy, and clear days, and all seasons. I have negative and positive dots and *yin* and *yang* dots, complementing each other; dots with water and dots with ink, all mixed together; dots for holding budding flowers, for algae lines, fringes, and joining strings; empty, broad, dry, and tasteless dots; dots with ink, without ink, flying white and smokelike; and dots burnt like lacquer, dark and transparent. There are also two other kinds of

dots that I have not been willing to reveal to students. There are dots that show no Heaven or Earth but seem to cut right in front of you; there are also dots that show absolute quietude over a thousand peaks and myriad ravines. Alas, there are no definite methods; only one's spirit makes them the way they are!⁷⁶

Appropriately, the painting recognizably evokes the soft hill forms and forest groves of the tenth-century monk-painter Juran, who was one of the early masters most closely associated with the use of *dian*.

Shitao also approached the issue of surface from the representational side. Chapter Nine of his treatise is devoted to the problem of represented surfaces, under the title "Texturing":

It is through texturing [literally, "wrinkles"] that the brush gives a living surface [literally, "face"]. And since mountains take on ten thousand forms, their surfaces cannot be reduced to a formula. People know about texture strokes but still fail to create a living surface: They go at it with their texture strokes, and yet where did one ever see a mountain with such a texture? No matter whether it is rock or earth, if you only paint this rock and this earth, the texturing will be limited, unlike the texturing landscape itself provides. As for the texturing provided by the landscape, just as mountains all have different names according to the wonders of their organic structure [literally, "body"] and the life in their surface, so too their appearance varies, and texture strokes have a naturally grounded variety. "Billowing clouds," "axe-cuts," "hemp fibre," "unraveled rope," "ghost face," "skull-like," "scattered twigs," "sesame seeds," "gold and jade," "jade powder," "pellet holes," "alum stone," and "boneless" are all examples of such texture strokes.⁷⁷ They must correspond to the particular organic structure of the mountain and the animation of its surface.

The mountain and its texturing are adapted to each other; texturing is born of the mountain. The mountain cannot change the nature and function of the texturing, yet the texturing is [naturally] able to absorb the mountain's resonances of form.

Putting these various texts together, one can define Shitao's theoretical understanding of the materiality of surface as the convergence of two ideas: on the one hand the somatic indexicality of the trace; on the other, the body metaphor that informs the representation of landscape surfaces.

The Emblematic Image

Perhaps the most powerful and uncompromising image in the 1703 albums depicts a tall rock outcrop with the tense energy of a clenched fist, answered by a bare, twisted, almost horizontal tree at its base; the tree in turn points over toward a small waterfall that empties

into a pool (Figure 134). The painting bears a short poetic inscription in clerical script:

Inspired, I give free reign to my imagination [*shen*]
in a sketch,
Using lines like seal and clerical script to image the
forms.

Every generation has someone who takes hold
To attain the supreme expression in the world.

Perhaps we should take the "fist," then, as an emblem of Shitao's belief in his greatness, as he takes his generation in hand. It is undoubtedly not a coincidence that the painting should, by its calligraphic craft and anguished forms, recall Dong Qichang: It was Dong, one remembers, who said that "scholars who paint should use the methods of strange characters in grass script and clerical script as their guide" (Figure 135).⁷⁸

While the improvisatory process is clearly one main concern in this painting, the other is the imaging of forms. Thus, it is not just the particular brushstrokes of the archaic seal and clerical scripts that Shitao is evoking as a basis for painting but also the imagistic forms of their characters, which serve here as paradigmatic images. However, there was an even more fundamental paradigm underlying both calligraphic and pictorial images; namely, the trigrams and hexagrams of the divinatory *Book of Changes*. Hu Qi evoked this paradigm in his preface to the *Hua pu*:

"Mi Xi [Fu Xi] looked up and saw the images [*xian*] of Heaven; looked down and examined the *fa*-ing [patterning] of Earth. He contemplated the markings of birds and beasts and the adaptations to the regions. He proceeded directly from himself, and indirectly learned from things [of the world]. Then he invented the eight trigrams to englobe the virtues of spiritual clarity, and categorize the ten thousand things according to their nature." . . . [Shitao] long submitted himself to the eight trigrams of Heaven and Earth. Then, when he came to be stimulated to encompass the principles of the world, he painted decisively, and had the means to do so.

The artist, however, would have seen the One-stroke as the very root of the hexagrams, as seen in the definition he gave to it close to the beginning of his treatise:

Now the One-stroke is the origin of all presence, the root of all phenomena [literally, "the ten thousand images"]. Its function is visible to spirit and hidden in the human, but the ordinary person will not realize. Thus the methods of the One-stroke are established from the Self.

It is through spirit (or imagination, *shen*) that the painter fulfills the One-stroke's function of making manifest the images that give form to phenomenological presence.

The most extended discussion of imagery in the treatise is itself appropriately imagistic. Although its title is "Ocean Waves," it is as much concerned with mountains as with water. Surely there is a connection here with the image embedded in Shitao's own name, "Stone Wave":

Oceans flow in vast currents;
Mountains crouch down and hide.
Ocean tides engulf things and disgorge them;
Mountains salute and bow low.
Oceans can reveal their souls;
Mountains can pulsate with terrestrial energy.
Mountains are composed of
layers of peaks
and ridges upon ridges,
remote valleys,
precipitous cliffs,
sharp and towering summits
where mists, fog, dew, and clouds all congregate.

This is just like the vast flow of the ocean's currents and the way it swallows things and disgorges them. So it is not only the ocean that reveals such a soul – mountains can take on these characteristics as well.

Likewise, oceans can take on the character of mountains:

their broad expanse,
depth and grandeur,
their convulsive laughter,
the mirages of towers on the horizon
created by the breath of clam-monsters,
the coursing of whales
and the soaring of dragons,
the morning tides, like peaks,
the evening tides, like ridges –

this is how the oceans can take on the characteristics of mountains in contrast to mountains taking on those of oceans.

Thus mountains and oceans take on each other's characteristics, and man can observe this with his own eyes. Even such mythical places as Yingzhou, Langyuan, Ruoshui, Penglai, Xuanpu, and Fanghu, though separated from one another like chess pieces on a board or like stars in the sky, can be imagined in terms of flowing springs or the pulsating arteries of the land. But one will have failed to perceive things if what one has observed about the oceans is not also applied in depicting mountains and vice versa. I know from my own perceptions that mountains are oceans and oceans are mountains; and they seem to understand that I have perceived this about them. It is all conveyed by the artist through his flowing movements of brush and ink.⁷⁹

133 (facing). "The Path beyond the Bridge," *Landscapes for Liu Xiaoshan*, dated 1703, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, each leaf 57.8 x 35.6 cm, leaf 3, ink on paper. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. (Purchase: Acquired through the generosity of the Hall Family Foundation.)

相公既以章年一考
發之秋日希在該別先

天
子
子



悟後運神竹稿鈎勒篆隸相形
一代一夫執掌羊掛角門庭

夏日清湘
苦瓜癡絕



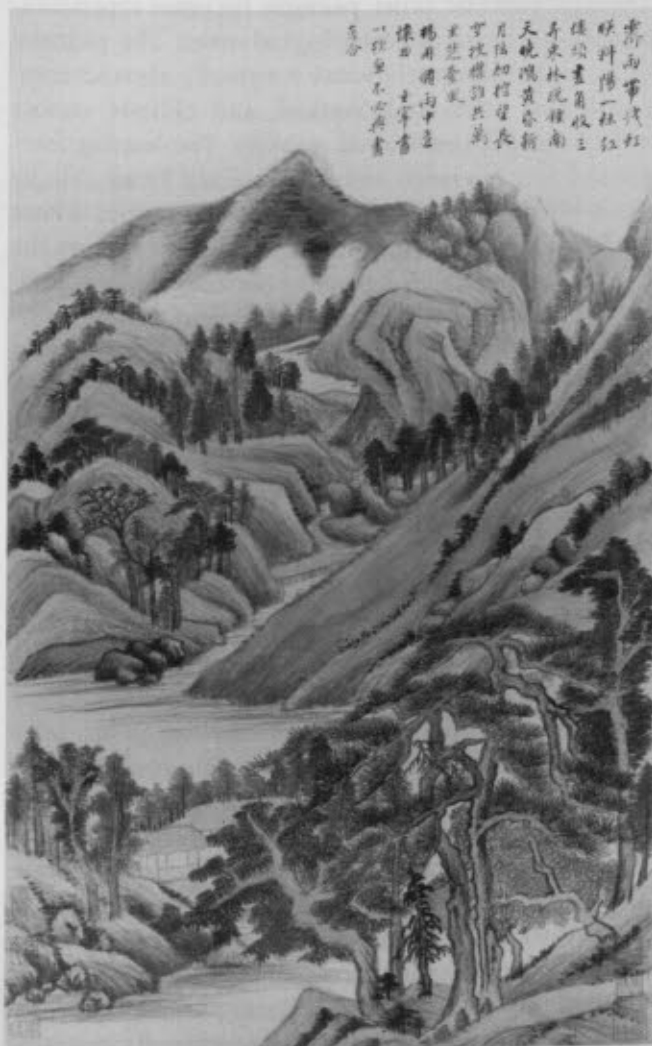
Perhaps, then, it is not outlandish to see in this particular album leaf a morphological reminiscence of crashing waves, nor to see in other paintings the visualization of his name, "Stone Wave" (see Figurea 131, 199).

Structural Economy

Chapter Twelve of the treatise isolates for discussion a single type of pictorial unit – tree groups:

134 (facing). "Rock Outcrop and Barren Tree," *Landscapes*, one of two album leaves, ink on paper, each 47.9 x 32.3 cm, leaf 1. Östasiatiska Museet, Stockholm (NMOK 447). Photographer: Erik Cornelius.

135. Dong Qichang (1555–1636), "Landscape after a Song by Yang Hongxiu: 'The Clearing Sky, the Fading Rainbow and the Stretches of Red in the Sunset,'" *Landscapes in the Style of Old Masters*, dated 1621–4, album of 10 leaves, ink and color on paper, each leaf 62.3 x 40.6 cm, leaf 9. The Nelson–Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. (Purchase: Acquired through the generosity of the Hall Family Foundations and the exchange of other Trust properties.)



The Ancients painted trees by threes and fives, nines and tens, depicting each one in all the individuality of its different views and the play of light upon it, mixing tall trees and short in groups full of life. My own way of painting pines and cedars, old acacias and old cypresses, is to group them by, for example, threes and fives. I give them stances like warriors in [heroic] poses, some looking down, some looking up, crouching or erect, and the whole group in unsteady movement or, on the contrary, lined up in a row. . . . For great mountains the method is the same, and there is no need for anything else. To pursue a fragmentary image with raw and pungent means: This is one of the secret principles.

Shitao recommends that the painter multiply the possible polarities within the group of trees. A pictorial unit of this kind should have a complex internal relational structure, a requirement he extends to mountains and that implicitly holds for the level of the overall composition as well. At the same time, the fact that his groups of trees are odd-numbered suggests the impossibility of an internal symmetry: The group has an inherently "open" structure that facilitates its integration into the larger world of the painting, just as the overall painting implies a larger world beyond its own boundaries. I take "raw and pungent means" to be an injunction to the painter to be economical. Shitao's argument on this point is strikingly reminiscent of the slightly earlier writings of Gong Xian on the painting of trees. Though less inclined than the Chan-trained Shitao to formulate the question dialectically, he had an equally strong sense of painting as a relational system. Gong made his point through lengthy and, on the surface, dry, technical discussions that I shall not quote here,⁸⁰ but his view can be summarized as follows: If one fully understands the structural principles of landscape motifs, an infinite number of structural and relational changes can be wrought on the basis of a limited number of elements. Painting does not try to reproduce nature's surface diversity; instead it establishes analogous variety, limitless on its own terms. As he put it aphoristically, "Little by little is better than more and more; this is the advanced stage of the painter."⁸¹

Gong's comment appears as an inscription in a teaching album comprising images of isolated motifs, facing an image of trees that precisely fulfils Shitao's requirements for the "fragmentary image." The close-up, fragmentary view was a commonplace of pictorial pedagogy, found also in *The Mustard-Seed Garden Manual of Painting*, which, as we have already seen, used isolated landscape fragments as a way of introducing specific representational techniques. Among the images in Shitao's 1701 *Landscapes Painted during Leisure from Illness* are two similarly close-up views: landscape fragments that by the power of their internal structure stand



136. Wang Gai (active c. 1677–1705), "Li Sixun's Method of Painting Rocks," from *The Mustard-Seed Garden Manual of Painting*, 1, 3/32b.

metonymically for something more complete. In one leaf, he took the principle of the manual's isolation of a rock face to demonstrate a technique of texturing (Figure 136) and, by adding a second, complementary element, shifted attention from a motif to a relation, placing the focus on the intersection between the foreground peak and the sea of mountains behind, one highlighted and focused, and the other blurred (Figure 137). In a second, Mi-style leaf, which seems to have Wang Gai's exposition of the Mi-family style as a specific source (Figure 138), Shitao put a second peak behind the first to add body and weight, defining the relation between the two original units more clearly as one of depth by introducing a stream (Figure 139). From being a fragment, an incomplete detail, the image has been transformed into an involving and highly immediate scene in itself. Al-

though there is a central motif in this case – the stream – it serves only to underscore the tension between the motifs it separates.⁸²

Within the 1703 albums, Shitao's theoretical reflection on compositional order is inscribed on a more elaborate close-up scene (Figure 140). Built around a basic opposition between a middle-ground hill and a cut-off foreground outcrop jutting horizontally into the painting, the painting is a complex study in compositional dynamics. (One thinks of Gong Xian's comments on stability and strangeness in composition). Shitao's inscription, itself a further, complicating compositional unit, links technical concerns to metaphysical ones:

The hill-and-gully [embodies] Nature's structural order [*li*],
The brush-and-ink adapts itself to the scene it encounters,
Following one's conception, the concealed brush tip twists and shifts direction,
Bringing into [the painting] the limitless interest [of the scene].

Through pictorial order painting becomes representationally adequate to cosmological order. The pictorial order is once again relational: a virtually abstract composition of horizontal, vertical, and oblique vectors brought into a provisional stability. The leaning foreground pine intersects and is intersected by an oblique stone bridge; it seems to buttress the outcrop, whose horizontal thrust is reinforced by a band of mist on the left, itself intersecting a grove of perfectly vertical conifers. The material component of the pictorial sign – surface – grounds the illusion of landscape, asserting that order is the result of a participatory process in which subjectivity has authority. It was this authority that enabled a structural economy based on the autonomy of the fragment.

The Scene and the Scenic

For the seventeenth-century painting profession, pictorial craft was not necessarily based on narrowly pictorial values; calligraphic craft provided, if not an alternative model, then at least an alternative starting point. In an influential study, James Cahill has sought to account for the resulting polarity by the idea of a structural tension in seventeenth-century painting between realism and abstraction, an argument that is characteristically modernist both in its choice of familiar Western terms and in the antagonistic opposition it posits.⁸³ More recently, Richard Vinograd has recast the argument in terms more sensitive to the Chinese context, distinguishing the *scenic* (which evokes the *emic* [i.e., intraculturally relevant]

137. "Rock Face," *Landscapes Painted during Leisure from Illness*, dated 1701, album of 10 leaves, ink and color on paper, 24.2 x 18.7 cm, leaf 4. The Art Museum, Princeton University. Museum purchase, gift of the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation.



concept of the *jing*, or scene, as a fundamental representational unit) from the *formalized* (in which there is an echo of Dong Qichang's *shi* or "dynamic force of forms").⁸⁴ Vinograd's concept of a scenic visuality is broader than Cahill's realism, since it encompasses not only an illusionism based on optical experience (or its conventions) but also a metailusionism that builds scenes from formalized elements; for this reason it also accounts better for the interpenetration of what might be thought of as two visual economies. Much of what I have already cited by Shitao on energy has a certain relation to a formalized visual economy derived from calligraphy, though it owes an equal debt to the performance aesthetic of Zhe School painting via Xu Wei; and as one might expect of an artist whose own calligraphy is known for its introduction of pictorial values, the chapter of his treatise devoted to the relationship be-

tween the two art forms ("Integrating Calligraphy") extends the principle of painting to calligraphy and has almost nothing to say on calligraphy per se. In contrast to Dong Qichang, for whom scenic issues could only be addressed *through* a formalized visuality, Shitao was more liable to adapt even a formalized visuality to scenic purposes; one can imagine entering Shitao's landscapes in a way that is not possible for those of Dong Qichang.

Not surprisingly, therefore, Shitao's treatise devotes several chapters to questions of scene. The most explicit discussion is in Chapter Eleven, entitled "Shortcuts," which presents strategies for creating a kind of lyric drama based on unexpected or even illogical juxtapositions that intensify the quality of spectacle. As a procedure, the "shortcut" shows the influence of his Linji Chan training in its use of contradictory declarations meant to help the believer to a sudden enlightenment:



138. Wang Gai (active c. 1677–1705), "Mi Youren's Method of Painting Rocks," from *The Mustard-Seed Garden Manual of Painting*, 1, 3/27b.

Focusing on the [main] scene rather than the mountains [behind]: for example, the mountains are hoary as if it was winter, but within the boundaries of the scene it is like springtime.

Concentration on the mountains rather the [main] scene: for example, the trees in front are old and bare as in winter, whereas the mountains are springlike.

The trees stand up straight but the mountain and rocks are leaning; or the mountain and rocks are upright whereas the trees are leaning over. These are two examples of a slanting scene.

The mountain is deserted and dark without the slightest sign of life, but you add the likes of a sparse show of willows, young bamboo, a bridge or a country hut. This is an example of a supplemented scene.

Thus, one of the close-up scenes introduced earlier is a textbook example of a slanting scene (see Figure 140).

In the important Chapter Eight, "Mountains and Waters," Shitao formulates the single, unified space-time view of the scene in impressive terms that match the visual extrapolation of the *jing* to monumental scale that can be seen in *Drunk in Autumn Woods* or *The Waterfall at Mount Lu*:

As for the grandeur of landscape, the landscape stretches for a thousand *li*, clouds envelop it for ten thousand *li* as peaks and ridges stand forth in array. From a narrow point of view, it would appear that even a flying transcendent could not circle it all. But if the One-stroke is employed to survey it, then man can participate in the nourishing transformations of Heaven and Earth.

Survey landscape's dynamic form.

Measure the earth's full extent.

Investigate the distribution of peaks and ridges.

Be cognizant of the obscurations of clouds and mist.

From a front view, survey it for a thousand *li*;

From a side view, note its myriad layers of mountains.

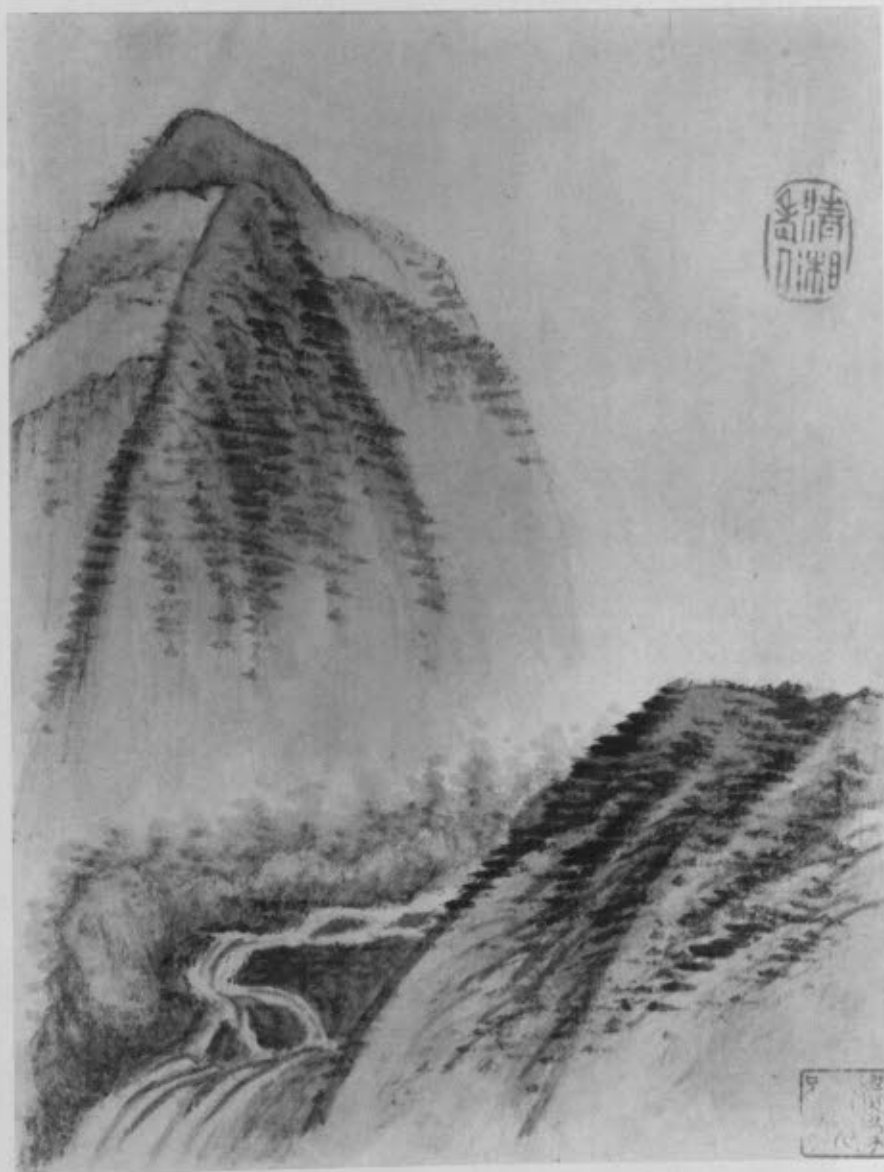
The emphasis in this text on the eye as an active instrument of cognition (within an understanding of perception as receptivity)⁸⁵ recurs in the 1703 albums, in the inscription to a leaf that recalls Song landscape – the heyday of painting as "the investigation of things" – by its profusion of detail and vast space (Figure 141):

The vast expanse that opens itself to an angled look is the painter's accumulation of vital energy [*ch'i*] over a lifetime. Steep hills and rolling ground, villages blending into mist, sometimes hidden, sometimes visible; people and vegetation; boats, carts and city walls – all the details: it makes the viewer imagine going into the mountains himself.⁸⁶

Is it mere coincidence that the landscape curves to a horizon that would not look out of place in a seventeenth-century Dutch print? There is no reason to exclude the possibility of a reference to pictorial technologies imported from Europe: At least two of Shitao's fellow Yangzhou artists, Li Yin and Gu Fuzhen, experimented with aspects of Western representation, as did many Nanjing artists with whose work he would have been familiar.⁸⁷ There may even be a submerged reference to the European representational device of the bird's-eye view in the transcendent's-eye view in Chapter Eight of Shitao's treatise. The trope of the bird's-eye view is found in a rather similar and almost contemporary text published in Yangzhou in 1697 by Zhang Chao, commenting on a set of poems on foreign countries:⁸⁸

This once inspired me to a flight of imagination. I had the desire to have a body like a bird that would suddenly sprout a pair of wings; I would travel to all the countries beyond the seas, view the wonders of their landscapes and people, the strangeness of their writing and speech, and

139. "Mountain Stream," *Landscapes Painted during Leisure from Illness*, dated 1701, album of 10 leaves, ink and color on paper, 24.2 x 18.7 cm, leaf 2. The Art Museum, Princeton University. Museum purchase, gift of the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation.



without realizing it would travel ten thousand *li* from west to east between dawn and dusk.

Might we not read Shitao's transcendent's-eye view as a domestication of this dangerous but exhilarating impulse, an example not of Western influence but of the more complicated phenomenon of an alternately fascinated and resistant response to Western ideas?⁸⁹

Temporality and Mood

In another magnificent leaf from the 1703 albums, rocks are hewn out of light, in a free interpretation of the so-called axe-cut texture strokes of the Southern Song Ma-Xia School, and contrasted with the color silhouettes of the reeds and mountain behind (Figure 142). A second leaf summons up the lush sunlit green of spring, with the

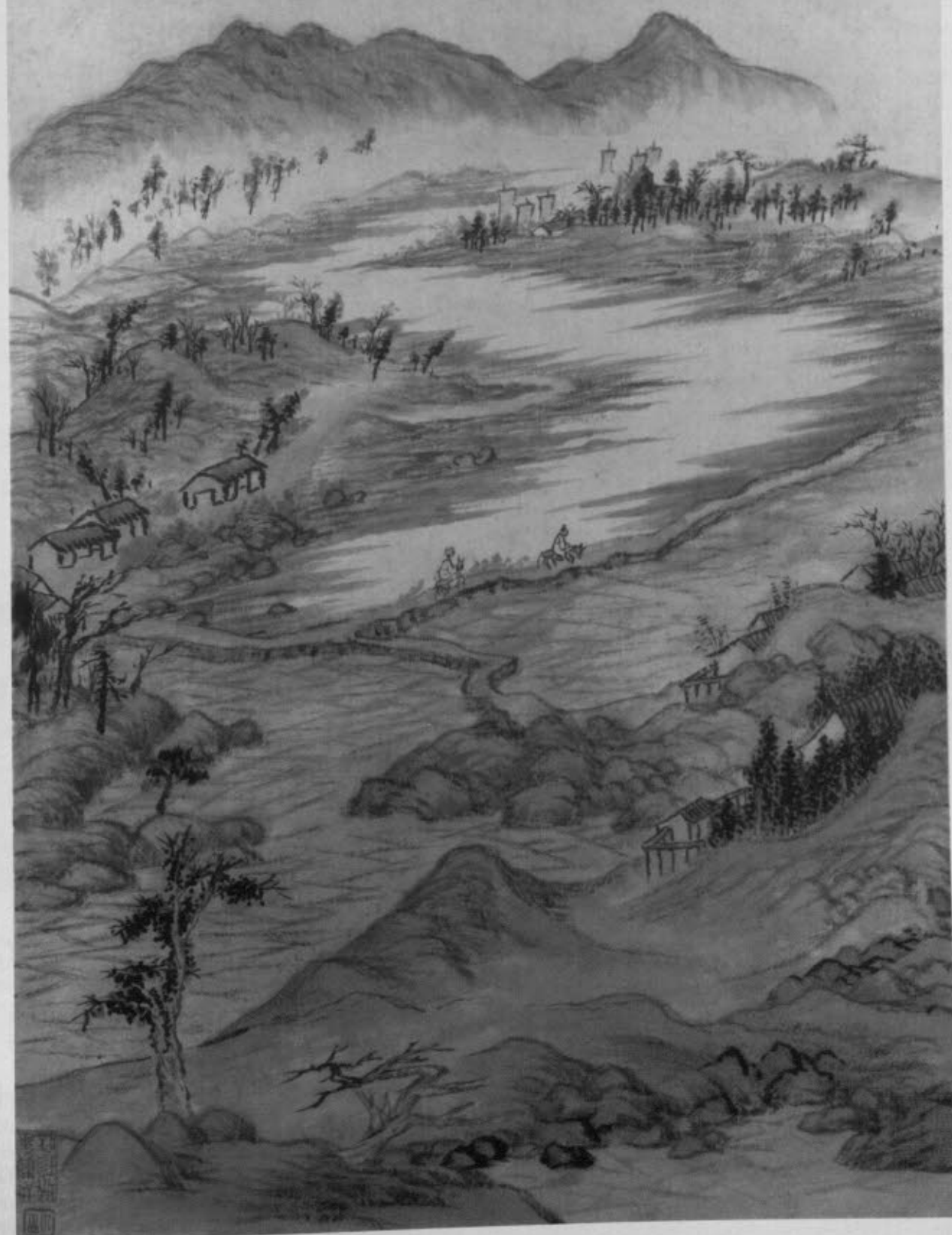
surprising but strikingly effective addition of gold highlights (Figure 143); and in a third leaf, the mossy surface of a huge foreground rock is established as much by the play of light from the setting sun as by the texture strokes (Figure 144). Light has here become Shitao's explicit subject and is thematized in the inscribed poem, while poetry itself is signified visually by the book that one of the figures holds.⁹⁰ These images belong to a specific moment in Shitao's development. Prior to the end of the 1690s his paintings (like those of Gong Xian) had tended to an almost wholly internal luminosity that did not require the viewer to make any specific, concrete link with the optical experience of nature, though overall there was a general analogical connection. Starting around 1699, however (and continuing through 1703), without abandoning light as an "internal" phenomenon – on the contrary, Daoism gave it an added *raison d'être*



140. "Stone Bridge across a Stream," *Landscapes for Liu Shitou*, dated 1703, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, 47.5 x 31.3 cm, leaf 5, ink and color on paper. William Francis Warren Fund. Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

141 (facing). "Travelers in the Countryside," *Landscapes for Liu Xiaoshan*, dated 1703, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, each leaf 57.8 x 35.6 cm, leaf 1, ink and color on paper. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. (Purchase: Acquired through the generosity of the Hall Family Foundation.)

盤礴睥睨乃
是翰墨家生
平所養之氣
岬嶮奇崛磊
磊落落如也
甲聯雲時隱
野現人物州木
舟車城郭就
事就理令觀
者生入山之想
乃是 大游子



– Shitao began to introduce “external” forms of light, which permitted a new atmospheric tangibility. As will be discussed in Chapter 9, this “realism” was embedded in a Daoist alchemical visuality; but his optical empiricism is nevertheless undeniable, and it can be seen in the 1703 albums in the way that brightness can abolish detail or throw it into relief, as well as in the suffusion of light by mist. To this observation of natural lighting can be added the artist’s attention to the problem of focus. In certain paintings, foreground definition is quite explicitly contrasted with the indistinct images brought about by distance; and this, in turn, is of a piece with his new scenic care to harmonize diminution of scale and recession.⁹¹

In his treatise as in the 1703 albums, Shitao associates this more tangible, observation-based evocation of light and atmosphere (itself a scenic device) with poetic mood. Guo Xi – one of Shitao’s points of reference in the treatise – had written on the same question in the *Linquan gaozhi*:

Mountains look different in the spring and summer, the autumn and winter. This is called “the scenery of the four seasons is not the same.” A mountain in the morning has a different appearance from in the evening. Bright and dull days give further mutations. This is called “the changing aspects of different times are not the same.” Thus can one mountain combine in itself the significant aspects of several thousand mountains. Should you not investigate this?

And in the continuation of this passage he tied the question of observation to that of poetic mood:

In spring mountains, mists and clouds stretch out unbroken and people are full of joy. In summer mountains, fine trees offer profuse shade and people are full of satisfaction. In autumn mountains, bright and clear leaves flutter and fall, and men are full of melancholy. In winter mountains, dark fogs dim and choke the scene, and men are full of loneliness. To look at a particular painting puts you in the corresponding mood. You seem in fact to be in those mountains. This is the mood [*yi*] of a painting beyond its mere scenery.



142. “Spring Breeze, Moonlight,” *Landscapes for Liu Shitao*, dated 1703, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, 47.5 x 31.3 cm, leaf 1, ink and color on paper. William Francis Warren Fund. Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Shitao’s more elaborate discussion of the temporality of landscape, in a chapter entitled “The Four Seasons,” takes its cue directly from these remarks but brings to it different epistemological assumptions. Whereas for Guo Xi the atmospheric poetry of the landscape must conform to a predetermined order, which it is the painter’s

task to reveal or confirm, Shitao by contrast seems less interested in order than in raw experience:

When painting a scene with a seasonal character, the atmosphere and lighting should be differentiated. One does this by studying closely the season and the weather. The Ancients expressed such scenes in poems. For Spring, there is:

As ever, grass pushes up through
the sand;
Together lengthening, river and
clouds merge.

Further examples follow for the other three seasons.⁹² From this first level of differentiation, he passes on to more subtle distinctions:

There are also winters when it is not properly cold. As a poem says:

Snow is rare, for Heaven stints on
coldness;
Close to New Year and already the
days are getting longer.

Although it is the middle of winter yet there seems to be no feeling of cold. . . . Other [such ideas] may be inferred for the other three seasons according to the character of each.

As in Guo Xi's explanation, the same principle applied to the seasons can also be applied to the times of the day. Here Shitao proceeds directly to more subtle, ambiguous moments:

There are also scenes divided between darkness and light:

A wisp of darkness brightens the
dark moon;
The sunset brightens the sun's edges.

Or seemingly dark and light at the same time:

It may not be the sadness of twilight
But only a faint shadow on the horizon.

He concludes with a statement that goes far beyond Guo Xi's straightforward invocation of poetic mood to place his whole art under the sign of poetry. Mood, conveyed above all through atmosphere, is not just one aspect of his art but its very core, just as the idea of an underlying order is at the heart of Guo Xi's:



143. "Verdant Spring." *Landscapes for Liu Xiaoshan*, dated 1703, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, each leaf 47.4 x 31.5 cm, leaf 2, ink, light color and gold on paper. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. (Purchase: Acquired through the generosity of the Hall Family Foundation.)

I use the ideas of poems as ideas for my paintings. There is no scene that does not have a seasonal character; the mountains and clouds that fill our view are entirely transformed as the seasons change. If you recite poems with this in mind, you will understand that painting is the very intention of poetry and poetry the enlightenment of painting.

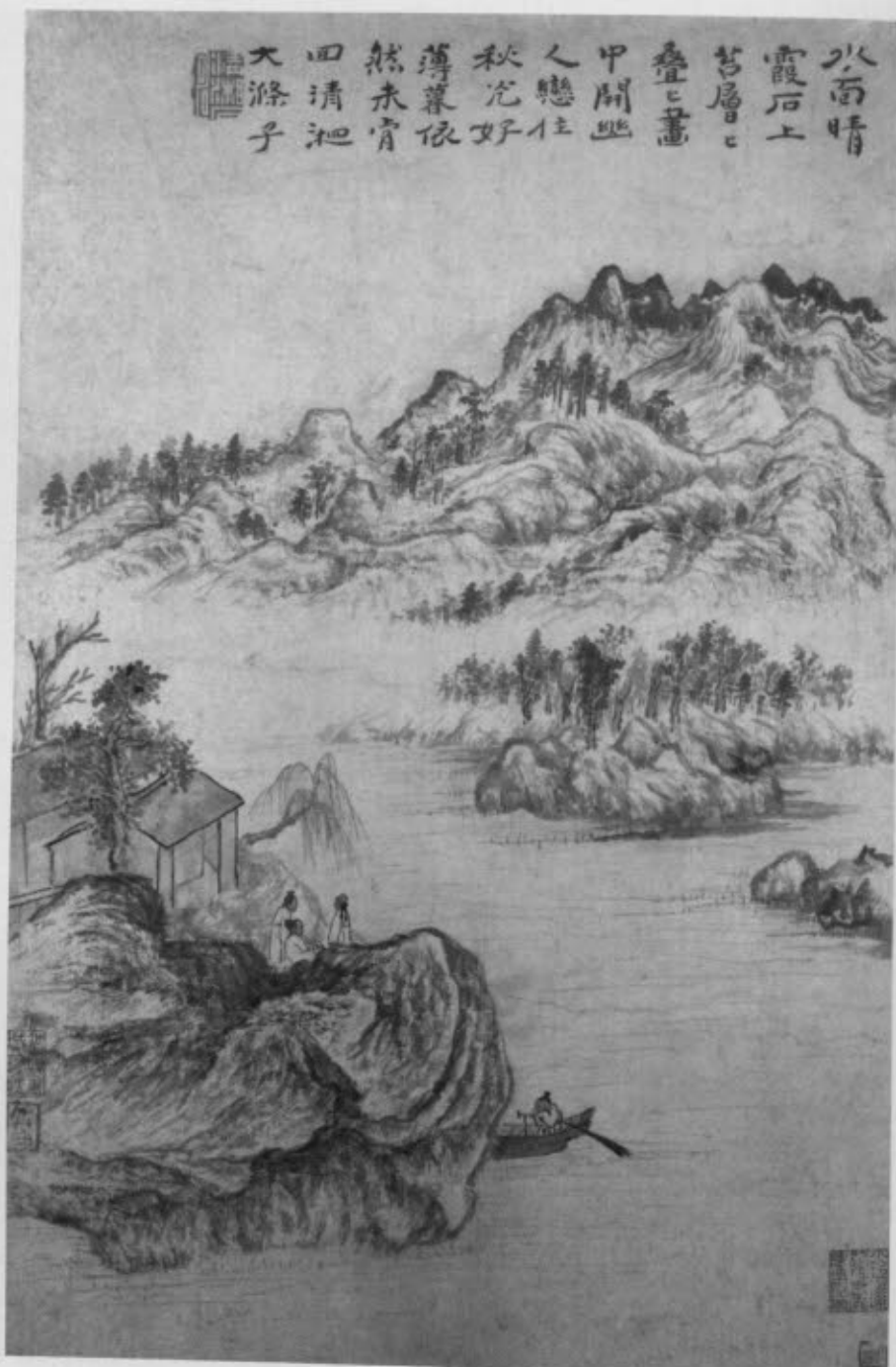
This statement belongs to an aesthetic world in which *qing* ("feeling" or "subjectivity") as one of the expressions of energy (*ch'i*) has replaced rightness and hierarchical order (*li*) as the primary organizing principle. In the inscription to a further leaf from the 1703 albums (the text itself dating from his stay in the North), Shitao takes his stand on the lyrical nature of painting in just such terms (Figure 145). His terminology, indeed his entire aesthetic stance, derives directly from the great defenders of subjective experience in the late Ming, the writers of the Gongan School.⁹³

The painting in poetry is something that comes from one's subjective nature [*xingqing*]. So painting is not about doing a picture in such-and-such a style and then making up a poem [to go with it]. The poetry in painting, meanwhile, is born of the interest [*qu*] of a scene at a particular moment. So poems are not to be tossed off and then paintings forced out of them. If properly understood the two will [instead] be inseparable, as in a mirror reflection. How easy this was in the beginning, but people today do violence to the relation between poetry and painting.

Although, for his illustration of this text, Shitao chose to evoke the calligraphic values of Ni Zan, it is clear from the other leaves I have cited that "the interest of a scene at a particular moment" extended to include the phenomenality of light.

Intervisuality

If, as we have seen, Shitao sometimes incorporated history into painting through the sense of place, at other times he did so by invoking an established parallel between painting and the practice of history. To legitimate his place in the present, the modern painter ordered his relationship to the past of painting, notably through the construction of lineage relationships of style or method (*fa*).⁹⁴ It was in the resultant order that history in a wider sense than mere art history entered the space of painting, by a mechanism of resonance, since the trope of lineage extended through all areas of public culture, in-



144. "Autumn Light before Dusk," *Landscapes for Liu Xiaoshan*, dated 1703, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, each leaf 57.8 x 35.6 cm, leaf 6, ink and color on paper. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. (Purchase: Acquired through the generosity of the Hall Family Foundation.)

145 (facing). "The Painting in Poetry, the Poetry in Painting," *Landscapes*, album of 4 leaves, ink on paper, each leaf 47.5 x 31.2 cm, leaf 4. Bei Shan Tang Collection, Hong Kong.

詩中畫性情中來者
也則西不是可擬張
擬李而後作詩畫中
詩乃境趣時生者也則
詩不是便生吞生剝而
後成畫真識相觸如
鏡寫影初何容心今
人不免唐突詩畫矣

小乘客阿長



cluding the political. Shitao, however, did not himself subscribe to the normative lineage view of painting history associated with Dong Qichang and his followers, who on this point included Gong Xian.⁹⁵ When Shitao cited lineages, as we have already seen in one 1703 album leaf, it was to disown them and maintain instead that "nature endows each individual with peculiarity and each generation with its own responsibility." On another leaf from the 1703 albums he inscribed this virulent declaration, probably written during his stay in Beijing (Figure 146):⁹⁶

When the Ancients first came to establish methods [*fa*], I wonder what methods they took as their models? Yet ever since the Ancients established methods, latter-day painters have not been allowed to go beyond them. For more than a thousand years, this has prevented artists from emerging in their own right. Studying the traces of the Ancients but not studying the Ancients' minds has made them unable to emerge in their own right. How lamentable!

Yet this iconoclastic text appears on one of the most carefully considered, virtually classical leaves of the 1703 albums. Adapting for the purpose a Chan master's technique in which he was very experienced, Shitao sets up a contradiction here between image and text that provokes a doubt as to the proper way to proceed; there is no correct (or, for that matter, incorrect) choice. Shitao's individualism embraced both possibilities and their coexistence. Thus, while Shitao reduced lineage to just one possible form of historical relationship among others, without special authority, he was far from advocating turning one's back on tradition, as he made explicit in a third inscription from the albums (Figure 147):

Although ancient masters excelled each in one style, yet I wonder if they had not studied all models through copying. Otherwise how could they understand so well the source of various principles? Nowadays learned men are really like withered bones and dead ashes (for they never learn widely). To know this truth is the surest means to achieve the state of a dragon (the supreme height) in painting.⁹⁷



146. "Visitors," *Landscapes for Liu Shitao*, dated 1703, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, 47.5 x 31.3 cm, leaf 9, ink and color on paper. William Francis Warren Fund. Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Shitao constructed an alternative to the lineage relationship to the past by detaching from it Dong Qichang's accompanying principle of studying "the minds of the Ancients." Faithful here to Dong's practice but also to Linji Chan, Shitao advocated only a direct, unmediated relationship with past masters that saw the reinvention

of their art as the condition of its entry into the present. In his treatise he gave this principle the name of "transformation," and at the end of a chapter that rehearses the arguments of the above-cited painting inscriptions, famously cast the issue in the terms of the inalienability of the body:

I am myself because my Self naturally exists. The whiskers and eyebrows of the Ancients cannot grow on my face, nor can their entrails exist in my stomach. I have my own entrails, and my own whiskers and eyebrows. Even when there may be some point of contact with another master, it is he who approaches me, and not I who seek to become like him. I have been taught directly by Heaven; how could I learn from antiquity without transforming it?

What this leads to in pictorial terms is, on the model of intertextuality, an intervisuality that is radically dialogic in character. Shitao affords to his model enough autonomy to permit a productive resistance but not so much that it can stifle his own personality. Thus the strong reminiscences of earlier painting that I have noted in several of the 1703 album leaves (Juran, Southern Song Ma-Xia School, Ni Zan, Dong Qichang) can be seen as the result of a struggle among equals, each with his own entrails and hair on his face. Still more intense is his struggle with Guo Xi in *The Waterfall on Mount Lu*. History is first and foremost difference.

This spatialized sense of history did not always take such a personal form, however; Shitao also had a strong sense of the character of different periods (Figure 148):

The art of painting should reflect the period, just as poetry and prose are influenced by current taste. The pictures of ancient times [Tang and earlier] are naïve in treatment and simple in conception like the literary expressions of the Han, Wei, and Six Dynasties. The paintings of the middle ancient period [Five Dynasties and Northern Song], however, are majestic and luxuriant like [the literature of] the Tang dynasty in its early years and at its height, while the paintings of the late ancient period [Southern Song], al-



147. "River Bend," *Landscapes for Liu Shitao*, dated 1703, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, 47.5 x 31.3 cm, leaf 6, ink and color on paper. William Francis Warren Fund. Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

though elegant, begin to be shallow like the literary expressions of the Tang dynasty near its end. Coming to the Yuan dynasty, the paintings are like [the poetry of] Ruan Ji (210–63) and Wang Can (177–217). Those by Ni [Zan] and Huang [Gongwang] suggest the line in Tao Qian's poem: "What a pity a beauty shrivels from too frequent bathing in water." I fear the beauty cannot be restored.⁹⁸

The painting that these words accompany is appropriately depersonalized and is, in its own way, a tour de force, using as it does the oblique composition associated with Southern Song to evoke the kind of monumental working landscape associated with the "majestic and luxuriant" painting of the Five Dynasties and Northern Song.

THE 1703 ALBUMS FOR MR. LIU

As a single monumental project, the 1703 albums have two main sets of contemporary pictorial references. First, they incorporate a response to the initial, landscape volume of *The Mustard-Seed Garden Manual of Painting*, which had just been republished. In addition to the borrowing and parallels noted earlier, one leaf (Figure 149) simply reverses the composition of one of Wang Gai's illustrations (Figure 150). These specific visual connections, however, are merely symptomatic of the larger role played by *The Mustard-Seed Garden Manual* as a model for Shitao's ambition in the albums. Wang Gai's manual, though not unprecedented, was the most comprehensive attempt yet made to provide a systematic, illustrated exposition of methods of landscape representation. It also exposed professional secrets of materials, introduced basic concepts of art history, and included a final section of examples of the work of contemporary masters. As such, it was to some extent a collective enterprise. In fact, the kernel of the manual lay in teaching paintings by the late Ming artist Li Liufang (1575–1629), and Wang may also have drawn upon the teaching methods of Gong Xian for his use of close-up fragments. *The Mustard-Seed Garden Manual* in effect staked out the territory of pictorial craft in the name of Nanjing painters, for a transregional audience that was easily reached through modern commercial publishing. As a response, Shitao's 1703 albums were much more personal and had a very limited audience, but they were not an isolated project; on the contrary, one has to think of them as part of a much larger enterprise involving both other, less ambitious works of the same kind and a full-blown treatise on painting, which collectively provided the means for Shitao's ideas to spread through the art world.

The other set of references in the 1703 albums establishes them as Shitao's considered response to the classicizing art of Dong Qichang's followers, particularly those from Taicang and Changshu. In the first place, the outsized dimensions of these album leaves were not popular in the artistic circles that Shitao had frequented; in contrast, the giant album was one of the favored formats of painters such as Wang Jian (1598–1677) and

Wang Hui, following Dong Qichang (see Figure 135), and was used by them for tour-de-force explorations of pictorial craft and theory. Building on this, Shitao acknowledged the classicist painters in both word and image. His antilineage inscriptions, as we have seen, take a violently confrontational stance; yet a number of the paintings, including the ones on which these declarations are inscribed, engage in a more peaceable dialogue. Shitao's Song-style landscape with a ferry, for example, comes as close to the art of Wang Hui as anything he ever painted: the documentary detail, the restrained and precise touch, the confident combination of realism and Yuan-derived brushwork all point to the Changshu master, just as the art-historical inscription suggests the kind of inscription often inscribed on Wang's work by Wang Shimin and Yun Shouping.⁹⁹ Several other leaves, by their conspicuous compositional stability and their calligraphic craft, are just as plainly reminiscent of Wang Shimin¹⁰⁰ and Wang Jian, though one may suspect a satirical edge to the poem that Shitao has added to one of them (Figure 151):

Even this cold and winding path
Is fit for the eye and mind to dwell upon.
How could vulgar mountains and foul waters
Be of no interest to Hutou and Dachi [i.e., Gu
Kaizhi and Huang Gongwang]?

The joint dialogue with *The Mustard-Seed Garden Manual of Painting* and classicism thus weaves a single larger context for the albums from both transregional and national art-world strands. Shitao's ambition refuses to be bound by a distinction between the two that could only work to his disadvantage. The context could only take form, however, through a public – the public that Shitao addressed and in the process constructed. Here it may be useful to make a distinction between "inside" and "outside" publics that made up the art-world audience. The engagement with issues of pictorial craft that I have been considering spoke to an "inside" public of his peers and students, entering into the process of "reciprocal excommunication" that Pierre Bourdieu has noted as the condition of intellectual and artistic autonomy in a professionalized cultural field.¹⁰¹ In other words, the albums spoke, through their dialogue with Wang Gai's manual and with classicizing painting, to the painting profession and those amateurs who hovered on its fringes. In this sense, they were con-

148 (facing). "River Ferry." *Landscapes for Liu Shitao*, dated 1703, album of 12 leaves, ink on ink and color on paper, 47.5 x 31.3 cm, leaf 2, ink on paper. William Francis Warren Fund. Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

筆畫皆隨時代順時又風氣既轉去之畫通間而志清如漢
魏六朝之自然中在之畫如初唐盛唐雄渾壯麗下在之畫如晚唐
之句雅清澹而漸之清矣則元明之既藉王蒙矣倪黃輩如
口編陶潛之句悲世人之憂沫從白水以折前悲無後在矣大雅子



tinuous with Shitao's treatise, which claimed no other audience. One leaf dedicated to Mr. Liu explicitly draws him into the fold of this "inside" public: On a simple Ni Zan-type lake landscape of the kind that an amateur painter might venture, an inscription ambiguously addressed to Ni and/or Liu shows a false modesty whose only purpose is to indicate a social deference (Figure 152):

Artistic reputation and elevated
moral character
Show him/you to be high above
the superficial people.
This old man is among the
superficial ones;
I complete the inscription with a
laugh, hurrying my colored
brush.

It is one of the ironies of professionalism that among its expressions was an exaggerated deference to amateurism – when the latter was associated with patronage.

However, unlike the treatise, the albums also, and perhaps primarily, engaged with an "outside" public of patrons and connoisseurs whose social approbation Shitao sought, as can be seen from a series of leaves within the albums that equally bear dedications to the patron. In these – making paradigmatic use of the recipient with whom he had chosen to place, like a canny investor, this advertisement of his talent and achievements and synthesis of his thinking on craft – he self-consciously constructed the "outside" public that he required, as embodied in Mr. Liu. It is therefore frustrating that Liu remains for the moment only a name, though, as we shall see, a vague profile emerges from Shitao's inscriptions (but see note 11). On the other hand, one may be sure that Shitao would not have gone to this trouble were he not confident that Liu was likely to make the albums properly known. The fact that they subsequently passed (perhaps directly) into the hands of Ma Yueguan (1688–1755) and Ma Yuelu, Yangzhou cultural leaders of the next generation, suggests that his judgment was well-founded.



149. "In the Studio of the Yellow Crane a Man Sleeps," *Landscapes for Liu Shitao*, dated 1703, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, 47.5 x 31.3 cm, leaf 7, ink and color on paper. William Francis Warren Fund. Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Like the dedications preceding novels in early modern Europe, the laudatory dedications Shitao infrequently used to acknowledge (or seek) a special generosity belonged to an established genre of deferential flattery. Not intended to be taken at face value, their efficacy lay

more in the elegance of the performance than in the qualities they attributed to the patron. For my purposes, however, it is precisely the attributes of the patron that are of most interest because they make it possible to sketch a profile of Shitao's ideal viewer. Among the inscriptions in the albums that address the patron as a social actor, the most elaborate depicts Mr. Liu as well-traveled, wealthy, and cultured (see Plate 13):

Mr. [Liu] Shitou is pure and elegant in taste;
His heart is aimed at expression of culture.
Ten thousand *li* of great waves have washed
his bosom;
Wind and snow all over the sky have
sharpened his eyes.
Five thousand volumes of distinguished
books are on his shelves;
Three hundred *hu* of fine wine are in his
cellar.
He reads a volume and pours a cup of wine;
In purple gown, smiling, he relaxes in his
house under plum blossoms.
Rapid sleet flies around without interruption,
Cold waves run down the wintry banks.
The Chan monk that I am would like to
sweep away writing
But I find myself composing poetry for his
high ideals.

This was a recycled text from pre-Dadi Tang years, indicating less a lack of originality on his part than a certain stability in his view of his public.¹⁰² The painting emphasizes the elegant (*ya*) side of the portrait, depicting Mr. Liu himself (corpulent, or is he just bundled up against the cold?) enjoying the austere pleasures of the hermit within a vast landscape that surely symbolizes the "ten thousand *li* within his breast."

The picture of Liu is filled out by two more leaves that, if they do not mention Liu by name, are easily understood to refer to him. One, a variation on the hermit-fisherman theme, encourages him to take off his "gray silk hat" and go fishing in the moonlight instead. Since hats of this kind were specifically worn by officials, this might be thought to mean that Liu was a current or former government official, but this is unlikely to be the case given the lack of the appropriate formulae of respect in Shitao's dedications. More plausible is that he was one of Shitao's many acquaintances from mercantile families to have obtained an official rank that permitted entry into government service. On



150. Wang Gai (active c. 1677–1705), "The Method of Painting Fields," from *The Mustard-Seed Garden Manual of Painting*, 1, 3/35a.

the other hand, the inscription may also have been nothing more than an appeal to his vanity, including him in a public that was partly composed of degree holders. Finally, one poem evokes a busy man with refined pleasures during his rare free time; the twist here is that it could equally well apply to Shitao himself, and as such

established a complicity between artist and patron (Figure 153):

The flowers in the Leisure-Cultivation Pavilion grow like written characters;
The master of the Leisure-Cultivation Pavilion is busy with them every day.
His commitments, like flowers, are more numerous every day
But the character-like flowers furnish real pleasure.

Guests arrive just as he is engaged in the leisure of cultivation;
Flowering has been delayed by the rain and snow of a cold spring.
Paying no attention to the clean snow that fills the sky
Everyone joins in setting the roots in place one by one.

The master is a student of calligraphy and loves to cultivate flowers;
The flowers seem to understand the man and each grows like a fine character.
When I ask for one character among the flowers
All the flowers, smiling, bend toward the setting sun.

This clever intertwining of gardening and calligraphy, and of the ideas of being kept busy by the garden as opposed to business commitments (he uses the same term, *duoshi*, for both, as in a pun between busy-ness and business) was not, in fact, written for the occasion. There did in fact exist a Leisure-Cultivation Pavilion, where the poem was originally written, and Shitao had inscribed the poem on an earlier album.¹⁰³ The earlier work may have been painted for the pavilion's owner, and the owner may have been Mr. Liu; but given the artist's propensity to recycle his texts, this is not necessarily the case. The two paintings at any rate share more than the same inscription, both locating the pavilion within the seclusion of a lush bamboo grove.

On the literati model of the *zhiji* or "true friend" (we are at the heart of the discourse of the *shi*), Shitao personifies his "outside" public at its apex, in the form of an ideal viewer/patron. The composite portrait he builds up in his inscriptions under the name of Mr. Liu is that



151. "A Lonely and Desolate Path," *Landscapes for Liu Shitao*, dated 1703, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, 47.5 x 31.3 cm, leaf 4, ink and color on paper. William Francis Warren Fund. Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

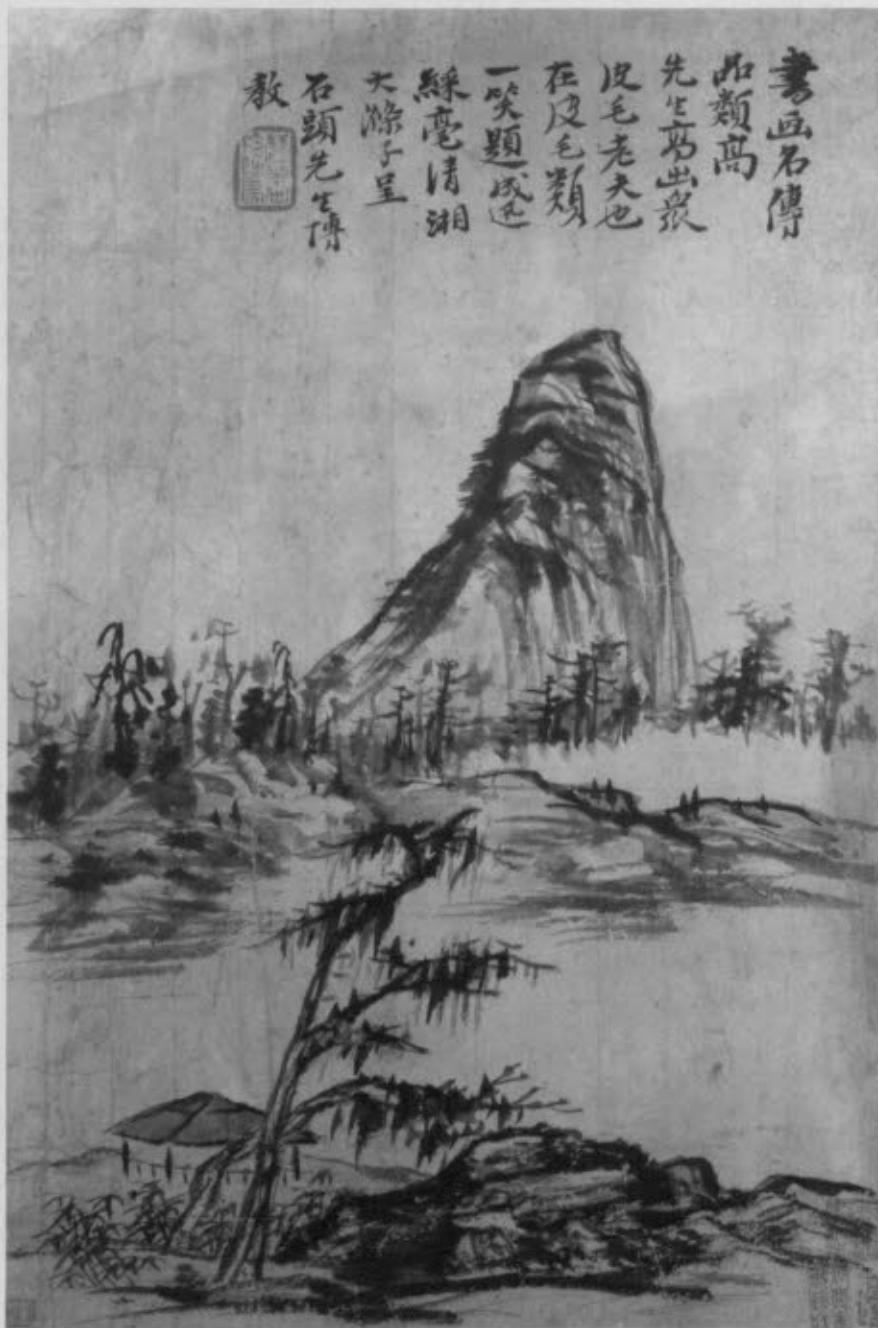
of someone at the highest levels of the urban elite, a member of Yangzhou's commercial oligarchy, and a civic cultural leader – in short, a man such as Zheng Zhaoxin, Yao Man, Xu Songling, Cheng Jun, Jiang Shidong, or, in years to come, Hong Zhengzhi. It was the appre-

ciation and patronage of such men that Shitao was willing to accept as bestowing cultural legitimacy. My concentration here on the 1703 albums has, however, skewed the picture of Shitao's "outside" public. A wider selection of Shitao's dedicatory texts would certainly lead us to diversify this model to include certain local gentry figures, as well as local government officials such as Kong Shangren or Cao Yin. Officials of this prominence were not only active in the regional and transregional worlds but were also players on the national cultural stage. To their names, one can add the names of central government figures such as Wang Zehong, Tu Na, and even the powerful Li Guangdi himself, who wrote, using the language of *wenren hua* and as if speaking of Wang Hui:¹⁰⁴

Qingxiang Daoren's skill in painting is famous throughout the country, lauded by one and all. [Paintings the size of] an inch of paper or a foot of silk are within the capabilities of any contemporary professional painter, but giant handscrolls and albums are rarely seen. Only Qingxiang has the requisite skills of drawing, description, brushwork, and composition: No professional painter can compare.

Thus, the very man whose ideological leadership had inspired the Orthodox fervor at court, and so indirectly set the seal on Shitao's failure on the national level, was the one to acknowledge the legitimacy of "resounding fame," basing his acknowledgment explicitly on Shitao's mastery of pictorial craft. However, he did so outside his role as servant of the state, as was the case for almost all of Shitao's many promoters among the bureaucracy during his long career: These men had one foot in the transregional art world, and it was there that they found it easiest to lend him their support.

Whether cultivated merchants, local landowners, or government officials, in Shitao's eyes the members of his "outside" public had their own responsibilities to his art. On these men he imposed the burden of responsibility as "understanding viewers" (*jieren*) – the discern-



152. "Landscape after Ni Zan," *Landscapes for Liu Xiaoshan*, dated 1703, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, each leaf 47.4 x 31.5 cm, leaf 8, ink and slight color on paper. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. (Purchase: Acquired through the generosity of the Hall Family Foundation.)

ing custodians of justified reputation for the present and for history. In the 1703 albums he tested them, Mr. Liu first of all, by inscribing this injunction on an image apparently devoid of admirable craft (Figure 154):

In this vocation there are those who were not approved at the time but whom later generations revered; and there are others who at the time were lauded to the skies but whom later generations neither heard of nor asked after. Neither found an understanding viewer.

Thus, indirectly, he acknowledged that the "resounding fame" in which he had placed his trust in 1694 was not the artist's alone to create but an affair of the art world as a whole.

153 (facing). "The Leisure-Cultivation Pavilion," *Landscapes for Liu Shitou*, dated 1703, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, 47.5 x 31.3 cm, leaf 8, ink on paper. William Francis Warren Fund. Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

154. "House by the Water," *Landscapes for Liu Xiaoshan*, dated 1703, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, each leaf 47.4 x 31.5 cm, leaf 4, ink on paper. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. (Purchase: Acquired through the generosity of the Hall Family Foundation.)



種閑亭之花如字種閑主人日多事多事如花日
漸多如字之花太遊戲客來恰是種閑
時雨雪春寒花放遲滿室晴雪

不經意的根朵誰為之主人

學書愛種花之意知人

字之嘉我何花間賦一

字衆花齊嘆日

西斜 清湘陳人天際子



CHAPTER NINE

Painting as Praxis



Faced with the work of those Chinese artists who identified painting with self-expression and the revelation of private feeling, one of the modern scholar's most powerful interpretative tools has been the concept of self-cultivation (*zixiu*). In this optic, the practice of painting as self-expression is understood to have its own reflexive significance, as a *praxis* that molds and constructs the self. More broadly, as a defining feature of the educated person's practice of culture in Ming and Qing China, the self-cultivation concept is the foundation on which current interpretations of the entire range of literati cultural practices have been developed, with their special attention to persona, identity, and other aspects of the representation of self.

In the particular case of painting, from the standpoint of praxis a central function of paintings as objects was to *attest* to the process of self-cultivation. This meant that the act of painting was never just a ritual practice in which the painting as product was secondary; it was also a production of material traces that were expected to circulate. In taking account of this double characteristic, some of the finest modern scholarship has aimed at recovering the reexperiencing role that the contemporary viewer is thought to have occupied in relation to the creative process – often understood in religious or quasi-religious terms – that gave rise to the painting.¹ The role of this reexperiencing viewing subject was ideally incarnated in the true understanding friend (*zhiji*).

The attractions of a hermeneutics of retrieval, however, should not obscure the need for an accompanying hermeneutics of suspicion; for the customary approach to praxis as self-cultivation begs numerous questions, notably regarding the relationship between self-cultivation and communication with others, the strategic social functions that self-cultivation served, and the social elitism of such individualism. It also passes over in silence a feature that, historically and epistemologically, should probably not be taken for granted: namely, the need on the artist's part to believe the self ultimately coherent, if only through a lucid recognition of incoherence.

Shitao was one of the artists who reflected most powerfully upon painting as praxis (alongside his theoretical engagement with painting as practice discussed in Chapter 8), returning to it again and again over a forty-year period in paintings, in their inscriptions, and ultimately in his treatise on painting. This sustained reflection has itself been interpreted as a kind of self-cultivation, with scant attention to the fact that it was an integral part of Shitao's vocational commitment to soteriological guidance (teaching of means to enlightenment), embodied in his role as a "master" (*shi*). This commitment was a constant in his adult life. Teaching through painting was not only central to his career in the Buddhist church, but subsequently it was an important aspect of his Daoist profile as Dadizi in Yangzhou. Nonetheless, despite the vast body of work it inspired, Shitao's sote-

riological teaching has attracted little attention from art historians. This is part of a more general blind spot of current scholarship, which has not yet come to terms with the importance of religious teaching in the late seventeenth century as a functional context for the practice of painting, involving numerous painters of widely varying philosophic and religious persuasions.

One great advantage of a soteriological focus is to allow us to think differently about paintings as communication, in at least three respects. First, whereas the self-cultivation paradigm tends to reduce the act of reception to hermeneutic recovery and internalization of the artist's ritual process, soteriology as a frame of reference attributes a more active role to the viewer, as someone to be challenged and persuaded. (Here too, however, one must guard against an overly abstract analysis: Teaching could serve social ambitions, and one cannot afford to forget that it retained the self as the privileged focus of attention, with all the attendant implications of elitism.) Second, Shitao's engagement of his painting in a soteriological project, while continuing a long-standing Chan tradition, was also caught up with the more general social phenomenon of a displacement of the sense of public social purpose from government into cultural practices – one that can be traced back to the sixteenth century, certainly, but that was further intensified by the fall of the Ming dynasty and the subsequent alienation of remnant subjects from the Qing state. Through its moral and ethical priorities, in other words, it had a dimension of social activism. Finally, Shitao's soteriological teaching exemplifies one of the means available to religious professionals to obtain for themselves a specific place within the cultural elite. As we shall see, Shitao's many lay-Buddhist admirers looked to his painting for spiritual guidance.

In his role as a philosophical-religious teacher, Shitao taught the transcendence of the limits of human life through self-realization; he used painting instrumentally as a means of helping others to attain what is often termed enlightenment. To get at the historical and social specificity of his teaching, however, one has to consider its relation to contemporary social thought. From this point of view it is notable that his teaching corresponded rather more to the immanent metaphysics of urban social life than to the ideal metaphysics of the dynastic state. On the one hand, the path to enlightenment that Shitao advocated required an extreme degree of self-affirmation; on the other hand, his conception of the merger of the microcosmic self with the macrocosmic world followed a logic of embodiment that privileged the psychophysical over the symbolic. Above all, the self-cultivation he espoused concealed a calculated response to the *displacement* of early modern life. Later

in this chapter, when I return to the discussion of modernity, I shall define this response as the establishment of a utopian sense of place around his own subjectivity.

First, however, given the general lack of attention to the teaching question, priority must go to a reconstruction of Shitao's use of painting as a mode of teaching. Since his long years as a Chan master of the Linji School had a determining influence on his later approach to teaching, I begin with a brief chronological account of the artist as Chan master.²

THE ARTIST AS CHAN MASTER

Shitao's protector, whom we know only under the Buddhist name Yuanliang Hetao, and who was himself an educated man, guided him toward the Chan sect. The two men made their way, not within the erudite, text-oriented Caodong School in which the painters Xuege (later to be known as Bada Shanren) and Kuncan became leading masters, but within the Linji School, which was radically opposed to religious erudition and appeals to authority.³ In "Song of My Life" Shitao describes his Songjiang area-based teacher, Lü'an Benyue, as "a true priest of the highest religious achievements," but Lü'an was far from being a dry cleric: He was a cultivated man, a skilled poet in the long tradition of Linji monk-poets who easily mixed with literati on their own terms, nowhere more so than in and around the Tiantong Monastery of his own teacher, Muchen Daomin, which was famous for its monk-poets.⁴ The examples of Muchen and Lü'an must have done much to confirm Shitao in the role of a monk who, in any area where he settled, would be based in a monastery or temple and seriously engage himself in Chan study but would also exploit the possibilities of the cultural world that had developed around Buddhist establishments since the late Ming period.⁵ Through its lay Buddhists and other literati participants, this culture served as his bridge into a larger world of social interaction within which he found many admirers.

As a Chan monk-painter, Shitao had several established pictorial means of teaching open to him, which he exploited in a rich and diverse poetics that can be reconstructed fairly systematically. The "system," however, was always open to challenge from its own practitioners, for whom any "skillful means" (*upāya*) were ultimately questionable.⁶ A first means was the re-creation of established Buddhist figural themes, such as *The Sixteen Luohans*, guardians of the dharma, the Buddhist Law (Figures 155, 156), whose two versions took up so much of his energy in the late 1660s, or his 1674 *Guan-yin Bodhisattva* (Figure 157).⁷ In works of this kind a

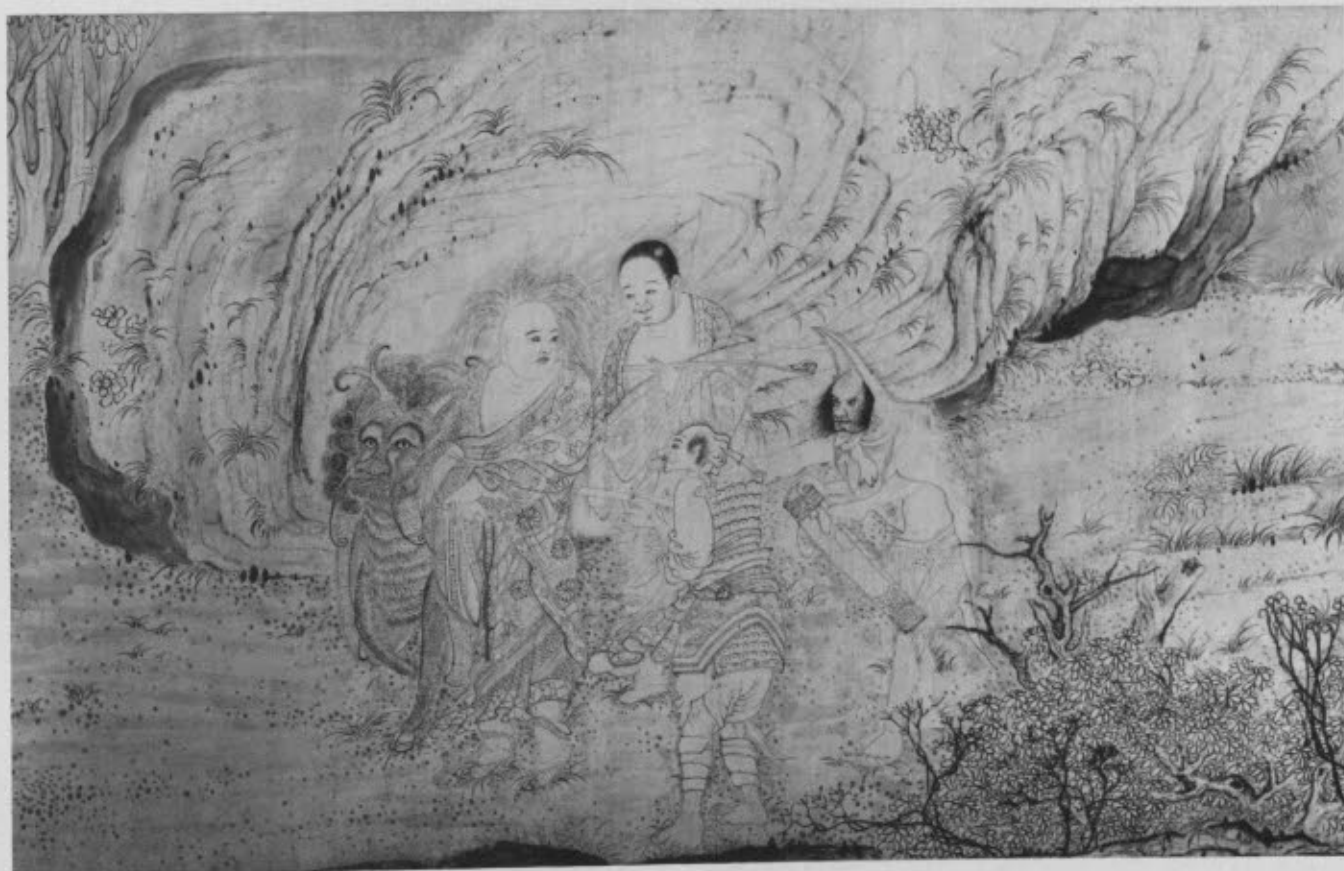
reworking of the traditional compositions gave the iconography new life; following in the footsteps of Chen Hongshou and, closer to home, the lay-Buddhist Anhui painter Ding Yunpeng, his execution was both highly personalized, implying the need to find the Buddha-nature within oneself, and extremely vivid, embodying the fundamental optimism of his faith. Many years later, in an emotional colophon to a Ming version of the sixteen-luohans theme written not long after his own handscroll of *The Sixteen Luohans* had been stolen, Shitao explicated his approach to the depiction of Buddhist subjects, recording an explanatory formulation that by then (1688) he had apparently come to use regularly in face-to-face discussion:⁸

I always say that when I paint arhats and Buddhist and Daoist icons, at one moment I'm at the top of Heaven, at another in the dragon palace [of the sea god], at one moment in the Western paradise, the next in the Eastern paradise, and all the time my transcendent, Buddha-becoming mental nature manifests itself in the paper and ink. When I lower the brush [onto the paper], I make each [image] embody an extraordinary announcement of blessings, an extraordinary happiness – impossible to achieve if one abandons the divine dragon and the ghosts and spirits. Through the former [i.e., the divine dragon] one sees worlds in the palm of the hand [as it covers the eyes], and can suggest "the sands of the Ganges" [i.e., the infinite diversity of existence] beyond the ostensible theme. The latter [i.e., ghosts and spirits] is the negation of the former, and is beyond the comprehension of human beings. This is Monk Bitter Melon's purpose in painting Buddhist images.

155. *The Sixteen Luohans*, dated 1667, handscroll, ink on paper, 46.3 x 600 cm (detail). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Gift of Douglas Dillon, 1985 (1985.227.1).

In the surviving version of *The Sixteen Luohans*, then, the dragon at the center of the scroll shown in the moment of its release from a bottle by one of the arhats can





156. *The Sixteen Luohans*, dated 1667, handscroll, ink on paper, 46.3 x 600 cm (detail). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Gift of Douglas Dillon, 1985 (1985.227.1).

perhaps be understood as a visual image of the "divine dragon." As Maxwell Hearn has suggested, it is the very image of artistic creation; but from Shitao's own words it is clear that he saw artistic creation as the channeling of the divine through his own "transcendent, Buddha-becoming mental nature."⁹ Finally, in addition to these various soteriological aspects of the scroll, *The Sixteen Luohans* can also be read in a rather different manner, through the prism of the artist's brief inscription noting his own lineage position. His precise reference to two Linji Chan masters, Muchen and Lü'an, imposes an interpretative connection between monks and *luohans*, suggesting that the handscroll was also meant to serve metaphorically as a collective representation of the most important contemporary Chan masters, men known for their impressive and otherworldly physical presence.¹⁰ As his almost boastful invocation of lineage intimates, at the age of twenty-six Shitao already aspired to join their ranks.¹¹

Important as such images were for the artist, they were also rare. More important for the development of his art, the early Qing was a period when artists experimented with new and highly personal forms of Buddhist

landscape image that were usually explicitly or implicitly topographical. Among the most common subjects for a Buddhicized landscape was Mount Huang, with monk-painters such as Hongren, Kuncan, Xuezhuan, Yizhi, and of course Shitao leading the way.¹² Both the 1667 Huangshan album for Cao Dingwang and the celebrated Huangshan album in the Sumitomo collection (c. 1685) can be understood as records of spiritual and not merely touristic journeys.¹³ His Huangshan landscapes could also be given an iconic character, the clearest example being the 1667 hanging scroll with which he commemorated his first ascent of the mountain range after his return to Xuancheng (Figure 158). Focused on a single, relatively large-scale figure at the painting's center, an icon of this kind, rather than creating the space for a potential manifestation of the beyond, establishes a space of religious experience in the here-and-now, embodied in self. The broad-faced, bearded figure, though possibly self-referential, may alternatively depict the recipient of the painting. In either event it has the distinctive persona of the solitary madman in the mountains, which returns frequently thereafter in his landscape paintings, often in a Huangshan setting. The landscape itself is given an intensely iconic formulation, formally very close to the rock against which Guanyin rests in Shitao's 1674 depiction. To the mountains that thrust skyward in the upper half of the painting correspond the



157. *Guanyin Bodhisattva*, dated 1674, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 193.6 x 81.3 cm. Shanghai Museum.

swirling rock at bottom right and the plunging waterfall it partly conceals; out of the band of mist that separates the two across the middle of the painting, the figure surges toward the viewer. "This Chan expert, so original, has a pair of empty eyes; his mad brush, so extreme, clears away ignorant worldliness," writes Tang Yan-sheng (1616–92), who was possibly the recipient, in what was originally the sole inscription on the painting, at top right.¹⁴ Too filled with energy and the figure's presence to serve as a catalyst for meditation, this image of the attainability of enlightenment is more like a challenge to emulation: "Follow me/him," it seems to say, "if you dare." Still more explicit (though geographically unspecific) is one of the set of twelve hanging scrolls that Shitao painted for Cao Dingwang in 1671 (Figure 159). A *luohan*-like monk stares at us unsettlingly across an abyss, the road behind him blocked by mountains as if he had settled at the edge of the world. More such iconic landscapes followed in the 1670s.¹⁵

Elsewhere in his early landscape painting, Shitao's madness has a Daoist rather than Buddhist frame, but the boundary between the two would have been of relatively little importance when the individual's institutional orientation was clear. Indeed, Shitao could look to the example of Muchen, who had argued for the compatibility of Daoism (and Confucianism) with Chan Buddhism. Nonetheless, Shitao's Daoist interests represent a specific inflection of his Chan identity, as Mei Qing, writing c. 1670, clearly recognized:¹⁶

Master Shi has a mist-and-clouds allure,
His descending brush summons up thoughts of free
wandering.
Not only does he embody the strangeness of
Longmian [Li Gonglin, celebrated as a lay-
Buddhist painter]
But he excels in what Hutou [Gu Kaizhi, also
known for his Daoist "pure talk"] appreciated.
Year after year he has applied himself to gathering
fungus
His out-of-the-way searches I can believe took a
long time.
He has obtained authenticity through the experience
of the eye
And having entered the realm of understanding now
leaves us his images.

158 (facing, left). *Mount Huang*, hanging scroll, 1667, ink and color on paper, dimensions and whereabouts unknown. Source: Xie Zhiliu ed., *Shitao huaji*, fig. 1.

159 (facing, right). *Twelve Landscapes*, dated 1671, set of twelve hanging scrolls, ink and color on silk, dimensions unavailable, scroll 5. Jicui Yuan Museum, Fujian. Source: *Shitao shuhua quanji*, vol. 2, pl. 415.



160. "The Iron-Feet Daoist," *Hermits*, handscroll, section 4, ink on paper, 27.5 x 314 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.

Shitao affirmed the Daoist interest himself in his illustration of the biography of the legendary Iron-Feet Daoist in the handscroll *Hermits* (Figure 160). He expressly relates the biography to his own experience of climbing Huangshan for the second time in 1669:¹⁷

The Iron-Feet Daoist used to go barefoot in the snow; when inspired he chanted the Nanhua and Qiushui chapters [of the *Daode jing*]. He also liked to eat plum blossom, chewing a few pieces at a time together with snow. Someone asked him why he did this, and he replied: "I want the winter's fragrance to penetrate my intestines." Later he collected fungus on Mount Heng [the sacred mountain of the South]. He climbed Zhuchong Peak at night, and when he saw the sunrise he looked up to Heaven and cried out: "The cloud sea warms my heart and breast." He then floated away and disappeared.

To which Shitao appended a short commentary:

When I came to climb the Peak of First Realization at Huanghai [literally the Yellow Sea, a name for Huangshan] and saw the Eastern [Cloud] Sea, I paid my respects. I even regretted that I myself could not vanish [to become a transcendent, as the Iron-Feet Daoist had done].¹⁸

In his description of this moment (cf. Figure 85), which through the evocation of the Iron-Feet Daoist indirectly links his ascent of Huangshan to his earlier visit to Mount Heng, appears for the first time a theme of *rapture* that will occupy us a great deal in this chapter. This was to be a lifelong aesthetic goal, which Shitao notably

embraced in his late mountainscapes of famous mountain ranges and peaks, including Mount Lu (see Plate 12, Figure 129), and the Peak of First Realization at Mount Huang (see Figure 107). Earlier in his life there was a certain tension between this and Chan asceticism that could not always be reconciled by the shared ideal of "madness." In "Song of My Life," referring to his decision at the beginning of the 1670s to spend more time at Guangjiao Temple in Xuancheng, he writes: "How exhilarated I felt in those moments, / Even my garments felt ready to fly away; / Yet I had hoped to follow the way of Huangbo [Xiyun, died c. 850], / So at Mount Jingting again we lived only with the lonely clouds."

In a separate but parallel direction, Shitao also took his cue from the couplet craft of lyric poetry. His first tentative experiments of this kind date from the 1670s following his return to Xuancheng. Ever since Song poets had drawn on Chan enlightenment for an analogy to successful poetic craft, the way had been open for Chan monk-poets to invert the analogy and thus use poetry for their own purposes.¹⁹ Shitao extended this recuperation into poetry illustrations. In the 1673 *Landscapes for Jiwen*, he illustrated poems by the late Ming Jingling poet Tan Yuanchun (1586–1631), a nationally known figure from the Wuchang area in which Shitao spent his teenage years.²⁰ Tan was known, or was notorious, for his startling couplets, which often have a puzzling aphoristic character that Shitao has sought to recreate in his images. Taking his cue in one leaf from the closing couplet of a Tan poem – "As one climbs the mountain, the moon is in the wilderness; when one descends, it is in the mountains" – he placed the mountain at the bottom of the image, and the wilderness with its

waters reflecting the moon at the top where one would have expected to see the sky (Figure 161). Exactly halfway up the painting on the left a covered gate stands astride the path that leads from the mountain toward the reflected moon; at exactly the same height on the right is a seal reading *famen*, equally translatable as “the gate of the dharma” and “the gate of [painting] method.” Underlining the connection, the body of Shitao is turned toward the gate on the road while he faces the seal: The gate, of course, is a metaphor for enlightenment. A few years later, in an album painted for a lay Buddhist at the turn of 1677–8, Shitao continued in the same vein of visual *gongan*, or koan, illustrating at the friend’s request some of the works of a poet closely associated with Chan, Su Shi (a lifelong point of reference and inspiration for Shitao). Indeed, one of the poems cited was dedicated by Su to a monk.²¹ The poems, however, have been edited: In most cases only a couplet is inscribed on the painting – one that has been selected for its ethereal and sometimes paradoxical quality (“Flowers don’t see their faces, but still smile; birds don’t know their names, but still sing”). The landscapes in this album, meanwhile, have usually been described as being influenced by the painting of Huizhou artists (Hongren, Dai Benxiao); the source, however, is rather less important than the purpose, which appears to have been to create a visual equivalent to the “lifeless” and “icy” state of the enlightened Chan practitioner (Figure 162).

Finally, Shitao also experimented with Chan visual metaphors. A mid-1660s depiction of lotuses evokes the Mahayanist idea of rebirth into the lotus ponds of the Pure Land paradise, but by its austere linear depiction, so different from the highly colored renderings of temple murals, reinvents the vision as a metaphor for enlightenment.²² A handscroll from 1673 depicts a tumbledown hut in a snow-covered landscape. The accompanying poems are Shitao’s own and had been written the day before in response to verses by two other monks: his “familial elder brother,” Hetao, and a certain Huai-



161. “As One Climbs the Mountain, the Moon Is in the Wilderness,” *Landscapes for Jiwen*, dated 1673, album of at least 6 leaves, unnumbered leaf, ink and color on paper, dimensions and whereabouts unknown. Source: Xie Zhillu ed., *Shitao huaji*, fig. 2.

xue. The key to the painting is probably the second poem, which conjures up an image of the painter, whom Huaixue had once put up in spartan conditions, painting a paradise scene full of palace roofs. As one’s attention returns to the painting with its humble thatched cottage, one realizes Shitao is making the point that paradise is a mental and not a material reality.²³ His major exploration of Chan visual metaphors in Xuancheng, however, was his 1674 “self-portrait,” with its pine-planting theme that, on the most abstract level, signified the Buddhist monk’s “mission” of propagation of the dharma (see Plate 1, Figure 53).



162. "The Echo," album leaf mounted as a hanging scroll, ink on paper, 22 x 29.5 cm (originally belonging to the album *Illustrations to Poems by Su Shi*, dated 1678). The Art Museum, Princeton University. Museum purchase, gift of the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation.

The poetics of Shitao's pictorial teaching was thus already a rich one in the 1660s and 1670s. Two impulses can be discerned within it: On the one hand, it is indebted to Linji's radical "faith in himself, which leads him to question any outside authority,"²⁴ while on the other, it often adopts the mainstream Chan strategy of challenging the student and stimulating his doubt in order to build up the psychic pressure that would make sudden enlightenment possible. In its classic oral form, this was called "looking at the words" (*kan hua*) and consisted in creating a powerful doubt at the heart of some well-attested Chan story.²⁵ The four examples of Shitao's teaching recorded in Chaoyong's *Wudeng quan-shu* are all of this kind, but being attributed to the Chan master of the Single Branch Pavilion they probably date from a slightly later moment, following Shi-

tao's move from Guangjiao Temple in Xuancheng to Changgan Monastery in Nanjing.²⁶ As recounted in Chapter 4, his move was accompanied by a new commitment to ascetic Chan self-cultivation; concurrently, his soteriological practice took on a new sophistication and intensity, stimulated, perhaps, by a growing number of lay-Buddhist admirers. One of the four recorded examples of his teaching is a commentary on the parable of an old woman in the eastern part of the city who was born at the same time as the Buddha but did not want to see Him. In the original story she is said to have run away whenever she heard Him coming, but as soon as she looked back there were Buddhas everywhere. So she covered her face with her hands, only to discover Buddhas on her palms and each one of her ten fingers. Shitao's commentary was this:

Not to want to see the Buddha generally means [still wanting to see] a little. If one covers one's face with one's hands, and all around there is Buddha, what guarantee is there that one will reach enlightenment?



163. *The Conversion of Hariti to Buddhism*, handscroll, ink on paper, 27.2 x 353.3 cm (detail). Marshall H. Gould Fund by exchange. Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

While the parable might make it appear that the truth of the Buddha is unavoidable, Shitao challenges that confidence. His skepticism implies that while curiosity opens the door to understanding, the Chan student's inner resistance cannot be overcome by anyone but herself or himself.

Shitao's new seriousness was equally visible in painting. A first example in the realm of traditional Buddhist iconography is the figural handscroll *The Conversion of Hariti to Buddhism*, painted around 1683 in the Single Branch Pavilion at Changgan Monastery.²⁷ It is a depiction of soteriological teaching in action, with Śākya-muni demonstrating by his invincibility the superiority of the Buddhist Law, thus bringing about the conversion of the recalcitrant and hostile Hariti, Mother of Demons.²⁸ If *The Sixteen Luohans* incorporated an image of the "divine dragon" (cf. his 1688 explication), *The Conversion of Hariti to Buddhism* might be considered complementary, given its multiple depictions of "ghosts and spirits" in the entourage of Hariti (Figure 163). Shitao's brief inscription explicitly notes that the painting is an "incomplete sketch," by which he may have meant that he planned to paint a second, more ambitious (and more personal) version of the theme, as he had previously done with *The Sixteen Luohans*. Another important testament to his changed attitude dates from the following year, 1684, when during a visit to a temple on East Mountain in the Nanjing outskirts, he painted a new hanging-scroll depiction of Guanyin Bodhisattva, show-

ing her reclining within a huge lotus leaf that emerges from water below. More ambitious than his 1674 depiction, this painting is known only through a prewar reproduction bearing an inscription of several hundred characters that is difficult to decipher, much less translate.²⁹ In a reflection couched wholly in the language of Buddhist metaphysics, Shitao there presents the bodhisattva as an object of personal identification through which Buddhahood can be achieved as well as a visual metaphor for the stilling of the senses. The female figure, visualized as the blossom of the lotus (whereas in the 1674 painting she rests against a notably phallic rock), thus becomes an object of, one might say, the desire for no-desire.

Alongside such re-creations of traditional figural images, Shitao also continued to paint Buddhicized topographical images of temple sites and mountainscapes (the Sumitomo *Huangshan* album, painted c. 1685, being an outstanding example), and maintained his earlier interest in subjectivized figure-in-landscape icons in which he himself (literally) loomed large. The most impressive of the latter is a horizontal hanging scroll of unusually large dimensions painted for Provincial Education Commissioner Zhao Lun, in which the madman in the mountains (he describes himself as mad [*chi*] and crazy [*dian*]) is now an angler – a motif often associated with Daoism (Figure 164). The heart of the inscription is a four-line passage in which he glosses the painting as an image that personifies and materializes the *Dao*, or Way – to which Chan and Daoism offered different but not unrelated forms of access:

Not only is this heart-mind [*xin*], not only is it *Dao*,
But apart from heart-mind and *Dao* I have no other
purpose.

I simply depend on one flavor of brush-and-ink
Chan

From time to time letting loose in it my living heart-
mind.

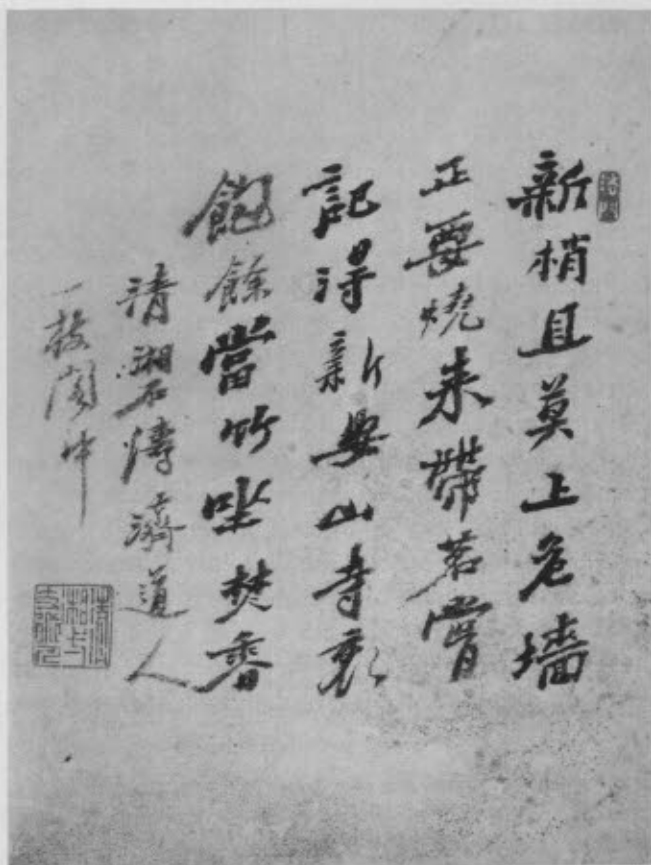
The patron, Zhao Lun, was interested in both Buddhism and Daoism: He is known to have had his portrait painted in monk's robes, and his *hao* was Langxian, "transcendent of Mount Lang," after a mythical Daoist mountain.³⁰ Shitao may have been aiming at a syncretist image, which would help to explain his use of a seal with a Daoist legend at the top center of the painting reading "preserve and nourish divine harmony" (*baoyang tianhe*).³¹ Certainly, the compatibility of Buddhism and Daoism was on his mind: In the inscription to his 1684 depiction of Guanyin, he writes: "Buddhism and Daoism have the same principle; it is for convenience that they have their separate lineages."

During the 1680s Shitao also developed, in a somewhat different direction from before, his earlier interest in bending seemingly secular lyric painting (and poetry) to a Chan purpose. This period is notable for his exploi-

tation of an established Chan poetics of flower, plant, and vegetable themes based on early compilations of Chan stories and commentaries, such as *Emerald Cliff Record* (*Biyan lu*), that was also being exploited by other Chan painters including Xuege (Bada Shanren); yet it was not a monk-painter whom Shitao invoked as his model but Xu Wei (1521–93), whose Single Branch Hall (Yizhi Tang) home was probably the inspiration for Shitao's own Single Branch Pavilion (Yizhi Ge), and whose monochrome treatment of similar Chan-associated themes had influenced Xuege as well.³² Shitao explicitly invoked Xu Wei in inscriptions as early as 1681, secure in the knowledge that even when the inscription and the reference were wholly secular, the very fact that he himself was a Chan monk introduced religious metaphors into standard literati themes. The lotus, however, was a symbol of the Buddhist dharma, while bamboo shoots, which grow in wintry ground, symbolized the monk's undying religious commitment (Figure 165), as did the plantain by virtue of its longevity. The plantain had an added association with the Tang monk-calligrapher Huaisu, who was said to have written on its leaves when he had no paper. Plum blossom, commonly likened to frost and snow, were metaphors of renunciation (see Figure 56). Vegetables and fruit were in general a reminder of the monk's vegetarian diet, but could also

164. *Fishing in a Mountain Stream*, horizontal hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 104.5 x 165.2 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.





165. "Bamboo Shoots," *Paintings and Calligraphies for Zhou Jing*, album of 4 leaves of painting with facing leaves of calligraphy, ink or ink and color on paper, each leaf 23.8 x 18.4 cm, leaves 1 and 1a. © Christie's Images.



take on specific Buddhist meanings (see Figure 87).³³ Separately or in combination, all of these themes (habitually treated in the more austere mode of ink without color) proliferated in Shitao's work after his move to Nanjing and continued to be fundamental to his art as long as he remained a monk, and occasionally thereafter.

For landscape, too, Shitao's main new point of reference lay outside the Chan world itself, in Dong Qichang's invocation of Chan lineage theory and *gongan* Chan formulations for his own purposes. Shitao's ambivalent engagement with Dong went back to his early rejection of Dong's calligraphy as a model and surfaced from time to time in landscape painting in the 1670s.³⁴ It only became central, however, in Nanjing, once he started to work more seriously at developing landscape in the direction of a "brush-and-ink Chan" or "painting Chan," making heavy use of inscriptions in the process. It is not too much to say that Shitao was engaged in a Chan reappropriation of Dong's theories, in explicit opposition to Dong's normative and prescriptive declara-

tions. An early example of Shitao's theoretically framed landscapes is a 1682 landscape on satin for an "honored guest," perhaps a Buddhist superior (Figure 166). The inscription develops a play on the contradictoriness of knowledge, in which the appeal to couplet craft becomes the basis for an explicit theoretical dialectics:

Mengde [Cao Cao, d. 220] said, "Mountains do not weary of height; seas do not weary of depth." Mengde [Liu Yuxi, 772–842] said, "Mountains do not depend on their height; waters do not depend on their depth." Today, where will this Master De of ours [Shitao's guest] start from in his understanding? The ancients had another saying, "[you may] gather up the hem of your robe from the left or the right."³⁵

Shitao returned to this double emphasis on relativity and reception in a 1684 inscription to a now lost album.³⁶ First he expressly took issue with a well-known declaration of Dong Qichang:

Chancellor Dong once said: "Painting and calligraphy each have their own house. Calligraphy cannot be raw; painting cannot be ripe. Calligraphy finds a rawness beyond ripeness, but painting must find a ripeness beyond ripeness." I say: calligraphy and painting are just the same, but in calligraphy one sometimes uses *fa* from painting, and vice versa. Rawness and ripeness each have their appropriate moment. Who will believe what a hermit monk has to say?³⁷



166. *Smoky Grove*, dated 1682, hanging scroll, ink on satin, 105.1 x 52.1cm. © Sotheby's, Inc.

The second part of his inscription well describes Dong's own practice (but not the codifying tendency of his early Qing followers):

When the Ancients established a *fa* it was like a Chan master offering an aphorism [to catalyze enlightenment]: Everything depends on how it is received.

In another inscription – undated but probably from the 1680s, and rare in its explicitly Buddhist character – he championed a principle of “unfixed methods,” with the

individual at liberty to adapt any existing method to his personal character and situation.³⁸

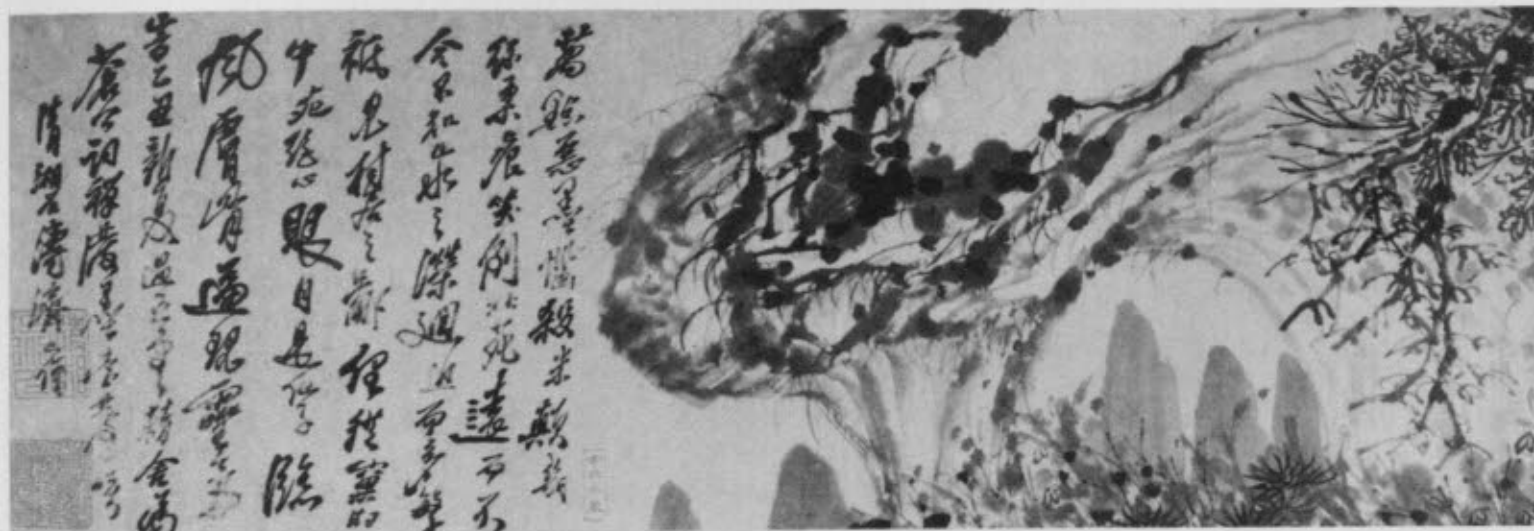
Śākyamuni said: “Yesterday I spoke in terms of fixed methods; today I will speak in terms of method that is not fixed.” This provided me with the insight to free myself from schools of method.

In theory, (literati) self-affirmation and Chan belief were incompatible; but Shitao's multiplication of selves, his refusal to identify himself with any one method, allowed him to walk a fine line between self-negation and self-affirmation. In so doing, *fa* – the central term in Shitao's thinking on pictorial craft, which I have translated following its normal art-critical usage as “method” – provided the crucial mediating concept: Because, as we saw earlier with his “gate of *fa*” seal, *fa* was also a central term of Chan discourse as the Buddhist dharma, every reference Shitao made to “method” in painting inscriptions was doubled by another level of Chan meaning. In 1686, for example, he had the opportunity to add an inscription to his 1667 Huangshan hanging scroll (see Figure 158).³⁹

In painting there are the Northern and Southern lineages, and in calligraphy the different *fa* of the two Wangs [Wang Xizhi, 321–79, and Wang Xianzhi, 344–86]. Zhang Rong [of the Six Dynasties] once said: “I don't regret not having the *fa* of the two Wangs, but I regret their not having my *fa*.” Now, if it is asked: Did I learn from the Northern or Southern lineage, or should they learn from me? Holding my belly laughing I would reply: I use my own *fa*.

His painting needed nothing more than the discourses of lineage and *fa*, together with the subversive force of laughter, to become painting *as* Chan. There is more to this statement, therefore, than a simple *qishi* rejection of the Northern–Southern lineage theory of Dong Qichang; indeed part of the (very serious) joke, from a Chan point of view, is that it was Dong, the man whom some treated as the patriarch of a conservative classicism, who had originally imported the Chan analogy into painting.

This probably takes us close to the original context for such powerful and apparently secular improvisations as *Ten Thousand Ugly Inkblots*, painted in 1685 at Five Clouds Temple (Wuyun Si) in Nanjing for a certain Cangong, identified as a poet, who may be the remnant subject Du Yin (1617–93) (Figure 167).⁴⁰ This handscroll, a monochrome, wet-brush performance, invokes a Ming heritage of improvisatory wildness, which Shitao particularly associated with Xu Wei, to create a vision of a landscape coalescing (just) from the primordial ink blots. Opening with the evocation of two canonical masters of Dong Qichang's Southern School, the inscription passes easily from art theory to metaphysics:



Ten thousand ugly inkblots to scare Crazy Mi
[Mi Fu, 1052–1107] to death!
Some fibers of soft traces to make Beiyuan
[Dong Yuan, d. 962] roll over laughing!⁴¹
From a distance, the perspective doesn't work – it
lacks a painting's winding paths.
Close up, the details are all confused – you can
barely make out a few simple cottages.
Once and for all cut off the "mind's eye" from
conventional molds,
Just as the transcendent who rides the wind has freed
his spirit from the bounds of flesh and bones!⁴²

The Daoist analogy in the last line is not to be wondered at in the context of a painting that can fairly be called rapturous.

The ambiguity between the two religious frames of reference reaches an extreme in the celebrated *Landscapes for Yu Daoren*, undated but probably painted around the later 1680s for Wu Chengxia, a committed lay Daoist, whose father Wu Zhenbo was present at Guangjiao Monastery when Shitao painted the above-mentioned snow landscape in 1673.⁴³ In the *Landscapes for Yu Daoren* Shitao reinterprets the styles of Song and Yuan masters in a dozen quite different ways, with such originality that one could easily miss the art-historical allusions altogether. One extraordinary leaf, which works an extreme variation on the crystalline treatment of naked rock associated with the tenth-century masters Jing Hao and Guan Tong, has at its center a gateway that harks back to the "gate of *fa*" image in the 1673 *Landscapes for Jiwen*, though it is worth noting that in the interim a new seal had begun to appear on his paintings from time to time, reading "[I] do not enter through the gate" (*bu cong men ru*) (Figure 168).⁴⁴ Another leaf, which in the heyday of abstract expressionism emerged as one of a handful of canonical images defining Shitao's artistic profile, invokes the fluctuating

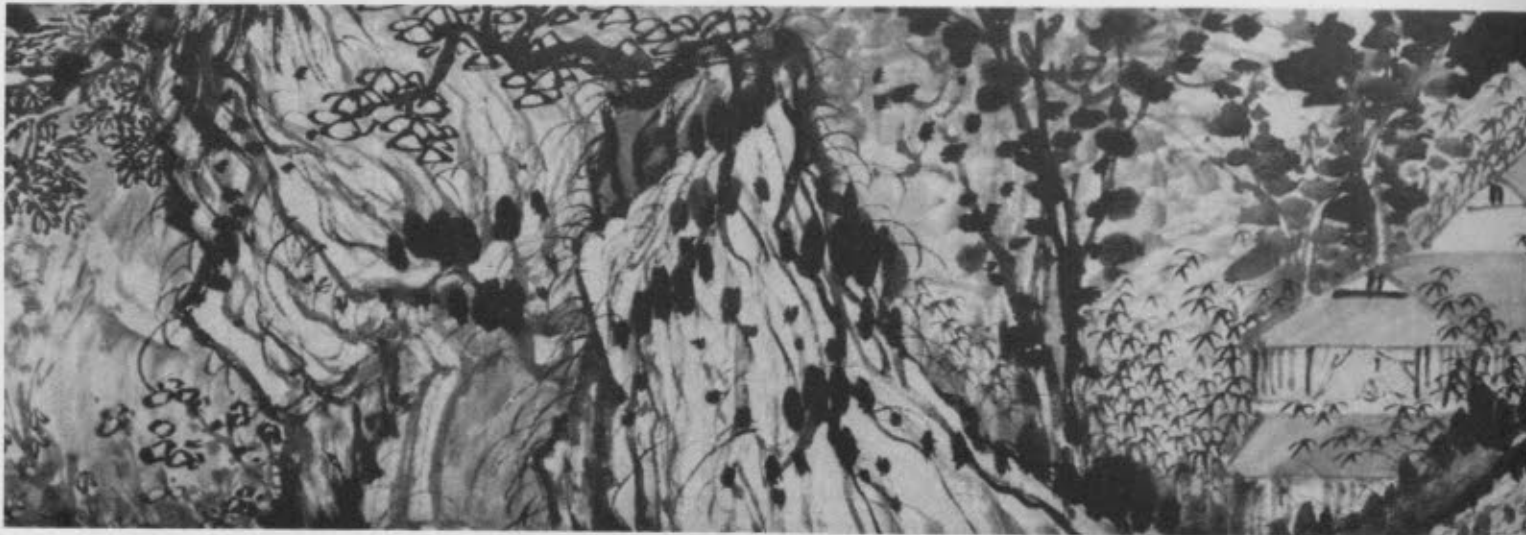
167. *Ten Thousand Ugly Inkblots* (begins on p. 253).

organic contour line associated with Guo Xi but adapts it in the service of an antihierarchical image centered on a figure whose featureless face suggests that he is looking inward (Figure 169).⁴⁵ The famous statement that is Shitao's only commentary on the work is a characteristically dialectical manifesto of his painting Chan: "This *fa* is no-*fa*, and so becomes my *fa*" – or, in its art-theoretical interpretation, "This method is no-method, and so becomes my method." In a 1686 inscription to a lost work for the same patron, he restated this ambition in slightly different terms:⁴⁶

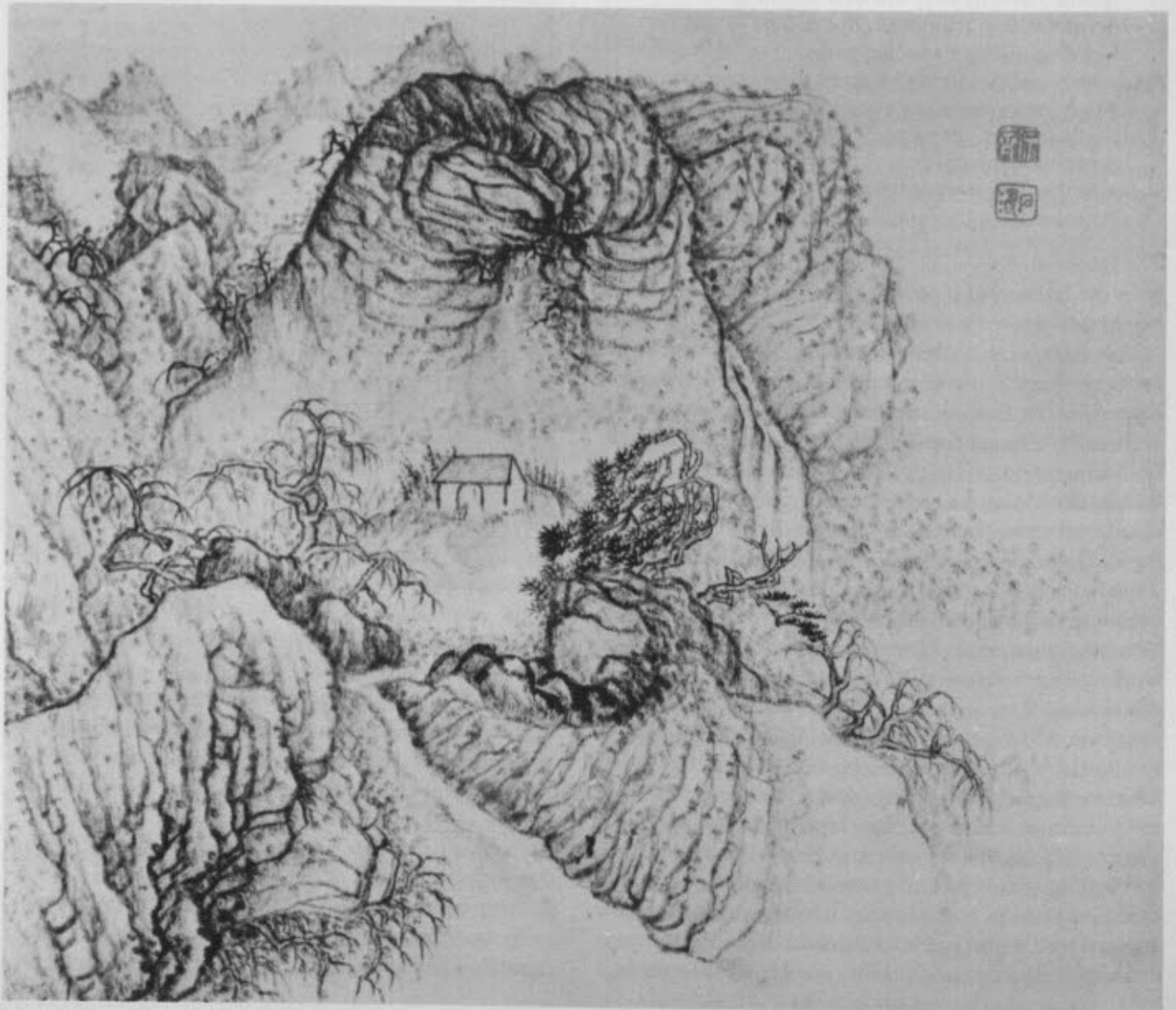
Qingxiang Daoren dares not establish a *fa* here, but how can he do without one? With this one *fa* I can generate the ten thousand *fa*. Where the brush leads, the ink also follows: sometimes like rain or like clouds, sometimes barely mist or dew. How can one look at it and judge it like a single hill and valley?

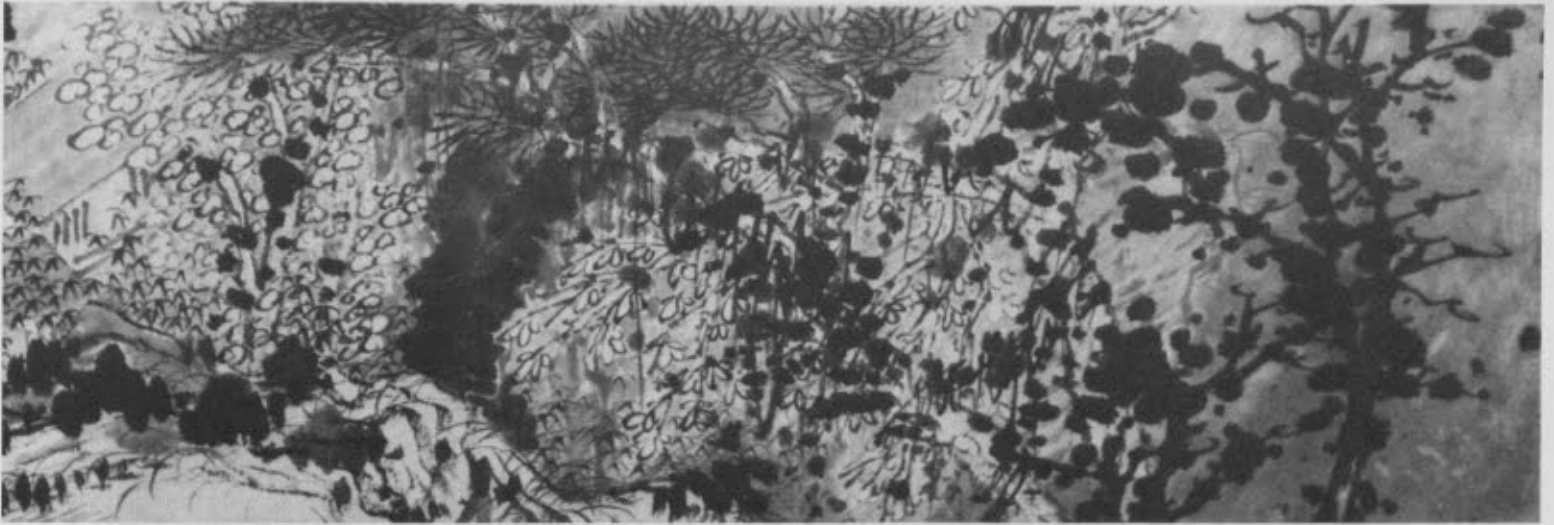
From one fundamental *fa*, an infinity of specific *fa* are born. At this point in his life, Shitao was advocating the pursuit of a method that would be adequate to his sense of his own difference, which is to say a method that would not be a method, that would escape codification but would be utterly his.

The identity of the patron of these last two works throws into relief the fact that Shitao's teaching was socially rooted in a specific lay-Buddhist milieu in which the Wu family was particularly active. In other words, though we have repeatedly met the Wu family as patrons, this patronage was probably indissociable from the religious interests of the various members of the family with whom Shitao became friendly, and more generally with the family's history of lay-Buddhist involvement that led to an earlier member of the family, Wu



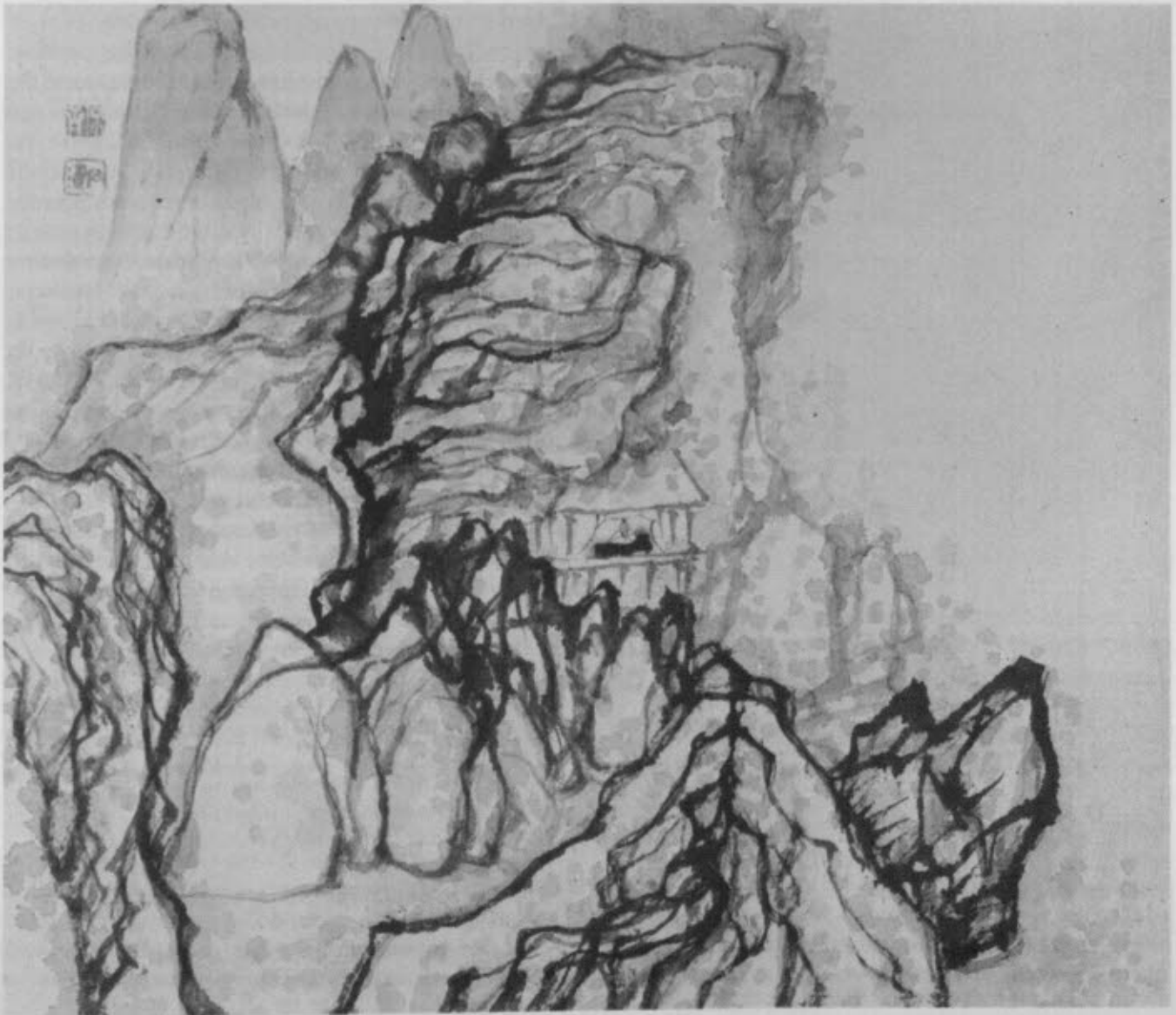
168 (below). "A Gateway in the Mountains," *Landscapes for Yu Daoren*, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, each leaf 24 x 28 cm, leaf 2, ink on paper. C. C. Wang Family Collection, New York.





167 (above). *Ten Thousand Ugly Inkblots*, 1685, handscroll, ink on paper, 25.6 x 227 cm. Formerly Suzhou Museum.

169 (below). "A Mountain Pavilion," *Landscapes for Yu Daoren*, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, each leaf 24 x 28 cm, leaf 3, ink and color on paper. C. C. Wang Family Collection, New York.





170. *Landscape for Mr. Bochang*, dated 1692, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 99.3 x 48 cm. © Christie's Images.

Maoji (1594–1665), receiving a congratulatory essay from Muchen on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday in 1653.⁴⁷ It is also not irrelevant that the Wu family, through a Xi'nan native-place association, sponsored a subtemple within the Changgan Monastery complex in Nanjing, where Shitao was based during most of the 1680s.⁴⁸ Among the Wu family members with whom he was connected, in addition to the father and son Wu Zhenbo and Wu Chengxia, were Wu Yanhuai,⁴⁹ the

likely recipient of his 1677–8 album of illustrations to Su Shi's poems (see Figure 162), and Wu Canxi, for whom Shitao painted a landscape album in 1680 that bears several contemporary colophons by Buddhist monks.⁵⁰ Strikingly, in the late 1680s a cousin of Wu Chengxia, Wu Chengli (1662–91) – the father of Wu Yuqiao, whose several commissions to Shitao during the Dadi Tang years were discussed in Chapter 2 – went so far as to commission a portrait of himself together with Shitao.⁵¹

Shitao was still practicing the various modes of painting Chan that I have outlined above when he reached Beijing in 1690; and it was on this basis that he confronted there the theory of painting that Dong Qichang's followers had created by picking and choosing among Dong's declarations and suppressing his innumerable theoretical contradictions; this theory was now being consecrated at court by its alignment with the ideology of neo-Confucian orthodoxy. The obvious Chan–Confucian opposition was probably less important in determining a difficult relationship than other factors. First, to a Linji Chan monk the conservative classicist approach to painting must have seemed to duplicate the error of academism to which the Linji School was opposed in an infra-Buddhist context. Paralleling this, on another level a fairly standard difference of positions and style with regard to philosophical-religious practice was in play: Shitao's rhetorically subitist empowerment of individual initiative versus Wang Yuanqi's gradualist emphasis on the internalization of tradition. There was, moreover, a difference of physical investments in painting, with Shitao's exuberant improvisatory practice in obvious contradiction with the conspicuous restraint of those painters who identified themselves with political power. Shitao's practice spoke against the classicist embodiment of the politically ordered social body. However, as we have seen, this did not preclude a certain mutual respect, nor was Shitao without prominent admirers in the North. One appreciative description of Shitao's work was written by his Tianjin patron, Zhang Zhu, another lay Buddhist. Its description of him at work on a painting is so vivid that it is worth citing in full:⁵²

Master Shi is an "original" [*qishi*], not a painter –
Only through strangeness can one seize the principle
of painting.
In the principle is a *fa* unknown to men,
A circle of indistinct, primordial energy.
A single circle turns into a thousand, ten thousand,
a hundred thousand,
And the form of mists and clouds give rise to
strange visions.
You clap your hands and shout for joy
As you wash away the ordinary landscapes of men.



171. "Approaching the Ferry Station," *Landscapes for Wang Fengrong*, dated 1691, album of 10 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, leaf 12, ink on paper. Higashiyama Collection, Tokyo. Source: Cahill, *The Compelling Image*, fig. 6.24.

Ordinary professional painters have never seen anything like it:

Their tongues stick to the roof of their mouths, the light dies in their eyes.⁵³

If Zhang Zhu's awareness of Shitao's individualism leads him to characterize the southerner in terms of that category outside categories – the *qishi* – on the other hand the voice of Shitao that slips through at second hand is that of the Chan master, explicating his *fa* through the ancient Chan metaphor of the circle, rejecting the prescriptive authority of the *fa* of the Ancients, and ending again in the disconcerting eruption of laughter: "Who is there in the world to appreciate your painting?/You just shake your head and laugh endlessly!"⁵⁴ We cannot afford to forget that around this very time Shitao had himself portrayed in the formal guise of a Chan master (see Figure 61) and was pushing his professional Buddhist ambitions to their limit.

It would be redundant simply to accumulate the evidence of Shitao's continued practice of painting as Chan in the North: the topographical landscapes, landscape icons, Chan visual metaphors, and theoretically framed landscapes with their new and more polemical variations on *fa* – "Not to establish a *fa* is my school; not to

abandon a *fa* is my goal. Those who wish to learn take note!"⁵⁵ or again, "When the Ancients first came to establish *fa*, I wonder what *fa* they took as their model?" (Figure 170). Among a large body of images and texts, I want to focus on a single complex statement that has widely been recognized to register a shift in Shitao's theory that occurred under the pressure of his encounter with the Beijing taste for classicizing landscape painting.⁵⁶ He inscribed the text on the last leaf of a landscape album painted in 1691 for his Beijing host, Wang Fengrong (Figure 171). The painting itself dramatizes his situation as a monk of no fixed abode: To the left a lone figure in a skiff approaches a ferry station, with its implication of further travels; to the right, concealed behind a rock escarpment, lies a temple that promises temporary shelter to the arriving figure – a metaphorical depiction, perhaps, of Ciyuan Temple, to which he had just moved from Wang Fengrong's home and whence he expected eventually to return to the South. The inscription, written with an almost slapdash verve, is passionate:

I once saw the words "I use my own *fa*," and was deeply struck by them. Painters these days, however, do nothing but follow the men of the past. What is more, the critics say: "This brushstroke resembles such-and-such a *fa*, this other brushstroke does not" – how ridiculous! [I thought:] If I am able to use my own *fa*, have I not already left the general run of painters far behind? But now I have the realization that it is not like that either. In the boundless universe there is but a single *fa*. If one masters this *fa*, then nothing is without *fa*, though one is necessarily forced into

calling it “my own *fa*.” When feelings are born, force is stimulated; and when force is stimulated, one lets it loose to organize the composition. In fact this is nothing but my original insight, that in the possible transformations there is an endless potential for visual forms [literally: patterns, formulae].

Today, painting these fourteen leaves, I was certainly not trying to conform to the Ancients; nor was I using in any fixed way my own *fa*. In each leaf there was the movement of an idea, the birth of feelings, and the stimulation of force. This came out in the composition, giving rise to the transformations of visual form. Yixi! Critics can call it my own *fa* if they like, or the *fa* of the Ancients, that will do too; there’s even nothing to stop them from calling it the *fa* of everyone in the world!

This was at once the culmination of a decade’s theorization and a breakthrough in a new direction. Shitao’s theory of *fa*, taking its cue from Dong Qichang’s, aligned Chan theory with the problematization of tradition in a discourse of Ancients and Moderns. Up to this point Shitao, in a kind of mirror image of Dong, had situated himself with the Moderns *against* the Ancients, pursuing uncompromising iconoclasm as the path to reinvention of the tradition and recovery of the ancient truths; but in this text he goes a step further, subsuming his earlier position under a new and more complex one. Here he disaligns himself from the Moderns, displacing himself outside the Ancient–Modern dichotomy. His “realization” was that there was only a single all-encompassing *fa*/dharma in the boundless universe. To align himself with that *fa* was to occupy a utopian, free-wandering point that transcended Ancients, Moderns, and the individual self, though he was “necessarily forced into calling it “my own *fa*.”⁵⁷ His earlier iconoclastic declarations in the name of “my own *fa*” were not negated, therefore – he used some of them for years to come – but their meaning was recontextualized within the expanded horizon of his thinking. Henceforth, the way was clear for a far more open dialogue with Ancient and Modern painters, whom he no longer had to see as potential opponents but rather as potential allies. This very album, in fact, as Richard Vinograd has pointed out, shows him drawing upon some of the compositional ideas of Wang Jian and Wang Yuanqi.⁵⁸

Already beginning to be doubtful about his future as a Buddhist monk when he returned to the South in 1692, Shitao as we have seen spent the next few years preoccupied with reorienting his life. It is true that in the second month of 1693 a conversation about “painting Chan” with his Buddhist “nephew” and painting student Gengyin (a follower of Poyu, the abbot of Yangzhou’s Jinghui Monastery) led him to paint a landscape album, partly as an exposition of pictorial principles

but also as a demonstration of religious teaching.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, though in Yangzhou he was back on home ground, so to speak, and no longer needed to defend himself against conservative critics, he seems to have suffered a crisis of confidence and to have temporarily turned away from religious teaching. It must have been during these post-Beijing years that Shitao made the statement, later published in Zhang Chao’s *Shadows of Secret Dreams*, “I don’t know how to argue Chan, and I wouldn’t presume to preach the [Buddhist] Law; all I do is use my free time to paint mountains for sale!” Sure enough, during the years 1693–6, his few discussions of *fa* have a technical character, avoiding the previous ambiguity with *fa* in the Buddhist sense;⁶⁰ nor is this a period with any notable landscape icons of a Buddhist character. Still less did he re-create traditional Buddhist iconographies, as he had done in *The Conversion of Hariti to Buddhism*; and if, on the other hand, he still had this handscroll and his “self-portrait” *Master Shi Planting Pines* in his possession, he allowed inscriptions and colophons to be added that framed with doubt his earlier Buddhist commitment. The strongest element of continuity with his earlier painting Chan lay in the flowers, plants, and vegetables that he still liked to paint; even these, however, were by 1695 noticeably less austere and often given a more worldly iconographic interpretation in the accompanying inscriptions (see Figure 192).

Particularly revealing is his 1694 album for Huang Lü, where, as in his *Shadows of Secret Dreams* statement, he was at pains to resist the role of a teacher. Huang was a connoisseur who may have expected one of Shitao’s patented declarations on painting Chan; but the fact that he was a Nanchang resident who knew Bada Shanren – someone whom Shitao greatly admired and thought of as a master in the fullest sense – may well have made Shitao even more reticent. As I noted in Chapter 8, Shitao, in the dedicatory inscription to this album, quite uncharacteristically displaced attention onto other painters whom he admired, taking a step toward a primary public identity as a professional painter that was also in line with his theoretical breakthrough in 1692. Only at the end of the text did he turn back to himself: “These are all men who in their generation were ones who understood! Only I cannot grasp these ideas and so my painting is vacant and hollow [*kongkong dongdong*], dumb and mute [*mumu moumou*] like this.” One could hardly imagine a greater contrast with the bold Chan master of years past. To be sure, the onomatopoeic description of his work as “vacant and hollow, dumb and mute” is austere Chan; but this is an inward-turned, meditative Chan, echoed in images of stillness, hesitation, and stasis (see Figure 63).⁶¹ It was not until two years later, in the summer of 1696, that

Shitao broke his silence in his self-portrait as a blind arhat; and then he did so only in order to commemorate the “death” of the Blind Arhat that he had been: “The man in the picture, can he be called the Blind Arhat’s future incarnation or not? Ha, ha!” (see Plate 2).

Still, as we arrive at the Dadi Tang years and the revitalization of his teaching within a Daoist context, it should be noted that Shitao by no means gave up the company of Buddhist monks after 1696.⁶² In particular, his two Chan painting students, Gengyin and Donglin, stayed in contact with him, and he could on occasion be persuaded to reapproach the role of a Chan teacher. A single example will stand for several. In the summer of 1701, he went on an outing with Donglin and another monk, staying for a few days at an unidentified temple. The temple had a lotus pond where the white flowers were in bloom, and he executed a painting of the lotuses in the moonlight that he signed, nostalgically, “Man beneath the branch,” in memory of his years at the Single Branch Pavilion in Nanjing (Figure 172). In this tour de force of controlled ink drawing and color wash, the precise linear quality evokes not only his earlier lotus paintings but also his *baimiao* (plain-line) Buddhist figure paintings executed in Xuancheng and Nanjing – as if the presence of a “water and moon” Guanyin has been displaced into the lotuses, now both sinuous and monumental, that in his earlier paintings accompanied the bodhisattva, and into the moonlight itself. Following a poem of his own and an account of the outing that led to the painting, Shitao completed his inscription by citing a second, thoroughly Buddhist poem by a monk – decorum no doubt prevented him from glossing the image himself as he would have done in past years. It reads in part:

I love the flowers, and also love the leaves,
I love the rain, and love the autumn mist.
Without looking into the mist,
Who will understand my painting’s *Chan*?

THE ARTIST AS ALCHEMIST

I don’t know how to free myself of the world
completely –
I’ve just met someone who laughed at all the hair I
[now] have.
Why was I put on this earth?
I was ranked with the transcendents for nothing.
In my dejection there is Zhuang Zhou’s dream,
In the deep of night there is the oar of the Han
ambassador [Zhang Qian].
I am ashamed not to have any marvelous principle –
In this respect I have accepted no loans.

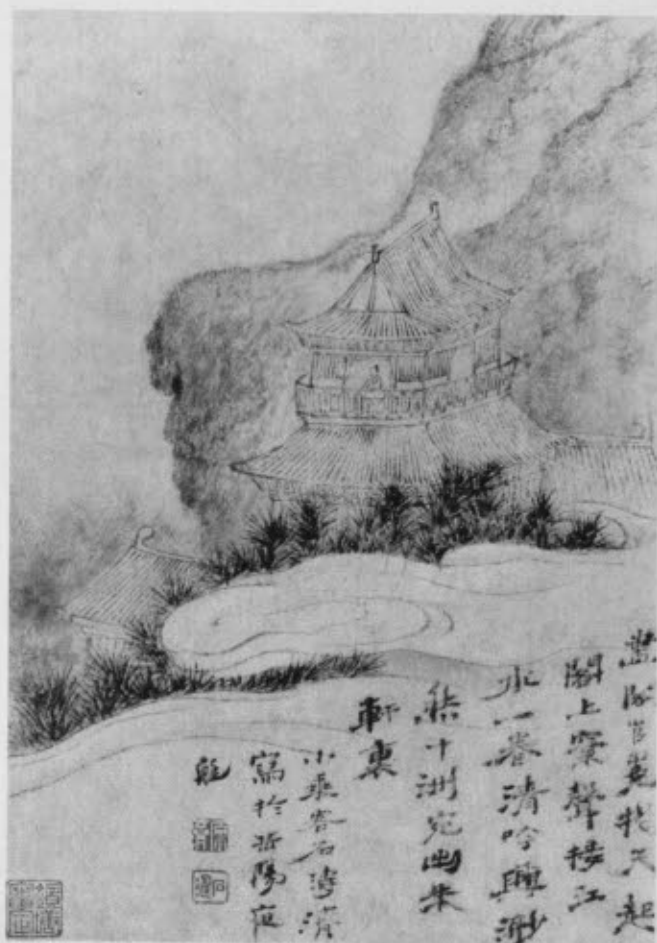
Poem 6 of a 1706 set of ten plum-blossom poems.⁶³



172. *Lotuses in Moonlight*, dated 1701, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 91.1 x 35.2 cm. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taiwan, Republic of China. Loan from Lanqian Shanguan Collection.



173. "Yueyang Tower," *Landscapes, Flowers, and Bamboo*, album of 12 leaves, ink on paper, each leaf 25 x 17.6 cm, leaf 1. Guangdong Provincial Museum. Source: *Shitao shuhua quanji*, vol. 2, pl. 371.



Ten years after taking on the name of Dadizi, in this poem inspired by a chance meeting with someone who had known him as a monk, Shitao admits that his engagement with Daoism had not been entirely successful. His self-perceived failure was as a *teacher*: He had not developed any "marvelous principle" of his own to pass on to others. However, this was not for want of trying, and part of what I want to do in this section (on paintings and painting inscriptions) and the next (devoted to his treatise) is to trace out Shitao's "failed" attempt to develop painting as alchemical praxis, and, with it, a corresponding visual and textual soteriological teaching, the two (praxis and teaching) being no less inseparable here than in his earlier "painting Chan." There were certainly many difficulties: Neither the tradition of Daoist painting nor the community of Daoist painters could compare with what was available for a Chan artist, and Shitao did not throw his full energies into the project of a Daoist soteriological painting until very late in his life. However, I shall later argue that the obverse of the "failure," such as it was, was an engagement with painting that effectively allowed painting to emerge as its own, autonomous Way.

It would be possible and plausible to construct a pre-Dadi Tang lineage of Shitao's Daoist paintings of more than thirty years, since even as a Buddhist monk he regularly demonstrated his attraction to Daoism in more or less pure form. Some examples were introduced earlier, but it is especially striking that in the album that may be his earliest surviving work, he already imagined Yueyang Tower as a red-lacquered Daoist palace from with-



in which a single, probably self-referential transcendent gazes (Figure 173).⁶⁴ With hindsight one can see that Shitao was laying the basis for retooling himself as a Daoist teacher as early as 1693. In that year he painted for the bannerman Zhang Jingjie a representation of the sacred site of Mount Dadi outside Hangzhou, from which he would later take his name (Figure 174). Shitao's own title for the painting, *Looking at the Mountains at Yuhang*, should perhaps be understood to mean *studying* the mountains. Separated from the foreground by a stretch of water and fading into mist at the left, the mountain range is transformed into a floating, Penglai-like island mountain, with mineral blue-green woven into the brocade of green and orange to suggest further the sacred character of the site. Art historically, in this classicizing image his model is Huang Gongwang, presumably not just because Huang painted sites of the Hangzhou region but also because he was a Daoist master (*daoshi*) of renown.⁶⁵ It was probably not long after that Shitao painted the first of his illustrations to Li Bai's rapturous song-poems on Daoist mountain sites, *Mount Emei*, the whole landscape suffused with a visionary inner light (Figure 175).⁶⁶ Significant in a different way is a painting from this approximate period dedicated to a Daoist master and depicting the monastery where Shitao had visited him.⁶⁷ By the time he took up residence in Xu Songling's Place for Reading to Study the *Dao* in Yizheng in 1695, he was experimenting more freely with Daoist iconography, but within the context of a process of self-examination.⁶⁸ In Daoist terms, too, the immediate pre-1697 years were a period of introspection.

All of this changed in 1697 and 1698 when Shitao, in the first flush of his new identity as Dadizi, recovered all

174. *Looking at the Mountains at Yuhang*, dated 1693, handscroll, ink and color on paper, 30.5 x 134.2 cm. Shanghai Museum.

his former enthusiasm for teaching and set about finding appropriate modes for it. One can take the measure of the transformation from the contrast between the relatively understated *Looking at the Mountains at Yuhang* of 1693 and the exuberant *Visit to Master Zhang's Grotto* c. 1697–1700 (Figure 176, see Plate 8).⁶⁹ Both works depict important sites of grotto heavens (*dongtian*) that were counted among the seventy-two Blessed Places of Daoist cosmic geography. Master Zhang's Grotto bears the name of the Han dynasty patriarch of the Daoist church in the South, Zhang Daoling (d. 156). Zhang was reputed to have lived for some time within the vast, multichambered cave complex that is situated on the bank of Lake Tai, near Yixing, in southern Jiangsu.⁷⁰ While it is true that the original pictorial idea was not Shitao's own – he was working directly from one of the various versions of this composition attributed to the fifteenth-century master Shen Zhou – there can be no doubt of his personal investment in the theme. The Shen versions are far more restrained than Shitao's: Foregrounding their topographic purpose, they use only light color and make less of the organic strangeness of the rock formation. Shitao, by contrast, develops further here the visionary yin–yang contrasts of light and use of dotting (*dian*) to energize the picture field, first seen in *Mount Emei*. Most striking of all is the color, which takes the same “brocade” approach seen in *Looking at the Mountains at Yuhang* and, so to speak, turns up the chromatic volume. Shitao's colophon to his handscroll

explicitly verbalizes the Daoist resonances clustered around his subject:

There is no one in Master Zhang's Grotto,
But from inside the Grotto a spring breeze arises.
Who knows where this spring breeze comes from,
Born to blow on tens of thousands of men.
Although it leaks mysterious truths into nature,
Such secret marvels are passed over in people's
paintings.
When most people talk about it they tend to be
vague,
So I have depicted it, to give the flavor of its spirit
and principle.
This cave is dark and melancholy like an "original"
[qiren],
Its restless nature compels the world to take notice.
Once you escape into the deep mystery of its
interior,
Its features come to look like tigers and leopards.

Shitao takes the grotto through a series of metaphorical transformations. It starts out true to its "cave paradise" function as a passage between this world and the world of transcendents inhabiting the grotto heavens on the inside of the landscape. The spring breeze of youth originates in that other world.⁷¹ The mysterious breeze also identifies the cave as a primordial source of energy – indeed, in the painting the rock structure seems to grow organically from the luminous cave; but in its next transformation, the cave's external manifestation as rock structure (in the painting) is revealed to be an exteriorization of the marvels of an otherwise hidden internal structure. The painting turns the cave inside out to reveal its features like tigers and leopards, its restless nature – in sum, its character as an expressive correlate for Shitao as *qishi* or *qiren*. In so doing it sacrifices its darkness and melancholy, though not its deep mystery. In a further transformation, in the second half of the poem the cave becomes a fantastic image, embroidered, composed, and molded on the model of Nu Wa's legendary repair of the Heavens with multicolored rock, into a larger-than-life personification of the Daoist adept as *junzi*, or polished gentleman. The adept can also be seen in human form at the cave mouth, engaged in a veritable dialogue with two dark, anthropomorphic rocks, which can perhaps be taken to be Nuwa's primordial sculpted humans. Finally, in the last lines, the grotto becomes "a landscape all of its own," the reds and purples of the painting making manifest its charged spiritual character.

The chromatic intensity in *Visit to Master Zhang's Grotto* functions as an iconic manifestation of the sacred character of the site. It plays a related role of manifestation – though no longer tied to a sacred site – in some leaves of the roughly contemporary and no less

colorful *Wilderness Colors* album. The blaze of red and yellow in his illustration of a couplet by Li Bai describing Parrot Island in Hubei, not far from the home of his youth, Wuchang, turns a bank of peach trees in bloom into another icon of spring (see Plate 7). In a second leaf, a floating band of pale orange mountains stands out dramatically against a blue background of more distant mountains and sky (Figure 177). Since he claims for this image that "it has a theme beyond the theme, and possesses none of the spirit of a [mere] painting," one may be justified in speculating that the wavelike interaction of pine, clouds, and mountain was intended to provide an iconic Daoist mountainscape. Shitao also describes this painting as "raw" (*sheng*) (the same word appears in Li Bai's couplet on the Parrot Island leaf), probably in reference to the sharp contrasts of its color. The inscriptions to two further leaves depicting vegetables – the paintings themselves straightforward recuperations of a Chan genre – make explicit the connection between rawness and Daoism, but now within a context of embodiment by the adept rather than manifestation in nature (Figures 178, 179):

Wang Anjie [Wang Gai] once presented a *ci* song-poem to me in which he said: "With your bronze bowl, you separate the spring water from the silt and boil taro to eat." He really knew me. But you can laugh at this man of the wilderness that I am, eating these few big taro. I simmered them for a while, but before they were cooked I took them all out and ate them still partly raw. Try and guess what temperature it has reached in my stomach!

Purple gourd, purple gourd, its flavor is excellent. You say that it needs a lot of soy, but today this old man mishears you: I pick them up like chestnuts, or peppers, or raspberries, and swallow them all raw. I'm going to grow new roots and sprouts!

These exuberant texts refer to the Daoist conception of the body as a crucible for alchemical (self-)transformation, and to the widespread dietary belief that raw foods are among those that heat the body. Raw taro – typical Buddhist monk's fare – now becomes the poor man's substitute for cinnabar; the raw eggplant will revitalize the old man's body. The purple color of the eggplant, meanwhile, as in *Visit to Master Zhang's Grotto*, is undoubtedly a complementary reference to the color symbolism of alchemical practice, in which purple is one of the colors indicating the achievement of an altered state.

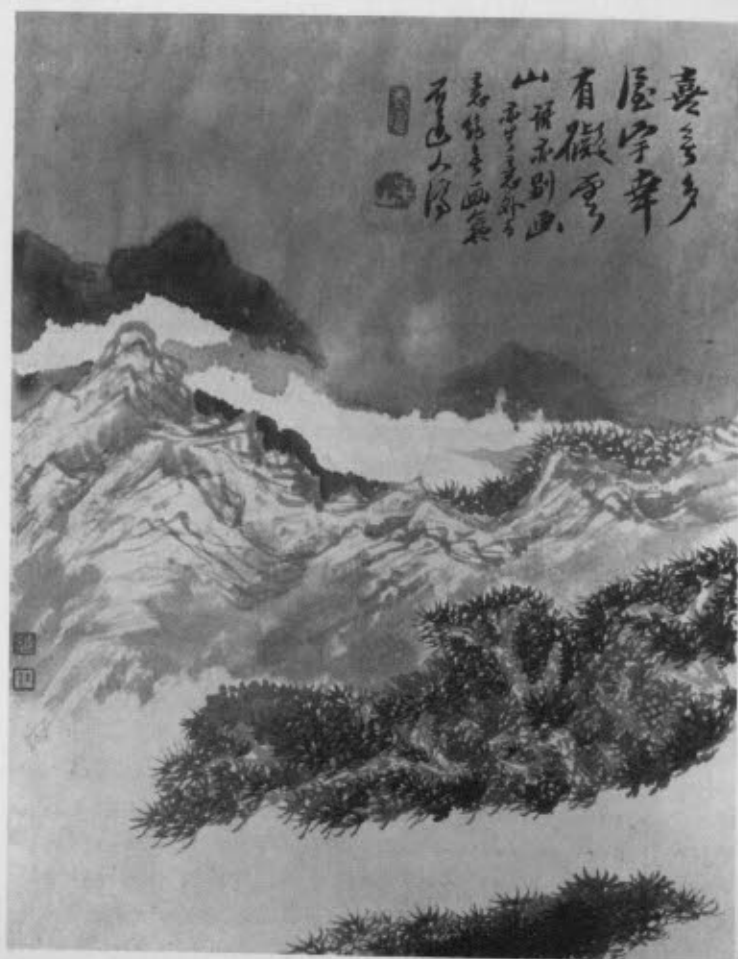
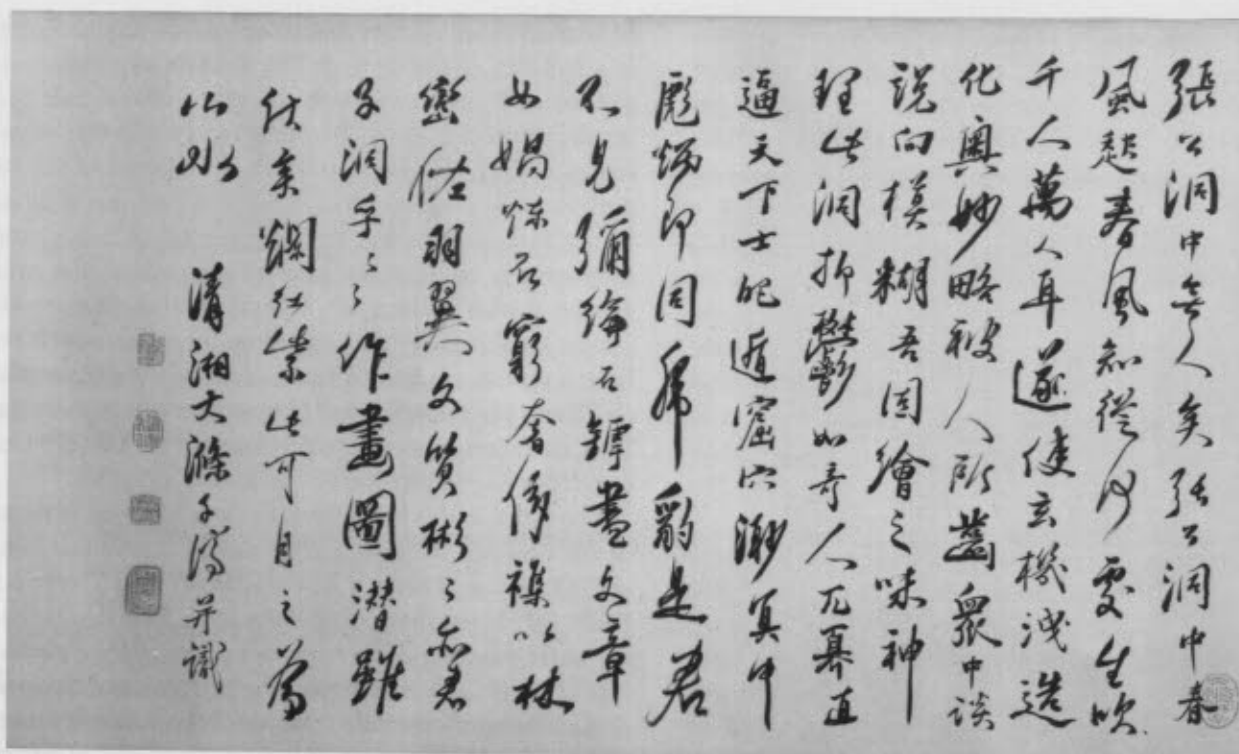
The use of "brilliant" or "raw" color was among Shitao's great innovations of the Dadizi period, a coloristic counterpart to – almost a translation of – the *xiaosa* aesthetic in monochrome that Shitao as a Chan painter had developed with Xu Wei as his model. However, the connotations of madness and bodily release in the *xiaosa* mode made it apt in itself to express his exuberant sense



of liberation in his new Daoist role. An early example is a handscroll dating from December 1697 that transcribes and illustrates (with an image whose pale red wash evokes cinnabar) one poem by Xu Wei on the varieties of *lingzhi* fungus and – in a memorable *xiaosa* performance – another by Du Fu on a painting of pines by the Tang painter Wei Yan (Figure 180). Although the iconography could easily have simply embodied a conventional wish for long life, in his dedication Shitao proclaims his solidarity with the recipient, who must have been a serious student of Daoism such as Wu Chengxia or Zhang Jingjie, writing: “I know that you possess the Dao, entrusting yourself to precious herbs; /I would like to follow you in pursuit of the Yellow Emperor.”

The pines in this handscroll so closely resemble those of the undated hanging scroll entitled (by Shitao himself) *Qingxiang Dadizi's Reminiscence of the Thirty-six Peaks* (of Huangshan), that there seem little doubt that the latter painting dates from this same 1697–8 period (see Plate 3).⁷² Curiously, there is neither signature nor dedication: only the title into which his name is incorporated, as if he wanted to draw attention to that name. Indeed, the name's prominence also implies that the figure in the boat represents Shitao – or rather Dadizi. The figure is in fact so large and detailed that it takes on the character of a self-portrait. He represents himself with the topknot of a young boy and with his hair combed forward – a reference to the ideal of childlike innocence and spontaneity. As in the similarly large and exuberant *Fishing in a Mountain Stream* (see Figure 164) from the 1680s, whose strong Daoist dimension was noted earlier, he is a fisherman whose line has no hook, for he wishes to catch only the fish that wants to be caught. Another element of continuity between these two impressive works is the use of destabilized spatial relationships to frame the fisherman. In the inscription to the earlier painting, Shitao describes himself as mad (*chi*) and crazy (*dian*) and his painting as composed of “crazy [*kuang*] waves and huge blots generating clouds and mists.” The spatial contradictions metaphorize his radical detachment from worldly coordinates, contributing to a visualization of the *kuangren* or “madman” that returns in *Reminiscence of the Thirty-six Peaks*. The metaphor is maintained there in the rough, unrestrained brushwork and dripping wet ink of Shitao's Xu Wei mode, bringing to mind another major work of the 1680s, *Ten Thousand Ugly Inkblots*.

175. *Mount Emei*, hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 205 x 62.5 cm. Private collection, Hong Kong. Source: *The Selected Painting and Calligraphy of Shih-t'ao*, vol. 1, fig. 48.



177. "The Cloud-Blocking Mountains," *Wilderness Colors*, album of 12 leaves, ink and color on paper, each leaf 27.6 x 21.5 cm, leaf 10. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The Sackler Fund, 1972 (1972.122).

178 (facing, left). "Taro Root," *Wilderness Colors*, album of 12 leaves, ink and color on paper, each leaf 27.6 x 21.5 cm, leaf 2. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The Sackler Fund, 1972 (1972.122).

179 (facing, right). "Eggplant," *Wilderness Colors*, album of 12 leaves, ink and color on paper, each leaf 27.6 x 21.5 cm, leaf 8. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The Sackler Fund, 1972 (1972.122).



176. Visit to Master Zhang's Grotto (begins on p. 265).





Just as striking as the figure of Dadizi himself is the building above and behind him. It has a reduced cipher-like form, bluntly stated, with a halo of bamboos that only accentuates its iconic presence. The steps leading up to it, as well as the suggestion of an altarlike form within, give it a formal, quasi-religious character that could be explained in a number of ways. If the fisherman is Dadizi, then the building should logically be the Dadi Tang, the Great Cleansing Hall. At the same time,

however, Shitao presents the painting as a reminiscence of Huangshan, which authorizes us to read the figure as the young Shitao of thirty years before and the building as a mountain shrine. Finally, the iconography is also potentially readable in purely symbolic terms: One possibility is that in terms of Daoist visualization it represents a place within the cosmos of the body, the Purple Chamber (*zi fu*), which the adept was enjoined to visualize as a simple building for solitary retreat and medita-



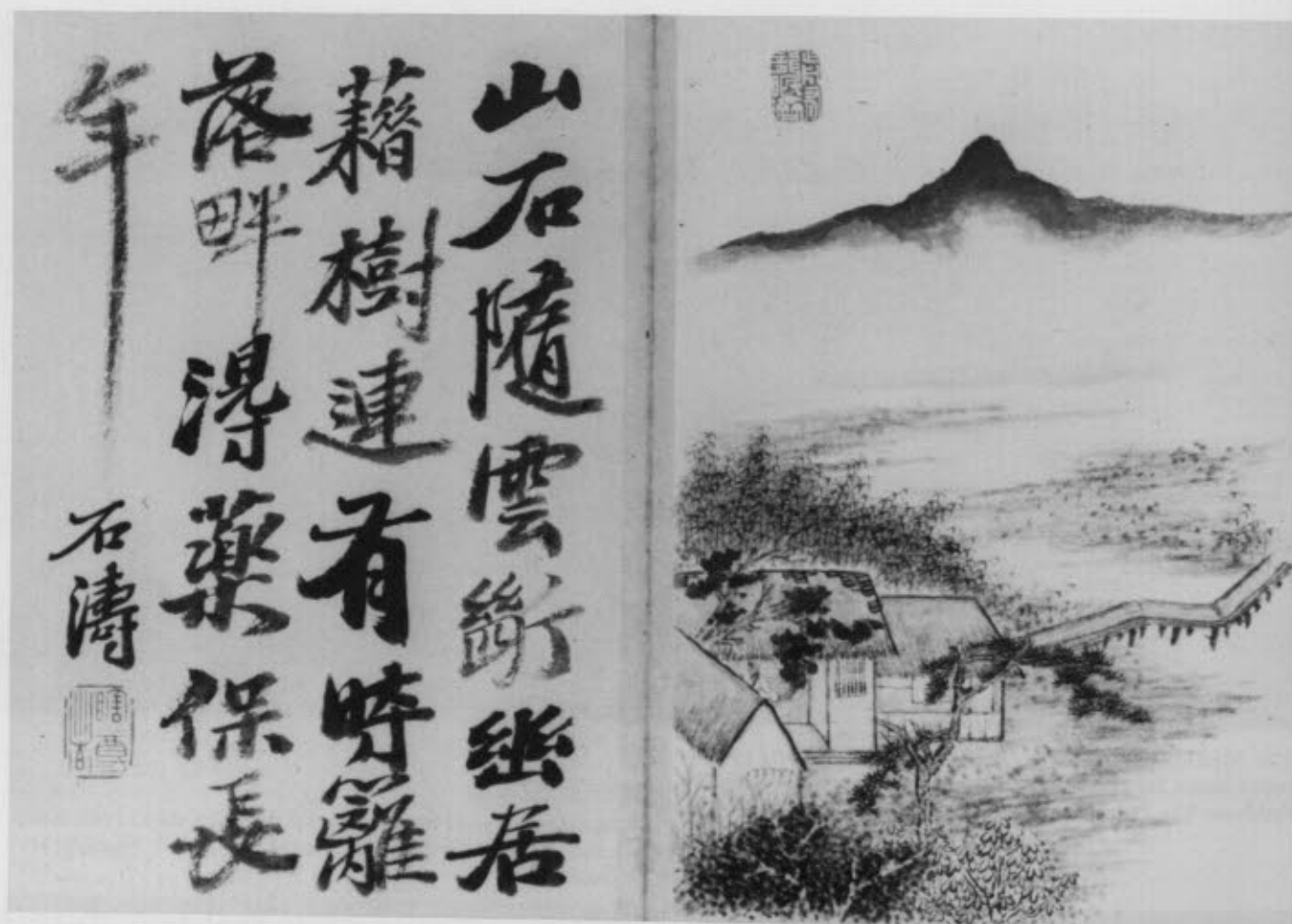
176. *Visit to Master Zhang's Grotto*, handscroll, ink and color on paper, 46.8 x 286 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Purchase, The Dillon Fund Gift, 1982.

180. *Lingzhi and Pines: Poems and Paintings*, dated 1697, handscroll, ink and color on paper, 30 x 234.1 cm (detail). Shanghai Museum.



tion.⁷³ Within a Daoist frame of reference, the painting emerges as a self-conscious attempt to affirm the roots of his new Daoist persona in his youth. The title, after all, presents it as a reminiscence, and Shitao's memories of Huangshan dated back to his days as a young monk in the late 1660s. There may even be a specific context for the Huangshan iconography in the fact that in 1697 a friend brought Shitao's 1667 *Mount Huang* hanging scroll (see Figure 158) to the Great Cleansing Hall to re-

quest an inscription. *Qingxiang Dadizi's Reminiscence of the Thirty-six Peaks* was painted, I suspect, after he was reunited with this magnificent early work, perhaps even as an answer to it. This, at any rate, would explain the reappearance in his 1697 scroll of the great vertical yin-yang structure set up by the foreground outcrop and distant mountain peaks. The 1667 painting was a "mad Chan" image showing Shitao at the center of the fluxus of nature. Now, thirty years later, he reclaimed his Chan



181. "Daoist Meditation," *Landscapes and Poems*, leaf 3, ink and color on paper, each leaf 27 x 21 cm. Private collection.

past for his present "Daoist" self, accomplishing by means of a new Huangshan icon what he also attempted in a new and uncompromisingly Daoist inscription to the 1667 scroll. In both that inscription and in the new painting he produced, we are returned to the site of his early rapturous experience that led him to regret that, unlike the Iron-Feet Daoist, he himself was unable to vanish to become a transcendent.⁷⁴

The exuberant paintings and texts of Shitao's first years as Dadizi, where he advocated by straightforward embodiment, were complemented in some contemporary and later works by a noticeably more considered and reflective advocacy of inner alchemy, including one self-portrait in Daoist meditation c. 1698 (Figure 181). A leaf from the 1703 Mr. Liu albums transforms a riverbank close-up into a monumental evocation of cosmic order through a composition that maps the division between land and water onto the painting's horizontal axis, and thereby onto the division between heaven and earth (Figure 182). The artist's inscribed poem draws

out the the painting's larger ambitions, associating the image with an invisible sacred mountainscape of the mind, and the act of painting with Daoist visualization:

Fallen from Heaven, the Yellow River flows to the sea;

Its ten thousand *li* of water feed my ambitions.

Within it a sacred mountain occupies the heavens,
With rolling white clouds that merge with pine-covered passes.

At its gate great gulleys contend below waterfalls,
Whose is the red cinnabar on its topmost peak?

Stopping my brush from time to time, I look upon it –

To do so surpasses flying through the void upon a divine horse.

In the same vein, in a hanging scroll from around 1699–1700 Shitao followed up on his earlier *Mount Emei* by illustrating another of Li Bai's visionary poems of moun-

182. "The Force of Rivers," *Landscapes for Liu Xiaoshan*, dated 1703, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, each leaf 47.4 x 31.5 cm, leaf 7, ink on paper. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. (Purchase: Acquired through the generosity of the Hall Family Foundation.)

黃河落天走江
海萬里湧入胸懷
間中有岳雲踞霄
深白雲滾迷松
閣當門巨壑爭
泉下懸頂丹砂泥
之者我時佳筆
還自看勝勝飛
空駕天馬

文滌子



tain ascent, this one devoted to Mount Tiantai in Zhejiang, the center of the Upper Purity (Shangqing) School of Daoism (Figure 183). The mountain is also important in Daoist sacred geography as another of the seventy-two Blessed Places. Shitao's overall image could be described as the representation of a hollow at the core of the mountain: In the best Daoist tradition, solid is born of void. The cascade of a waterfall traverses the hollowed-out space in a double movement, the first ending in a basin from which mist rises, the second passing beneath a natural rock bridge to plunge into a gorge of which only the top part is visible. The bridge divides the void into more or less equal halves and intensifies the iconic force of the image – *yin's* receptivity as the source of *yang's* strength; and yet, beside the rock bridge, with its symbolism of liminality that might be assumed to signify the adept's ambiguous position between two states of being, Shitao has placed a Buddhist stupa to remind us of the concurrent Chan significance of the site.⁷⁵

However, the central pictorial achievement of this second aspect of Dadizi's practice of painting as alchemy is yet another illustration of Li Bai's Daoist song-poems, *The Waterfall at Mount Lu* (see Plate 12).⁷⁶ This monumental hanging scroll is one of Shitao's most admired paintings, in which the Five Dynasties and Northern Song vision of cosmic landscape is remade. It is a work that confronts its models on their terms – of naturalism, large format (it is over two meters high), and a silk surface. The painting is undated, but the signature "Qingxiang Chenren" (the Old Man of Qingxiang) is found on paintings dated between the third month of 1698 and the seventh month of 1703, and it does not appear on any undated paintings that can be shown to have been executed much, if at all, earlier than 1698. Its realist craft, meanwhile, so different from the exuberant works we have been considering, has no parallel before 1699 or after 1702, which suggests rough parameters for its date of execution. At a first level, the painting is a depiction of Mount Lu in Jiangxi Province, illustrating Li Bai's famous poem, *A Song of Mount Lu: To Attendant Censor Lu Xuzhou*. Mount Lu was a great Buddhist center of particular importance to Shitao, not only because he had visited it with Hetao in his youth but because Muchen Daomin had attained enlightenment there, at Kaixian Monastery.⁷⁷ For Daoists Mount Lu was the site of a sacred grotto heaven and home to the Numinous Treasure (Lingbao) School. (Li Bai was an adept of the Shangqing School.) The representation's subjectivized status is doubly clear, first in the prominent self-reference at its center – the contemplative figure seemingly floating above the ground, his feet shrouded in mist – and then in the way the inscription begins with the character *wo*, "I." Since this is the first word of Li Bai's poem, the central figure is ostensibly

the great Tang poet; but Shitao's tendency to place himself at the center of his paintings is familiar, and the dilemma is easily resolved by admitting the figure to be Shitao in the persona of Li Bai. It is an identification that Shitao actively encouraged in this period, painting many works in the Green Lotus Studio, probably located within the Great Cleansing Hall and so-called to evoke one of Li Bai's sobriquets.

Like Xu Wei, Li Bai provided a model for Shitao's madness, but with the added element of wanderlust:

I am, indeed, the Madman of Chu,
Making fun of Confucius with a Phoenix Song.
In my hand I carry a "green jade" bamboo cane⁷⁸
And set out at dawn from the Yellow Crane Tower.
When I search for transcendents on the five sacred
peaks, I never complain how far:
All my life I have liked to roam in famous
mountains.

Here we have a skeletal lineage for Shitao's individualism and nonconformism: back through the heroic individualism of Li Bai (of whom Stephen Owen has written that he was the poet who, being without legitimate social background, had to "invent himself")⁷⁹ to Jie Yu, who mocked Confucius with the words, "Desist, desist! Great in these days is the peril of those who fill office." What, after all, was Shitao if not a madman of Chu, one who had set out from the Yellow Crane Tower at Wuchang and all his life roamed in famous mountains? Now, however, Li Bai's search for transcendents also resonated with his life as Dadizi; indeed, as in *Qingxiang Dadizi's Reminiscence of the Thirty-six Peaks*, it was probably part of the painting's purpose to rewrite his Buddhist past in function of a Daoist present.

Li Bai's "Song of Mount Lu" continues with an imagistic description of the mountain that seems to have been the basis, with many modifications, for the upper three-quarters of the picture. The waterfall, for example, can be understood as a "fallen Milky Way."⁸⁰ There then follows a description of the view from the top of the mountain, less relevant to Shitao's painting; however, the bottom part of the picture corresponds to the last part of the poem, when Li Bai has climbed back down the mountain:

Slowly, I gaze into the Stone Mirrors to clarify my
mind;
The places where Duke Xie [Xie Lingyun, 385–433]
passed are obscured by moss.
Take purified cinnabar early on and there will be no
worldly cares;
"As the mind is brought into harmony the Three
will gather together" and the Way begins to be
accomplished.
Far above I see transcendents in the midst of
luminous clouds,



Proceeding to court in the Jade Capital with lotus flowers in their hands.

First I make an appointment with Far-flooded Freedom beyond the Nine Peripheries;
I wish to join Lu Ao and roam in the Heaven of Grand Clarity.⁸¹

With this we are made privy to the thoughts of Li Bai as he looks into the mist, which here takes the place of the Stone Mirrors (which, as their name suggests, were reflective stones).⁸² Although we see no transcendents, there are indeed luminous clouds; and the figure of Li Bai/Shitao appears to hover above the ground, as if the purified cinnabar is already having its effects and he is himself becoming luminous, dissolving himself into nature.⁸³

Complementing the dimension of narrative visualization, the very structure of the landscape image is governed by a transformational symbolism that adds a second dimension to Shitao's visualization of alchemical principles. The painting has the structure of a cosmic diagram. The twin peaks of the Golden Gateway are answered at the bottom of the image by a rock outcrop of much the same squared-off shape; like the peaks, it too emerges out of mist. Between these two compositional elements is a third blunt rock form, this one splitting into three at its tip. This triadic form shares the geometric center of the painting with a cloud and the middle section of the waterfall. The resulting diagrammatic image has first of all a numerological dimension in the 1-3-2 pattern of the major rock motifs. Its image is of primordial differentiation, as expressed in the *Daode jing*: "The Dao engenders one, one engenders two, two engenders three, and three engenders the infinity of things." More immediately, it echoes the use of the number three in Li Bai's poem. It is also imagistic, however, for the triadic form brings to mind the pictogram for "mountain," while the waterfall is abstracted to convey the idea of a primordial water source, the water miraculously transmuting to cloud below. The cloud in turn assumes the shape of the sacred *lingzhi* fungus, which was supposed to become visible to Daoist adepts entering the interior landscape of the mountain.⁸⁴

As in *Qingxiang Dadizi's Reminiscence of the Thirty-six Peaks* and *Visit to Master Zhang's Grotto*, Shitao also extended his visualization of alchemical principles from the painting's iconography into its visuality, with aspects of temporality and the scenic to the fore. *The*

183. *Mount Tiantai*, hanging scroll, materials, dimensions and whereabouts unknown. Source: *The Selected Painting and Calligraphy of Shih-t'ao*, vol. 1, fig. 47.

Waterfall at Mount Lu, of course, is neither *linli* nor “raw,” displaying instead a luminous realism in which the luminosity itself is the key to its alchemical character. Shitao hinted at this himself in the postscript that he added at the end of his transcription of Li Bai’s poem, which I cited earlier in a very different context:

It is said that Guo Heyang painted in the tradition of Li Cheng and that he captured the aspects of clouds and mists as they form or fade away, and of summits and peaks as they hide or emerge. He dominated his era. In his early years his work was ingenious and consummately skilled; in his late years he wielded the brush with increasing virility and power. In my lifetime I have seen more than ten of his paintings, most of which were praised by everyone. I was the only one to say nothing, for I did not see in them any surpassing mastery of the hand and eye. Today I remember my own travels of long ago. I have taken Li Bai’s poem *A Song of Mount Lu: To Attendant Censor Lu Xuzhou* and made a painting of it, combining my own methods with what I have seen over the years. One could almost take this as Xi’s own vision [*guan*]: What need is there for the works of old!

By choosing as his model Guo Xi, Shitao was evoking a painter whose commitment to Daoism was standard knowledge, since it permeates his reported statements on painting in the *Linquan gaozhi* compiled by his son. Shitao’s discussion of Guo Xi’s art should be read in the light of their joint Daoist interests; significantly, he identifies his painting, not with Guo Xi’s methods (*fa*) as one might have expected, but with his vision (*guan*), a term that could be translated with equal justice as “visualization.” *Guan*, as observation and visualization, was central to Daoist practice; and as “lookout,” it was one of the names for Daoist monasteries. Although Shitao’s first comments, down to “hide or emerge,” are cited from a fourteenth-century text, this does not detract from their importance.⁸⁵ The key statement is that Guo Xi “captured the aspects of clouds and mists as they form or fade away, and of summits and peaks as they hide or emerge.” For Shitao, this was the essential quality of Guo Xi’s vision and visualization, as can be seen from the way he himself pursued this quality in his painting. Translating it into more abstract terms, it is the ability to suggest the interpenetration of existence (*you*) and nonexistence (*wu*), which was one of the fundamental concepts of inner alchemy Daoism. Although Shitao does not draw out the philosophical implications in this text, we can turn to his inscription on a painting of a Daoist theme from around 1700, *The Tender Peach* – unfortunately, so subtle in its coloring as to be un-reproducible – where he comments on a vivid, visionary naturalism that it has in common with *The Waterfall at Mount Lu*.⁸⁶

As I thought of pursuing the light that shone from
the drunken moon onto the mountains
The endless horizon was stained with rosy dawn
clouds.

Contented, in the eastern breeze, I take my leisure
Transforming [the scene] into the wordly flowers of
the tender peach.

To elaborate on the peach blossom, I feel that they seem to exist [*you*] and yet not exist [*wu*]. People in the world do not understand. How worthless to visualize [*guan*] them in terms of sensuous materiality [*fanhua*].

In other words, the realism is suggestive of its own crystallization and dissolution, and the viewer who sees only its affirmative aspect has missed the point of Shitao’s visualization. Light is the means to this, both in the poem and in the painting. Returning to *The Waterfall at Mount Lu*, one now sees that the crystallization/dissolution of the body of Shitao/Li Bai has its counterpart in the use of luminosity to suggest the crystallization/dissolution of the landscape.

Finally, parallel to his pictorial practice, a series of painting inscriptions from the Dadi Tang years shows that Shitao also recovered during this period his earlier interest in the soteriological possibilities of a discourse of *fa*.⁸⁷

The Ancients did not establish a *fa* nonchalantly. With free time on my hands, I started from the pair of characters *xuling*, “free and inspired,” not taking them literally but thinking that it was like seizing a reflection in a mirror. The authentic quality of landscape can be captured only by going into the wilderness and watching mountains as they alternate between reality and illusion. All this [comes out] in the inspired energy of my brush tip as I paint. No one will be able to see where I started and finished; this is the mark of a truly great painter – one need not speak of [the difference between] the Ancients and the Moderns.

Of his earlier Chan language almost nothing remains beyond the concept of *fa* itself and the opposition of Ancients and Moderns. He has a new vocabulary: free and inspired (*xuling*), inspired energy (*lingqi*), reality (*zhen*) versus illusion (*huan*). The mention of a mirror, which once evoked the emptiness of material appearances, now evokes (as in the allusion to the Stone Mirrors in *The Waterfall at Mount Lu*) the elusiveness of the inner and potentially immanent alchemical reality. As I have been arguing, the physical act of looking is certainly central as the way of seizing that elusiveness; but at the same time it is the unity or Oneness of the trace of the physical act of painting – achieved not through closure but through the unending free circulation of energy – that

harmonizes the self. The painting as trace does not simply record the event of its production but accumulates and fuses its components, converting temporal transformations to spatial ones. Following the logic of inner alchemy, it abolishes the relentless progress of time.

Shitao accomplished his effacement of the painting's chronology at every level but did so most fundamentally in the movements of the physical act of painting and in the alchemy of the material surface. He wrote at length on both aspects, and on the relation between them, within the framework of what he perceived to be the dialectic of brush and ink. Brush and ink, respectively, are emblematic in his writing of the controlled, directed act and the material reaction with its margin of autonomy. Shitao consistently placed the two elements, or rather principles, on an equal footing, as in this excerpt from a rather technical inscription to a small landscape painting executed in 1702 (Figure 184):

There are three types of brushwork. In the first, the brush is kept perpendicular to the paper; in the second, the brush is held at an angle; the third is the [modulated] movements of painting. Only when a painter has mastered these three types of brushwork has he taken the first three steps in painting.

First, force; second, ease; and third, modulation. When force dominates the movements of painting, then you will have spirit [*shen*]. When the brush does not waver, you will have an inspired quality [*ling*]. When you are able to create transformations [*bian*] in the movements of painting, the result will be extraordinary [*qi*]. These are the three requirements.

First, the transformations [*bian*] of water; second, the introduction [*yun*] of these into the ink; third, their reception [*shou*] by [the ink's] potentiality [*meng*]. If the water has no transformations, there can be no alertness. If the ink is not brought into movement [by the transformations of water], there can be no clarity. And even if alertness and clarity are present, if there is no potentiality then the result will remain plain. These are the three achievements.

In sum, the brush is charged with ensuring continuity by an easy force, while ink is charged with exploiting its po-



184. *Clouds and Mountains*, dated 1702, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper. Palace Museum, Beijing. Source: *Shitao shuhua quanji*, vol. 1, pl. 168.

tential for transformation. Brush force meets ink potentiality most spectacularly in the modulations of the brush and the transformations of the liquid ink. In elaborating this idea, he calls upon a rich conceptual vocabulary, including spirit, inspiration, transformations, receptivity, and potentiality.

The above inscription, though on the face of it a technical discussion of painting, by the very fact of the specificity of its terminology intimates a further purpose,

which can only be to suggest the alchemical potential of painting as praxis. On other occasions, Shitao deployed the same language for explicitly soteriological purposes, as in his recorded inscription to a painting from 1703, where he highlights the concept of potentiality:⁸⁸

In writing out paintings it is necessary to understand the nourishment of potentiality [*mengyang*].⁸⁹ Potentiality derives from the absence of *fa* in antiquity; nourishment derives from the lack of differentiation in the primordial chaos. From lack of differentiation comes nourishment; from the absence of *fa* comes potentiality. Before [the paper] receives the ink, first reflect upon [the ink's] potentiality; and once you start activating the brush, examine [the brush's] nourishment. You yourself can develop the potentiality to complete [the work of] the Ancients; you yourself can visualize transformation and become free of *fa*. When transformation is visualized and *fa* abolished, the painting naturally conforms to the Way of nourishing potentiality.

Invoking Daoist cosmogony, Shitao argues that painting as praxis must reestablish contact with the primordial state of unity that preceded the differentiation of form and the proliferation of *fa*. Through the diversity of *fa* and the differentiation of form, it has to reestablish a unity that once more abolishes time and allows the painter to occupy a utopian point of freedom and wandering, keeping faith with his 1691 breakthrough.

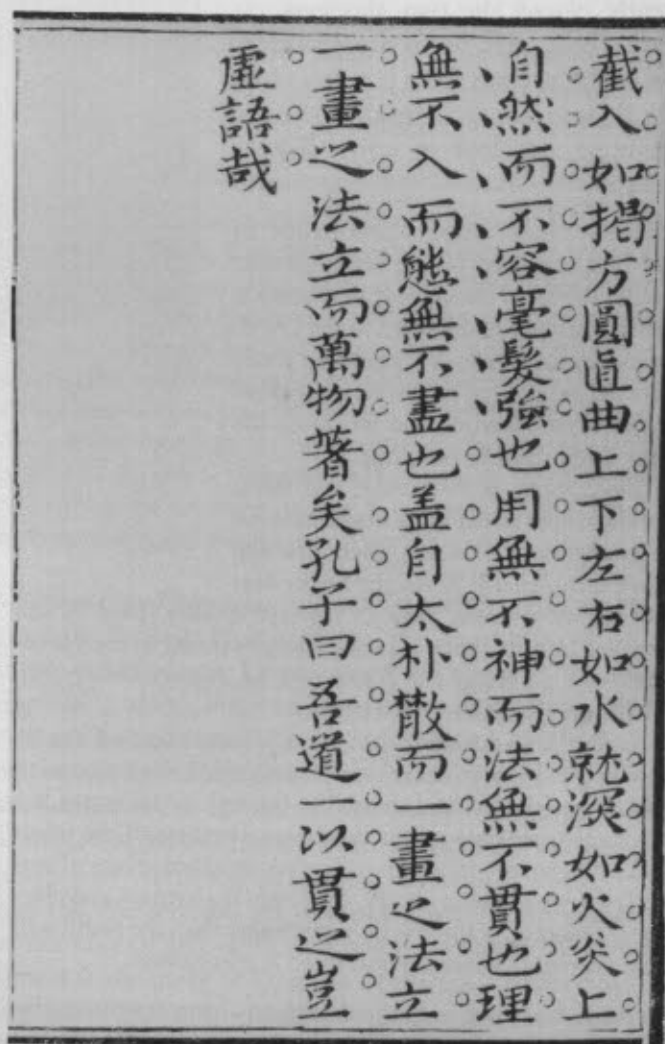
ONENESS AND THE PERFECTED MAN: SHITAO'S TREATISE ON PAINTING

Few artist-theorists in Chinese history achieved the kind of historical influence through their theories that can be claimed for Shitao. Shitao's particular importance as a theorist derives in large part from the fact that he was one of the very few artists ever to attempt a systematic treatise on painting. His own ambitions, however, were not simply as a theorist; in his treatise, as in many (but not all) of his theoretical inscriptions on paintings, his concern was also with painting as religious praxis.

The earliest evidence for the existence of Shitao's treatise on painting is a fan, datable to around 1697–8, on which he wrote out what he refers to as the first chapter of a larger text (Figure 185).⁹⁰ The name he gives there to this larger text is *Primer in the Methods of Painting* (*Huafa beiyuan*). It seems that he wanted to mark his move into the Dadi Tang by a grand synthetic gesture in teaching. The text of the fan is clearly a preliminary version of the first chapter of Shitao's existing treatise in eighteen chapters, of which the *Huafa beiyuan* must have been close to the first incarnation.⁹¹ Despite his privileging of "the *fa* of painting" in the title of the larger text, Shitao in this chapter freed himself from his ear-

lier dependence on a discourse of *fa* by introducing a new term, *yihua*, or the One-stroke (literally, "Oneness painting") to signify a cosmic unifying principle underlying the practice of painting. Used in conjunction with the more straightforward concept of *hua*, meaning the embodiment of the One-stroke as "painting," the One-stroke is affirmed to be commensurate with the *Dao* itself. An initial statement of cosmogenesis, echoing the *Daode jing*, sets the stage for a view of the practice of painting as the recovery of Oneness. The painter thus participates in the Daoist ideal of the perfected man, cosmic ruler in his own body.⁹²

In the course of the later transformations of this key text, entitled "The One-stroke," the original Daoist discourse remained untouched (Figure 186). Indeed, Hu Qi's preface for the 1710 printing of the late *Hua pu* recension of the treatise expressly presents Shitao as a Daoist painter.⁹³ The most common (*Huayu lu*) recension of the opening chapter of the treatise, predating the more economical recension in the *Hua pu* reproduced here, has a new clarity and monumentality by compar-





185 (above). Excerpt from the "Huafa beiyuan," folding fan, ink on paper, Shanghai Museum.

186 (below & facing). Chapter One of the Hua pu. Source: Facsimile reprint of the 1710 ed. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1962.

畫譜

一畫章第一

太古無法。太朴不散。太朴一散而法自立。法于何立。于一畫。一畫者。衆有之本。萬象之根。見用于神。藏用于人。而世人不知。所以一畫之法。乃自我立。

清湘石濤大滌子極著
廣寧閭山子樹胡琪閱



一畫之法者。蓋以無法生有法。以有法貫衆法也。夫西者。法之表也。山川人物之秀錯。鳥獸草木之性情。池榭樓臺之矩度。未能深入其理。曲盡其態。終未得一畫之洪規也。行遠登高。悉起膚寸。此一畫收盡鴻濛之外。即億萬之筆墨。未有不始于此而終于此。惟聽人之取法耳。人能以一畫具體而微。意則筆透。則腕不虛。腕不虛動。之以旋潤。之以轉居。之以曠出。如

ison with the fan version and is worth citing here in its entirety for its incomparable manifesto-like power:

In remote antiquity there were no methods; the Primordial Simplicity had not yet disintegrated. When the primordial Simplicity disintegrated, then methods were established. On what basis were methods established? They were established on the basis of the One-stroke. Now the One-stroke is the origin of all things, the root of all phenomena. Its function is visible to spirit and hidden in the human, but the ordinary person will not realize. Thus the methods of the One-stroke are established from the Self. And the establishment of the methods of the One-stroke sees the absence of methods engender the presence of methods, and the presence of methods embrace the multiplicity of methods.

Now, painting is something that is guided by the heart-mind. Whether depicting the tapestry of landscape and people or the nature of birds and animals, grasses and trees, or the dimensions of ponds, pavilions, towers, and terraces; if one fails to discern their inherent structural principles or is unable to represent the details of their appearance, it is because one has not acceded to the vast regulating powers of the One-stroke. Distant journeys and high ascents all begin from the first inch. This single stroke brings within its sway even that which lies beyond the borders of the universe. The infinite contacts between brush and ink all begin here and end here. It only depends on the artist to take control, for if he can employ the One-stroke to create a universe in miniature, then his conception will be brightly visible in the passage of his brush.

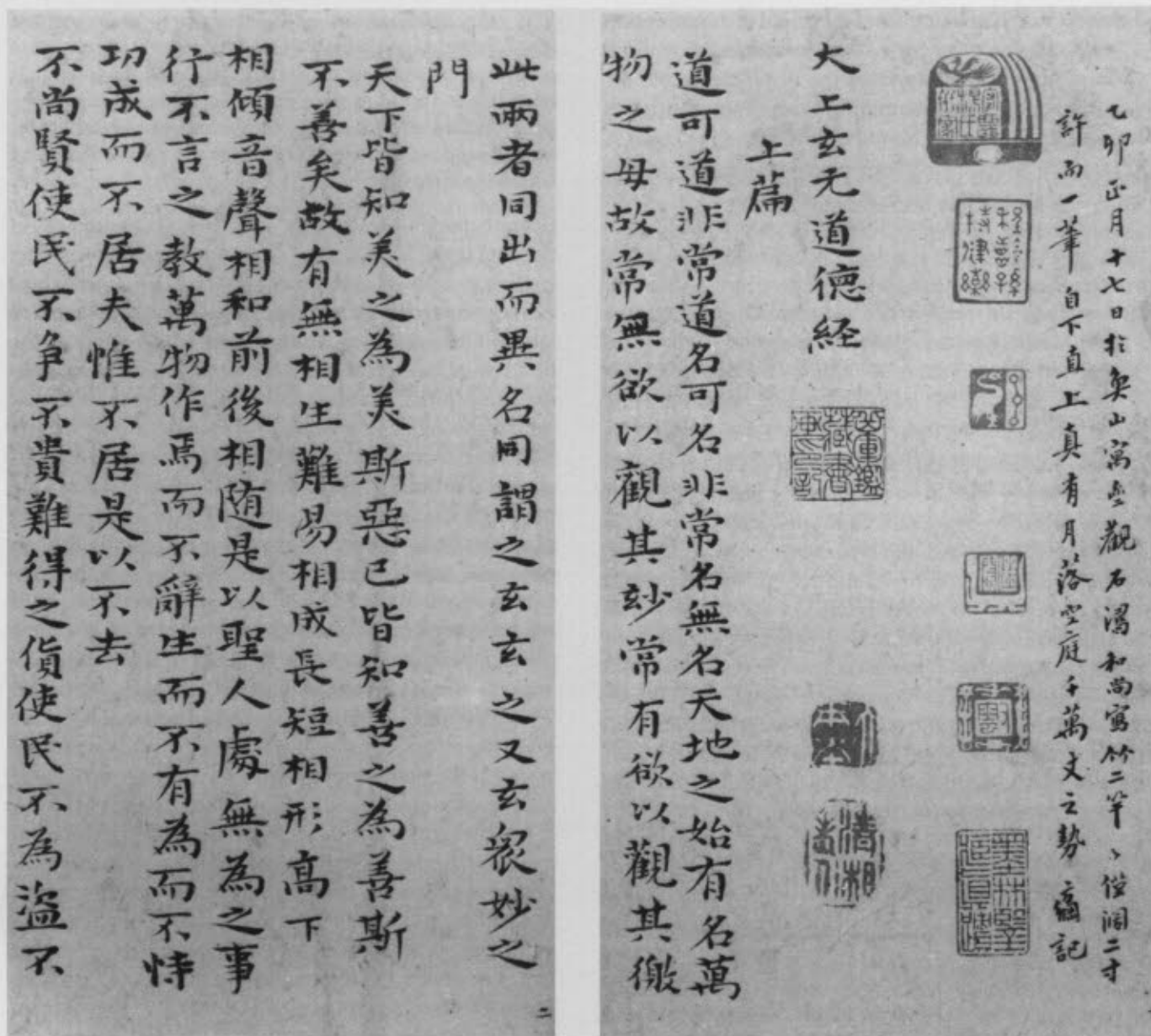
If the wrist does not move with freedom [*xu*], then the painting will seem wrong, and when a painting seems wrong it is because the movements of the wrist lack inspiration [*ling*]. Activate it in circular motions, ease it by twisting and turning, and bring it to rest with a feeling of spaciousness. Lift the brush as if tearing something off; apply it as if attacking. The movements should be round, angular, direct, meandering, ranging upward and downward, shifting with equal facility to the left or right. They should soar and dip, acting suddenly. They should cut incisively, extend horizontally or obliquely. Dropping toward the depths like water or shooting upward like flames, they should be natural, without the least coercion.

When every use [of the wrist] is animated by spirit [*shen*], all methods can be mastered, all structural principles can be captured, and all outer appearances fully depicted. With a confident movement of the hand, one depicts landscapes, people, birds, animals, grasses and trees, ponds, pavilions, towers, and terraces. One can capture forms and suggest stances, paint from life and visualize an idea, express one's feelings and evoke a particular scene. Whether clearly revealing or subtly suggesting things, the painting is completed without the artist realizing it, yet accords completely with the need of the heart-mind.

The Primordial Simplicity disintegrated and the methods of the One-stroke were established; the methods of the One-stroke once established, all things became visible. Thus, it has been said: "My *Dao* employs Oneness to string everything together."

In this revised version of Shitao's credo, the One-stroke plays an even more prominent role than in the fan. The *Dao*, for example, is reduced to a single mention in the philosophical coda at the end, because it has now been subsumed into the One-stroke. Shitao has also added a lengthy discussion of the concrete realization of the One-stroke through mastery of the movements of the wrist. In fact, this has transformed the text from a purely philosophic statement into a more complex one in which his philosophic concerns are brought into a relationship with a practice-oriented theory of painting. We might say that this revised text is concerned with the relationship between painting as philosophical-religious praxis and the practice of painting, the single term of *fa* (method) being used to cover both praxis and practice.⁹⁴ In purely literary terms, meanwhile, the new version is far more impressive, animating its several lists of terms by the push-pull of opposites and rhythmically propelling the argument through its transformations of level and theme. The energetics of the text – which often recall the *Daode jing*, of which there exists a fine transcription by Shitao (Figure 187) – in this way echo and reinforce what Shitao has to say on the qualities of the One-stroke.⁹⁵ Finally, he closes the text with a citation from the *Analects* of Confucius, which mischievously turns the Sage into a spokesman for Daoist Oneness. Indirectly, this is an allusion to the *Zhuangzi*, where Confucius often meets such disrespectful treatment.⁹⁶ It balances the allusions to the *Daode jing* in the opening lines of the text, taken over from the *Huafa beiyuan* version. In sum, like *The Waterfall at Mount Lu* as compared with *Qingxiang Dadizi's Reminiscence of the Thirty-six Peaks*, the later version is more restrained but also more ambitious, animated as much by a considered metaphysics as by sheer force of religious engagement, yet still firmly rooted within a Daoist framework. Oneness (*yi*) denotes the continuity of being that unites the Self (*wo*) and the phenomenal world (*congyou* and *wanxiang*). Materialized in the One-stroke, Oneness is an affair of the body as much as the mind. That is, it is internalized through spirit (*shen*), which cuts across the mind-heart-body boundary, and is exteriorized through the freedom (*xu*) and inspiration (*ling*) of the wrist – the same ideas that we have seen Shitao explore in his *fa*-oriented painting inscriptions.⁹⁷

On the basis of this opening chapter, the treatise as a whole goes on to elaborate both the philosophical discourse of painting as praxis and the theoretical discourse of painting practice, sometimes in separate chapters, sometimes intertwined within a single chapter. (My translations, drawing on those of Richard Strassberg and Pierre Ryckmans, do not involve any passages in which the different recensions are in serious disagreement.)⁹⁸ Nonetheless, if the opening chapter is the key-



187. Transcription of the "Daode jing," album of 37 leaves, ink on paper, each leaf 24 x 12.7 cm, leaves 1 and 2. Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taiwan, Republic of China. Gift of Mr. Zhang Yuejun.

stone of the entire treatise, announcing its themes and articulating its intent, the remaining seventeen chapters are not evenly weighted explorations of its implications. On the contrary, the treatise has a rather complex thematic architecture. At its simplest level, this architecture comprises four sections, each of which is dominated by one particularly ambitious chapter. Chapters One to Three take method (*fa*) as their theme and are dominated by Chapter One, "The One-stroke." Chapters Four to Seven, which explore painting as trace (of the act of

painting), culminate in Chapter Seven, "Fusion." Chapters Eight to Fourteen explore issues of representation on the basis of Chapter Eight, "Mountains and Waters." Finally, Chapters Fifteen to Eighteen pursue a discussion of painting in theological terms that is brought to fruition in Chapter Eighteen, "Assuming Responsibilities." For my purposes, it is most important to draw attention to Shitao's repeated return to the discourse of Oneness in the key chapters of each of the four sections.⁹⁹

Following the discussion of *fa* in the first section, Shitao turns in the second to painting as trace. In successive chapters, he discusses receptivity to/perception of (*shou*) the world, the interaction of brush and ink, and the movements of the wrist, before bringing his argument to a general conclusion in Chapter Seven, "Fusion" (*yinyun*).¹⁰⁰ By fusion, he means the final fused unity of the movements of the brush and the materiality

of the ink in the painting surface, which is the condition of successful self-expression. This unified, individualized whole confronts the viewer as the displacement of the painter's self: a self-presentation with the authority of the body's investment. Shitao concludes:

Even if the brushstrokes do not look like brushstrokes, the ink does not look like ink, and the painting does not resemble painting, my Self will still be present through it all. For I apply the ink – the ink does not apply itself; the brush is controlled by me – not by itself; I give birth to my creation – it does not create itself. Start from Oneness to make the distinctions among the ten thousand; start from the ten thousand to bring about Oneness. By transforming Oneness into a state of fusion, all the possibilities in the world can be mastered.

Following this, at the beginning of the third section of the treatise – that is, in the opening lines of Chapter Eight – comes a passage that announces the shift in the argument: Having discussed painting as trace, he will now approach it as representation. In this new context, brush-and-ink is no longer referred back to the self of the artist but instead to what he is depicting (Shitao's example is landscape). In representational terms, the treatment of brush-and-ink is associated with the exterior appearance of landscape (*shi*), while the structural principles of the painting are associated with the substance of landscape (*zhi*). At this point, therefore, Oneness operates along an interior–exterior axis:

The substance of landscape lies in attainment of the natural order of the Creative and Receptive principles [*qian* and *kun*] of the universe. The exterior appearance of landscape lies in attainment of the methods of brush and ink. To be aware of exterior appearances and yet go against natural order will destabilize the natural order [of the painting]. To be aware of substance and yet go against method will render mediocre the methods [of the painting]. Thus, the ancient masters were aware that the dangers of destabilization and mediocrity could be avoided only through Oneness. If Oneness is not clearly understood, then inhibitions will arise in the depiction of the ten thousand things. But if it is thoroughly understood, then the ten thousand things can be fully depicted. The natural order of the painting and the methods of the brush are nothing other than the substance and exterior appearance of Heaven and Earth.

The main body of Chapter Eight expands on the final sentence of the opening passage in a visionary evocation, here omitted, of representation as the manifestation of the cosmic patterns and qualities of landscape: a view that returns us to the ideas of vision and visualization involved in the Daoist concept of *guan*. The chapter concludes with a magnificently defiant statement that identifies the enterprise of representation with the Great Cleansing:

Fifty years ago I had not yet found myself in landscape: not that I thought it worthless, but I let it exist for itself. Now landscape entrusts me to speak in its name: Landscape is born of me and I am born of it. I seek out extraordinary peaks to turn into paintings; our spirits meet and all traces of us disappear. In the end, it all becomes part of the Great Cleansing.

One of the features of this passage is its insistence on the passage of time, on the accumulation of experience, leading to a physical change of state. As Kristofer Schipper has written of Daoist alchemical practice, “the third law of Chinese physics (which one could also call the first law of its metaphysics) is that any unity participating in a prolonged and repeated cyclical action is transmuted through the process of its purification.”¹⁰¹ The idea that representation could be practiced as an alchemical process of transformation is familiar from the paintings discussed earlier, but what does it mean to place this under the sign of the Great Cleansing? The implication, surely, is that Shitao's Great Cleansing, far from being a simple break with the past, on the contrary marks the culmination of a long pursuit of Oneness through painting over a period of fifty years. As in *Qingxiang Dadizi's Reminiscence of the Thirty-six Peaks* and *The Waterfall at Mount Lu*, Shitao subordinates the Buddhist character of his past to his Daoist sympathies, which at the time seemed secondary but have now come to seem symptomatic of his authentic self.

Chapter Eight having shifted the ground of the argument to painting as representation, the six chapters following it address as many different aspects of representational practice and belong to the theory of painting in a strict sense; they are cited at length in Chapter 8 of the present volume.¹⁰² With Chapters Fifteen and Sixteen, however, respectively entitled “Distancing Oneself from the Dust of the World” and “Casting Off Vulgarity,” we enter the very different, theological discourse of the fourth and final section of the treatise. Shitao pursues his theme of mental attitude through these two short chapters before elaborating the monumental theological vision of Chapter Eighteen, “Fulfilling Responsibilities.” (Chapter Seventeen, on the relation between calligraphy and painting, is somewhat out of place.)¹⁰³ In Shitao's theology, both the artist and the landscape that he paints have responsibilities; they are imposed by the qualities the two possess, which are assigned by heaven. However, the responsibilities of landscape are different in one crucial way from those of the artist: While it is landscape's responsibility simply to be so-of-itself (*ziran*), self-so-ness for the artist requires effort (even if it is the effort to attain effortlessness). Responsibility for an artist is necessarily conscious: He must assume the responsibilities of his talent and vocation. For Shitao, writing

in Chapter Eighteen, this is a moral imperative, because without the artist's powers of visualization, the cosmic pattern of landscape would not become visible:

If the mutual responsibilities of mountains and waters were not made visible, then there would seem to be no cause behind the movements of flowing and enveloping. And if flowing and enveloping are not made visible, then the nourishment of potentiality and mastery of animation would lack purpose. But when potentiality and animation are activated, then there will appear to be a cause behind flowing and enveloping. And when there is that cause, then the responsibilities of mountains and waters can rest fulfilled.

In the end, therefore – and this is how Shitao brings the treatise to a close – Oneness exists as a state into which the artist can dissolve himself, but the artist's effort also contributes to the propagation of Oneness:

Responsibilities require cultivation of potential and mastery of life, so that the ten thousand can be ordered by Oneness and Oneness can be defined through the ten thousand. When the artist's practice no longer depends on mountains or water, on brush or ink, on tradition or the present, or on sages, only then does his responsibility find its fulfillment.

Thus the gradual pursuit of Oneness through the praxis of self-perfection ultimately leads to an achieved state of being that, in inner alchemical texts, is often called the state of a True Man (*zhenren*) or Perfected Man (*zhiren*). Shitao's preferred term is Perfected Man, which appears twice in his treatise. In Chapter Three, perfection is the concept by which Shitao transforms Chan no-method (*wufa*) into Daoist no-method: "Moreover, I say: the Perfected Man has no method. This is not to say that he is without any methods, but rather that his is the method that comes from no-method, and is the perfected method." Later, in the final, theological section of the treatise, he devotes the entire Chapter Sixteen, "Casting Off Vulgarly," to explaining – in an eloquent definition, which needs no commentary, of the painter as Daoist – the significance of perfection:

To be ignorant is to have the awareness of the vulgar. When one is not blinded by ignorance, then understanding emerges. When one is not stained by vulgarity, then one can be pure. The vulgar perceive in function of their ignorance; the ignorant are confused due to their blindness. And so the Perfected Man is necessarily fulfilled and illuminated. Being fulfilled, he undergoes transformation; being illuminated, he undergoes change. In his response to events he is unattached to physical forms; in his engagement with physical forms he leaves no traces. He activates the ink as if its form was already set. He moves the brush with the appearance of nonaction. Within a few feet of paper he orders Heaven and Earth, mountains and waters, and the ten thousand

things, and yet his mind is detached as if unconcerned. Thus is ignorance banished and wisdom born, vulgarity purged and purity achieved.

Clearly, then, if Shitao felt in 1706 that he had in the end been unable to come up with any "marvelous principle" of his own that would have allowed him to see himself as having successfully made the transition from Chan master to Daoist master, it was not for lack of effort or commitment. Why then did he doubt his achievement? One could of course downplay his doubts as the result of a passing moment of discouragement, even if they are expressed within a set of poems (discussed in more detail in Chapter 10) that, overall, bear witness to an exceptional frankness. However, this may be the point where another set of doubts, those that art historians have often expressed with regard to Shitao's religious engagement in general and that I have sought to counter in this chapter, can usefully be brought back in a more limited form. While credence can no longer be given to the notion that Shitao was a Buddhist monk simply for reasons of political convenience, nor to the idea that his identity as Dadizi did not seriously engage him in Daoism, such skeptical interpretations were partly inspired by an insight that is less easily set aside. Simply put, it is that Shitao's major achievement was as an artist, and more narrowly as a painter, from which it could be inferred that Shitao's ultimate concern was not with Buddhism or Daoism but with his art. This view of the question has proved especially congenial to modern critics and art historians fascinated by the Chinese literati ideal, and influenced by a certain art-critical formalism and rationalist approach to intellectual history characteristic of mid-twentieth-century modernism. It wildly underestimates the distance that separates us from Shitao's world, in which art enjoyed nothing like the exceptional degree of autonomy that modernism has won for it in the twentieth century. If it is anachronistic to take the autonomy of art as an assumption, however, one can on the other hand legitimately approach it as a question that had currency in Shitao's world. His doubts, I would suggest, were a symptom of the importance that the question had for him.

THE METAPHYSICS OF INDEPENDENCE

At this point it is necessary to open up the argument to include a brief interpretation in social terms of Shitao's successive approaches to painting as praxis. My argument in the remainder of this chapter is that his soteriological teaching can be understood as a metaphysical representation or displacement (depending on whether

we understand it to have been achieved consciously or unconsciously) of the social problematic of independence. The question of painting's autonomy relative to religious praxis – its potential as a Way in its own right, in other words – I see as inseparable from this problematic, of which it is one of the expressions. First, however, one has to identify the larger historical context within which such issues were able to emerge.

That context can be defined as the secularization of social consciousness – that is, the development of doubts about the cosmology of the dynastic state itself – that accompanied the development of a functionalist ethic in the late Ming–early Qing period previously discussed in Chapter 8. Out of this process emerged the alternative cosmology in which Shitao's teaching, I believe, was rooted. Though secularization has often been recognized, especially in the domain of speculative thought, scholarship, and literature,¹⁰⁴ historians have been reluctant to attribute to it a radical effect on social consciousness at the integrative level. The challenge that such freely expressed doubts represent to the hierarchical worldview aligning family and state is acknowledged, but the emergence of a viable alternative doubted.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, the individual – with exception made for an elite counterculture – has seemed to remain, in the end, defined by the family unit that was the basis of the dynastic cosmology.¹⁰⁶ However, returning to the discourses of practicality (*shixue*), it is surely significant that these are also found in merchant apologiae, administrative edicts, and technical manuals of all kinds (not to mention the fact that they were actively promoted by Kangxi himself). Taking these and other (intellectually) less prestigious texts into account as well,¹⁰⁷ it may be possible to identify an alternative social cosmology, less systematically and vociferally promoted than the orthodox dynastic one, with a local and above all urban base but extending all the way into Qing government practice.

Whereas the dynastic cosmology, founded on the fundamental unit of the lineage family, envisioned society through a metaphorical equivalence between the lineage family and the state,¹⁰⁸ one finds within late Ming and early Qing discourses of practicality a different form of social thought in which the individual (literally, the “body,” *shen*) is conceived as the basic social unit. The individual body was variously a producer, a consumer, and a person engaged in the struggle for survival.¹⁰⁹ Self-reliance was a paramount value, even in strategizing for the benefit of the family.¹¹⁰ The body metaphor was replicated at higher levels of social organization. Thus, the social or group body was conceived in terms close to Daoism and to medicine (e.g., stable prices prevent societal “illness”) as an organism made up of specific social

functions accomplished by occupational specialists.¹¹¹ Producers were to produce, merchants (the arteries of the system) to exchange, and administrators to administer (but in a noninterventionist, “nonaction” manner).¹¹² When the social body was in danger through war, natural disaster, epidemics, or simple poverty, philanthropy was to treat the illness through famine relief, orphanages, and proper burial, measuring its success by the number of individual bodies saved or cared for.¹¹³ Threats to the urban political body, meanwhile, from invasion, rebellion, or banditry, necessitated a concentration of social energies within the local elite across boundaries of class.

Since it is a question here less of a self-conscious social theory than a set of relatively fluid assumptions, it is perhaps to be expected that there are no obvious key declarations to which one can turn for a synthetic statement of what was at stake. However, one type of writing in which the full range of social issues consistently came to the surface is the morality books of the late Ming and early Qing, recently studied by Cynthia Brokaw: prescriptive guides to personal social conduct that reached a wide audience. The books varied in form and purpose but, with the exception of the founding text of the genre by Yuan Huang, they can be said to be exercises in containment, attempts to regulate a social body in flux by adapting old values to make them attractive to newly enfranchised social groups. Read for their authors' intentions, they can certainly be understood as demonstrations of “the absorptive powers and relative flexibility of the Confucian intellectual tradition.”¹¹⁴ Considered symptomatically, on the other hand, the direction of absorption is less clear. The evolution of the books between the beginning and the end of the seventeenth century reveals an implicit shift from the acknowledgment of individual autonomy in the elite individual alone to a recognition of its presence in a broad and heterogeneous section of society. The argument that the later morality books' discourse of stability preserved the status quo loses much of its power if the status quo itself had changed in the direction of individual responsibility for one's own destiny.¹¹⁵

What the morality books register positively, so to speak, is also registered negatively in the late Ming and early Qing by state efforts to impose censorship on printed texts and theater – that is, attempts to control the private and public spaces created by a socially expanded market for printed literature and entertainment. These efforts of control were widely echoed in the writings of conservative literati ideologues.¹¹⁶ Related forms of control can be seen in the household instructions promulgated by family elders, which incorporated sumptuary regulations for the whole family, as well as

strict restrictions on female movement.¹¹⁷ It is now well-established that one of the perverse “successes” of patriarchal ideology in early modern China was the spread of footbinding; on the other hand, the spread of widows’ chastity has recently been demonstrated to be a complex phenomenon, one that for many women was enabling because it permitted them to affirm property rights and rights over their own body that they would otherwise have lost.¹¹⁸ In all of this, whether the efforts of control were successful or not is, on another level, less important than the emergence of the private and the personal as a contested area across the social spectrum.

Around the edges of all the discourses summarized here can be seen, periodically, a concern for the physical body: its integrity, its potential, and its limits. Elsewhere this concern took over, as in the emergence of erotic and pornographic literature (and painting), prime objects of censorship, with their valorization of the senses and of the body’s potential to exceed and escape the limits of rational group discourse. Within the sphere of painting, the concern for the physical body can also be seen in the emergence of informal portraiture as a major genre, the sitter invariably represented in a context of leisure where physicality could easily be brought into play. To these long-term developments can be added a third, narrowly tied to the experience of the fall of the Ming and the Manchu conquest. As part of the larger phenomenon of wilderness history, eyewitness accounts by survivors proliferated; often harrowing in the details they offered of physical degradation, they circulated in manuscript from individual to individual. New levels of physical and psychological experience were articulated in the often short, fragmentary accounts through which survivors attempted to come to terms with the trauma.¹¹⁹ It must be wondered whether there is not some connection with the huge demand for portraits from survivors in the decades following 1644 and with the obsessive self-representation of survivor artists such as Shitao, Dai Benxiao, and other Individualists.

Far from being merely a countercultural phenomenon, the individualism of many of the leading intellectuals and painters of the early modern period was deeply rooted in the fundamental coordinates of their social space. In the local culture of early modern Jiangnan and its offshoots, those thinkers, writers, and artists who took up Wang Yangming’s (1472–1529) theory of “the inborn knowledge of the good” (*liangzhi*), with its crucial valorization of the self as the locus of moral knowledge, were proceeding in line with changing social realities.¹²⁰ At the same time, as John Hay has pointed out, “Wang Yangming was a symptom, not a cause.”¹²¹ The ideological differences separating the different philosophical exploitations of his heritage – that is, between

Donglin and Taizhou theories of moral action, or between the world-ordering systems of the Qing official Lü Liuliang and the Ming loyalist Wang Fuzhi – pale into insignificance beside their common affirmation of the individual subject as the locus of metaphysical authority. There are few leading thinkers (and few leading painters) of the late Ming–early Qing period whose thought is not, on this basis, rooted in one aspect or another of the alternative frame of reference I have been sketching out, be it the functionalist ethic, “practicality,” individualism, the concern for the personal body, or a body-centered cosmology.¹²² The secularization seen in the intellectual realm was the speculative tip of an eminently practical iceberg.

Painting, particularly landscape painting, not only was implicated in these changes but furnishes some of the clearest demonstrations of the emergence of a body-centered cosmology. It is helpful here to explore the possibilities of “cosmology” as an art-historical term, one that denotes the capacity of painting to articulate a social cosmology in its visual structure. It was intrinsic to painting’s epistemological function as representation of the natural world – less cognitive here than recognitive – that it brought into the pictorial realm the cosmological encoding of the natural world. As soon as the artist adjusted the formal and thematic structure of his (and, increasingly, her) painting to the assumed structure of the world, therefore, he provided his painting with a visual cosmology that he could, in certain instances, self-consciously and programatically formulate in a partisan way according to the particular interpretative positions of, say, Buddhism, Daoism, or neo-Confucianism. In the painting the cardinal axes, the frame, the relationship of the lower and upper halves of the picture surface, the geometric center, the focal center, and the “eye” or “I” of the painting together offered infinite possibilities for metaphorical configuration of forms at the structural level. In the Chinese landscape tradition, the exploitation of these formal resources was already fundamental to the painter’s enterprise by the tenth century at latest, and it was not in the least weakened at the end of the seventeenth.

From the beginning, Shitao’s landscape painting de-emphasized pictorial cosmology in the hierarchical tradition of the imperial cosmos; instead his work is characterized by an organic, dehierarchized substructure through which nature itself is visually formulated in corporeal terms. The body having long been a model, however, the more important question is how the body was conceived. John Hay has demonstrated that Shitao took to a dehierarchized extreme a cosmomorphic conception of the body as organism, mapped out as a structured field of energy correlatively related to the cosmic field

in a relationship of microcosm to macrocosm.¹²³ To this one can add that this ancient, ultimately animist conception of a chaotic body was the territory of the complicit theorists of medicine and Daoism, on the margins of the Qing version of the dynastic cosmos and now more closely tied to urban culture. The turn toward the individual, potentially chaotic body as a model for pictorial structure did not, of course, begin with Shitao, as Hay has shown in his discussion of the emergence of the autonomous, empowered subject in the late Ming.¹²⁴

Northern Song paintings, such as the established masterpieces by Li Cheng, Fan Kuan, Xu Daoning, and Guo Xi, are all centered on bodies of various sorts in relations of both representation and resemblance. Fan Kuan's *Traveling among Streams and Mountains*, for example, is meshed with representations of the imperial body and its residence. Huang Gongwang's *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* can be seen as a somatic narrative. But the body in late Ming painting and literature threatens to upend the old order. Authority is a key. The bodies in Northern Song painting sustain their contemporary order by organizing themselves around a set of politico-cosmological centers. Huang Gongwang still defers to these, if only just, and painters subsequently backed away from the extremes of Yuan painting. But in the late Ming the center cannot hold. This is not to say that some of Dong [Qichang]'s paintings are not supported by cosmological functions, for example, but the center is collapsing in an epistemological as well as in a social and political sense. The subject is forced to establish its own site in which to exercise its own representation of authority and from which to extend its signifying role in the construction of meaning.

Making allowance for the fact that Hay's "cosmological" refers restrictively to what I have been calling the dynastic cosmos, his argument comes close to the one I have been making. In a prior passage, Hay notes that "Dong Qichang uses both trees and mountains as a body, and a physiological representation is essential to both."¹²⁵ The somaticization of landscape imagery and structure in a decentered direction is widespread in the early seventeenth century, characteristic of painters as diverse as Wu Bin, Chen Hongshou, and Song Xu (1523–1602?), as well as Dong himself. Shitao, along with other Individualist painters in the late seventeenth century, was the direct heir of this elevation of the individual and independent body to a paradigmatic morphological role. The *qishi* initiative in painting cannot in the end be defined simply by its symbiotic relationship to traditionalism/orthodoxy, and its body-centered cosmology exceeds and escapes the single overarching frame of values of the dynastic cosmos – now being self-consciously promoted in a restrictive form by the Qing state as an orthodoxy. Moreover, in painting as else-

where, the orthodoxy itself was often more apparent than real, a rhetorical more than a functionally operative value system.¹²⁶ In other words, the currency of the forms of the imperial cosmology, never greater than under the Manchus, does not provide a secure guide to its integrative force in the early Qing transregional and local world.¹²⁷

Taking a Chan form first, then a Daoist one, Shitao's teachings on praxis increasingly implied the possibility of painting as its own autonomous Way – a possibility whose full articulation probably entailed an ultimately unthinkable degree of secularization, though he came very close in the treatise and other writings of the Dadi Tang years. There he theorized individualism around three tightly interwoven themes, all of which engaged with a body-centered cosmology and jointly defined a metaphysics of independence. The first of these themes was a radical self-affirmation in which one can hear echoes of Li Zhi (1527–1602), the late Ming philosopher who was most closely associated with Linji Chan, sometimes called "wild Chan" (*kuang Chan*). Although Shitao never cites Li Zhi directly, it was the latter's iconoclastic declarations on cultural and political traditionalism that furnished the template for Shitao's own violent attacks on conservative views. Both men belonged to a distinctively individualistic strain of early modern thought that included, as intervening figures, the writers of the Jingling and Gongan schools as well as leading Linji masters like Muchen. Shitao's self-involvement stood out even within the early Qing painting world, but in broader cultural terms it was a well-recognized stance that had its own history and points of reference to legitimize its "madness." With painting as his subject, Shitao construed self-affirmation partly in terms of vision and the eye. From an early date there was a productive epistemological tension between the creatively aggressive "mind's eye" (*xinyan*) of Chan and the receptive, sensual eye of Daoism that is also visible in the paintings. During the Dadi Tang years, however, one sees in his teaching a shift toward receptiveness and the senses, which at the level of visibility in his painting was expressed in a new engagement with color and with optical observation. Accompanying this shift was a change in his engagement with painting's somatic potential. Earlier in his career Shitao advocated in one part of his production a calculated Xu Wei-like loss of control, though those paintings also draw heavily on morphological reminiscences of the bodily organism. During the Dadi Tang years, however, he added to this a more subtle and open displacement of the self into painting, one that would operate at the level of the entire scene by means of the Oneness of the material environment of brush-and-ink, shifting attention onto the entire body of the

picture. Thus, though Shitao seems never to have theorized the self-referential figure that was such a fundamental aspect of his painting practice, the paintings confirm in other ways that the theme of self-affirmation in his teaching was bound up with an evolving discourse of the body.

A second theme was the sustained attachment to what might be called a "free" cosmological location. This began in the willfulness of the unpredictable and inalienable *wo fa* ("my own *fa*") of the 1680s, which he later realized trapped him within the discourse of Ancients and Moderns, classicist and "original." He freed himself from those binary constraints in 1692 with the concept of a universal *fa*, his identification with which displaced him to a mobile utopian point outside any fixed framework. Finally, with the concept of the One-stroke, he made that wandering utopian point absolute: not only outside the dialectics of Ancient versus Modern and of classicism versus the pursuit of difference but eventually outside Buddhism, Daoism, and any fixed relationship between self and the world. It is obviously relevant here that Shitao's biographic and socioeconomic experience was in both cases one of permanent displacement, involving psychological and social positions that held belonging and not-belonging in tension. He was by no means unique in this – on the contrary, transregionality may be one of the hallmarks of early modern experience – but his was an unusually intense experience of displacement. It might be suggested that his attachment to a mobile cosmological point served to valorize the experience of his (devalued) social condition. In Shitao's teaching, mobility – one word for which would again be *qi* – took two main forms, of which the first was the organic, structuring brushstroke out of which the order of compositions was to emerge. As noted earlier (Chapter 8, section "Energy"), the 1690s saw a shift from the advocacy of a practice based on the brushstroke in the usual sense of the word to arguments for a more receptive practice in which ink (as inkwash) was just as important as the brushstroke itself. Throughout, however, he privileged energetics (or dynamics) over hierarchy, thus aligning *qi* (strangeness) with *ch'i* (energy): The implicit cosmology, as I have argued, was a *ch'i*-based one that pointed toward the fluidity of the self-sufficient body rather than the hierarchical structures of the orthodox socialized body. The other aspect of Shitao's mobil-

ity is seen in the relation he adopted to the tradition and to contemporary painters: It was necessary to study other painters but not slavishly. Through a sort of constant self-reinvention, the painter could maintain an ambiguous, interstitial position whose axis traversed that of the orthodox transmission.

The third theme of Shitao's teachings on praxis was the attribution to this interstitial position of a sense of place, of belonging. He initially located the sense of place in the individualist self, and later in Oneness, but it was always an issue of autonomy or self-sufficiency. Autonomous, the painter was able to create a utopian sense of place around his own subjectivity. Biographically, one cannot but relate this to Shitao's desire for a home of his own, which he eventually achieved in the Dadi Tang, situated in the no-man's-land of the area outside the Great East Gate. Autonomy, however, was also a socioeconomic goal that he pursued first through a standard Chan career, then through the pursuit of imperial patronage, before falling back on the possibilities of the open market. The market in painting, which to an extraordinary degree was a transregional one, dominated by buyers whose wealth came from interregional trade, epitomized the erosion of the traditional sense of place by the far-separate interconnections of modern space. The sense of place that Shitao created for himself around his autonomy was, by its absolute, unrooted character, virtually an act of mourning for a lost social experience of undisturbed stability that may never, in fact, have existed.

These three themes – self-affirmation, a "free" cosmological location, and an absolute sense of place – together define a utopian metaphysics of independence in Shitao's teaching. Leaving aside the biographical implications that would be relevant to an interpretation in the terms of self-cultivation (*zixiu*), from a soteriological point of view this metaphysics constitutes a response to urban experience, teaching the transformation of individual survival into the transcendence of the limits of human life through self-realization. It was in his teaching from 1697 on that Shitao most rigorously assumed the responsibility of this problematic. In social terms, his late teaching can be summed up in the idea that, in the moment of the praxis of painting, the attainment of an utopian independence makes possible the (always provisional) resolution of the problem of social alienation.¹²⁸

CHAPTER TEN

The Private Horizon



Alas! What was considered poetry and prose in ancient times started from the Self [wo], while that of today is no more than plagiarism. The same is true of calligraphy and painting. [People] are incapable of generating their own ideas: Using formulae, they fondle the ability of their predecessors. This is the way of the mediocre! Now, *qishi* ["originals"] are necessarily different, but *qishi* are never to be seen. There is only Dadizi whom I find original [*qi*].

Li Lin, "Biography of Dadizi."

With this earnest flourish opens Li Lin's biography of Shitao. Immediately, Li places his text under the sign of the core literati value of authenticity – authenticity, that is, to a undivided self. Not only is *wo* (omnipresent in Shitao's treatise on painting) the strongest available word for the self and the most evocative of personal difference, but Li identifies authenticity with *qi*, here meaning something close to "original." Complementing his opening, toward the end of the biography Li Lin seeks to demonstrate Shitao's originality and thereby his authenticity by a series of anecdotes that are meant to reveal the private man. One takes us into Shitao's home to give us an account of the bamboo that the artist had painted there on a wall. A second reveals, on Shitao's own authority, the true meaning of three otherwise puzzling seals that he used. Two more anecdotes transmit Shitao's revelation of some of the "secrets" of his art. A further two pass on accounts of dreams. Li Lin saves for the final anecdote

Shitao's disclosure of why he left the Buddhist church and where he now stood in religious terms.

How private was Li Lin's private Shitao? Not very, when one considers what is revealed in the light of what is not. The bamboo painting, though an emblem of his personal survival, was a mural in the most public space of his home: the reception hall. In explaining three of his seals – "Blind Arhat," "the Blind One," "aging, unfeigned, and illiterate" – Shitao lets on that he had never been a scholar and was by temperament straightforward and unvarnished. Though true, this passes over the original Chan significance of the sentiments expressed in the seals in favor of a more generalized self-presentation as a bluff, honest character in a world of artifice. The "secrets" of his art that he reveals are even more calculatedly conventional. Claims that he used the compositional principles of calligraphic script types in the compositions of his paintings; or that he used styles of high antiquity for the "bone structure" of his calligraphies and paintings, clothing and softening it with ideas from Dong Yuan or Mi Fu; or that his orchids, chrysanthemums, plum blossom, and bamboo were his most original paintings – all these simply reinforce an image as a literati artist. As for his accounts of two dreams, one an encounter with divine paintings in the beyond, the other participation in a magical event, these present him as a recipient of divine powers in painting, an unsurprising claim he often made in other ways. Finally, the self-

justificatory explanation he offers for leaving the *sangha* – that he had become disgusted by the materialism of his Buddhist colleagues – is, as we have seen, only a very small part of the story. The revelation that he had then placed himself outside both Buddhism and Daoism – which suggests that the name Dadizi did not mean that he had become a Daoist adept instead – was implicitly to appeal to orthodox Confucian prejudice, and as we have seen contradicts the evidence of contemporary accounts and surviving paintings and texts. In sum, these anecdotes create a carefully constructed *effect* of the private that furthers Li Lin's characterization of Shitao as the embodiment of the literati subject in its raw, and for Li Lin authentic, form. One wonders to what degree Shitao himself was complicit in this characterization, and to what degree it was the subtle creation of his biographer.

Modern art history has tended to follow the *qishi* and their early Qing commentators in their attachment to the literati subject and its origins in a coherent private realm, not least by dubbing them the Individualists. In his study of Bada Shanren, Richard Barnhart interprets the artist's semiotic ambiguities and disjunctions as strategies that, while expressive in their own right, also serve as a protective curtain behind which the artist speaks.¹ By a careful decoding process, the curtain is raised and Bada's true self revealed, sheltered in the private realm. In his recent study of portraits and self-portraits from the seventeenth century onward, Richard Vinograd concludes that "it is remarkable how many are permeated with an aura of escapism, which can range from a frivolous role-playing as a rustic fisherman to a quietly unsettling intimation of psychological isolation."² For examples of the latter, more often found in self-portraits than portraits, he draws attention to Chen Hongshou's "instinct for guarded concealment" and notes the "aura of disconnection" seen to a greater or lesser extent in all of Shitao's self-portraits. The trope of escapism, with its implication of a conscious choice, suggests that in such images the artist has withdrawn but again can be pursued onto his home ground of escape. The self can be concealed, isolated, withheld, even (as he argues for Shitao) fragmented, but its ultimate social integrity is not in doubt. In a separate essay, Vinograd has posited a history of private art in China that began in "the shared memories and understandings of literati groups" (i.e., in a context of sociability) in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and found its "last refuge" in "the hidden realms of the personal psyche" starting with the art of Shitao and other *qishi* painters in the late seventeenth century.³ Prior to the seventeenth century, painting by literati served "as the occasion and site of re-creations, recognitions and commemorations," in contrast to a

public art of court (as well as temple and marketplace) "fundamentally concerned with the image-status of the painting." He suggests that the subsequent retreat of private art into the psyche was a reaction to the collapse of the consensus on public art, as pictorial knowledge was publicized through the woodblock illustrations of painting manuals, and as European pictorial imagery intruded into the seventeenth-century Chinese consciousness. Vinograd makes his argument on the terrain of the internal history of painting, but it can easily be translated into sociohistorical terms. Consistent with Craig Clunas's recent conclusions on the analogously placed late Ming tastemakers, it implies a view of the *qishi* painters as heirs to the scholar-amateurs of old, fighting to preserve their social exclusivity and status within the transformed public realm determined by the rise of the open market (and, in the late-seventeenth-century case, the conquest of China by the Qing dynasty).⁴ The private, having begun as an aspect of the sociability of a leisured class, was now transformed into an atomized phenomenon: a personal and embattled territory of defense and, sometimes, dissent.

Whether concerned, as Barnhart is, with the coherent structure of the self or, as is the case for Vinograd, with the shifting nature of its boundaries and the social basis of its legitimacy, these present-day art-historical inquiries into the private dimension of *qishi* painting continue to operate within the frame of reference of the literati subject. My point is not to dispute the existence of such a subject but to clarify its status. In this book I have argued that the literatus, as a special case of the *shi*, is best understood as a rhetorical (or discursive) position within the larger game of social positioning in early modern Chinese society. The subjectivity at stake in *qishi* paintings is not exhausted by literati subjecthood, despite the attachment of the artists themselves to the utopian unity that it offered. The paintings reveal, if we let them, the direct impress of underlying social interests that have their context in the complexity of urban experience, and as such open up to view a different frame of reference, which is that of a modern urban subjectivity. The present chapter examines some of the ways in which Shitao's paintings expose this subjectivity at the point where it is most easily confused with the private dimension of literati subjecthood that supposedly provides a ground of authenticity.

It would be difficult to argue that an urban subjectivity introduced into Shitao's art any other core *value* superseding or rivaling authenticity. What the preceding inquiry has brought to light, by contrast, is the importance of a particular *practice*: disguise.⁵ The proliferation of roles, personae, and identifications with past artists and poets is as fundamental to Shitao's practice as

his assertive "I." Even memory is mined for its disguising possibilities. Shitao addressed the issue of disguise himself in a 1702 colophon, evoking there the historical story of You Meng, who was disguised as his ruler after the latter's sudden death in a ruse intended to deceive the ambassadors of a neighboring state.⁶ To speak of a "You Meng resemblance" was to indicate a seeming resemblance that had no real basis:

You Meng's resemblance was no more than the resemblance of the clothes. Once he was dressed up, if you looked for You Meng himself, where was he? When it comes to the spirit and character of the Ancients, I often have [paintings] like these ones which go beyond [a resemblance of] the "clothes."

Although Shitao is speaking specifically to art-historical disguise here, his description has a more general relevance. The anxiety inherent in disguise as a practice was that there would be a loss of self; but Shitao himself claims to be able to surmount this danger, apparently by the intensity of his personal investment in his role. Behind this lies the claim to a protean, transformational selfhood (the *wo* of Li Lin's biography and of Shitao's treatise). The temptation is then to reduce the question of disguise to the nomadic identity that I noted at the outset of this study, explaining the displacements biographically by the shifting contexts of his life. However, the fact that the practice of disguise had been fundamental to painting since at least the sixteenth century suggests that there is more to it, even in Shitao's case, than an issue of identity explicable in biographical terms. It can be postulated – and I shall try to demonstrate this for Shitao's work – that disguise had its own social value; that there was personal meaning in the surface play of displacements itself. If this is true, then it follows that the self in play in Shitao's art was built upon an internal contradiction between claims of authenticity and disguise. It was a socially fractured self and, as such, consistent with the ideological hybridity of the local urban culture in which he operated.⁷

I have already noted evidence for the fracture, for example, at those points where Shitao's self-representation is marked by a betrayed awareness that the literati role is just that, a role. In this chapter, however, I trace the line of fracture using different means. In particular I want to draw attention to features of his art that the radar of a hermeneutics of the literati subject does not pick up, geared as it is to trace (self-presentation) and metaphor ([self-]representation). In Bada Shanren's case, for example, the artist's sustained semiotic and phenomenological ambiguity – his pressure on the language of painting – does not show up on the screen. Not just expressive surface and protective curtain, I would argue,

this constantly renewed commitment has its own meaning as a practice rather than a discourse, problematizing the very act of utterance in a traumatized and divided world. Lost from sight, too, are such constitutive features of Chen Hongshou's art as morbidity, lewdness, and skepticism, precisely because they are not "stated" but insinuated. In such cases we reach a point where legibility does not exhaust the work's meaning as representation and self-representation, where there is "something more" that remains out of the viewer's reach: a surplus of meaning, or excess, that resists interpretation in iconographic, stylistic, or thematic terms but is nonetheless fundamental to the artist's project. Shitao evokes this excess in his own vivid manner in an undated but probably early commentary on the art of Chen Hongshou, written for one of Chen's paintings of women:⁸

"Without reading ten thousand chapters, how can one execute paintings; without traveling ten thousand *li*, how can one compose poetry?" Thus, ordinary men have the comprehension of ordinary principles, and say and do ordinary things, whereas men who are out of the ordinary have insights that are out of the ordinary. Zhanghou [Chen Hongshou] painted figures with strange forms and eccentric faces; in the past, people had a saying: "Tears will kill a beautiful woman, laughter will kill a ghost." It is precisely the "water without ripples" [a straight face?] that gives a flavor beyond the ostensible idea.

It is this "flavor beyond the ostensible idea," this excess, produced in Shitao's own work by quite different means, that I wish to examine here.⁹

Across the special case of Shitao, I have been building an argument in this book that the literati subject, whose privileged connection to its gentry roots had been eroding for centuries, was further recontextualized in the seventeenth century within an emergent urban and modern culture. It was not what it purported to be, and what it was was visible only across its grain. At the private pole of social experience, the move into the psyche was indeed (in the terms of the literati mythology) a last refuge; however, at another level what we are witnessing is the production of a disjunctive private space through the playing out of a more complex subjectivity – urban, hybrid, modern. In this new space, the self-conscious notion of the private as that which underpinned, shadowed, and was conflated with a discourse of self, cohabits with, and is recontextualized by, untheorized, unarticulated practices of the kind I have just described for Bada Shanren and Chen Hongshou – ones that exist in the interstices of self-expression and escape literati terms of reference (and, one should not forget, artisanal terms of reference as well). Paradoxically, the overwhelming formal presence, or performance, of the literati subject

in the *qishi*'s discursive field had no corresponding social content, while conversely the *qishi*'s position as an urban subject was not something he could easily have named; instead it took form silently as manipulations, displacements, and elisions within the established order. This argument can be specified more tightly around the concept of *si*, which in Confucian discourse was "private" in a pejorative sense, self-interest cloven from the socially molded self. Thus, one of the Confucian critiques of the pursuit of profit was that it was *si*, "selfish." As I have argued, merchant ideologists turned this argument on its head by arguing for the free play of social energies, naturally constrained by function. Similarly (and linked to the merchant initiative via the shared condition of the market), while *si* at the personal level was mistrusted by orthodox critics as leading to self-indulgence and caprice, in practice it was increasingly embraced as the principle of difference that authorized the *qishi*. It is a silent argument for the positive value of *si* that informs Gong Xian's famously uncompromising declaration: "Throughout the world there are strange and treacherous places. If not for the artist painting them and passing them on, those who end their days by the window would be unable to see them. It is not even necessary for such places to actually exist, for whatever a painter has in his mind is entirely what exists in the world itself."¹⁰ A statement of this kind, by its embrace of fictionality, abandons the requirement of authenticity to an undivided self. Shitao himself was equally blunt in his 1706 plum-blossom poems: "I have always followed my own whims [*sihao*]; it isn't now that I will become a new person" (see Figure 213). This implies an idea of authenticity very different from Li Lin's: Shitao is true only to the instability of a "selfish" selfhood. Such statements are a reminder that the *qishi* were heirs to the final sixteenth-seventeenth century break with an ancient, already deeply eroded assumption: that the self was continuous with, and thus authorized by, the correlative cosmos of which it was an embodiment or expression. They belong to a world marked instead by the emergence of a concept of the psychically contained, and thus utterly "other," individual.¹¹ Li Lin's biography of Shitao assumes this idea of containment when it appeals to the authority of his dreams (though he then exploits it in the service of a discourse of literati subjecthood), and Shao Changheng (1637–1704) took it as given when he wrote in his biography of Bada Shanren that "Many people know of Shanren, but actually no one really knows him."¹² Subjectivity, as the relation to oneself, exceeded the bounds of any subject position, opening up a different kind of private horizon to view, defined not by an interiority confirming a literati self but by psychic autonomy. In the end, the very identification by Li Lin

and others of literati authenticity with the rare extremes of *qi* is in its own way an implicit recognition of the limits of literati subjecthood, since *qishi* are the rare exceptions (How many *qishi* exist? asks Li Lin) in a world where authenticity has become impossible and disguise (the "plagiarism" decried by Li and Shitao's "Youmeng resemblance") is all-pervasive.

My attempt to chart this other private horizon argues that the unified self of the literati subject was authorized by the foundational acts of internal difference that allowed it to constitute itself. It was defined not only externally by what it excluded (the female, the non-Chinese, the artisanal) but also internally by what it repressed.¹³ From the latter point of view, the aesthetic excess that escaped the bounds of the trace and did not reach the threshold of metaphor is of particular interest. In Shitao's work this excess defines a horizon of psychic autonomy discontinuous with, and repressed by, the revelatory private realm invoked by Li Lin, a horizon not reducible to the usual hermeneutics of authentic and revelatory experience. The excess is sometimes associated with the acknowledgment of desire implicit in addictions or passions, and it contributes to a poetics of excitement or arousal. Equally it may be associated with the extreme concentration on the present moment implicit in self-absorption, in which case it contributes to a poetics of security or habitability. In yet another direction, the excess may have a context of melodramatic sadness that has to do with Shitao's recognition of the limits of his independence – limits marked at one pole by separation from friends and at the other by personal physical decline and death. Out of this comes the complementary poetics of friendship's longing and of solitary survival. In this way (though not only this way), Shitao's painting comes to bear the imprint of three defining features of early modern experience (to which it mounts its own microresistance): consumerism, with its manipulation of consumer desire; the insecurity of urban life; and the threat of isolation. The excess, we might say, gives us access to the private aspect of the social unconscious of Shitao's painting, in opposition to the consciously private realm of literati authenticity.

With this, the argument that I began to make in Chapters 2 and 3 comes full circle. I started out there with two theses on Shitao's landscape painting. The first was that he constructed its social space through a discourse of leisure that mediated the formulation of public values (self-reliance, functionalism, political mourning) ideologically favorable to local urban culture and the hybrid social subject associated with it. The second was that certain of his landscape paintings are caught up with a common claim on national (dynastic) political history that was being made from a locally based, public-

private space of sociability. In Chapters 4–9, taking into account different genres, I then turned to an examination of the use Shitao made of painting to negotiate social identity at a personal level, with particular attention to the historical contingencies of his situation. I successively argued that the sociopolitical discourse of destiny, economic discourse of survival, professional discourse of craft, and philosophical-religious discourse of soteriology concealed such underlying modern concerns as independence, calculated risk, professionalism, and responses to the displacements of early modern life. In this concluding chapter, taking up the analysis of social space directly again, it remains to consider Shitao's explorations of those kinds of private experience that tend toward psychic autonomy and radical intimacy – explorations that have a particular importance in the history of Chinese painting because they (along with those of the other *qishi* painters mentioned above) were among the first to exploit positively, so to speak, the early modern fracture of private experience. If the spaces of psychic difference and its transcendence were not widely explored until later in the eighteenth century, their horizon was first delineated in the early Qing period.

THE PAINTER'S DESIRE

He also told me that he usually has many extraordinary [*qi*] dreams. He once dreamt that crossing a bridge he came across a woman washing vegetables. She led him into a great courtyard to look at paintings, with transformations so extraordinary that they could not be chronicled. He also dreamt that he ascended the Flower-Rain Terrace [Yuhua Tai], where he scooped up [the flowers that rained down] with his hands, and for six days swallowed them. His calligraphy and painting were transformed with each [swallow], as if he was being taught by spirits.

Li Lin, "Biography of Dadizi." 14

To the extent that the dreams are stories with a "moral," they are readable as mythologized explanations or metaphors – a fine balance is held between the two – for his creativity. They present the artist as medium, we might say, but cast in the terms of popular culture: Shitao's adventures have more than a little in common with the journeys to the spirit world represented on the stage and in the pages of novels.¹⁵ Li Lin, however, introduces these dreams into his portrait of Shitao as proof of the *qishi* status that for him is the key to understanding the man. The dream accounts are held to be revelatory of his *qi*.¹⁶

The modern reader, on the other hand, is bound to read the accounts symptomatically as well, which exposes other stories of a different kind. In the first dream, an object of desire initially appears in the composite

form of the woman washing vegetables, a motif that associates the sensual pleasures of eating (Shitao's beloved vegetables!) with the unaccompanied and implicitly desirable female. (It is not an old woman: the term *nuzi* used by Li Lin can apply to a woman or a girl.) The story then operates a displacement, a mutation – the vegetables are forgotten, the woman becomes a guide. Only now can Shitao's desire be satisfied, by the displacement toward the spectacle of paintings. In this dream Shitao is a relatively passive participant: He is led to a place where something is revealed to him. In the second dream he plays a much more active role. First, Flower-Rain Terrace is presented as a destination; it is presumably not irrelevant that while he lived in Nanjing he was fond of climbing this hill, which was close by Changan Monastery (see Plate 9). Once in the midst of the flower rain for which the terrace was named, he does not simply watch the scene nor simply reach out to catch some of the petals, but scoops them up using both hands. The flowers are the immediate object of his desire, a desire that drives him to swallow them, and yet this is not where desire is satisfied: Again there is a displacement, this time physiological, which leads once more to painting, but as a practice. His own act of painting assuages the desire. The differences between the two dream accounts, however, are less important here than their common association, across the discourse of *qi*, of painting and desire.

Desire was also central to Shitao's practice in another way: as the consumer desire on which his livelihood depended and that he often evoked in the themes of his paintings. Here, an excerpt from Zhang Chao's *Shadows of Secret Dreams* provides a more general context:

One can like wine but not to the point of insulting the other people present. One can like sexual pleasure but not to the point of harming oneself. One can like wealth but not to the point of blinding the heart-mind. One can like energy [*ch'i*], but not to the point that it takes precedence over hierarchical order [*li*].

*Yuan Zhongjiang comments:*¹⁷ When someone like Guanfu serves wine, the whole party feels the effects. Last night after I left South Pond I took a brothel girl home with me on my horse. Why not? I think it showed my authentic heroic character [*yingxiong bense*] all the more clearly.

Zhang Chao's chain of associations – drunkenness, sexual desire, materialism, the ontological authority of energy – sketches out the central role of desire in Yangzhou's consumer society; while acknowledging the pull of desire, he enjoins only a certain self-restraint. Why so straitlaced? replies Yuan Qixu (d. 1696), playing the role expected of him and rehearsing an argument identified with his early-seventeenth-century namesakes, the

Gongan School literary theorist Yuan Hongdao and his brothers: Self-restraint hides one's authentic character (*bense*) from oneself; giving in to desires allows the *bense* to reveal itself through flaws, mistakes, passions. It is just this uninhibited, heroic *bense* promoted by the Gongan School, with reference to Xu Wei among others, that Shitao exposed to view in *Drunk in Autumn Woods* and all his many paintings employing an expressionistic *xiaosa* aesthetic. The theatrical public persona seen there was constructed on the authority of a sensualism that required the risk of illegibility to impose its effect of authenticity against the theatricality.

The more moderate position taken up by Zhang Chao owes no less of a debt to late Ming culture than Yuan Qixu's. His largely positive acknowledgment of the pull of desire and his association of desire with a commodity society speak to a seventeenth-century consumer's world and its reassessment of human desires (which were *si* by definition) in the light of a *ch'i*-based epistemology. In Zhang's two great anthologies of recent and contemporary essays, *Compendium of Writings from the Sandalwood Table* (*Tanji congshu*) and *Compendium of Writings of the Present Age* (*Zhaodai congshu*), published between 1697 and 1703, pleasure is a recurrent theme.¹⁸ Several texts list the author's pleasures and dislikes in a mixture of the conventional and the arbitrary that becomes clearer as one moves from one to the next.¹⁹ One commentator speaks directly to this by listing as his pleasures the contraries of those listed by the author of the text in question.²⁰ There are essays on ink (with brand names duly noted), seal paste, stone for making inkstones, and clay for making teapots; also on litchis, hortensia, crabs, varieties of Jiangnan fish, and the highly valued Yinshan tea that was sent to Shitao in 1687 to accompany a painting commission.²¹ A book collector discusses what he calls his addiction (*pi*).²² Several texts are devoted to drinking games. The general fascination with unruly consumer desire also appears in negative in moralistic texts of admonitions (*xie*) that are variously convincing, ambivalent, and, in the case of the "Bean Curd Admonitions" (applicable only to bean-curd eaters), parodic.²³ More realistic, perhaps, than most wealthy patriarchs, another writer lists dos and don'ts of pleasure that exclude allowing one's sons to spend the night with prostitutes but include encouragement to take in concubines instead.²⁴ There is even a tormented philosopher to demonstrate, with the aid of diagrams, the impossibility of any compromise in the battle between the innumerable forms of desire and its solitary opponent, hierarchical order (*li*).²⁵ Zhang Chao's anthologies were in themselves monuments to consumer desire: The first volume of each was immediately followed by a second, and then a third: A note to

Tanji congshu announced, "never given away or lent, only sold."

It was not only in his paintings executed under the influence of wine (not to mention tea – see Figure 88) that Shitao participated in this sensualist world of consumption. There was, for example, his passion (or addiction, *pi*) for eating vegetables and fruit, which surfaced in the two paintings of taro and eggplant that I introduced earlier in a Daoist context (see Chapter 9). Of the taro he writes: "I simmered them for a while, but before they were cooked I took them all out and ate them still partly raw" (see Figure 178); and of the eggplant: "I pick them up like chestnuts, or peppers, or raspberries, and swallow them all raw" (see Figure 179). This naked, highly personal delight in eating taro, eggplant, chestnuts, peppers, raspberries, and so on, which exceeds its Daoist alibi and is physically embodied in the raw color and execution, turns up again in a four-leaf album probably from the late 1690s. On a leaf showing string beans, he writes: "How can one keep them in a bunch and not eat them?" Another depicts the bitter melon from which he had taken one of his many names: "Old Tao has eaten this bitter melon his whole life long!" goes the simple inscription (Figure 188). A third leaf has cabbage and mushrooms; the fourth depicts the loquats that Shitao painted on numerous occasions. A superb monochrome handscroll from the summer of 1700 for Wu Yuqiao extends further the range of "vegetarian delight," depicting cabbage, turnips, eggplants, and melons together, as if in a garden, with a praying mantis cheekily peeping out below the signature. A cornucopia hanging scroll from 1705 adds pumpkins, lotus root, and water caltrop (a type of water chestnut with the approximate shape of a bat in flight) to the familiar eggplant and mushrooms (see Figure 99). Shitao's passion for eating notwithstanding, these were, of course, quintessentially urban subjects, natural elements abstracted from a market-stall context, metaphors for the market and consumerism. They also evoked the rituals of social intercourse: gifting, as in the loquats sent to Shitao by Zheweng or the tangerines sent by Tuiweng, and hospitality, as in the meals to which Shitao invited Li Lin and others.²⁶ (Vegetarian restaurants, it is worth noting, were a Yangzhou speciality.)²⁷ The paintings themselves – functioning as luxury substitutes for the vegetables and fruit, and entering the urban market as commodities – close the metaphorical circle. It is not a matter of deciding between Shitao the consumer and Shitao the addict, as the latter only appears in the guise of the former. Shitao writes in his poem on the 1705 hanging scroll: "When I prepare caltrop, it's not that my feelings are less; if I give you a melon, my sentiment can still be deep." Inscribed on a slapdash painting without a dedicatee, this may seem to

be all disguise; but inscribed on a more careful work for a long-standing patron (painted, perhaps, on the same day), it already demands to be taken more seriously (see Figure 100). Shitao's response in a letter to Tuiweng's gift of tangerines was appropriately respectful, but need we consider his delight feigned? Why should we not assume, moreover, that the gift was thoughtfully aimed at Shitao's weakness for such things?

Paradoxically, it was by their private plays on the consumer role that Shitao's paintings of edibles most thoroughly activated an urban and modern social space, although this is far from immediately obvious. Some of his subjects in a superb eight-leaf album of vegetables, fruit, and flowers (c. 1703–5) were themselves luxury items (e.g., grapes and oranges), and his color effects throughout the album are correspondingly sumptuous (see Plates 18–21). In addition, the poems and stories that give the album an appropriately literary character also add an entertainment dimension to the work.²⁸ We enjoy the edibles in good epicurean company: Emperor Wu of the Han (r. 140–87 B.C.E.), Chu Guangxi of the Tang (eighth century), Huang Tingjian (1045–1105) and Lu You (1125–1210) of the Song, and Feng Qi (1559–1603) and Chen Jiru (1558–1639) of the Ming. Until the final leaf of wild plum blossom and bamboo, the album is an ode to Jiangnan produce and to Yangzhou's markets, so well-stocked with imports from other regions. Metaphorically, the key word is flavor (*fengwei*), which was both a desired, general quality of sensuality and the particular sensual quality that distinguished the products of one place, one period, one producer, from those of another. By its lush concentration of flavor and flavors, Shitao's album conveys well the particular flavor of Yangzhou as a wealthy and sensual Jiangnan city. Shitao's own poems and paintings, however, go beyond the metaphoric realm of flavor to expose the rawness of desire itself. On a stunning, pulsating image of water vegetables (see Plate 18), the color effects less a metaphor for flavor and freshness than an embodiment of it, he added this short poem of his own to three others (which he had copied out, so he tells us, for their *fengwei*):

Everyone loves caltrops and "chicken heads"
Those from this morning can't compare with ones
freshly bought.
I go myself [to shop] on board the riverboats
And when I get home each one I've selected is
superb.

The poem is about shopping, finding the best product available; it embodies an obsession, an addiction, that led him to do the shopping himself, to go as far as the riverboats that supplied the markets, and to eat the caltrops and "chicken heads" as soon as he reached home.

Some time before this, in the summer of 1699, with a consumer's delight in spiking the market, Shitao had even taken his love of vegetables far enough to start a vegetable garden in the shadow of the city wall (presumably the east wall of the old city, close by his house). We have the story from Shitao's own brush: He wrote a short essay about the experience – one that would not have been out of place in the *Compendium of Literature from the Sandalwood Table* – and in the spring of 1700 inscribed it on another cornucopia painting showing the fruits of his labors (and again the praying mantis) (Figure 189).²⁹ The essay begins by recounting how he acquired the vegetable plot, hired a gardener, and watched the plants grow. The long middle sections of the essay consist of a rhapsodic description of the different vegetables he grew, and then an account of his difficulties with insects.³⁰ We pick up the story at the end, as he prepares to pick, cook, and finally eat (of course!) what he has grown:

I took my time playing with the little children who held my fan and dragged my staff. They propped me up, let me go, came close, stayed away; they sometimes lay about, and sometimes walked around. Then they accepted my suggestion, took their orders, and I slowly watched the children do the picking, competing with each other, and as happy as if they were dancing for rain. Fragrance accumulated in the pot of mixed vegetable stew, its cover slightly off as it boiled away. A fresh selection to offer to the guests: Salt created dewdrops of moisture, the stew gave off billows of steam; we seized our chopsticks, and our jaws went to work, our cheeks filled with fine smells. We ate till we were full up and had lost our ambition; the noisy conversation came to an end. . . . We welcomed the bright moon atop the trees' branches, and felt our stomachs, hardly believing how large they had got! How wonderful! What joy! If one could do this all the year round, there would be no need to go anywhere!

Shitao's text, betrayed by my translation, aims at an easygoing simplicity, avoiding complicated rhetorical effects. Even without the references to Lu Ji (261–303) and Guo Pu (276–324) earlier in the essay, the contemporary reader would have recognized in this an evocation, once again, of early Six Dynasties recluse life, since it was partly texts of this kind that had formed history's image of that ideal. The discourse, meanwhile, is the familiar one of leisure. Ultimately, however, the historical disguises and the evocation of leisure are exceeded by Shitao's impulsive enjoyment of the day as it developed.

"Desire" (*yu*) is not a word found in Shitao's inscriptions to his paintings of edibles, nor indeed in any of his painting inscriptions. Far too naked a statement of what was at stake, its place was taken instead by the more innocuous term *xing*, banally translatable as "enthusiasm" or "excitement." Thus, when he inscribed on



188. "Bitter Melon," *Vegetables and Fruit*, album of 4 leaves, ink and color on paper, each leaf 28 x 21.5 cm, leaf 4. Zhile Lou Collection, Hong Kong.

his painting of caltrops and "chicken heads" three poems whose "flavor" he liked, it was "in order to assist the *xing* of my brush." The inscriptions to numerous other paintings end with the declaration that he had painted the work in order to find happiness by conveying his excitement (*qian xing wei kuai*). The measure of the importance that Shitao attached to this concept can be seen from the words with which he opens the culminating chapter of his treatise: "The men of ancient times entrusted their excitement to brush and ink, borrowing landscape as their Way." *Xing* was the arousal of the feelings/senses (*qing*) that embodied desire (*yu*). While at the deepest level it was the psychophysical state that made all painting possible, it also reached the surface in paintings and texts on sensualist themes, among which his depictions of edibles were only one group.

In this urban sensualist world, flowers were doubly important: as objects of desire in their own right and as charged metaphors of the female objects of male sexual desire. Yangzhou had a large commerce in flowers, with the market stalls supplied by flower nurseries in the city outskirts and in other regions. Shitao evokes the flower sellers in his recorded inscription to a "drunken brush" painting of orchids for his wealthy student Hong Zhengzhi:³¹

At the top of New Prosperity Street, flowers cover the ground,
At the mouth of Makeup Lane they count the flower money.³²
How can [those flowers] compare with my drunken summons to the thick ink?
Boldly transmitting the spirit [of the orchid],
I cultivate my natural state!

If consumerism is evoked here as a foil for the artist's literati pursuit of authenticity, the opposition is rhetorical (even theatrical); for Shitao's ostensible denial of the market serves as an excuse to intensify the desirability of his flower painting by invoking consumer desire for the flowers themselves (and, in the second line, possibly for courtesans, female "flowers," as well). In the end the real substance of his denial lies on another level, in the



189. A Lesson in Hoeing, dated 1700, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 80 x 62 cm. © Christie's Images.

exuberance of his drunken claim on the orchid, which exceeds the law of the market that is its context. A more contemplative version of the denial operates in his delicate study from life of a day lily, probably a gift ordered by a friend (Figure 190):³³

These days this particular plant is cultivated a great deal in the Qin-Huai area [of Nanjing]. Every year in the fifth month people rush to buy these flowers. Today, the double fifth, a florist brought this one by hand for my table. Facing it, I made a sketch.

In Shitao's narrative sketch we see commercial cultivation (in Nanjing) giving way to interareal trade and open sale on the Yangzhou market, then to personalized purchase (very early in the season) for presentation to Shi-

百合名重萬一名中庭一名重臣生宛胸及荆山梁宣帝詩云接葉有
 多重開塔森異色含露或低垂從風時偃仰今秦淮多種此蕊香
 月市頭爭買此花今五日塔師手記此花種吾案頭對之偶臨



190. "Day Lily," from an album of 6 leaves of painting and calligraphy by Shitao and Bada Shanren (1626-1705), ink and color on paper, 21.1 x 17.2 cm. Private collection.

tao, and finally to the act of painting inspired by a private response to the flower's ephemeral beauty.

Flowers doubled as signs of sexual desirability through a series of correspondences with the constructed femininity of the courtesan. Alluring color, fragrance (synesthetically evoked), the soft texture of the made-up face, and the grace of stylized gesture could all be suggested. The female body itself was far from unrepresentable in sexual terms – there was a vast production of erotic imagery in book illustration, prints, and painting – but during the Dadi Tang years, with the exception of his copies of old compositions such as the lost *One Hundred Beauties* or *The Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden* (see Figure 124), Shitao took little part in this figural tradition, preferring to it the more oblique literati appeal to the corporeality of flowers. During his years of active engagement in the *sangha*, on the other hand, Shitao had only infrequently represented those flowers most closely associated with the image of women; yet although one can understand that the open acknowledgment of sexual desire in his work postdated his renunciation of monastic orders, a painter who was to embrace this theme so warmly at the end of his life could hardly have kept it out of his painting during the first four decades of his career. Indeed, there does exist an earlier thematics of sexual desire in paintings of the 1670s and 1680s, which in stark contrast to his later practice takes a figural form and is variously largely marked by ambivalence, resistance, and fear. As we have seen, his 1674 and 1684 depictions of Guanyin both make direct allusion to sexual desire (see Figure 157), with the inscription to the latter making it clear that it had to be neutralized, “stilled.” Notable in a different way is his gender-ambiguous 1678 portrait of the legendary Jade Maiden in an album of illustrations to poems by Su Shi. Androgynous in appearance, she leans on a tree trunk in a position that Shitao usually liked to reserve for self-referential monks and arhats.³⁴ Finally, *The Conversion of Hariti to Buddhism*, however respectable its ancestry as a Buddhist composition, identifies women with violence and danger. A striking contrast exists, however, between his unconvincing treatment of the violence of the story and his loving depiction of the ugliness of goblins and the beauty of the women (see Figure 163).



191. "Peonies," *Flowers, Landscapes, and Calligraphy*, album of 10 double leaves, ink on paper, each double leaf 23.5 x 30 cm, leaf 2. Shanghai Museum.

Among Shitao's rare Buddhist-period evocations of sexual desire in flower painting are a few leaves in an unexpectedly worldly album from the period of his most intense monastic commitment (1681). The album includes one inscription that refers to the romantic play *The West Chamber Romance* ("Qingxiang pours out his West Chamber tune"), as well as lush paintings of hibiscus and peonies. On the peony painting he writes: "In return for the wine that my host set out, [I offer] this heavy scent and spring color [to express my] endless feelings" (Figure 191).³⁵ However, it was not until the mid-1690s that such open sensualism became common in his work, joined then by rich color, as in a hibiscus painting from his 1695 album of flowers and figures for Huang You (Figure 192). Late-blooming, the hibiscus came to stand for the fading charms of the older courtesan. In his representation, the rounded forms and lined petals fit in well with the conceit, suggesting a blowsy beauty touched by age. "She leans over the waves to see her evening makeup, / as if afraid her rouge will get wet. / Ask the person who paints her eyebrows / what that implies?" In 1697 he inscribed a lush fan painting of lotuses with an erotic poem significantly more personal than any earlier one (Figure 193), initiating a series of sexually explicit painting inscriptions; from this point on, erotic flower painting became one of the staples of his production:

臨波映晚妝
娟娟怯胭脂
濕試問
畫
看人此意何消息
不道人濟

[illegible]



194. *Hibiscus, Lotus, and Rock*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 116.2 x 57.1 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Purchase, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. David M. Levitt, by exchange, 1978.

The lotus flower emerges from the water, its face
half made-up,
And plays with my feelings as if it were a beautiful
woman.
Sometimes in the moonlight (?) I probe its mysteries
with painting,
Pure thoughts excite me, leaving me heart-broken
in frustration.

The *xiaosa* execution of the painting, which has its own more public, theatrical meaning, reads in the context of the poem as the physical embodiment of his sensual excitement. A similar play of word and image, public and

private, structures an undated hanging scroll, *Hibiscus, Lotus, and Rock*, inscribed with words borrowed from Su Shi (Figure 194): "Now that old age has come I don't have luxuriant dreams [i.e., erotic dreams or fantasies] any more; a single bush at the pond's edge already seems too much." Lushly and impetuously painted in a pale register of ink tones, the painting establishes an atmosphere at once intense and dreamlike.

Shitao returned to the theme of frustrated desire in a poem inscribed on a far more considered album leaf depicting plum blossom and bamboo (Figure 195):

Where to find a hundred thousand [flowering plum trees] in the spring breeze?
The branches shining on me would make me drunk and blissful.
Their hidden fragrance would touch and awaken the poet.
When their incomparable colors appear, they make an old man feel the spring.
It needs nothing else – my feelings are already on the verge of overflowing,
This doesn't happen often, so I am alone with these passions.
At dawn, in the front courtyard, I scratch my head in wonder as I look [at the flowers],
How can I stay a solitary scholar in this human world?³⁶

The image stages a situation of male–female confrontation through the connection with a stylized gestural language that survives today in the theater, and can also be seen in Shitao's rare surviving figural images of women. The painting goes one step beyond the poem, with bamboo again playing the role of the desiring male who takes the initiative as the plum blossom seems to accept his advances. In another leaf from the same album, a narcissus bulb coyly retreats from the encroaching tip of bamboo, with one leaf like a sleeve raised in mock protection (see Plate 17). The bamboo's sharp stiffness contrasts with the curved, "yielding" narcissus to create a sexual tension. A similar figural conceit in the previously discussed album *Flowers, Vegetables, and Fruit* manages, on the basis of the Chinese-language pun between loquat and lute (both *pipa*), to turn a loquat obscured by a leaf into the face of a woman, half-obscured by the lute she carries (see Plate 20). Other leaves from the *Flowers* album isolate a sprig of flowers or a single bloom on the page. The material presence of a pink peony is overwhelming, creating a tangible lushness and softness, with color that is frankly joyous (Figure 196). The paper used is relatively porous; Shitao revels in the possibilities for bleeding one color into another, for softening edges and lines. Here he goes beyond the manipulation of the outward signs of sexuality that created an evocation of a performance of femininity; instead, he



195. "Plum Blossom and Bamboo," *Flowers*, album of 9 leaves, ink and color on paper, each leaf 25.6 x 34.5 cm, leaf 8. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Gift of the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation.

aims at a rougher inflection and more immediate effect, so that desire not only lies within the painting's metaphoric space but enters the surface in all its materiality.

Two still later paintings show him pursuing this last approach through rather different formal means, and in both cases allying himself with a contemporary poet. In a large horizontal hanging scroll of a lotus pond he takes his distance from illusionism, instead overlaying motifs in a collagelike manner in conjunction with an extreme density of different surface effects, including single and layered ink washes, dotting, and patterning that enlivens much of the picture surface, accents of pale color and black ink, and the fine "palace paper" left dramatically in reserve (Figure 197). The tangled lushness of lotuses blooming at the lake's edge in the shadow of a willow and the still warm atmosphere at the beginning of autumn are conveyed as much through the materiality of the painting surface as through any descriptive reference. Claiming in his inscription to have been dissatis-

fied with the quality of his own painting, Shitao transcribed ten lotus-picking songs by Fei Mi's son, Fei Xihuang, which, after evoking at length the desire for (and of) teenage girls, conclude as expected on a note of renunciation. The reading of these poems, he is thus able to write, will "cleanse one's body and mind," thereby providing his painting with a moral alibi for its sensuality that is more of an elegant flourish than a serious qualification. The work of another local poet, Bian Gezai, in praise of a variety of peony that had become rare in the Yangzhou area, complements an ink depiction of the flower from the autumn of 1707 (Figure 198). The carefully sketched blossom, with its layer upon layer of petals, is framed by wet-ink leaves that turn the porosity of the paper to the artist's advantage. As the eye seeks to reconcile these two equally intense dimensions of the image, the impression is of a flower pulsating with lushness and vigor, and the experience one of pure sensuality.

It is impossible to know what access Shitao allowed himself to sexual pleasure. No longer bound by monastic rules after 1696, he certainly maintained a household, but this does not necessarily mean that he married. He did live very near Yangzhou's pleasure quarters, and

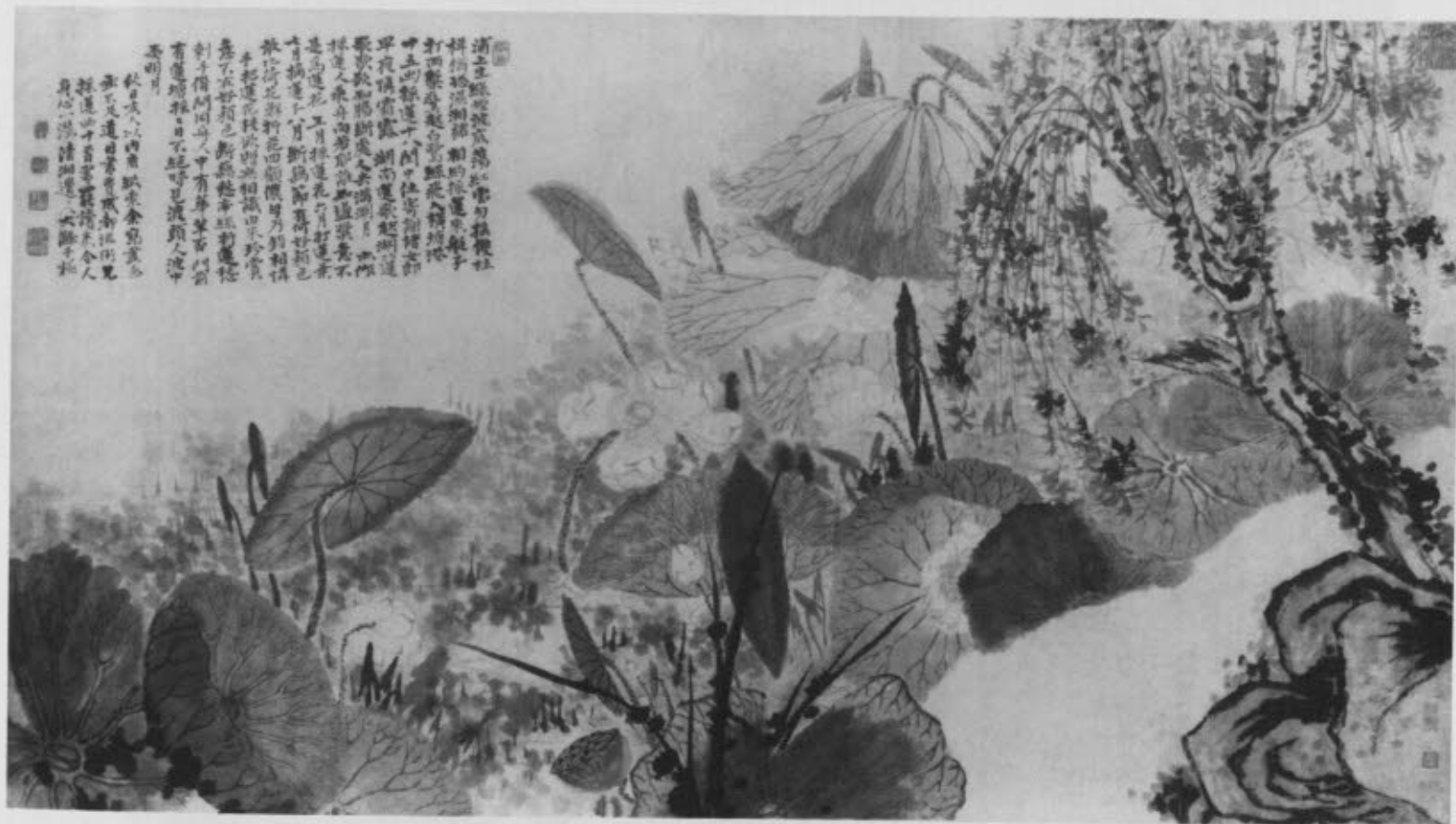
prostitutes would have been a familiar sight to him, but his interests did not necessarily run only to women: He had spent his life among men and lived in Yangzhou in a homosocial milieu that was largely tolerant of same-sex sexual activity when a fundamental distance of age and class was maintained, as in the case of sex with young male servants of the kind Shitao employed. This speculation as to possible same-sex interests is imposed by the visual document that is *Dadizi's Portrait of Himself Asleep on an Ox*, the single major example from the Dadi Tang years of an exploration of sexual desire through figural representation (see Plate 6). One of the principles of the embodiment of desire in Shitao's flower paintings is the creation of deferred expectations satisfied by somatic displacements. The self-portrait is open to a similar analysis. One visual account of the image would note the fused union of Shitao, ox, and servant,

so imperative that the legs and feet of the servant had to be sacrificed. A second would add a connection linking Shitao's closed eyes, the wide-open eyes of the ox, and the obscured face of the servant. A third account might start from the tenderness of the servant's encircling arm and hand, and – if one can get beyond the prudery that is somewhat unthinkingly attributed to all educated Chinese artists – would associate that central gesture with the heavily emphasized anus of the ox, and, on the other side, the double thrust of the ox's horns, echoed in the servant's two undone topknots. The three complementary accounts map out a private field of desire that never quite rises to the metaphoric surface of the painting.³⁷

"The men of ancient times entrusted their excitement [*xing*] to brush and ink, borrowing landscape as their Way." Landscape, too, could embody desire – even sexual desire – and did, throughout Shitao's career. Rocks in Chinese painting, as John Hay has recently written, were bodies that could be sexually charged in the plastic and tactile qualities of their nakedness.³⁸ Numerous ex-

196. "Peonies," *Flowers*, album of 9 leaves, ink and color on paper, each leaf 25.6 x 34.5 cm, leaf 4. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Gift of the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation.





197. *Autumn Shadows on a Lotus Pond*, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 77.6 x 139.7 cm. Shanghai Museum.

amples from Shitao's landscape painting could be cited to confirm this insight, but few make the point more clearly than an uninscribed 1699 album leaf in which a rock surges out of the earth amid the wind and rain, its mass inhabited by an enduring power and energy (Figure 199). A veritable stone wave, as I suggested earlier, the image is no less clearly a phallic self-image – which may explain the uncharacteristic lack of an artist's inscription. A very different visualization of desire can be seen in an album leaf from 1702 where Shitao's self-referential figure, echoing one found in paintings by Shen Zhou two hundred years earlier, has climbed up on a cliff overlooking the water (Figure 200). The triangular form created at the center of the picture by the escarpment and the left-hand tree places the figure close to its apex, with his staff the culmination and – in that it resembles a long brush – the origin of the image. "Excitement" is the first word of the two-line inscription, which reads: "When excitement comes is there a place where one could face the dusty atmosphere? Before my eyes I already feel no rivers or seas to exist."

However, the issue of desire in landscape was not always so narrowly, or so metaphorically, defined as in these two paintings. Of particular importance for the theme of this chapter is the increasing attraction to incoherence – that is, to the disruption, even negation of the aesthetics of the trace (as canonized in the ancient formula "energy-resonating, generating life-movement" [*qiyun shengdong*])³⁹ – that appears from time to time in Shitao's painting, not just in landscape, from around 1700 onward, and that by 1705 came to characterize his overall practice. This has been taken as evidence for his decline as an artist, and attributed to corruption by the commercial pressure of the market and/or physical diminishment.⁴⁰ The issue, I believe, presented itself to Shitao in precisely contrary terms, and can be stated as follows: In the face of undiminished commercial pressure and, later, increasing physical weakness, how could he adapt? What was essential, and what superfluous?

The context of commercial pressure first: Awkwardness, clumsiness, or even crudeness had by Shitao's time long held a secure place in the discourse of authenticity. For the Chan Buddhist artist, they allowed the evocation and destruction of an illusionism that was considered philosophically suspect. Along Daoist lines, they were seen as the fruits of a process of unlearning in which the stranglehold of convention was broken to reveal one's



198. "White Peony," *Flowers*, dated 1707, album of 10 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, each leaf 32.7 x 23.5 cm, leaf 1, © Sotheby's, Inc.



199 (above). "Rock," *Landscapes, Figures, and Flowers*, dated 1699, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, each leaf 24.5 x 38 cm, leaf 11, ink on paper. Shanghai Museum.

200 (below). "Looking Out over a River," *Landscapes Painted at Wanglū Tang*, dated 1702, album of 8 leaves, ink and ink and color on paper, each leaf 18.6 x 29.5 cm, leaf 8, ink and color on paper. Östasiatiska Museet, Stockholm.



natural, childlike self: "Thus is ignorance banished and wisdom born, vulgarity purged and purity achieved."⁴¹ Craft (*fa*), in other words, was disabling as well as enabling; it was a potential obstacle to the understanding of one's true self, and thus inimical to authenticity. This ancient fear surfaced violently again in the seventeenth century in the literary theory of the Gongan School, to which Shitao owed so much.⁴² His corresponding pictorial rejection of artifice, of care, of restraint, of conscious attempts at control came in the form of spontaneous improvisations. The first of these date from around 1700, in an album for his student Wu Jixian, where the sketchiness, linearity, seal-like attention to surface design, and use of dry ink take their cue from recent Huizhou painting.⁴³ Within that loose aesthetic mode that he knew so well, the particular character of the album derives from a clear intention to shock. In some leaves Shitao has

taken a delight in creating jarring spatial relationships: the foreground thrown up against a middle-ground cliff, itself reduced almost to a cutout; or the middle ground suppressed entirely. In others he pursues a shaky imbalance, as if the spatial architecture of the painting has been knocked out of shape; here the dry texture strokes are juxtaposed with prominent contour lines painted in wet ink. In some cases motifs are left as mere ciphers: not a man in a boat, but a sign for the idea of a man in a boat (Figure 201). These diverse stylistic devices jolt us into an awareness, on the one hand, of the conventional basis of imagery and, on the other, of the raw poetry of form itself. This clearly allies the paintings to calligraphy, so it is not surprising that Shitao should have inscribed one leaf with an enjoinder to compare it to the blunt calligraphic mode of the Tang calligrapher Yan Zhenqing. Beyond this, however, we here see Shitao trying, as it were, to take himself by surprise, acting on the Gongan School presumption that the craft of expression in fact hid as much of his true self as it revealed.

Though this account roughly approximates the intentionality of the album, something else is happening here to which intentionality is irrelevant, something that has

201. "Boating on a Calm River," *Landscapes and Flowers for Wu Jixian*, dated 1700, ink on paper, leaf 7, dimensions unavailable. Palace Museum, Beijing.





202. "Orchids," *Landscapes, Figures, and Flowers*, dated 1699, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, each leaf 24.5 x 38 cm, leaf 2, ink on paper. Shanghai Museum.

its context in the rhythm of Dadi Tang production. Although we are in general extremely ill-informed on what Shitao produced in any given week or month, we do know that this album was completed on the seventeenth day of the first month of 1700 – just four days after he had completed the important *Eight Views of Xi'an* for Wu Yuqiao, having already painted the very large and ambitious *Blue-Green Screen of the Southern Mountains* as the first part of the same commission during the previous month. The two carefully constructed, highly illusionistic works fulfilling specific briefs from a wealthy customer were thus followed by a work for a Dadi Tang insider that allowed Shitao the freedom to cast off all constraints and work, in the first instance, for himself (though the work did not necessarily go unrewarded). What is important for my argument here is that the pleasures of this freedom or resistance lay in giving himself over to a sensual engagement with his materials – ink, paper, brush – which allowed him to transform trace into mark, work into play, production into consumption. Shitao's passion for his materials often found its way into inscriptions. On an orchid painting

from a 1699 album painted on Chengxin Tang paper, for example, he completes his inscription with the declaration: "Once Dadizi from Qingxiang got drunk and got this paper into his hands he was bound to find joy in not offending this gentleman [the orchid?!]" (Figure 202). There are many other such paintings where he draws the viewer's attention to the fine quality of the "palace paper" or *luowen* paper, and several where on the contrary he shows himself dissatisfied. One reads that the paper did not harmonize with the intentions of his brush because it was too new;⁴⁴ that it was not very good quality and had hampered the flavor of his brushwork;⁴⁵ that because it was new, the paintings would have to mature for ten years.⁴⁶ The papers he liked were not always available, and he had little control over which papers he was sent (when it was paper and not silk or satin, which he liked much less). With regard to ink, he seems to have gained particular pleasure from being lavish with it. On another "drunken brush" painting, a spectacularly blotchy image of pine and bamboo, he writes "One bucket, two buckets of ink! A thousand, a ten-thousand-year-old branch! Where the paper is short and broad, I consign these four lines of poetry!" (Figure 203). When the brush used was unusual, whether worn-out, made of goat's hair, or antique, he noted it.⁴⁷

Such pilfered pleasures no doubt occurred in all sorts of contexts – at a moment of frustration, when the right kind of customer came along, when he felt like painting for his own pleasure, and so on – but usually we have no way of knowing how a “clumsy” work relates to the rhythm of production. One other notable exception is the leaf from the 1703 albums for his great admirer Mr. Liu with which I concluded Chapter 8: a quite shockingly clumsy, seemingly unsuccessful painting that interrupts a sustained virtuoso display of Shitao’s craft (see Figure 154). The inscription’s wry taunt, however, gives pause for thought: “In this vocation there are those who were not approved at the time but whom later generations revered; and there are others who at the time were lauded to the skies but whom later generations neither heard of nor asked after. Neither found an understanding viewer.” The painting has made us drop our guard, and suddenly our doubts about Shitao’s mastery are transferred to our own judgment. Look again, Shitao says; and sure enough, one realizes at a second viewing that one’s expectations were misplaced. This is Shitao’s *arte povera*, an image created with the debris of technique – scratchy brushstrokes, monotonously repeated, and cipherlike trees and architecture – that fails at the level of trace and metaphor but triumphs transgressively as a consumption of its materials.

Physical decline reinforced Shitao’s interest in such an approach. Pierre Ryckmans has drawn attention to the Chinese paradigm of an artistic development in three stages. The painter starts out producing work that is “raw” in the sense of immature, untutored; in time he attains a mature mastery (*shu* as opposed to *sheng*); but at the end of his life he is able to turn to rawness again – a rawness born of perfect mastery, that retains only the essential, and is spontaneous.⁴⁸ Rather than a cycle, this is a spiraling model of development, and it helps us, I think, to see Shitao’s paintings of the final few years without prejudice. Still, there is more to it than this. Loss of control was a misfortune, but Shitao turned it into an opportunity; it provided the alibi for explorations of the desire to let go, to rebel against the restraint implicit in the *qiyun shengdong* ideal, in much the same way that the much younger Gao Qipei was then doing through finger painting. In this convergence between Shitao and Gao Qipei lay the beginnings of the *guai*, or “eccentric,” aesthetic, which was one of the most important developments of eighteenth-century painting. This entire development has often been seen in terms of decline by critics, Chinese and Western, past and present, who insist on imposing the aesthetic criterion of the trace on work that disavows it (as is also done with paintings by women, guaranteeing the verdict of a limited achievement). A reassessment of Shitao’s contribution in terms of a pri-

vate horizon of psychic autonomy can provide the basis for a more positive account.

By 1704, an interest in more direct, even brute expression came to permeate most of Shitao’s work; eventually in 1707 he added a seal with the legend “Daubs to the east, smears to the west.” While all the paintings from this period illustrated in the present study demonstrate this shift, only two of them – a leaf from a 1707 *Flowers* (see Figure 220) and a somberly intense 1707 hanging scroll depicting Mount Huang (see Plate 15) – give the full measure of how far he was prepared to go, and here will have to stand for many others.⁴⁹ He routinely turned to rougher or more absorbent papers, where the material ground of the painting asserted itself through the visible watermark or the anarchic “bleeding” of ink. Several paintings from 1706–7 use a paper that bears the imprint not of the usual bamboo slats but of coarse cloth. He loaded the brush with ink, or let ink dry on the brush, or yet again used a worn-out or crude brush. Brushstrokes tend to the status of marks, the descriptive function obscured. Motifs are wrenched into ugly but powerful shapes. Atmosphere and mood are established first and foremost in the material environment and presence of the painting. Compositions often seem to be almost random juxtapositions of fragments, or have ragged edges much like torn paper. The poetic inscriptions are usually restricted to couplets or single lines that, thus isolated, read with a blunt force. This is often echoed in the calligraphy, as in a new style of roughly chiseled characters that he introduced in 1706.

Shitao certainly understood the risks he was taking, writing in 1707: “Using . . . drumsticks of fir to beat the drum [to accompany popular songs], or [coarse] goat’s-hair brushes to write calligraphy, makes us happy now, but it’s hard to say whether it will be judged successful or not a thousand years from now. Without a ruthless hand, who would dare try it? When you have reached true understanding, you will believe what I say.”⁵⁰ As this text well reveals, Shitao’s private horizon of desire was an urban one, bound up with the circle of production and consumption. Unable to escape that circle, Shitao, like other artists and writers, made a private space for himself within it, seeking intersections between his personal pleasure and consumer demand. Since his survival, both psychological and economic, required that he believe himself to be a displaced literatus within an oppressive urban world, he construed his situation as alternately an affliction and a challenge. The fact that he was a product of that world all the way into the most private recesses of his social being was literally unthinkable, for to acknowledge it would have destroyed the basis of his negotiation of identity.



203. *Bamboo, Rock, and Pine*, dated 1701, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 93 x 46 cm. Shanghai Museum.

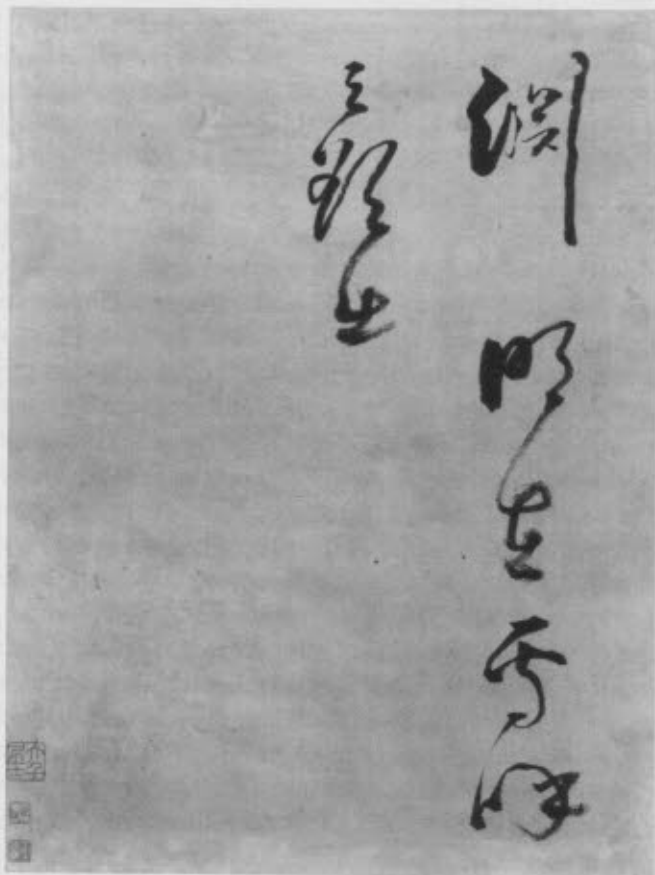
A MOMENT OF ONE'S OWN

If the obsessional form of Shitao's *qi*, his strangeness or originality, had desire at its center, it was mood that took over this central position when his *qi* took a reflective turn. Mood was part of his heritage as a poet-painter in a Ming tradition stretching back to Shen Zhou, a heritage fully assumed in an inscription from the albums for Mr. Liu (cited more fully in Chapter 8), where he writes (see Figure 145):

The painting in poetry is something that comes from one's subjective nature [*xingqing*]. So painting is not about doing a picture in such-and-such a style and then making up a poem [to go with it]. The poetry in painting, meanwhile, is born of the interest [*qu*] of a scene at a particular moment. So poems are not to be tossed off and then paintings forced out of them.

Appropriately this manifesto of lyric painting was inscribed on an image and in a calligraphic hand clearly intended to evoke Ni Zan, so admired by Shen Zhou, who was one of the first artists fully to inscribe poetry in the space of painting.⁵¹ However, as noted earlier, the terminology and aesthetic stance derive from the late Ming writers of the Gongan School. The aim, whether the painter starts from a poem or from the process of painting, is to do justice to the heightened awareness of things that springs from one's "subjective nature" and is stimulated by the "interest" of the world, and that the artist transmutes into the central, expressive dimension of his painting. No less than desire, mood is irreducible and inalienable: Authenticity lies in the unforced naturalness of response, passing unproblematically into expression and crystallizing as a visualized moment. Shitao's pursuit of the specificity of the moment, its utterly personal character, led him like many other early modern painters toward an imagery of absorption or *jing* (literally "stillness"), the focal figure as here occupied in a private activity or reflection; we as viewers extend this absorption as a quality to the whole picture. The absorption, in terms of authenticity, is a negative move of concealment made on the assumption that a reconstructive hermeneutic viewing by the viewer will supply what is not actually revealed.

However, through absorption the lyric moment in Shitao's Dadi Tang-period painting is also informed by a very different logic: a logic of security. The Chinese term here is *an*, whose meanings include stability, peace, peacefulness, stillness, and rest; there are implications of slow or gentle movement and of long duration. If desire implies the free circulation of psychical energy, security implies its conservation.⁵² *An*, though, can also mean economic security: It is the word Shitao uses in his 1706 plum-blossom poems when he speaks with relief of having been able to "provide security for" his old age. One remembers his plea to Jiang Shidong (from letter 17): "Whenever you have the chance, keep a small place for me in your thoughts, otherwise my livelihood will gradually be lost." The threat of insecurity was at the psychological center of Shitao's urban milieu: Even wealthy people had to take risks and sometimes went bankrupt. "After I made the mistake of falling into a trap the year before last (1699), all my inheritance was lost. And so I have taken the name Sanzai Daoren: All I have left is



204. "Two Children Flying a Kite," *Flowers and Figures*, album of 8 painting leaves, ink and color on paper, with facing colophons, each leaf 23.2 x 17.8 cm, leaves F and FF, The Art Museum, Princeton University. Museum purchase, gift of the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation.

my house and my person – what I once had can never be recovered.”⁵³ So wrote Zhang Chao in 1701, no longer the well-off publisher who in the 1690s had published *Compendium of Writings from the Sandalwood Table* and the first volumes of *Compendium of Writings of the Present Age*. Another set of (verbal) meanings of *an* – to place, to take up a place, to dwell – had currency in Shitao’s time: Following his disaster, Zhang Chao philosophically described his situation as an opportunity to “dwell in poverty” like a true scholar.⁵⁴ In Shitao’s painting, a semantics of habitability is also part of what takes visual form in the lyric moment, with its stabilized mood and atmosphere.⁵⁵ Absorption, by its centripetal power, strengthens the sense of contained, infinitely maintainable isolation: At a premetaphoric level it abolishes time’s pressure (the economic deadline under which the painting is painted) and overcomes the loss of a sense of self implicit in the practice of disguise; it turns the moment, albeit provisionally, into a psychic

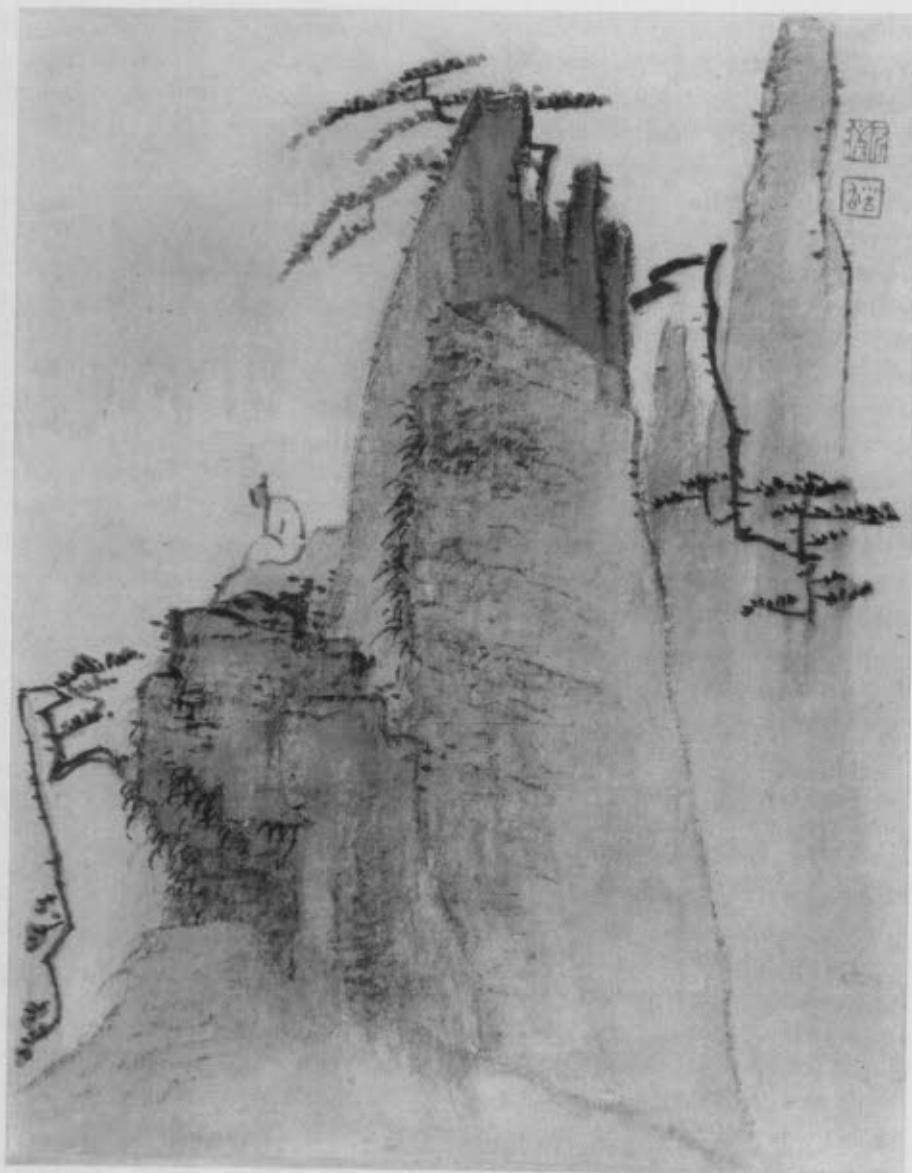
home. This is not the palace-home coveted by the orphan prince but the same locus of security sought by countless deracinated city dwellers within the boundaries of the commodity society of early modern China⁵⁶ – a place where the Ni Zan disguise becomes so habitable that it ceases to be a disguise.

The identification of absorption with a provisional security has a long history in Shitao’s work, but it is only in the mid-1690s that he started to give it a principally economic context, as seen in a rare image of children flying a kite from a bridge (Figure 204). “How I love the hearts of these two children” he writes in the first couplet, “a paper kite makes a playground.” It is his second couplet that carries the reference to his own situation: “Finding joy in a moment; when have they ever planned ahead?” Clearly, absorption of the kind we see in the 1703 album leaf was a conscious choice, a utopian return to the not-yet alienated “childlike heart” (a favorite concept of Li Zhi) betraying the desire to transform work into play. On the leaf facing the children a disabused inscription by Huang Yun written at the request of the owner, Huang You, associates “planning ahead” (*yuanji*) with political ambitions in a wry comment that works equally well as a reference to his own destiny, the patron’s plans for the future, and the artist’s experience at the capital:

A *buyi* [non-degree holder] can
 reach Heaven in one easy step –
 How different is this from children
 flying a kite?
 Suddenly it falls into the mud with
 broken strings –
 It's better not to be attached to
 fame and fortune.

For Shitao himself, however, economic anxieties were in 1695 already displacing political ones: his "planning ahead" more likely concerned what would become the Dadi Tang business; he was not trying to "reach Heaven" but to create the conditions for his economic independence. (Both writers, it should be noted, use a concept of calculable risk). Four years later, in an image of a fisherman at lake's edge in the wind and rain, concentrating on stringing up a just-caught fish, the economic context becomes explicit (see Plate 4): "Where water merges with mist," he writes, "a fisherman earns a living; he strings the fish with his hand while rain and wind create their beautiful colors." A note explains that he had seen this sight on a lake outing that day, but there is surely an element of disguised self-representation as well. For the painter as for the fisherman, security and independence depended on a sure hand and absorption in the economic task.

As the Dadi Tang business became more established, however, the identification of security with absorption took on new aspects. More than once already, I have cited Shitao's regretful comments at the end of the 1701 *Landscapes Painted during Leisure from Illness* that the demands of his business were forcing him to compromise on quality. In economic terms, his fear was that the demands of ensuring his immediate economic security were eroding his accumulated moral capital. For the eleven paintings of the album, however, he took advantage of the fact that he was free of commitments to take steps against this erosion, and "used these sheets of paper to improvise freely. Connoisseurs should recognize the difference and treasure them." These paintings without inscriptions are indeed striking, less for the boldness of their imagery than for the tight economy with which each one establishes a unique atmosphere and mood to



205. "Among Peaks and Pines," *Landscapes Painted during Leisure from Illness*, dated 1701, album of 10 leaves, ink and color on paper, 24.2 x 18.7 cm, leaf 1. The Art Museum, Princeton University. Museum purchase, gift of the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation.

create some of Shitao's most memorable images of absorption (Figure 205). For all their echoes of earlier images, hints of familiar topographies, evocations of wilderness life, and suggestions of reminiscence, these leaves remain impenetrable to any biographical interpretation. Without exactly being illegible in the terms of a discourse of self, they articulate that discourse at such a general level that their atmospheres and moods become mysterious: Frustrated, we attribute to them unyielded secrets, and defer unconsciously to a private self that we in fact invent. In so doing we pass over the fact that the moment is here freed from its usual discursive role,

whether in relation to a reminiscence, a recent experience, or an imagined situation. The normal usage might be termed strategic, that is, more or less explicitly calculated to reinforce either an image of the perfected man (*zhiren*) or the position that Shitao had fixed for himself within whatever narrative of destiny was then operative. Here atmosphere and mood are instead left to their nonmetaphoric selves, in evocations of moments as self-sufficient as they are provisional. Unidentifiable echoes and unfulfilled hints allow the private to take form elliptically, displacing Shitao as subject outside the frame of the semiotic transaction established by the painting. In the context of the inscription, absorption reveals itself to be a tactic of private resistance to the insecurity of the open market that, inescapably, awaits.⁵⁷

While the market was in this case deferred, this was a rare luxury for an artist who normally had to court it; but absorption could function even under normal constrained circumstances as a private tactic of resistance – that is, as detachment from the necessary reproduction of his moral capital through the revelatory moment, and as compensation for the psychic isolation implicit in disguise. Certainly absorption is an essential component of the illustrations to classical poems that were one of Shitao's stocks-in-trade. There, the "I" of Li Bai, Du Fu, or Su Shi as it may be is deftly slipped into the place of Shitao's self-referential figure. To be sure, such disguises afforded possibilities of theatricality, which he exploited in the many illustrations to poems that depict the poet in company with others in a displaced version of the staging of literati life discussed in Chapter 2. When the illustration finds the poet alone, however, Shitao consistently pushed the image toward the opposite pole of absorption. A 1695 portrait of Tao Qian from the same album as the kite flyers, while not strictly speaking an illustration of a classical poem, announces this preoccupation: As the poet under a willow tree raises a handful of chrysanthemums with his left hand to smell them, his right sleeve drops, forgotten (Figure 206). Above the dot marking the usually omitted nostril, another – intensely black – for the pupil effectively suggests his heightened awareness. The key line of the poem, evoking a famous couplet by Tao himself, offers absorption as the very theme: "Man and place, both forgotten." However, the next leaf of the album – the image of kite-flying children – reminds us that the man was a professional painter and the place the commercial city of Yangzhou.

Subsequent albums devoted to classical poems always yielded a number of such images of absorbed poets. Su Shi appears, lost in thought, in a pavilion; the pavilion is surrounded by lower buildings, the buildings by trees, the trees by mist (Figure 207). Out of our space and into

the mist leads a path that allows us to identify with the "I" of the image, the poet, on his island floating in the mist. Although the poem illustrated has a narrative character, recounting a walk on the night of the midautumn Moon Festival, the painting corresponds instead to the moment of reflection at the end of the evening once he has returned home. This ends with the thought – virtually an allegory of absorption as a tactic of detachment – that "In the morning with the sun will come the usual round of work; sadly, this will seem a dream flight to the moon." This image, from an album illustrating poems by Su Shi on different seasons of the year, was painted at the very end of the year. In the closing painting of the album the poet advances, a portrait of psychic containment, his hanging arms and stooped posture betraying discouragement; the sharp branches of a flowering plum that frame his progress extend from a foreground rock face that has the latent energy of tensed muscle (Figure 208). The poem reads in part:

My neighbor to the east is warming wine
And next door to the west the pork is fat.
At least I can be happy for a day
To assuage this end of the year grief.
Don't sigh for the old year's departure –
As it goes it leaves behind it the new year.
Let it disappear: Don't look back
At the man returning home older and weaker.

Shitao's pictorial reading speaks to the final couplet: He has looked back and seen himself aged; aged but not defeated, for the discouraged figure is locked into a composition energized by the imagery of stubborn survival, the rock, bamboo, and flowering plum. Above his head, in the top left corner of the leaf, a final inscription brings the album into the fabric of Shitao's life. He writes there that at the end of the year he had a mounted album in his studio ready for painting, and that he had painted all its leaves using Su Shi's seasonal poems while outside the Dadi Tang the wind blew and the snow fell. A contemporary viewer would, I think, have connected this stark scenario to the fact that all outstanding debts had to be settled by year's end, which led to a flurry of activity in the last days of the old year; it is not unlikely that this highly salable work was intended, directly or indirectly, to contribute to the elegant settlement of some

206 (facing). "Tao Yuanming Smelling Chrysanthemums," *Flowers and Figures*, album of 8 painting leaves, ink and color on paper, with facing colophons, each leaf 23.2 x 17.8 cm, leaf E. The Art Museum, Princeton University. Museum purchase, gift of the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation.





207. "Viewing the Midautumn Moon," *Illustrations to Su Shi's Poems on the Seasons*, album of 12 leaves, ink and light color on paper, each leaf 20.3 x 27.5 cm, leaf 9. Osaka Municipal Museum of Art.

debt, whether Shitao's own or a client's. In this optic, the all-too-appropriate discouragement of the figure acknowledges and comments on the transactive framework and, in so doing, opens up a private horizon beyond the transaction.

None of these album images, however, can rival for iconic power the image of absorption at the center of *The Waterfall on Mount Lu* (see Plate 12). The now familiar figure of Li Bai/Shitao is shown from the back, his turn away from the viewer underlined by the lack of interaction with the second, seated figure, who is separately absorbed. Although the traditional pictorial theme would have the figures gazing at the waterfall (thus the painting's traditional but inaccurate title, *Gazing at the Waterfall at Mount Lu*), Li Bai instead looks downward into the mist as if into a mirror, away from the spectacle of the mountainscape and into the self. What I earlier argued to be an icon of Daoist Oneness is thus embedded in a complex image of psychically isolated individu-

ality. A hermeneutic exegesis of selfhood can partly account for this, citing the figure's mist-shrouded legs as metaphor for the otherness of the adept, as it recalls Li Bai's reference to "gaz[ing] into the Stone Mirrors to clarify my mind." However, the absorption, containment, and isolation still remain after metaphor has done its interpretative work. For the excess the more fruitful context is again the economic one, acknowledged in Shitao's inscription. One might almost speak of an economics of disguise, with Shitao appearing not only as Li Bai but also as Guo Xi, whose works were so sought after and expensive. From this point of view it is authenticity that appears as an effect, manipulated in the absorption of his self-concealment no less than in the theatricality of his self-presentation. All is subordinated to a monumental stability, an overwhelming security – but a security that resides only in this moment, that is condemned to being provisional.

In contrast to the obvious disguises of Shitao's illustrations to classical poems, the paintings associated with his own old poems open the door to the more subtle guises of memory. In memory paintings, too, absorption often plays a central role as a sort of doubling or focalizing of the reminiscence; one could even cite *The Water-*



208. "Farewell to the Year," *Illustrations to Su Shi's Poems on the Seasons*, album of 12 leaves, ink and light color on paper, each leaf 20.3 x 27.5 cm, leaf 12. Osaka Municipal Museum of Art.

fall at Mount Lu as an example. Too easily, perhaps, one invokes Shitao's youthful visit to Mount Lu with Hetao as a private allusion, though there is no independent indication that Shitao had his own past in mind at all. In metaphoric terms, from there it is only a short step in one direction to a presumption that memory (youth, travel) was an escape from the present (old age, the constraints of a home and business); and an equally short step in another direction to the view of memory as a realignment of the past (Buddhist) to suit the present (Daoist) – both invite hermeneutic elucidation. This still leaves us, however, far short of an adequate account of the role of memory in *The Waterfall at Mount Lu* and in other, explicitly memory-oriented paintings. Given that Shitao's memories were the currency of his moral capital, economic issues are never far away. In the case of memory representations too, security is a central concern, attained again by the tactic of absorption – that is, immersion in a memory to the point of rendering it

habitable. In these terms, one might suggest that insofar as it is a disguised memory painting, *The Waterfall at Mount Lu* turns a key moment in his personal history into a habitable site on his private horizon of insecurity.

The album *Eight Views of the South* (c. 1698–1700), introduced earlier in relation to the theme of the orphan prince, brings together several more absorbed figures of this kind in contexts of explicit reminiscence corresponding to the old poems inscribed on the paintings. Half of its leaves recall outings that Shitao made in the environs of Nanjing while he was living in the area outside the southern city wall in the 1680s. That area was crowded with temples, of which Shitao's own Changgan Monastery was the most important; at its center was the hill known as Flower-Rain Terrace (cf. his dream), on which he stands in leaf 6, his staff perfectly vertical, looking out over the surrounding temples (see Plate 9). The 1680s poem is a meditation on the sight and sounds of the temples, and on religious identity (Buddhism vs. Daoism); but the seemingly innocuous note that he later added to the poem at the time of the painting raises other, more shadowy issues: "When I was living in the Qin-Huai area, in the evening at sunset after the people left I often climbed this terrace. When I had finished chant-



209. "East Mountain," *Eight Views of the South*, album of 8 leaves, ink and color on paper, each leaf 27.6 x 25.1 cm, leaf 1. British Museum.

ing poems I sometimes painted it as well." His solitary evening ascents of the hill (a busy tourist site during the day)⁵⁸ appear here as having a ritual character, consecrated by the chanting of poems and underlined by the act of representing the scene, repeated once more in this album leaf. The private ritual displaces him from the environment of the temple to that of a site that he alone possesses ("after the people left"). To the unpossessable space of the monastery is contrasted a space of dwelling built by ritual repetition. The issue of habitability is explicitly thematized in a second leaf depicting a solitary walk toward East Mountain (also known as Earth Mountain), which lay about 30 *li* to the southeast of Changgan Monastery (Figure 209):

Not discouraged by the distance of the secluded path

I walk alone toward East Mountain.

I ask the way at Geqiu Stream

And pass through the clouds, crossing Bamboo Pass.

A great bridge looms between the wilderness banks,
Tall willows lean over the river bend.
Coming upon the distant rising peak
I say to myself: I ought to settle in this place.

The painting itself is structured by a perfect alignment of the blue bridge – the iconic sign of passage, movement, displacement – with the orange-brown mountain: the very embodiment of *an*. The figure stands immobile at the center of the bridge, in the shadow of the mountain. By the poem's reading, the image is one of desire for a home in the mountains, a desire that will not, we understand, be fulfilled. However, the iconic stability of the painting and the absorption of the figure at its center effectively contradict the terms of this metaphoric deferral; they foreclose on an impossible future and import the habitability, the security, of the mountain into this moment. A third leaf represents a site on the Yangzi River to the southwest of Nanjing: the Marbled Stone Cliff with its Pavilion for Summoning Immortals, also known as the Taibai Pavilion after its association with Li Bai (Figure 210). Shitao's poem was probably written at the end of the 1670s:



210. "Marbled Stone Cliff," *Eight Views of the South*, album of 8 leaves, ink and color on paper, each leaf 27.6 x 25.1 cm, leaf 8. British Museum.

I have long missed Taibai's pavilion
 Now that I'm here again, I suddenly grow
 melancholy.
 The pristine moon of past and present
 Looks down sagely on autumn in the world.
 The Three Mountains opposite seem to sit on the
 window ledge
 Five drumbeats from the edge of the city mark the
 dawn.
 Tomorrow I'll be gone, a thousand *li* away
 Looking back on the water's fast current.

Straightforward in its poetics of melancholy, perfectly adjusted to his narrative of unfortunate destiny, the mood remembered from twenty years previously takes on a deeper significance, as the thousand *li* that were then only a figure of speech come to seem prophetic. Once more, however, the painting resists reduction to this metaphoric reading through the filter of the poem.

A line defining the edge of the bay curls around to become a ridge that in turn becomes the backbone of the mountain. By this device the void of the bay and the solid of the mountain, the waiting boat with the horizontal of its lowered sails and the pavilion with its open window and unseen, reflective figure, are locked into a yin-yang equilibrium, stable, restful and secure.

Having started out with explicit images of absorption we arrive here at an image where absorption is made explicit by the poem and figured in negative in the painting; but absorption functions in a still more shadowy fashion in this and other memory paintings by Shitao in his repeated return to certain sites, moments, and poems. *Eight Views of the South* includes several leaves that embody this matrix of repetitions. He returned to his poem on the walk to East Mountain, for example, in the album *Reminiscences of Jinling*, in the autumn of 1707 (see Figure 219). In the case of the Taibai Pavilion, it is the site rather than the poem that recurs. By 1681 he had already visited the site three times, and three poems from these visits survive; it is one of the other poems and a different composition that are used to depict

the site in *Reminiscences of Jinling*.⁵⁹ Finally, one of the *Eight Views* illustrates a poem written in the mid-1650s at the Yueyang Tower on the southern bank of Lake Dongting in Hunan (see Figure 82). As previously noted, a second illustration of this poem appears in an album for Huang Jixian (see Figure 81), but the same scene also appears in the *Wilderness Colors* album, where it illustrates a poem by Li Bai (Figure 211), and in his album of *Illustrations to Tang Poems*, accompanying a poem by Li Jinjie. The four paintings – more may yet come to light – share the same basic composition.

Memory was the currency of Shitao's moral capital; but in spending it he could at the same time find security. His memory returns were only superficially an escape from the present; at a deeper level they were an added means of making the present habitable. Ritualized repetition, which we have seen in his paintings of Flower-Rain Terrace ("in the evening . . . I often climbed") and of Taibai Pavilion ("Now that I'm here again") as a context for the represented moment, now appears as context for the act of painting itself. As he moved, like some itinerant worker of the imagination, from commission to commission, disguise to disguise, endlessly reproducing his moral capital, it was with such slight baggage that he transformed each enforced stop into a habitable home.

DEATH'S LIMIT

Back then he often used to invite me
To his solitary pavilion squeezed between the two cities.
His private words were hard to explain to people,
But his excitement came straight from the heart.
Now that it is full of sadness,
How can I walk down West Island Street?

Li Lin, from "Four Elegies for Shitao," 1707.⁶⁰

It was the absence that Shitao's death left within the urban landscape of Yangzhou that oppressed Li Lin. A part of the city was lost, a part of Yangzhou's private social space – private in the sense I have been developing here of that which "was hard to explain to people." Li Lin's elegy exposes the dark side of urban experience: the isolation of Shitao's "solitary" pavilion, and the isolation with which Li himself was left after the death of one of his few close friends in Yangzhou. Li Lin had first heard of Shitao through his cousin Li Guosong while he was still living in Xinghua. On two of his visits to Yangzhou in the winter of 1697 he tried to present himself to the painter at his home, but Shitao was too sick to receive him. Shitao might not have traveled as far as Xinghua to return the courtesy, but in 1698 Li Lin moved to the outskirts of Yangzhou to avoid flooding near his

home. "When he heard that I had arrived he came out of the city to visit me, and the next day I passed by his studio." We know these details from an essay presented to Shitao with which Li Lin commemorated this, his first visit to the Dadi Tang, just as ten years later he commemorated Shitao's death with a suite of elegies. I introduced much of the essay in Chapter 5 for its exemplary symbolic characterization of Shitao as a prince-painter. It ends, however, with a passage whose insistence on raw emotion exceeds its political context:

Alas! For my part, I am descended from a marshal of the previous dynasty. Although my hair is thick, yet this memory remains. As soon as I saw Mr. Shi, without knowing where the tears came from I let out a cry. . . . My family is one of loyal gentlemen: How could I not have made his acquaintance? But who realizes how my sorrow was infinitely deepened by this meeting? Afterward, I looked at his calligraphy and painting; for a long time we said nothing, and then we parted.

The elegy and the essay, with their re-creations, recognitions, and commemorations, certainly belong to the realm of Richard Vinograd's "private art" of literati sociability.⁶¹ Beyond this, however, they are also marked by a visceral longing that reveals Li Lin's dependence on friendship for a sense of intimate community within the urban context.

This melodramatic poetics of urban community was no less a feature of Shitao's art. In this context it is worth going back a few years before he moved into the Dadi Tang to the months following his own move to Yangzhou in early 1693. His *Landscapes for Yao Man* includes a leaf illustrating a poem written in response to one by Yao Man himself (see Figure 62). In the middle of a calm, rainy, misty autumn landscape, Shitao looks out at the viewer from the upper window of a mansion. Although the mansion is some way from Yangzhou, his thoughts are for the city:

Although feeling befuddled I force myself to
continue
While the sparse rain sprinkles the Han River
[in Yangzhou].
Wondering who I can share my thoughts with,
A letter arrives to dispel my melancholy.
Fragrance rises as the tea cauldron boils,
Fallen petals float in the winecup,
My memories wander across the streams between us
Clouds return, drawing in around the palace
pavilion.

Beyond the simple commemoration of friendship is an embodiment of it as longing, figured visually in the soft, palpable atmosphere and the intense absence/presence of the literally effaced figure. The commemoration is

further complicated by the dynamic of an artist-in-residence dealing with his patron: An unspoken acknowledgment of economic dependence informs the intimacy.

The letter and the gift (tea, wine), all-important elements in the rituals of elite social intercourse, are recurrent topoi in Shitao's poetics of community as emotionally charged tokens of friendship. They and other topoi are to be found in a group of half a dozen poems commemorating particular friendships that Shitao wrote during the first few months he spent in the Dadi Tang, in the spring of 1697. Although they were written for different occasions, he soon brought the poems together in an album, choosing as usual a different calligraphic style for each text. One of the recipients was Di Yi, the Hanlin academician from Beijing, whom Shitao went to see at the Literary Star Pavilion (see Chapter 1). Another, whom he tracked down at Xingjiao Temple, was his Nanjing biographer Chen Ding, a professional writer who had come to Yangzhou to arrange the publication of a collection of his writings. A third was Cheng Jing'e, who supported himself as a professional calligrapher in Nanjing; Shitao's poem was written out of disappointment that Cheng was no longer coming to Yangzhou. A fourth was his young Yangzhou friend Xiang Yin, who had just sent him a present of fine incense and tea. The fifth was an unidentified "true understanding friend" who was soon to return to Nanchang. The last was Wang Xian, who was leaving for Fujian, no doubt on business (the poem was originally written to accompany a parting painting [see Figure 121]); Shitao also took the opportunity to salute the arrival of Wang's uncle, a government official who was coming south from Beijing as the Examination Commissioner. Together, the poems paint a picture of friendships maintained with difficulty in the bustling early modern world that linked Yangzhou to cities elsewhere – Beijing, Nanjing, Nanchang, the coastal cities of Fujian. "Aging and useless," he writes to Wang Xian, "I have grown attached to my friends, / But year after year they have scattered like stars and seagulls." Or again, to Cheng Jing'e:

In Guangling [Yangzhou] I miss desperately the
close friends of my generation,
I hate not to see you, you who are so like me.
With your lofty conversation and fierce opinions
spoken right into my ear –
You may not have come down-river in person, but
your spirit is already present.

Yangzhou's own urban landscape – Xingjiao Temple, the Literary Star Pavilion, and here the Dadi Tang – is vividly evoked as a backdrop for the rare moments stolen for friendship by busy professional men. These moments have their immediate context in the visit, the parting, the letter, the gift, and at their most intense have the



211. "Illustration to Li Bai's Poem, 'On Ascending Yueyang Tower with Xia Shi'er,'" *Wilderness Colors*, album of 12 leaves, ink and color on paper, each leaf 27.6 x 21.5 cm, leaf 1. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The Sackler Fund, 1972 (1972.122).

same melodramatic quality that informs Li Lin's essay and elegy:

I climb up to the hall to pay my respects but get
such a shock that I exclaim loudly –
With what secret step did life move so quickly?
These ten years have exhausted my tears as old
friends found themselves apart
Now to meet you here – it's not easy to find the
words.
In your lodgings when we stop chanting poems,
only eight jugs have been drunk
But in my dreams we, white-haired, pour wine a
hundred times.
Among life's pleasures, unburdening oneself is true
happiness –
Worldly affairs, our successes and failures, and
fugitive feelings.

The poems (this one for Chen Ding) speak to an intimacy commensurate with independence and its extension into the interdependence of friendship; but, as this excerpt shows, even in 1697 both were shadowed by the physical limits of the body in the face of disease and time.

By 1705 illness and aging had eroded that independence and were casting a still longer shadow of solitary survival over friendship. The old topoi underwent an inversion of meaning, beginning with the visit, now longed for from others. Thus Shitao's moved response to the unexpected arrival of an out-of-town visitor, Mr. Cangzhou, one of Shitao's "scattered old friends" who turned up out of the blue on the Double Ninth, 1705, when Shitao was ill at home, unable to join in the customary festivities.⁶² He brought with him his new poems to show to Shitao, and eventually asked him, "Can jade-colored waters and hoary mountains still be obtained?" Shitao gave him a painting as a present (a mark of unusual affection) and on it inscribed, first of all, a poem (Figure 212):

This old man used to get excited about climbing on
high
But my sinews have decayed with the years, and I
no longer have my freedom.
I've put away my walking stick and have a wine jar
for company,
The outside gate undisturbed, the chrysanthemums
autumnal.
What a surprise to see one of my scattered old
friends!
To look over his new poems dispels my melancholy.
"Can jade-colored waters and hoary mountains still
be obtained?"
Take my gift of a picture to take with you on your
travels.

The poem begins with a moment of loneliness, which is then overcome through the arrival of his visitor, before parting announces its return; Shitao temporarily finds the understanding friend for whom he is such a friend in turn. The landscape it accompanies is appropriately autumnal, the tall mountains evoking the heights he cannot climb. A drenched, watery landscape, it commemorates a visit in the aftermath of the terrible floods of that year; the visitor, covered with a cape against the rain, makes his way toward the Dadi Tang. In proper literati fashion, Shitao assumes the burden of the loneliness and melancholy of aging as an inevitable part of the human condition.

Following this straightforward self-representation, however, Shitao added a long note in which he went over the same ground again in an altogether different mode, as if the poem had been necessary to clear the ground for something more probing:

Alas, I'm old and exhausted. My climbing spirit gets daily weaker and I can't even make use of a walking stick. On the Double Ninth, the year *yiyou*, I was lying propped up in the Dadi Caotang, tossing and turning with dark thoughts, when Mr. Cangzhou happened to arrive from a Yangzi boat. We faced each other with great feeling, and I matched the poem he had written for me. Then I thought back to the year when we first met, when he was still a youth and I middle-aged. Now suddenly it is he who is middle-aged while I am an old man. Like moonlight on the water playing with one's eyes, or the moon in the mist that won't stay still, or wisps of arriving cloud, or the traces of withered grass: How can figures of speech do justice to it? Alas, where is there one that I can use to transmit my feelings?

He can no longer leave his house in the middle of the city, is utterly pinned down; Cangzhou, free in his movements as Shitao once was, arrived from the river that means the outside world and no doubt had to be admitted to the inner room where Shitao lies. Old age has left him dependent and vulnerable to isolation. The painting is of a piece with this: The focus of the image is the arriving figure, and Shitao himself is invisible in the buildings at lower right that surely represent the Dadi Tang; it is the visitor's choice to have come, and Shitao can only be grateful that he has. The high mountains, the broad rivers, are not extensions of his mind but an outside world – most immediately the city of Yangzhou surrounding the Dadi Tang – that is now out of reach.

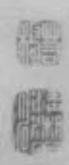
212 (facing). *Landscape Painted on the Double Ninth*, dated 1705, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 71.1 x 42.2 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Edward Elliott Family Collection. Purchase, The Dillon Fund Gift, 1981.

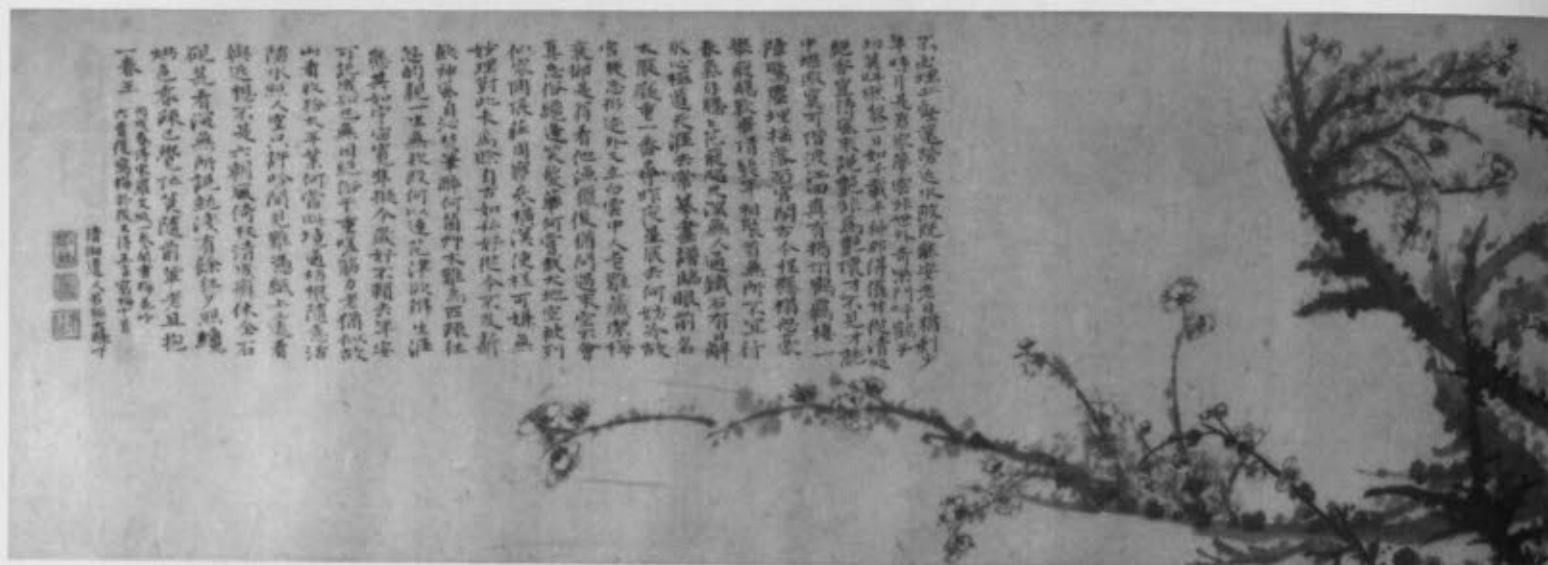
老夫舊有登高興筋力
 年衰不自由藜杖撇開
 樽酒伴柴月閒煞菊蕊
 秋飄零故友驚相見檢
 點新詩亦解愁碧水蒼
 山從可得贈君圖画與

弟跋

喜春老憶甚矣登覽
 之興日蹙而阿翁亦竟不相資矣二而

重九元正大跡野堂艱轉然也適值
 滄洲道先生來自江表對良
 辰既而和其所贈詩因想始將
 之年彼少壯而今忽彼壯老
 矣流光在人煙月無賴
 將來處雲霞竹之跡又
 豈可以意揣之邪
 既為有作用誌鄙懷
 清湘弟若極





Shitao, however, far from invoking the conventional modes of expression expected of the aging man – loneliness, melancholy – here ends up railing against the limits of language itself, its incapacity to transmit his feelings. The unsayable here is not time's passage, or even aging, but death itself. Death appears on Shitao's private horizon as this limit of language, echoed in a pointedly empty window.

Shitao recovered, moved about the city, went on rare outings. But in the spring of 1706 he fell ill again, became dependent once more, waited for visitors, continued to see friends scatter. For this we have the evidence of the wrenching cycle of ten plum-blossom octets from that spring, poems that are matched for intensity by the fierce image of survival that they accompany (Figure 213). From the cycle I have already cited one frank meditation on his "failure" as a Daoist. Two others speak no less frankly of his feelings for younger male friends, reminding us that during the Dadi Tang years Shitao surrounded himself with younger men. His students come first to mind, but there were others – such as Su Pi, on whom the artist leans in *Drunk in Autumn Woods* (see Plate 5) – who during one period or another were his regular companions:

One day passes like a thousand years,
How can the good-looking be hurried?
Enjoyment stops, starting with the pure places;
Can one wait for the breeze to bring fragrance?
There is talk of someone charming, but no charm
appears,
I miss talented youth, but no talent is to be seen.
I stay here enduring my loneliness,
Regretting that I crossed the Yangzi only to come
back.

There really was a Yangzhou crane
Who suddenly flew up from his nest on the wall.

The dust he shook off fell on my face,
But in all times an official career has been the
standard.

I hang up a rubbing and think on the bold hero,
One winecup follows another as I sigh over the end
of our feelings.

For a few years we were together,
It can't be wrong for him to go.

It has to be said that these are not conventional poems; even among Shitao's many hundreds of surviving verses, I know of no other examples that are quite so revealing of the intensity of his feelings toward other men. If the first undoubtedly takes on an erotic edge that then carries over into the next, these poems obey a different decorum from that which operates in *Dadizi's Portrait of Himself Asleep on an Ox*, the difference arising from a question of age and class in the object of desire. Because they employ a discourse of friendship's longing, the eroticism is left sufficiently ambiguous for it to be (just) possible to read it as rhetorical. It is the rarity of such texts, however, and the exceptional character of the poem cycle from which they come – an unblinking private look in the mirror – that in the end make this account unconvincing beside the alternative: that Shitao here allowed desire to surface disruptively within the discourse of friendship's longing, testing the very boundaries of its decorum.

Figured in negative in the artist's attachment to youth as object of desire is his own aging and the encroachment of death, subject of the eighth and not the least remarkable of the ten poems:

I would like to discern the shape of my life
But it seems vast like the universe.
It would be good if this year was my term;
I can't deny this last year was peaceful [an].



Can I trust you to know my heart or not? –
I have no reason to break with worldly concerns.
I sigh heavily that my sinews are old
As my old friend can see.

213. *Plum Blossoms*, 1706, handscroll, ink on paper, dimensions unavailable. Palace Museum, Beijing.

It is again, I think, not what he actually says that is most significant but what is indicated in the text by an impossibility, a double negative, a question, a sigh. After a lifetime of trying to discern the shape of his life in successive narratives of destiny, Shitao has found the limits of narrative too. To die now would close the story nicely, but there is no reason why that should happen, nor does he want it. On the other hand, the future is uncertain; why should security last? The body will betray the mind; old friends, perhaps, will betray an old friend by staying away. The interdependence that defined community in the 1697 poems has given way to survival as the attempt to render habitable (*an*) the isolation that is the negative form of urban community. For this, a sheer act of will, the twisted flowering plum was the natural emblem, in this scroll and elsewhere.

It would be wrong of me to suggest that a preoccupation with his mortality crept up on Shitao only in 1705–6. All through the Dadi Tang years Shitao's recurrent illness led him periodically to fear death as imminent. We read of it in his letters: "for a long time now a herd of lions has been terrorizing my heart," and "you would have thought Bitter Melon's root was going to break." It was at one such moment in 1701, lying sick and "fearing having the dream of the withered tree," that he sought to give an orderly closure to his life by giving his account of his teachers and students, the famous and the obscure, the privileged and the poor. "In the past ten years," he concludes, "mixing with people of all ages and studying Li Bai's songs, I have not been lonely at all." A few years later, in a similar spirit but in a less

fearful moment, he painted his self-portrait sleeping on an ox "to show what Dadizi looked like in his lifetime and the traces of his descent into this world." These two attempts at closure, made against the fear that he might in the end die alone and that Dadizi's descent into this world would be forgotten, anticipate the much more radical attempts somehow to picture death and make even it habitable that he repeatedly made during the autumn of 1707. He was still painting as late as the tenth month: Li Lin reports in another of his elegies that his last work was a now lost album of chrysanthemums that was bequeathed to him. Surprisingly, altogether seven dated or datable works comprising no fewer than sixty images can be documented from the seventh to the tenth month: five albums, of which three have survived, and two hanging scrolls, both extant.⁶³ Thus, after a long illness that saw his wrist injured as well, a slight improvement saw him back at work as usual during these final months.

To grasp the significance of Shitao's attempts to picture death, one needs to know something of what death was conventionally supposed to be. Inscribed in the ritual management of death – it is not necessary to go into the details of funerary ritual – were two assumptions: first, that death properly handled was a return, and second, that the living had a share in ensuring the peace (*an*, once more) of the dead. Life's proper closure lay in the soul's return to the beyond, and the entry there into a state of security and wholeness – what Li Lin associated with Shitao's "being able to meet his ancestors . . . in the underworld."⁶⁴ That Shitao cared deeply about

this ritual management we know from the record of a painting entitled *Picture of the Tomb Gate*, on which he inscribed the anxious couplet: "Who will place wine in front of this one stone each spring, and sprinkle water on the lonely mountain grave after the snow?"⁶⁵ Anxiety about the ritual handling of his death, powering a deep need to accomplish his own preparatory ritualization, lay behind Shitao's restless pictorial search for closure in the autumn of 1707.

He plunged first into memory, in the album *Reminiscences of Jinling [Nanjing]*. I have already (in Chapter 5) introduced the image with which the album in its present form opens and its inscribed lament from 1680, but these "words written for the closing of his gate," drawn from the set of poems he wrote to commemorate moving into the Single Branch Pavilion in Nanjing, are worth citing again (Figure 214):

I begin to feel the flavor of purity
On this winter's night, as moonlight floods the
courtyard.
Utter poverty pierces me to the marrow,
Under the sky I dare to call out to the souls of the
dead.
Among cold words I abandoned the [family] fire,
My liver withered, a root divested of leaves.
Who appreciates this meaning? –
I want to sigh, but the sound comes out a sob.

Shitao looks out at us; the hilltop on which his studio is perched floats amid moonlit mist, as if free of the bounds of this world. The sense of separation here encompasses the orphan's loss of his family, and the quarter of a century that separated him from the writing of the poem, but easily accommodates as well his own anticipated separation from this world. In 1680, he had called out to the souls of the dead to return; now, through memory, he transforms his own death into a return. By its reflexive character, however, the image tends to affirm his psychic containment, mere survival of the soul, the security of community in the negative. This is even clearer in a second leaf depicting an empty house in a secluded and forbidding spot, its gates and window open; paths lead in from left and right, but there is no one there (Figure 215). The absence at the center of the image finds no explanation in the poem, which instead vividly evokes, through the topos of the letter that does not arrive, the solitude of the man without family whose friends, not he, are absent. The contradiction between word and image opens up a cold space in which painting and poem together hint at the horror of a lonely death, while the absence in the poem of his friend gives way in the image to his own, anticipating Li Lin's elegy.

Two portraits of barren trees bring to mind his fear of "the dream of the withered tree" and find new visual metaphors for the prospect of inhabiting the beyond. One depicts an ancient pine in the outskirts of Nanjing that was reputed to have survived from the Six Dynasties (Figure 216).⁶⁶ Like him "it has shed all its normal branches and leaves." The fact that the tree had imperial associations, having reputedly been planted by Emperor Wu of the Liang, would undoubtedly have intensified its relevance as a self-image. The poem likens it to the arhat who renounces the final stages of enlightenment in order to stay behind in this world to relieve its suffering: "While steadfast hearts return to the Pure Land, / It remains, shaking in the teeth of the wind." Here the "future incarnation" as an arhat, deferred in 1696 in *Calligraphies and Sketches by Qingxiang*, surfaces again; so does it also in the truly shriveled tree, a ginkgo depicted in leaf 11, where the connection with the arhat self-portrait is visual rather than verbal (Figure 217). This, too, was one of the ancient trees of the Nanjing area, standing atop Qinglongshan, Green Dragon Mountain, as it had since the Six Dynasties.⁶⁷ "I happen to lean toward its empty heart," he writes, evoking the vacant, or dispassionate, heart of the devout Buddhist, "and from its tip I hear the music of Heaven." There are also images of departure: He depicts, for example, a journey through the mountains of Shuixi in Anhui, where "I descend from my horse at the long bridge, and start out on the stairs on foot" (Figure 218). The image contradicts the poem entirely, retaining only its mood of calm progress. Clouds come into view along the mountain, pass Shitao, and rise until they hover above him. With their *lingzhi*-fungus head and long, trailing stem, the clouds have taken on the form of the *ruyi*, "scepters," that often decorated the scholar's desk as symbols of immortality. Shitao's horse is less on the road than it is on the "stem," which becomes a second, alternative path, leading Shitao on a final journey up into the sky toward a transformed existence as a transcendent. Death is for him here – as it is for the Iron-Feet Daoist and countless other adepts – an ascent into the clouds. A second leaf depicts a "solitary journey to East Mountain," illustrating the poem we have already seen in which he expresses his desire to settle there (Figure 219). I would suggest that for East Mountain we can read the Sacred Mountain of the East, Mount Tai, residence of the dead. More prosaically (and were this any other album, one would hesitate to freight the theme

214 (*facing*). "The Single Branch Retreat," *Reminiscences of Jinling*, dated 1707, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, each leaf 23.8 x 19.2 cm, leaf 1. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Gift of the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation.



清趣初消受寒
宵月蒲園一貧從
到骨太散敢招魂
句冷辭煙火腸枯
斷菜根何人知此
意欲咲且戲吾清
湘大滌予一枝閉門
語



215. "Waiting for a Letter," *Reminiscences of Jinling*, dated 1707, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, each leaf 23.8 x 19.2 cm, leaf 2. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Gift of the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation.



with such heavy significance), in another leaf he washes out his inkstone and bids his host farewell before leaving on a long journey. The painting gives that sequence visual form, tying into a single composite motif the definitive act of cleaning his tools, the patron who would persuade him to stay, and the road behind that stretches out into the distance.⁶⁸

A month later, he was still finding metaphors for closure and trying them on for size. There was a return to Mount Huang, to the Terrace of the Yellow Emperor, an exposed, transcendent site; he has written himself into the painting's unfriendly surface, another fierce cipher of will (see Plate 15). There was "one blossom, one leaf – one lotus" painted, with a defiantly worn-out brush, to symbolize rebirth into the Western paradise of Amītabha: "The precious visage is slightly rounded; I look into his face, and see the people of the Western world with their hair hanging down."⁶⁹ There was "a withered root insisting on life" – but the pictured branch is on the

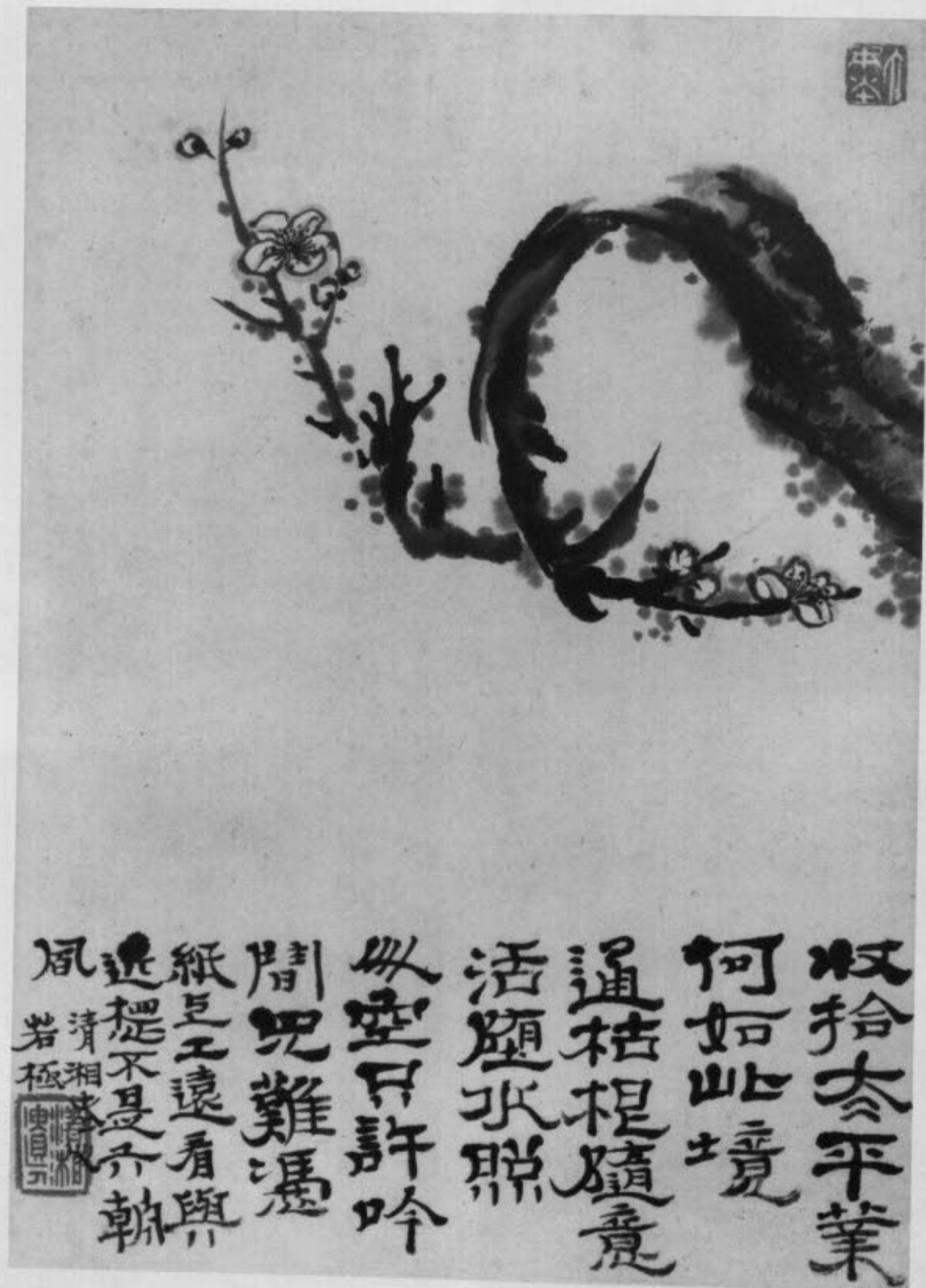
216 (facing, top left). "Ancient Pine at the Xufu Retreat," *Reminiscences of Jinling*, dated 1707, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, each leaf 23.8 x 19.2 cm, leaf 8. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Gift of the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation.

217 (facing, top right) "Old Ginkgo at Mount Qinglong," *Reminiscences of Jinling*, dated 1707, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, each leaf 23.8 x 19.2 cm, leaf 11. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Gift of the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation.

218 (facing, bottom left). "Riding the Clouds," *Reminiscences of Jinling*, dated 1707, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, each leaf 23.8 x 19.2 cm, leaf 10. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Gift of the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation.

219 (facing, bottom right). "Walking Alone toward East Mountain," *Reminiscences of Jinling*, dated 1707, album of 12 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, each leaf 23.8 x 19.2 cm, leaf 3. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Gift of the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation.





point of breaking (Figure 220). Ultimately, Shitao's restless search for closure contradicts his stated purpose. The restlessness itself, the constant displacements, are far more eloquent; for this is not solitary survival in the mythic light of destiny, which could at least find its term, but the urban survivor's response to an isolation that persisted into the liminality of dying.

220. "Plum Blossom Branch," *Flowers*, dated 1707, album of 10 leaves, ink or ink and color on paper, each leaf 32.7 x 23.5 cm, leaf 2. © Sotheby's, Inc.

APPENDIX ONE

Chronology of Shitao's Life



References are given here only for information that is not presented elsewhere in this book in fuller form (especially in Chapters 4–6) and accessible through the index. Here, as throughout this study, years refer to Chinese lunar years. Most of the places mentioned can be found on Map 3. Where an existing artwork contradicts the dates given here for the use of specific signatures and seals, this will generally mean that I am not convinced of the work's authenticity (though there will inevitably be cases of oversight or ignorance as well). With the existence and location in mainland Chinese libraries of rare publications and manuscripts by no less than thirty-six of his friends and acquaintances newly established, providing a rich new vein for biographical research, and with new works by Shitao regularly coming to light, this chronology must be considered provisional.¹

1642

Shitao was born into the family of the Ming princes of Jingjiang, under the name of Zhu Ruoji. His father was probably a relative of Zhu Hengjia, the prince of Jingjiang. Although the Jingjiang palace was in the city of Guilin in the southwestern province of Guangxi, Shitao always identified himself in later life as a native of Quanzhou, some seventy miles to the northeast of Guilin.

1643

Death of the founder of the Manchu Qing dynasty, Hong Taiji, and ascension of his five-year-old son, Fulin (1638–

61), as the Shunzhi emperor, accompanied by the appointment of Hong Taiji's younger brother, Dorgon (1612–50), as regent.

1644

Fall of Beijing to the Shun regime of Li Zicheng, followed shortly after by their abandonment of Beijing to Qing forces. Dorgon proclaimed Qing rule over China in the name of the Shunzhi emperor, who shortly after was brought to Beijing. In south China, resistance to the Manchus crystallized around different claimants to the Ming throne, whose regimes are collectively known as the Southern Ming.

1645

Fall of Nanjing to Qing forces. In Guilin in the ninth month, Zhu Hengjia was attacked and defeated by forces of the Southern Ming Longwu emperor, Zhu Yujian, under the command of Qu Shisi, and taken to Fuzhou, where he later died in prison. The attack involved a massacre of the Jingjiang princely family, from which the small child Shitao was saved by a retainer who smuggled him to safety, the two subsequently taking refuge within the Buddhist *sangha*.

1650

Death of Dorgon and assumption of power by the Shunzhi emperor himself.