

溪山圖請正

丁棋者王筆





善文敦常典于論丹青家其文秀之質
 而洋厚未之得道勁之力而風款不全至
 如石谷衆美畢具可謂毫髮無遺恨
 矣此圖沒沉浩遠元會靈通尤稱傑出
 良可寶也 姜水玉鑑題



乙卯暮春傲梅花庵王夏山圖請正

鷹昇先生 烏日山中樵者王華



In *Imitating Wu Chen's Summer Mountains*, 1675, (ink on paper, 26½ inches high), Wang Hui is inspired to break the log-jam of academic codification and release an over-all vortical energy. The detail on the cover reveals the ink tones and the archaic "seal-style" brush-strokes of this masterpiece of "academic" calligraphic abstraction. Collection Mr. and Mrs. Earl Morse, New York.

For Arthur + Marjette
from Wen

The Orthodox Master

By Wen Fong

Head of graduate programs in Oriental art at Princeton, Prof. Fong is largely responsible for the spectacular acquisitions in his field at the university's museum in recent years.

This article is based on a section in the author's forthcoming book, *Wang Hui and the Great Synthesis: Based on Ten Works by the Master in the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Earl Morse*. This collection of paintings by Wang Hui will be presented to the Princeton Museum.

In 1691, Wang Hui was summoned to the court of the Emperor K'ang-hsi (1662-1722) to supervise the creation of the "Southern Inspection Tour" (*Nan-hsün t'u*) scrolls, which were to illustrate and commemorate the Emperor's Southern journey of 1689. By Chinese count—which considers a child at birth as one year old—the master had just turned 60 that year. During the previous 30 years, he had built up an enormous reputation in Chiang-nan in Southern China. He was referred to as the "painting sage" who had realized the "Orthodox" ideal of achieving a "Great Synthesis" (*ta-ch'eng*) of all the earlier styles of the Sung and Yüan periods. His mentor, Wang Shih-min (1592-1680), himself a leading master, described him as "the kind of painter who has not been seen for 500 years."

A typical example of Wang Hui's work as a court painter in the 1690s is the large *Winter Landscape*, which is signed in the lower right corner in four carefully written characters: "Wang Hui respectfully painted." The large painting is pleasant, but mechanical. It uses a familiar Northern Sung formula repeated not only by himself, but also by his followers. The composition is cluttered with descriptive details and tortuous decorative passages. The brushwork is dry and astringent. Wang Hui, in short, painted this not from his heart, but for popular consumption. He was painfully aware

of his failure. On seeing one of his earlier works in 1701, he lamented: "I am old. My years are spent. [Such is] the difficulty of the Tao of painting. The harder one pursues it, the more elusive it becomes!"

In truth, Wang Hui had probably painted his most brilliant works a full decade before he entered into the Emperor's service. We would certainly remember him as an artist of the first order had he, like Wang Shih-min, died in 1680. Few Chinese artists' lives ran so straight and were so totally dedicated as Wang Hui's. By the time he was 30, he already personified Tung Ch'i-ch'ang's ideal of a "scholar painter who learned to exhaust the limits of workmanship and refinement, making Creation his teacher and friend." In the 1670s, his closest friend Yün Shou-p'ing wrote: "I have witnessed Wang Hui's painting undergo several metamorphoses [*pien*] . . . With each metamorphosis, it arrives at a new summit." When the brilliant student became a successful teacher, metamorphosis ceased.

The "Orthodox" theory of painting propounded by Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555-1636) in the closing years of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century was a revolutionary doctrine directed against the ailing, decorative conventions of late Ming art. By reverting to ancient models, Tung sought to restore to landscape painting its ancient simplicity and truthfulness. Painting was turned, in theory, into a humanistic discipline. A "Great Synthesis" of all the ancient styles was proposed to represent the perfect sum, as it were, of all the perfect parts. Technically, Tung equated painting with calligraphy, insisting that the chief desideratum in painting was brushwork and form rather than repre-



Wang Hui, late in life, retired into an official, decorative style: *Winter Landscape*, 1690s, ink, slight color on silk (67½ inches high). Morse collection.

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sentation. In the handscroll *Landscape in the Style of Huang Kung-wang*, painted before 1610, Tung reduces Huang Kung-wang's brush idiom to a calligraphic formula of "[filling] concave and convex forms [with] straight texture strokes." Landscape forms are turned into abstract graphic patterns. These he manipulates, as formal elements, according to his compositional principles of "void and solid," "rising and falling" and "opening and closing." As an over-all concept, he uses the ancient calligraphic principles of *shih* or kinesthetic movement. Continuous "breath-movements" circulate through the interconnected landscape forms. These "breath-movements" represented, for Tung and his followers, "life-motion" in landscape painting.

Born in 1632 in Ch'ang-shu (modern Kiangsu province), Wang Hui was discovered in 1651 by Wang Chien (1598-1677), who soon introduced him to the great master of Lou-tung, Wang Shih-min. The young man's brilliance so startled Wang Shih-min at their first meeting that the latter was moved to exclaim: "This is my teacher! How could he make me *his* teacher?" At Wang Shih-min's country villa in the western suburbs of T'ai-ts'ang, Wang Hui was given the opportunity to study and imitate all the ancient paintings in Wang Shih-min's rich collection. As Wang Hui's artistic stature grew, Wang Chien and Wang Shih-min magnanimously played the roles of ardent admirers of, and commen-



Right: By the propounder of "Orthodox" theories, Tung Ch'i-ch'ang: *Landscape in the Style of Huang Kung-wang*, late 1600s, ink on paper (15 inches high). Cleveland Museum.



Old-master model for the new theoreticians: Huang Kung-wang's *Dwelling in the Fu-ch'un Mountains*, 1350, ink on paper (13 inches high). National Palace Museum, Taiwan.



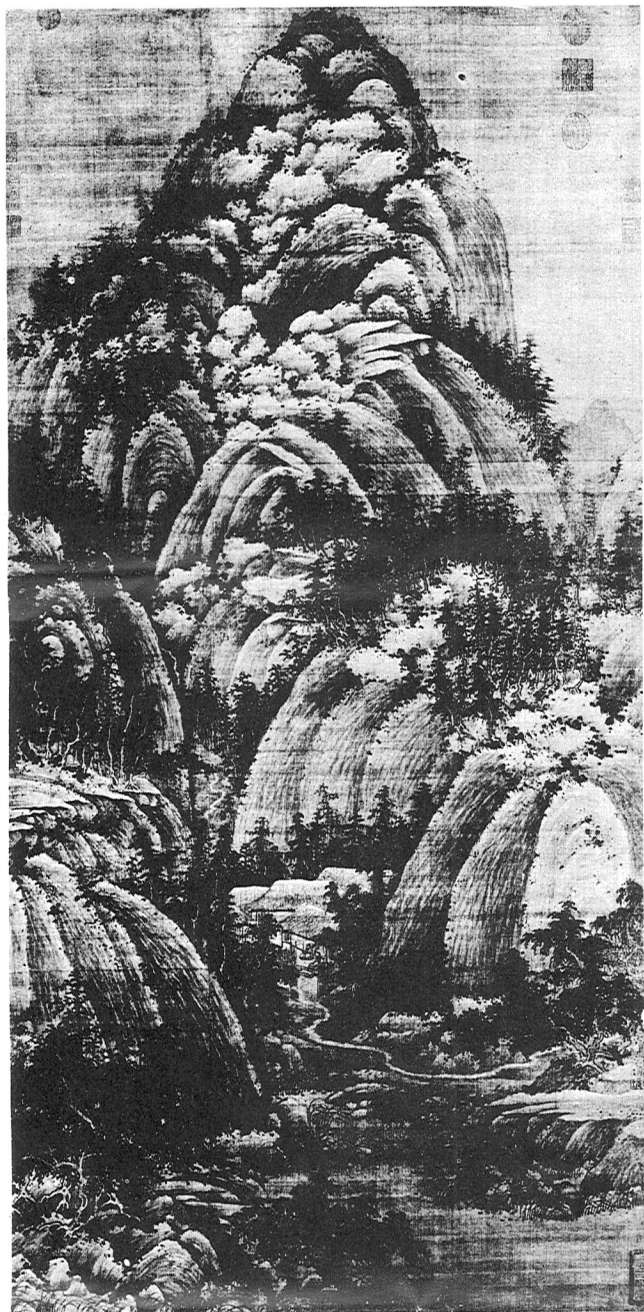
Model, copier and copier reinterpreted: the Northern Sung master Chü-jan's *Snow Scene* [left], ca. 960-980, Palace Museum, Taiwan, is the original of Wang Shih-min's copy of the 1620s, Central Museum, Taiwan, which in turn inspired his protégé Wang Hui's *Imitating the Brushwork of Chü-jan*, 1664, Morse collection.

tators on, the younger man's art. The extant writings of the two older Wangs in fact consist almost entirely of eulogistic colophons that they inscribed on Wang Hui's paintings.

The "metamorphosis" of Wang Hui's style through the 1660s and 1670s may best be studied in a series of paintings (in the collection of Mr. & Mrs. Earl Morse, New York) executed in the style of the tenth-century master Chü-jan. Chü-jan, according to the "Orthodox" theory of landscape painting, was one of the "patriarchs" of the "Southern School," which produced the "Four Great Masters of the Yüan Period," Huang Kung-wang, Wu Chen, Ni Tsan and Wang Meng. A hanging scroll by Wang Hui, titled *Imitating the Brushwork of Chü-jan*, dated 1664, reflects the composition of the *Snow Scene* attributed to Chü-jan. Wang Hui's immediate model, however, was Wang Shih-min's copy of the *Snow Scene* in the "Small Sketches" (*Hsiao-chung hsien-ta*) album—an album which Wang Hui faithfully studied in the 1660s and '70s. Freely adapting elements from Wang Shih-min's sketch, Wang Hui enlarged the group of pine trees in the foreground on the left, linking it diagonally with the smaller pine forest in the middle-distance, which in turn he related rhythmically with the great serpentine movement of the central peak in the background. In the drawing of the mountain form, Wang Hui followed Tung Ch'i-ch'ang's graphic formula of "filling the outlines with straight texture strokes." Individual brushstrokes are now the sole conveyor of life and energy; they grow and expand continuously until the whole becomes a great flowing pattern of undulating ed-

dies and counter-eddies, serving to "move" peaks and valleys around. Wang Hui wrote: "I must use the brush and ink of the Yüan to move the peaks and valleys of the Sung, and fuse with this the breath-resonance of the T'ang. I will then have a work of the Great Synthesis." The billowing movement in the composition is called the "dragon vein" (*lung-mo*). It creates an all-inclusive over-all effect, denying the compartmentalized division of the Northern Sung. The new compositional unity depends not so much on the balance and harmony of the parts, as on the kinetic energy and tension created by the individual strokes within the total structure.

A new model was used in Wang Hui's *Imitating Chü-jan's 'Floating Mist Rising over Distant Peaks'*, dated 1672. The painting shows a great heaving mountain mass with round calligraphic strokes in interlocking patterns of arcs, circles and dots. The only vertical elements in the painting are the trees in the lower portion of the composition; these are used merely to indicate the direction of the "dragon veins." Colophons by the artist and by his teachers Wang Shih-min and Wang Chien, found on the top of the painting, record the excitement of the new stylistic discovery. "This painting," writes Wang Hui, "does not make use of any paths, issuing streams, houses, temple buildings, boats or bridges. It depends solely on broad and heroic *shih* [compositional forces]." Wang Shih-min finds that "a primal breath fills the composition," and Wang Chien calls the painting "a living incarnation of Chü-jan." The actual model is lost, but a replica of it, now titled *Seeking the Tao*



Attributed to Chü-jan (ca. 960-980): *Seeking the Tao in Autumn Mountains*, ink, light color on silk (61½ inches high; National Palace Museum, Taiwan), replica of lost model for Wang Hui's scroll [right].



Wang Hui's *Imitating Chü-jan's "Floating Mist Rising Over Distant Peaks,"* dated 1672, ink on silk (76 inches high). Morse collection.

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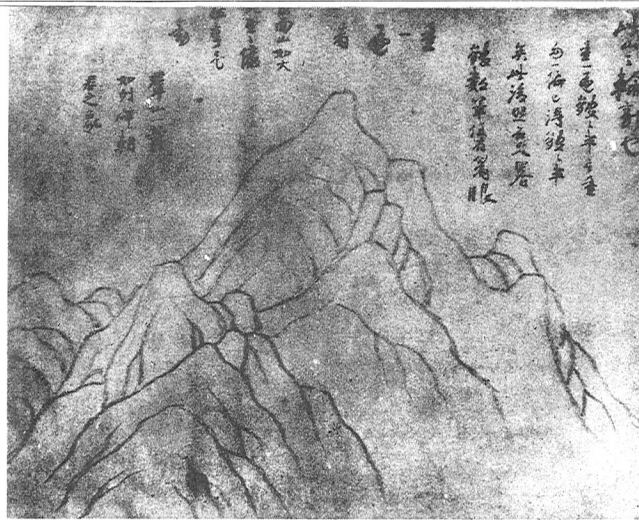
in the *Autumn Mountains*, still exists. Wang Hui's encounter with such a model in 1672 was a revelation: the "Southern School" style, epitomized by this "Chü-jan," treats painting as an orchestration of calligraphic lines in abstract space. The discovery provided Wang Hui with the key to interpret all the "Southern School," Chü-jan-derived styles. He was now able to "write out" his "Huang Kung-wangs," "Wu Chens" and "Wang Mengs" in the same calligraphic idiom.

An album by Wang Hui, dedicated to Wang Shih-min in 1673, offers a brilliant manifesto of the seventeenth-century

"Orthodox" belief in the "Great Synthesis" of Sung and Yüan styles. The album, in which a total of 11 different styles of the Sung and Yüan periods are represented, opens with an abbreviated statement of the "Chü-jan" style. The composition, which reverts to the ancient ideographic symbol of a "host" peak flanked by two "guest" peaks, is repeated not only in Kung Hsien's sketchbook of the 1670s, but also in the *Mustard Seed Garden Painter's Manual*, which was illustrated by Wang Kai, a pupil of Kung Hsien, and published in 1679. Not only are there no houses or figures, but

also no trees or grass; there is not a single distracting detail. The *Mustard Seed* says of this composition: "There is no need for additional scenic details. The absence of such details makes the painting appear particularly deep and massive. This is what is known as 'treating the basic subject without embellishment.'"

Out of this "Chü-jan" calligraphic abstraction came many of Wang Hui's Southern School metamorphoses during this period. His copy of Huang Kung-wang's *Fu-ch'un Mountains* composition, dated 1673, is based on this "Chü-jan" formula. A small hanging scroll, *Imitating Wu Chen's "Summer Mountains,"* dated 1675, is a fully realized masterpiece in this style. The brushwork, round energy lines in circular rhythmic patterns, is highly abstract. The tip of every stroke is carefully centered and "hidden," so as to emulate the blunt and archaic look of the "seal style" calligraphy. The ink tones are rich and luminous. The design seems to have been spun out of a single revolving breath. The lively, pulsating "dragon vein" dominates. At the sides, rocks, trees and even houses are tilted, as if pulled towards the center by a tremendous centripetal force, creating a great vortex in the lower half of the painting. The outer circle of this pattern continues upward and turns into a greater counter-whorl in the mountain peak above. In the upper right corner of the painting, Wang Chien writes this appreciative colophon: "Tung



Further stylization of the past: album drawing attributed to Kung Hsien (active 1660-1700), one of 18 leaves, ink on paper (9 3/4 inches high).



Ultimate stylization of the past: plate from *The Mustard Seed Garden Painter's Manual*, 1679, by Wang Kai (active 1680-1700); the text prescribes methods for every phase of art from inks to inspiration. Princeton University.

First drawing in Wang Hui's album which analyzes 11 Sung and Yüan period styles is this symbol of a "host" peak flanked by two "guest" peaks, dated 1673 (10 1/2 inches high; Morse collection), a motif that recurs in the work of Kung Hsien [top] and Wang Kai [right].



Ch'i-ch'ang used to say to me that 'painters who possess beauty and elegance frequently lack fullness of strength; those who have power and vigor are often short of style and resonance.' Only in Wang Hui are all the desirable qualities present. It may be said that not a single hair in his work ever causes regret. This painting is deep and calm, and quietly aloof. A primal breath seems to flow spiritedly through it. It is one of his great masterpieces, and should be carefully treasured."

In seventeenth-century China, the "Orthodox" mind appreciated originality only when it was presented in the guise of tradition. Change or "metamorphosis" was valued not for its own sake, but as a process of renewal by which the traditional principles were continuously given new life and meaning. Discussing the problem of imitating ancient models, Tung Ch'i-ch'ang asserted that "whereas copying is easy, spiritual communion with an old master is difficult to achieve." The fact is that creative activity in the "Orthodox" sense, though stemming from the inner recesses of the human soul, was in no way egotistical; the "Orthodox" painter surrendered himself to his heritage so that he might be born and revealed again as part of its glory.

In the early works by Wang Hui, brush idioms borrowed from revered ancient sources were used to create powerful new forms. The novelty of the form, however, was in itself of no great significance. Since the Tao was considered eternal and unchanging, it followed that skillful execution was prized above new ways of doing things. There was a religious or ritualistic intensity in the early Wang Hui, whose powerful creative impulse was deliberately channeled into a given range of possibilities. In a work such as *Imitating Wu*

Chen's "Summer Mountains," we experience the force of the artist's conviction and his exaltation before his heritage. Such a painting finally transcends the stylistic problems of representation or abstraction, originality or imitation; it becomes a symbol, first, of man's mastery of his cultural heritage, and secondly, of his success in reconciling ancient conventions with living reality. The appreciative colophons of Wang Shih-min and Wang Chien, therefore, used a language that is more esthetic than descriptive. Both older men saw a "primal breath" in Wang Hui's works, and they spoke of "beauty and elegance" and "fullness of strength," "power and vigor" and "style and resonance." These words described not only the paintings, but also the man behind them. The familiar subjects Wang Hui painted thus belonged both to the "Orthodox" heritage and to living individuals. They are not only beautiful, but they are also deeply expressive of the innermost feelings and the esthetic values of the "Orthodox" scholar.

Indeed Wang Hui's success as an "Orthodox" master was so complete that even his failures in later years illustrated the pitfall of the "Orthodox" theory. While expounding the virtue of imitating the ancients, Tung Ch'i-ch'ang warned that true correspondence could only come about through divine metamorphosis. This metamorphosis kept the painter in a constant state of tension and exaltation. When, after Wang Shih-min's death in 1680, Wang Hui became an established master and teacher, his art visibly relaxed. His forms lost their force as he began to teach them as conventions. The later Wang Hui failed, in short, not because he persisted in the strenuous path of imitating the ancients, but rather because he yielded to the temptation of imitating himself.



In Wang Hui's *After Huang Kung-wang's "Dwelling in the Fu-ch'un Mountains"* [see cover], 1673, ink on paper (15 1/8 inches high; Freer Gallery, Washington, D.C.), he imparts the "life-motion" of "Orthodox" theory to a composition based on an old-master model.