

ORCHIDS AND BAMBOO

'Orchids and Bamboo', also known as 'Orchids, Bamboo and Rocks' or 'Bamboo and Orchids', by Tao-chi/Dao-ji (Shi-tao) (1642-1707), with additions by Wang Yüan-ch'i/ Wang Yuan-qi (1642-1715), Ch'ing dynasty; hanging scroll, ink on paper, 134.2 x 57.7 cm; Palace Museum, Taipei (ROC); executed in 1691 when Tao-chi was 61 and Wang Yüan-ch'i 40 years old; see Jonathan Hay, *Shitao; Painting and Modernity in Early Qing China* [Cambridge, 200]), pp. 105-6 and fig. 59. Internet images online at <http://www.mat.uc.pt/~amac/v-shitao.jpg> (rather small), and then further at <http://www.chineseartnet.com/Nigensha/p50.jpg> -- click on image to enlarge (low resolution).

Artists' inscriptions: 'In the midst of captivating wind and dazzling snow, casually connecting the touches (of ink), how could the forms fail to create something clear and enjoyable? So I have completed a winter tree but the flowers of spring can also be discerned; I have also added this calligraphy to draw a smile and a nod. Painted in the second month of 1691 for the old sage, Wen-weng. Ch'ing-hsiang Shih-t'ao-chi tao-jen.' Three seals: K'u-kua ho-shang; Ch'en-tseng Yüan-chi; Shih-t'ao. 'Lu-t'ai added the slopes and rocks.' One seal: Wang Yüan-ch'i. Collectors' seals: Wen-t'ing chien-shang t'u-shu (Po Erh-t'u, active c.1700); Fu-kuo-chiang-chün Po Erh-t'u hao Wen-t'ing chih chang; Ho-k'o-yi-jih-wu-tse chün (unidentified); the Five Seals of Emperor Ch'ien-lung (r. 1736-1796); Emperor Chia-ch'ing yü-lan chih pao (r. 1796-1820); Emperor Hsüan-t'ung yü-lan chih pao (r. 1909-1912).

Tao-chi was a Buddhist monk whose original name was Chu Jo-chi; his *tzu* (monastic name) was Shih-t'ao and he used the sobriquets Ta-ti-tzu, Ch'ing-hsiang ch'en-jen, and Ch'ing-hsiang i-jen. Born in Guilin as Prince of Ching-chiang, grandson of Zhu Shouqian, Prince of Jiangsu, he travelled extensively and lived for periods at Lu-shan (Kiangsi), Hsüan-ch'eng (Anhui), Nanking and Peking. After the fall of the weakened Ming dynasty under assault from the Shensi bandit Li Tzu-ch'eng in April 1644 the Manchus took advantage of the power vacuum and in June of that year entered Peking. Swiftly the Manchu invaders subdued the whole of China, defeating Tao-chi's princely father Chu Heng-chia in 1645 and exacting fierce vengeance against resisting loyalists: Yangchou held out but after a seven-day siege the city was overrun and all its inhabitants massacred. Tao-chi subsequently fled to Wuchang and became a Buddhist monk, perhaps as a means of escape from more trouble; by 1662 he is closely attached to his spiritual master Lü-an, a Ch'an monk of the Lin-chi sect based at Sung-chiang. He befriended and was greatly influenced by Mei Ch'ing (Mei Qing, *tzu* Yüan-kung, *hao* Ch'ü-shan, 1623-97), with whom in c.1670 he made a deeply influential visit to the Huang-shan mountains in Anhui Province; both are referred to as leading figures in the Huang-shan school of painters, so-called because they often painted this sacred mountain.

From 1666 to 1680 he seems to have been mainly in Anhui, living reclusively, until his stay from 1680-87 in Nanking, thereafter in Yangchou by 1689 and by 1690 in Peking, returning to Yangchou in 1692 and thenceforth

residing there permanently (Richard Edwards, 'Tao-chi, The Painter' in Richard Edwards [ed.], *The Painting of Tao-Chi; Catalogue of an Exhibition, August 13 - September 17, 1967 Held at the Museum of Art, University of Michigan* . . . [Ann Arbor, Mich., 1967], pp. 26-7). By 1697, the year in which his special friend Mei Ch'ing died, he had renounced his monastic vows and returned to secular living. In Yangchou where he assisted in the design of landscape gardens he became a close friend of Chu Ta (Zhu Da, *tzu Hsüeh-ke, hao Pa-ta Shan-jen*, 1626-c.1705/6), his distant cousin and also of imperial lineage (see Loehr, *The Great Painters of China*, pp. 299-302), and K'un-ts'an (see Jonathan Spence, 'Tao-chi, An Historical Introduction', in Edwards [ed.], *The Painting of Tao-Chi*, p. 17), both of them painters and older reclusive Ming loyalists (K'un-ts'an eventually rose to the position of Abbott; paintings by both reproduced in *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting* [Cleveland, 1980], pp. 314-5, 318-21). But by the end of the seventeenth century the stability of K'ang-hsi's reign brought more secure and prosperous times for Tao-chi; it was the Emperor's invitation to Peking that took him to the capital where in 1691 he painted the 'Orchid and Bamboo' hanging scroll (Spence, p. 14; Edwards, p. 40).

Tao-chi claimed defiantly that for him there was 'no style' (*wu-fa*), rejecting imitation of traditional habits: 'The method which consists in following no method is the perfect method' (cit. in Oswald Sirén, *The Chinese on the Art of Painting* [New York, 1963], pp. 183, 187; see also Hay, *Shitao*, p. 251); yet there is acknowledgement of Shen Chou (Edwards, pp. 48, 87), and this precursor's influence as a mentor in temperament as well as in stylistic approach to human landscape is constantly evident, even as in his colophon to the 'Mountain Path' page of his 1703 'Album of Twelve Landscape Paintings' (Boston Museum of Fine Arts) he mentions Shen Chou among other masters (including Chao meng-fu) only to resist the connection (Edwards, p. 91). Mei Ch'ing more specifically acknowledged Shen Chou and Chao Meng-fu in the colophons to his album, 'Landscapes after Various Styles of Old Masters' of 1690, although the direct influence of Shen Chou is discernibly slighter than that of Tao-chi (*Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting* [Cleveland, 1980], pp. 307-9).

Tao-chi describes thus his own practice in his *Treatise on Painting (Hua-yü-lu)* of c.1700: 'Heaven has such powers that it can alter the soul of a landscape. The Earth has such authority that it can keep in motion the breath and pulse of a landscape. I myself have this "one single line" upon which I can string the forms and the spirit of a landscape' (Chap. 8; see Victoria Contag, *Chinese Masters of the 17th Century*, trans. M. Bullock [Rutland, Vt and Tokyo, 1967], p. 24). Loehr comments drily of this: 'What Tao-chi in his famous essay *Hua-yü-lu* terms *i-hua*, "one line", "one stroke", "the single stroke", "the one, first line", or "the primordial line", is an enigmatic concept without stylistic connotation and refers to the creative process of painting' (*The Great Painters of China*, p. 302). Jonathan Hay however emphasises the connection with calligraphic brush-writing and its roots in Ch'an Buddhist spiritual discipline; compare his translation of a passage from the same 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.

(Jonathann Hay, *Shitao; Painting and Modernity in Early Qing China*, p. 214.)
Of a piece with this stance is the claim that 'no-method' is the best method:

Painters these days . . . 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 (Hay, *Shitao*, pp. 255-6).

A fuller translation of the disputed passage concerning the single stroke emphasises and brings out what may also be, within the wide scope of Tao-chi's vigorous eclecticism, its connections with esoteric Taoist contemplation practices:

As for the immensity of the landscape, with its land stretched over 1,000 leagues, its clouds which roll over 1,000 leagues, its succession of peaks, its alignment of cliffs, even an Immortal who, in his flight, only glances at it superficially, would not be able to take it all in. But if one makes use of the Unique brushstroke as a yardstick, it becomes possible to participate in the metamorphosis of the universe, to sound out the shape of the hills and the rivers, to measure the distant intensity of the land I am blessed with the Unique brushstroke and that is why I can encompass the form and spirit of the landscape.

And further:

By means of the Unique brushstroke, man can recreate a larger entity in miniature, without losing any of it; from the moment that man creates a clear image of it, the paintbrush will go to the root of things.

(Sandrine Chenivresse, 'A Journey to the Depths of a Labyrinth-Landscape; The Mount Fengdu, Taoist Holy Site and Infernal Abyss', in A.W. Macdonald [ed.], *Mandala and Landscape* [the N and D of Mandala have central-subscript points] [*Emerging Perceptions in Buddhist Studies*, 6; New Delhi, 1997], pp. 51, 60.)

Sherman Lee speaks of Tao Chi's 'dashing and fluent' manner, and observes: 'Few, if any other Chinese painters use the brush more pictorially with relatively little emphasis on precision and accuracy of the stroke. His brush-stroke method, or as he would say, "no-method", is one of non-commitment' (Sherman E. Lee, *Chinese Landscape Painting* [2nd rev. ed., New York, 1962], p. 113); while not equally true of all his various kinds of treatment, this account does present a central feature of his dynamic and unconventional approach (see, e.g., the album-leaf reproduced as pl. 285 in Michael Sullivan, *The Arts of China* [3rd ed., Berkeley, 1984], p. 235) and leaf H of his album 'Reminiscences of Ch'in-huai River' of the late 1690's, *Eight*

Dynasties of Chinese Painting [Cleveland, 1980], p. 322). Many of his scroll-paintings and album leaves carry poems as colophons, in widely differing calligraphy, and again the style is restless and quirky:

Blue-green bamboo, white sand, village on the river;
 evening breeze among the flowers, water lapping the gate.
 As I walk home, the moon is a delicate lady;
 no words can describe the fragrance, the serenity in my tea cup.

('A Trip to the Village of the River of White Sand' [Fu Pao-shih, p. 22]; Jonathan Chaves, ed. and trans., *The Columbia Book of Later Chinese Poetry* [New York, 1986], p. 414; the bright-shining moon may be an indirect allusion to the Ming Dynasty.)

There are many examples of Tao-chi's work in the Shanghai Museum of Art; see also Lee, *Chinese Landscape Painting*, pp. 109-16, 148-9, and further, *A Gift of Heritage; Selection from the Xubaizhai Collection of Chinese Painting and Calligraphy* (2 vols, Hong Kong Museum of Art, Hong Kong, 1992), II, pp. 53-7. Josef Hajzlar describes him as an 'outstanding calligrapher and poet', in his *Chinese Watercolours* (Prague, 1978, repr. London, 1988), p. 21; on his calligraphy see also p. 23. In his late years he adopted the names Hsia-tsun-che and K'u-kua ho-shang. He was strongly attracted to the format of album-painting (see, e.g., Lee, p. 111); his repertoire included landscape, flowers and fruits, orchids and bamboo; in all categories his brushwork is unrestrained and the ink freely flowing; as Loehr again comments, 'with Tao-chi's works we enter a world of esprit, high intelligence and extraordinary inventiveness, yet never far removed from nature' (p. 302). He was much admired by Wang Yüan-ch'i, who considered him to be the greatest master south of the Yangtze, but his close family links with the defunct Ming dynasty explain why his work was scarcely represented in the vast imperial collections of the Manchus; his own constant assertion of separateness from lines of descent and affinity (compare the comment by Edwards concerning the connection with Mi Fu, p. 47) may also have contributed to his somewhat marginal status within the later canon.

The method of production of this 'Orchid and Bamboo' joint study has been reconstructed historically by Jonathan Hay, *Shitao; Painting and Modernity in Early Qing China*, in a manner which may suggest certain reasons for its classical, traditional-generic conception, and indeed (from the evidence of the seals) for its subsequent inclusion in several imperial collections:

In what was evidently an effort to promote him, Bordu [a Manchu grandee] in early 1691 brought his work to the attention of Wang Yuanqi, a highly placed scholar-official artist who worked in a classicizing mode. Bordu first invited Shitao to paint a hanging scroll of bamboo, leaving room for orchids and rocks to be added. The choice of bamboo as a subject was probably judged to appeal to Kangxi's personal interest in this theme. Wang was then invited, probably at a later date, to complete the painting (p. 105; reproduction, fig. 59, p. 106; cf. p. 327).

Yet, whatever the promotional origins of this hanging scroll, it is a noteworthy and highly individual example even within its professional genre. It is

overflowing with natural energy and motion, as if the stems and foliage are vitalised into mobility by the play of breeze and air currents all around and through them. The contrasts between darker and lighter ink-shading, to establish the overlay of foreground against background as the interior dimension of this living plant-form, demonstrate a confidence to dramatise thick clumps of dark leafage rather than to separate the twigs into a more botanising disposition. And yet the terminal leaflets are tweaked into agile postures, nicely tensile and witty, while the relations of the central pliant axes in the vertical to the lateral spread of bushy outgrowth preserve a dynamic balance in the whole composition. The stem-nodes are set in with a neat authority, the whole effect untidy and vivid yet under refined control; not quite classical because choosing to be more turbulent and clumped-together than would be the practiced elegance and repose of a more meticulously professional treatment, deeply conservative in its prevailing ethos. Maybe, indeed, this treatment was too individual for its then place and time.

For the compositional pedigree of this and the many other bamboo genre-paintings of this time, compare also Chu-tsing Li, 'The Development of Painting in Soochow during the Yüan Dynasty', in *Proceedings of the International Symposium on Chinese Painting* (Taibei, 1970): 'The standard bamboo paintings of early Yüan, based on paintings by Chao Meng-fu and Li K'an, were all executed with a centralized composition combining bamboos with rocks. . . . It seems to be the typical characteristic of the literati tradition' (p. 8); there were surely also many symbolic values, direct and oblique, attested by the combination. For other examples by Tao-chi (Shi-tao) in this genre compare 'Lan chu tang-feng', undated hanging scroll, ink on paper, 4 ft high by 1 ft 9 3/4 ins wide ('Bamboo and Orchids in the Wind'), Pao-wu T'ang Collection, New York; and 'Lan chu shi t'u' ('Orchid, Bamboo and Rock'), undated hanging scroll, ink on paper, 2 ft 4½ ins high by 1 ft 1/8 ins wide, Arthur M. Sackler Foundation, also New York; both reproduced in Richard Edwards (ed.), *The Painting of Tao-Chi* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1967), pls XXV and XXVI (pp. 155, 156; 86); also the 'Bamboo and Orchids' (with Wang Hui, 1623-1717), hanging scroll dated 1691, ink on paper, 130 x 56 cm, Zhile Collection, Hong Kong, and 'Plum Blossom, Bamboo, and Rocks', undated (?) hanging scroll, ink on paper, 172.5 x 88.3 cm, Shanghai Museum, both reproduced in Hay, *Shitao*, figs. 60 and 108 (pp. 107, 182).

For the general significance of the bamboo motif see also Cahill, *Hills Beyond a River*, pp. 158-60. Wen Fong gives a full account of the significance for the Yüan renaissance in calligraphy and painting of Chao Meng-fu (Wu-hsing, 1254-1322), who interspersed his outstanding work as a poet with extended imperial service in various high offices. In researching and developing a new calligraphic style based on Wang Hsi-chih (c.303-c.361) he set a pattern for the ensuing fourteenth century, both in writing and also in bamboo painting based essentially on calligraphic techniques and models (Wen C. Fong, *Beyond Representation; Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, 8th-14th Century* [New York, 1992], pp. 421-7, 436-40; see also Cahill, *Hills Beyond a River*, pp. 38-68).

Fong also describes (pp. 389-90) the career of Li K'an (Chi-ch'iu, Hopei, 1245-1320), as combining extended preparation for a career as professional bamboo-painter with intensive botanical researches while on imperial service

in Indochina (Annam) into exotic bamboo species. In his *P'ei-wen-chai shu hua p'u* (Treatise on Bamboo, preface dated 1299) Li wrote:

To paint bamboo one must 'hold the complete bamboo plant in one's heart.' Grasping the brush and carefully surveying the silk, the painter sees what he wants to paint, then quickly moves the brush to catch what he sees. . . . If the heart knows what must be done and the hand fails to realize it, the fault lies with lack of training. . . . If a man knows that bamboo must not be rendered merely section by section and leaf by leaf but denies that the complete bamboo plant in his heart comes only with training, he is like a person who dreams of rising to high places but fails to take the necessary steps.

(cit. in Fong, p. 391, where Li K'an's *'Bamboo and Rocks'* of 1381 is also reproduced; see also *Hills Beyond*, pl. 75.)

Wang Yüan-ch'i/Wang Yuan-qi (*tzu* Mao-ching, *hao* Lu-t'ai) (1642-1715) was a native of T'ai-ts'ang in Kiangsu Province, the grandson of the painter Wang Shih-min (1592-1680). Apparently he did not seriously start on his painting career before he received his *chin-shih* degree in 1670, at the age of 28, thereafter serving as a court painter under K'ang-hsi and as curator of the imperial collection of calligraphy and painting (Loehr, p. 322). As a scholar-painter he professed to be following the Yüan landscape masters but, despite this deference to convention, 'he worked with a single-minded concentration on developing a style of his own' (Loehr, p. 319); Lee also draws out his originality within a traditional context (*Chinese Landscape Painting*, pp. 97-102 and pl. 80).

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