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Introduction

Among painters, those who grasp the cosmos in their hands have nothing but vigor and vitality and thus they usually have long lives, while those who paint carefully and elaborately are enslaved by the Creator and thus their life-spans decrease because of a lack of vigor and vitality. Huang Tzu-chiu [Huang Kung-wang, 1269–1354], Shen Shih-t'ien [Shen Chou, 1427–1509], and Wen Cheng-chung [Wen Cheng-ming, 1470–1559] all had longevity. Ch'iu Ying [1506–1552?] was short-lived. Chao Wu-hsing [Chao Meng-fu, 1254–1322] only lived sixty odd years. Both Ch'iu and Chao, though the quality and style of their works are different, are among the professionals, who do not place their ideas in painting or take pleasure from it. The practice of maintaining pleasure in the process of painting might have been established by Huang Kung-wang.¹

Huang Ta-ch'ih [Kung-wang] looked like a child in his nineties, and Mi Yu-jen's [1074–1153] mind did not fail in his eighty years. Both of them died of no illness. That might have been nourished by the landscape.²

By learning painting, people can cultivate a gentle disposition, cleanse the vexed temper, break the eccentric mood, release the restless drive, and admit the calm marrow. People in the past said that landscapists had long lives because they were fostered by vapor and cloud and there was nothing but vigor and vitality before their eyes. Since most of the great landscapists from ancient times down to today have enjoyed long lives, this might be true.³

畫之道所謂宇宙在乎手者，眼前無非生機，故其人往往多壽。至如刻畫細謹，為造物役者，乃能損壽，蓋無生機也。黃子久，沈石田，文徵仲，皆大耋。仇英短命，趙吳興止六十餘。仇與趙雖品格雖不同，皆習者之流，非以畫為寄，以畫為樂者也。寄樂於畫者，自黃公望始開此門庭耳。

黃大癡九十而貌如童顏，米友仁八十餘神明不衰，無疾而逝。蓋畫中煙雲供養也。

學畫所以養性情，且可滌煩襟，破孤悶，釋躁心，迎靜氣。昔人謂山水家多壽，蓋煙雲供養，眼前無非生機，古來各家享大耋者居多，良有以也。

Chinese critics are certainly aware of the importance of the difference between the early and late work of an artist, even though the dividing line is not always clear-cut. For instance, Huang T'ing-chien (1045–1105) writes about the calligraphy of Su Shih or Su Tung-p'ò (1037–1101):

[As I have said often said, in his calligraphy,] the *ch'i* from his learning and literary talent is so dense and lush that it emanates from his brush and ink, which is why others cannot achieve it...

The late-style calligraphy by Mr. Tung-p'ò is especially monumental and strong. That is because he obtained the *ch'i* of the wind-blown crests of the sea. This especially cannot be achieved by others.⁴

余謂東坡書，學問文章之氣，鬱鬱芊芊，發於筆墨之間，此所以他人終莫能及爾...

東坡先生晚年書豪壯，挾海上風濤之氣，尤非他人所能到也。

Huang T'ing-chien's comments on Su Tung-p'ò's art of calligraphy were based on intimate knowledge and first-hand experience of works of art such as the short handscroll "Cold Food Festival Rain, Two Poems," 寒食雨二首, now in the National Palace Museum in Taipei (Figs. 0.1–0.2). The scroll is not dated. Although the poems were composed by Su Tung-p'ò around 1083, the scroll itself might well have been created somewhat later, around 1086–1093, on the basis of stylistic comparison with other extant calligraphic works by Su Tung-p'ò.⁵ In any case, it is an excellent example of the artist's late work.

The first poem, columns 1–7 in the scroll, reads:

From the time I arrived at Huang-chou,
Already three Cold Food Festivals have passed.
Year after year I wish to cherish spring,

But spring passes—not able to cherish.
 This year more bitter rain:
 Two months of autumn-like dreariness.
 Reclining, I listen to the cherry-apple blossoms,
 Mud defiling the rouged snow.
 In the dark [the rain] steals them away;
 At midnight it is truly strong.
 How is [this tree] different from a sickly youth,
 Who rises from his illness with a head of white hair?

自我來黃州
 已過三寒食
 年年欲惜春
 春去不容惜
 今年又苦雨
 兩月秋蕭瑟
 臥聞海棠花
 泥汙燕支雪
 閨中偷負去
 夜半真有力
 何殊病少年
 病起鬚已白

The second poem, columns 8–16 in the scroll, reads:

The spring river is about to enter the window;
 The rain's force comes without cease.
 A small hut like a fishing boat,
 In an empty kitchen I boil cold vegetables;
 In the broken stove I burn damp weeds.
 How do I know it is the Cold Food Festival?
 Crows are seen carrying paper money in their beaks.
 My lord's gates are nine layers deep;
 The family tombs are ten-thousand *li* away.
 Will I too weep that the road is at an end?
 Dead ashes, blown, will not reignite.⁶

雨勢來不已
 小屋如漁舟
 濛濛水雲裏

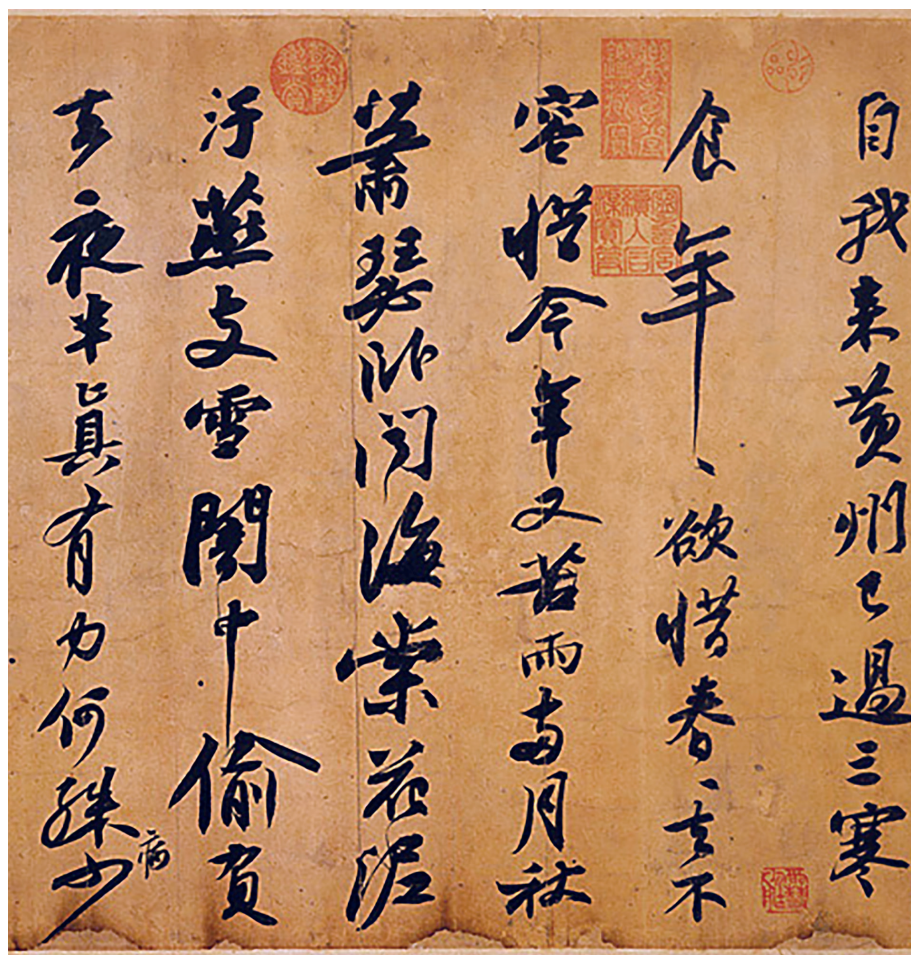


Fig. 0.1 Su Tung-p'o, "Cold Food Festival Rain, Two Poems," ca. 1086–1093. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig. 0.2 Su Tung-p'o, "Cold Food Festival Rain, Two Poems," ca. 1086–1093. Detail. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

空庖煮寒菜
 破竈燒溼葦
 那知是寒食
 但見烏銜紙
 君門深九重
 墳墓在萬里
 也擬哭塗窮
 死灰吹不起

The exuberant and spontaneous style in the “Cold Food Festival Poems” can be compared with Su Shih’s earlier work “Red Cliff Prose-Poem,” written in 1083 and now in the National Palace Museum. (Figs. 0.3–0.8). This prose-poem has remained one of the key monuments in Chinese culture because it embodies a profound understanding of the human condition. It has been quoted and transcribed ever since it was written and is worth reproducing in its entirety.⁷

It was the autumn of 1082, the night after the full moon in September, when I, Su Shih, together with some companions, let our boat drift, and we were carried beneath Red Cliff. A cool breeze came gently along, but it raised no waves in the water. I lifted my wine and toasted my companions, reciting the piece from the *Classic of Poetry* on the bright moon and singing the stanza on the woman’s grace:

The moon comes forth, glowing bright,
 comely woman, full of light,
 Her motions slow, of gentle grace—
 heart’s torment, heart’s pain.

After a while the moon did indeed come forth over the mountains to the east and hung there in between the Dipper and constellation of the Ox. A silver dew stretched across the river until the light on the water reached off to the very sky. We let this tiny boat, like a single reed, go where it would; and it made its way across thousands of acres of bewildering radiance. We were swept along in a powerful surge, as if riding the winds through empty air. And not knowing where we would come to rest, we were whirled on as if we stood utterly apart and had left the world far behind, growing wings and rising up to join those immortal beings.

By then I had been drinking to the point of sheer delight. I tapped out a rhythm on the side of the boat and sang about it. The song went:

Oars made of cassia, magnolia sweeps,
beat formless brightness, glide through flowing light,
far off and faint, she for whom I care,
I am gazing toward a lady fair there at the edge of sky.

One of my companions played the flute, accompanying me as I sang. The notes were resonant and low, as if expressing some deep wound, as if yearning, as if sobbing, as if declaring some discontent. The afterechoes trailed away, attenuating like a thread but not breaking off. Such notes made the dragons dance as they lay sunken in their dark lairs, and caused women who had lost their husbands to weep in their lonely boats.

I too grew melancholy. I straightened my clothes and sat upright. And I asked my companion, "Why did you play it like that?" My companion answered:

"The moon is bright, the stars are few, and magpies come flying south.' Isn't that Ts'ao Ts'ao's poem? Here facing Hsia-k'ou to the west and Wu-ch'ang to the east, where the mountains and the river wind around each other with the dense green of the forests—isn't this the place where Ts'ao Ts'ao was set upon by young Chou Yu? Once Ts'ao Ts'ao had smashed Ching-chou, he came down to Chiang-ling, going east with the current. The prows and sterns of his galleys stretched a thousand leagues, his flags and banners blotted out the very sky; he poured himself some wine and stood over the river, hefted his spear and composed that poem—he was indeed the boldest spirit of that whole age, and yet where is he now? Consider yourself and I by comparison, fisherman and woodsman on the great river and its islands, consorting with fish and friends of the deer. We go riding a boat as small as a leaf and raise goblets of wine to toast one another. We are but mayflies lodging between Heaven and Earth, single grains adrift, far out on the dark blue sea. We grieve that our lives last only a moment, and we covet the endlessness of the great river. We would throw an arm around those immortal beings in their flight and go off to roam with them; we would embrace the bright moonlight and have it done with forever. And since I knew that I could not

have these things immediately, I gave the lingering echoes of that desire a place in my sad melody.”

I replied, “And do you, my friend, indeed understand the water and the moonlight? As Confucius said as he stood by the river, ‘It passes on just like this,’ and yet it has never gone away. There is in all things a fullness and a waning to nothing, just as with that other thing, the moon; and yet it has never increased and never vanished altogether. If you think of it from the point of view of changing, then Heaven and Earth have never been able to stay as they are even for the blink of an eye. But if you think of it from the point of view of not changing, then neither the self nor other things ever come to an end. So then what is there to covet? Between Heaven and Earth each thing has its own master. If something is not mine, then I cannot take it as mine, even if it is only a hair. There is only the cool breeze along with the bright moon among the mountains. The ears catch one of these and it is sound; the eyes encounter the other, and it forms colors. Nothing prevents us from taking these as our

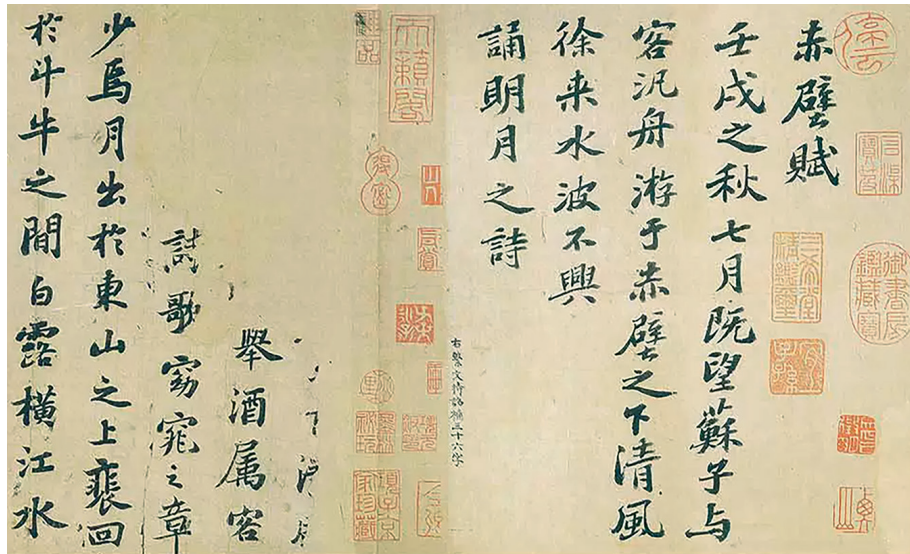


Fig. 0.3 Su Tung-p'o, "Red Cliff Prose-Poem," 1083. Detail. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

光接天縱一葦之所如陸
萬頃之茫然浩乎如憑虛
沛風而不知其所止飄乎
如遺世獨立羽化而登僊
於是飲酒樂甚扣舷而
歌之歌曰桂棹兮蘭漿
擊空明兮泝流光渺兮
余懷望美人兮天一方客有
吹洞簫者倚歌而和之其
聲嗚々然如怨如慕如
泣如訴餘音嫋々不絕如
縷舞幽壑之潛蛟泣孤
舟之嫠婦蘇子愀然正
襟危坐而問客曰何為其

然也客曰月明星稀烏鵲
南飛此非曹孟德之詩乎
西望夏口東望武昌山川
相繆鬱乎蒼々此非孟德
之困於周郎者乎方其破
荊州下江陵順流而東也
舳艫千里旌旗蔽空釃
酒臨江橫槊賦詩固一世
之雄也而今安在哉況吾與
子漁樵於江渚之上侶魚
蝦而友麋鹿駕一葉之扁
舟舉匏樽以相屬寄蜉
蝣於天地渺浮海之一粟
哀吾生之須臾羨長江之

Fig. 0.4 Su Tung-p'o, "Red Cliff Prose-Poem," 1083. Detail. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig. 0.5 Su Tung-p'o, "Red Cliff Prose-Poem," 1083. Detail. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

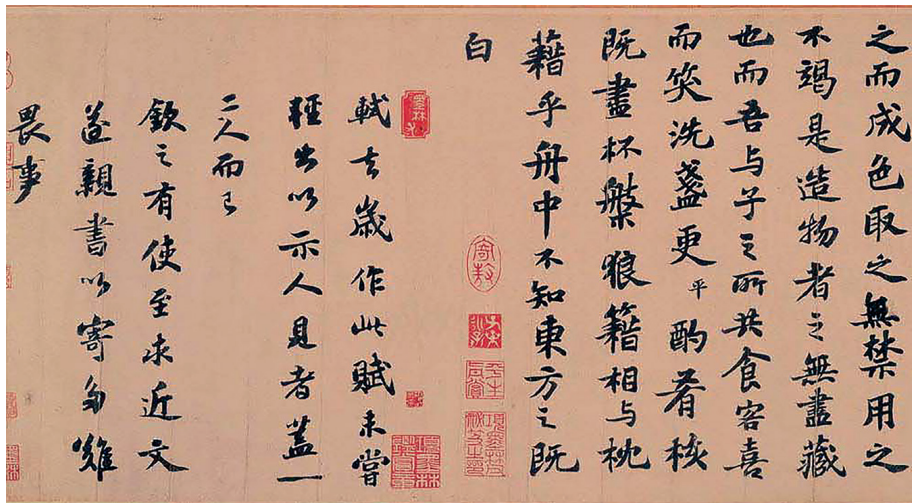
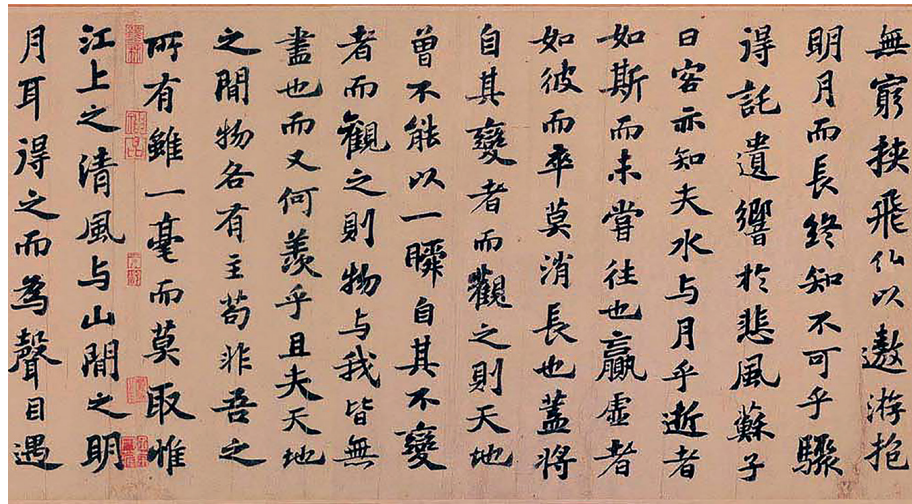


Fig. 0.6 Su Tung-p'o, "Red Cliff Prose-Poem," 1083. Detail. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig. 0.7 Su Tung-p'o, "Red Cliff Prose-Poem," 1083. Detail. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

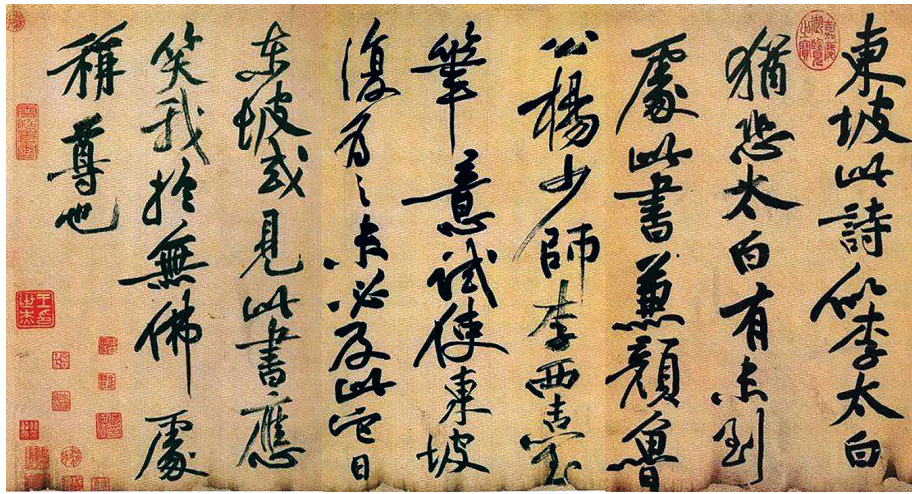


own. We can do whatever we want with them and they will never be used up. This is the inexhaustible treasure trove of the Fashioner-of-Things, and it serves the needs of both you and I alike."

My companion laughed in amusement, and washing out his cup, he poured himself another. The snacks and fruits had been finished, with plates and cups scattered all around. We all leaned against one another in that boat, unaware that the east was brightening with day.

壬戌之秋，七月既望，蘇子與客泛舟遊於赤壁之下。
清風徐來，水波不興，舉酒屬客，誦明月之詩，歌窈窕之章。
少焉，月出於東山之上，徘徊於斗牛之間，白露橫江，水光接天；
縱一葦之所如，凌萬頃之茫然。浩浩乎如憑虛御風，而不知其所止；
飄飄乎如遺世獨立，羽化而登仙。
於是飲酒樂甚，扣舷而歌之。歌曰：「桂棹兮蘭槳，擊空明兮泝流光。渺渺兮予懷，望美人兮天一方。」
客有吹洞簫者，倚歌而和之，其聲嗚嗚然，如怨、如慕、如泣、如訴，餘音嫋嫋，不絕如縷。舞幽壑之潛蛟，泣孤舟之嫠婦。
蘇子愀然，正襟危坐，而問客曰：「何為其然也？」
客曰：「『月明星稀，烏鵲南飛』此非曹孟德之詩乎？西望夏口，東望武昌，山川相繆，鬱乎蒼蒼，此非孟德之困於周郎者乎？」

Fig. 0.8 Su Tung-p'o, "Red Cliff Prose-Poem," 1083. Detail. National Palace Museum, Taipei.



方其破荊州，下江陵，順流而東也，舳艫千里，旌旗蔽空，醞酒臨江，橫槊賦詩，固一世之雄也，而今安在哉？

沉吾與子，漁樵於江渚之上，侶魚蝦而友麋鹿；駕一葉之扁舟，舉匏樽以相屬。

寄蜉蝣於天地，渺滄海之一粟。哀吾生之須臾，羨長江之無窮。

挾飛仙以遨遊，抱明月而長終。知不可乎驟得，託遺響於悲風。」

蘇子曰：「客亦知夫水與月乎？逝者如斯，而未嘗往也；盈虛者如彼，而卒莫消長也，

蓋將自其變者而觀之，則天地曾不能以一瞬；

自其不變者而觀之，則物與我皆無盡也，而又何羨乎？

且夫天地之間，物各有主，苟非吾之所有，雖一毫而莫取。

惟江上之清風，與山間之明月，耳得之而為聲，目遇之而成色，取之無禁，用之不竭，是造物者之無盡藏也，而吾與子之所共適。」

惟江上之清風，與山間之明月，耳得之而為聲，目遇之而成色，取之無禁，用之不竭，是造物者之無盡藏也，而吾與子之所共適。」

客喜而笑，洗盞更酌。肴核既盡，杯盤狼藉，相與枕藉乎舟中，不知東方之既白。

Huang T'ing-chien's colophon, written in 1101, shortly after the death of Su Tung-p'o, is an excellent example of Huang's late style. (Fig. 0.9) Huang T'ing-chien spent the last decade (1094–1105) of his life

Fig. 0.9 Huang T'ing-chien, colophon following Su Tung-p'o, "Cold Food Festival, Two Poems," 1101. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

in exile at various places. In the colophon, he comments on the stylistic affinities of Su Tung-p'o's poetry and calligraphy with the great masters from the past and ends with a lament on the passing of Su Tung-p'o and a proud assessment of his own artistic achievements.

Another late work by Huang T'ing-chien written in the free-flowing yet architectonic running script (*hsing-shu*), "Poem on the Pine Wind Pavilion" (*Sung-feng-ko shih*), dated 1102, clearly shows the artist at the height of his artistic achievements. As Lothar Ledderose has described it most vividly:

Of special significance are the inner spaces, that is, the blank areas between and around the strokes of a character. The shape of these inner spaces is a major criterion for quality in every piece of writing, and Huang T'ing-chien is one of its greatest masters. In the character *pu* ㄅ in the *hsing-shu* scroll (the fourth character in the eighth line), for example, the spaces between the four strokes are the result of deliberate and skillful shaping. They are a vital part of the structure of the character, commanding equal attention with the strokes themselves.... The strokes in the *hsing-shu* piece do not conform to standard rules: for instance, the horizontal strokes, thinned out in the middle and with wiggling contours, would not earn high marks for a normal practitioner.⁸

In 1204, at the age of eighty, the aging poet Lu Yu wrote "My Poems" (*Chih-shu shih* 自書詩), mounted as a long handscroll, now in the Liao-ning Provincial Museum (Fig. 0.11). It is clearly an emulation of the great Northern Sung master Mi Fu (1052–1107). About the scroll, Marilyn Wong-Gleysteen has written eloquently: "An exuberant celebration, it starts with a bold opening character and proceeds with an ever-changing variety of brushwork, small and finer alternating with plump and full, punctuated by sudden bursts of energy.... Wet ink follows dry in natural succession, and large and small characters succeed each other in complexity of stroke and an internal pulse. All is in keeping with Mi Fu's numerous injunctions about calligraphic method...."⁹ This late work also demonstrates Lu Yu's understanding the style of the great master Mi Fu, who in turn had been inspired by Wang Hsi-chih and other masters of the classical tradition in China.

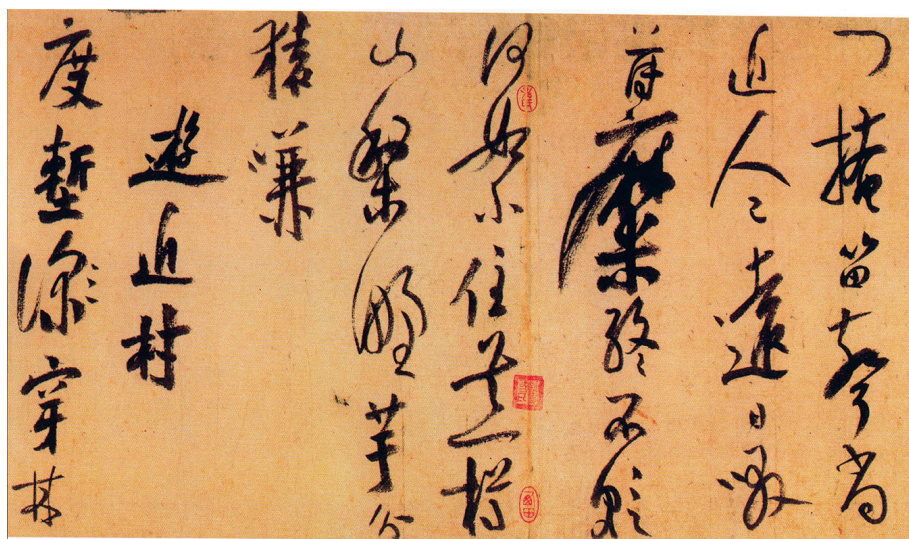
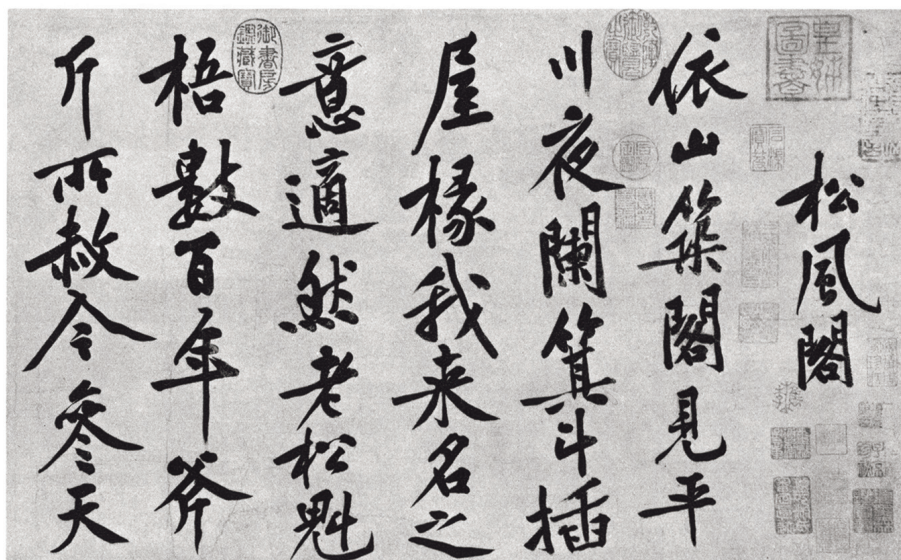


Fig. 0.10 Huang Ting-chien, "Poem on the Pine Wind Pavilion," 1102. Detail. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig. 0.11 Lu Yu, "My Poems," 1204. Detail. Liao-ning Provincial Museum.

In Chinese culture, old age is often thought of as a period of calmness and acceptance. In a passage in the Confucian classics *Analects* (*Lun-yü* 论语):

The Master [Confucius] said, "At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning. At thirty, I stood firm. At forty, I had no doubts. At fifty, I knew the decrees of Heaven. At sixty, my ear was an obedient organ for the reception of truth. At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired, without transgressing what was right."¹⁰

子曰：「吾十有五而志于學，三十而立，四十而不惑，五十而知天命，六十而耳順，七十而從心所欲，不踰矩。」

Confucius's comments represent one of the most common conceptions on the stages of life in general and old age in particular. Later writers often referred to this saying of Confucius when they commented on style and the aging artist. For example, in *Shu-p'u* 書譜 by Sun Kuo'ing, we find the following lengthy discussion:

Interested people used to come to me for instruction. I gave them a rough overview and taught them in that way. The mind of each student was alert and the hand complied; words were forgotten as the purpose was achieved. Although they did not completely master the art, they reached their goal.

For understanding basic ideas and principles, young people are inferior to the old. For grasping ideas, the old are outstanding; for practicing technique, the young are better able to exert themselves. When students exert themselves without stopping, they pass through three stages. Each stage changes to the next as its potential is exhausted. When you first learn to structure your writing, seek only the level and straight. At the first stage, you have not arrived yet. At the middle stage you have gone too far. *At the stage of comprehensive mastery, the person and the calligraphy will be ripe and mature.*

Confucius said: "At fifty I knew Heaven's will; at seventy I followed my heart." Thus, when one understands what is level and what is precipitous, then one comprehends the rationale of change; when one first plans and then moves, the movements do not lose their proper place; and when one speaks only at

the right time, the words hit the mark. That is why Wang Hsi-chih's calligraphy was so marvelous in his late years: because his thoughts were penetrating, because his disposition was tranquil, not extreme or fierce, and because his personality was controlled and far-reaching. From Wang Hsien-chih on, calligraphers have strained too hard and used affectations to form a personal style. Not only have their efforts been inadequate but their spiritual content has fallen short.¹¹

嘗有好事，就吾求習，吾乃粗舉綱要，隨而授之，無不心悟手從，言忘意得，縱未窮於眾術，斷可極於所詣矣。若思通楷則，少不如老；學成規矩，老不如少。思則老而愈妙，學乃少而可勉。勉之不已，抑有三時；時然一變，極其分矣。至如初學分布，但求平正；既知平正，務追險絕，既能險絕，復歸平正。初謂未及，中則過之，後乃通會，通會之際，人書俱老。仲尼云：「五十知命」、「七十從心。」故以達夷險之情，體權變之道，亦猶謀而後動，動不失宜；時然後言，言必中理矣。是以右軍之書，末年多妙，當緣思慮通審，志氣和平，不激不歷，而風規自遠。子敬已下，莫不鼓努為力，標置成體，豈獨工用不侔，亦乃神情懸隔者也。

Sun Kuo-t'ing clearly suggested a common conception about a relationship between aging and style and declared the ultimate goal of artists toward the end of their life.

The respect for the old and the aging (*lao* 老) in the social arena in Chinese culture was often carried over into the cultural and aesthetic realms. As the modern critic Lin Yutang points out in his "Chinese Critical Vocabulary," many positive qualities in art can be traced to old age. He explicates his critical vocabulary item no. 76 as follows:

老 *Lao* (*mai* [邁]): old, mature, experienced, *Laolien* [老練] means "to be experienced." A mature style is said to be *laotao* [老到] ("old and having arrived"), and what seems ancient and precious is said to be *kulao* [古老]. There is a fascination about what is old, expressed by the phrase *ts'anglao* [蒼老], as speaking of a big old tree.

And no. 75 is closely related:

古 *Ku*, ancient, antique, of ancient times, of ancient manner, mature. Almost anything which is *ku* is good in China. An old, rugged pine tree or a simple, kind old peasant is said to have the "manner of the ancients" (*kuyi* [古意]). The notion "ancient"

is also associated with “simplicity” (*kup’u* [古樸]), with “elegance” (*kuya* [古雅]), and with “eccentricity” (*kukuai* [古怪]).

Lin further notes in no. 77:

枯 *Ku*, dried-up, beautifully desolate or desolately beautiful, associated with the idea of *ku* 古.¹²

Old age was also often associated with wisdom. It is significant to note that the purported author of *Tao-te-ching* 道德經, one of the major Taoist classics, is said to be Lao-tsu 老子, literally “the Old Master.” Indeed, in the *Pi-fa-chi* 筆法記 (*The Brush Method*) by Ching Hao 荆浩 (ca. 920), one of the most important early texts on Chinese landscape painting, the author presumably simply wrote down the conversation between himself and an old artist he met in the mountains:

Among the T'ai-hang Mountains, there is a valley called Hung-ku where I cultivated half an acre or so of field and sustained myself. One day I climbed to Shen-ch'eng Ridge to have a view of all four directions. [On the way back], following a winding path, I happened to enter a huge doorway leading to a rock cave. Inside there was a moss-grown path dripping with water, and along it were strange stones enveloped in a mysterious vapor. I went along the path quickly and found an area covered solely with old pine trees. One of the trees had grown to occupy a huge area by itself. Its aged bark was covered with green lichen. It looked as if it were a flying dragon riding the sky, or as if it were a coiling dragon aiming at reaching the Milky Way. The trees that formed a grove looked fresh in spirit and were flourishing in their mutual sustenance. Those which could not form a group crouched by themselves as if to keep their own creeds within themselves. Some trees exposed their winding roots out of the ground; the cliffs and still others crouched in the middle of the ravine. Some grew tearing mosses and cracking rocks. I marveled at this curious sight and walked around admiring the scenery.

From the next day onward I brought my brush to this place and sketched the trees. After I had sketched some ten thousand trees my drawings came to look like the real trees. In the following spring I went to the Stone-Drum Cave (Shih-ku-yen 石鼓巖) and met an old man. Answering his questions, I explained in detail what I had experienced. Then he asked, “Do you know

the art of the brush?" To this I replied, "Your appearance is that of an old rustic. How can you know the art of the brush?" The old man retorted, "But how can you know what I hold inside?" Hearing this, I was both ashamed and surprised.

The old man said, "If you, young man, like to study, you can accomplish it in the end. Now there are Six Essentials in painting. The first is called 'Spirit (*ch'i* 氣).' The second is called 'Resonance (*yün* 韻).' The third is called: 'Thought (*ssu* 思).' The fourth is called 'Scene (*ching* 景).' The fifth is called 'Brush (*pi* 筆).' And the sixth is called 'Ink (*mo* 墨).'"

I said, "Painting [*hua* 畫] is equivalent to a flowering [outward appearance, *hua*]. That is to say, one obtains reality when one devotes oneself to attaining lifelikeness. How could this [simple truth] be distorted?" The old man answered, "Not so. Painting is equivalent to measuring (*hua* 畫). One examines the objects and grasps their reality (*chen* 真). He must grasp the outward appearance from the outward appearance of the object. He must not take the outward appearance and call it the inner reality. If you do not know this method [of understanding truth], you may even get lifelikeness but never achieve reality in painting." I questioned, "What do you call lifelikeness and what do you call reality?" The old man answered, "Lifelikeness means to achieve the form of the object but to leave out its spirit. Reality means that both spirit and substance are strong. Furthermore, if spirit is conveyed only through the outward appearance and not through the image in its totality, the image is dead."

I thanked him and said, "Now I understand that calligraphy and painting are to be learned only by the wise. I am only a farmer and have no qualification for learning these. Although I enjoy myself playing with the brush, I could not achieve anything in the end. I am ashamed to say this, but I am sure that I would not be able to paint the right way even if I should have the luck of receiving your kind teaching of the Essentials." The old man said, "Limitless desire is a threat to life. This is why wise people thoroughly enjoy playing the *ch'in* lute, calligraphy, and painting. They replace worthless desires with those [worthy ones]. Since you have already familiarized yourself with a good thing [like painting], you should make up your mind to study it from the beginning to the end. Never hesitate in the middle of the way.

“Since you like to paint clouds and trees, mountains and streams, you must understand clearly the fundamentals of every natural object. When a tree grows, it glows the true nature which it received from heaven. The true nature of a pine tree is as follows—it may grow curved; but never appear deformed and crooked. It looks sometimes dense and sometimes sparse, and neither blue nor green. Even as a tiny sapling it stands upright and aims to grow high, thus already showing its posture of independence and nobility. Even when its branches grow low, sideways or downwards, it never falls to the ground.

“In the forest, the horizontal layers of its branches appear to be piled one upon the other. Thus [appearing as a breeze blowing gently over the swaying grasses], they are like the breeze of the virtuous [which passes over the bowed heads of the humbly respectful]. Sometimes a pine tree is painted as a flying or coiling dragon, with its branches and leaves growing in maddening disarray. It does not represent the spirit resonance of pine trees.

“The cypress tree has the following true nature—it grows full of movement and has many turnings. It is luxuriant but not showy. Its trunk has many knots and is clearly sectioned. Its twisting patterns grow so as to follow the movement of the sun. Its leaves are [rugged] like knotted threads and its branches are [angular] like hemp clothes [on the body]. Sometimes the tree is painted with its leaves [smooth] like snakes and its branches [supple] like silk clothes. Or at times it is drawn with its inside hollow and its twisted patterns inverted. Those are all wrong.

“Each species of tree, such as catalpas, paulownias, camellias, oaks, elms, willows, mulberries, and pagoda-trees, differs from the other in its form and character. These matters are so obvious that [as in the popular saying] even thinkers far from each other come to the same conclusion. Each one may be clarified by yourself....

“Now, I have given you all the necessary instructions, although I still feel that I have not been thorough enough in explaining details.”

After some hesitation I brought out and presented to him the sketches which I had drawn of the extraordinary pine trees. The old man said, “The flesh of the brushwork does not conform to the basic rules, and the muscle and bone are not well applied. How can this deficient handling of brush serve to paint

such extraordinary pine trees? I have now taught you the art of the brush....”

Saying this, he brought out a few scrolls of silk and let me paint on them. Then he said, “Your hand moves now just as my mind wishes. It has been said that one must examine people’s words, besides knowing what they do. Would you compose a poem for me?”

I thanked him and said, “Now I realize that ‘teaching is a job for the virtuous and wise, who will not resign from the job even if they are not paid; and the deeds of those who are taught are nothing but what they perceive and respond to in the teaching.’ Since you invite me to try, I will obey you and compose a poem.”

Thus, I composed the following “Eulogy to an Old Pine Tree (古松讚)”:

Not withered, but not embellished,
 Is only the chaste pine.
 His force is high and steep,
 Yet he is humble and polite.
 The leaves spread open a green umbrella,
 And the branches coil a red dragon.
 He holds vines in the lower part
 And growing grasses under his dark shadow.
 How did he get his life
 With his force nearing the peak of the clouds?
 In a view up the lofty trunk,
 The piled layers of leaves are a thousand folds.
 As he towers in the middle of a ravine,
 His green contours are enveloped by the mist.
 The branches growing downward
 Wander freely, and
 When they come to meet the vulgar water below,
 They are friendly, without being equalized.
 What the ancient poems praised in him
 Was his noble air of the superior man.
 The breeze is pure and keeps blowing;
 Its faint sound is crystallized in the sky.

The old man was very much impressed, and after a while he said, "I wish you could see working hard. Only when you reach the state of forgetting the technical matters of brush and ink, do you achieve the real landscape painting... My place of living is within the Stone-Drum Cave and my style name is Shih-ku yentzu 石鼓巖子 (The Master of the Stone-Drum Cave)." I asked him, "Please let me follow and serve you." He answered, "You need not." Finally, after expressing my gratitude and saying farewell to him, I left.

Some days later I visited his place and found no traces of him. I have since studied his teaching of the brush. Now I have put together and edited what I received from him and have been treasuring, in order to present it as the standard rules of painting for later generations.¹³

Old age is also often associated with many frustrations in life, including failures in career, exiles, losses of loved ones and good friends, and physical disabilities. One of the most famous Chinese poems on the aging artist is Tu Fu's 杜甫 (712–770) long poem written in 764 and dedicated to the painter Ts'ao Pa:

The General is a descendant of Emperor Wu of Wei,
 But now his family have become commoners and are poor.
 Though the heroic conquests are a thing of the past,
 The artistic spirit is still preserved.
 In his study of calligraphy he first followed Madam Wei;
 His only regret is not to have surpassed Right General Wang.
 While painting, he "does not realize old age is coming on."
 "Riches and honors are to me like floating clouds."
 During K'ai-Yüan he was constantly received by the Emperor,
 And by his favor often entered the Southern Fragrance Hall.
 To the faded features of the statesmen in the Mist-Soaring Pavilion,
 The General's brush brought living faces.
 On the heads of noble ministers were "Promoted Worthy" hats;
 At the waists of fierce Generals, great-feathered arrows.
 The hair of the Dukes of Pao and O bristle;
 Their heroic aspect was alive with love of battle.
 The former Emperor's "heavenly horse," Jade-flower Dapple,
 Whom a host of painters had differently depicted
 That day was led beneath the Vermilion Terrace;

Rearing before the Palace Gate, he raised a great wind.
 The General was ordered to spread white silk;
 He earnestly devoted his skill to the planning.
 In an instant a true imperial "dragon" appeared;
 At one stroke all horses of all ages were made of no account.
 Jade-flower is there above the Emperor's throne!
 Above the throne and in the courtyard—a towering likeness!
 His Majesty smiled and pressed gold upon him;
 The stud keepers and the Master of the Horse all sighed.
 His pupil Han Kan had early mastered his skill;
 He too could paint remarkable likeness of horses,
 Kan only painted the flesh and did not paint the bone;
 He did not mind if the courser's spirit was lost.
 The General's skill in painting is truly inspired;
 He will paint the portrait too of any excellent man he meets.
 Now when his is a wanderer in time of war,
 He often paints ordinary travelers.
 In his straits he has come to suffer the contempt of the vulgar,
 For in the world no one is as poor as he.
 Only let him consider that from of old famous men,
 All their lives, were disappointed and constrained.¹⁴

丹青引贈曹霸將軍

將軍魏武之子孫，
 於今為庶為青門；
 英雄割據雖已矣！
 文采風流今尚存。
 學書初學衛夫人，
 但恨無過王右軍。
 丹青不知老將至，
 富貴於我如浮雲。
 開元之中常引見，
 承恩數上南熏殿，
 凌煙功臣少顏色，
 將軍下筆開生面。
 良相頭上進賢冠，
 猛將腰間大羽箭。
 褒公鄂公毛髮動，
 英姿颯爽猶酣戰。
 先帝天馬玉花驄，
 畫工如山貌不同。
 是日牽來赤墀下，

迴立闔闔生長風。
 詔謂將軍拂絹素，
 意匠慘淡經營中；
 斯須九重真龍出，
 一洗萬古凡馬空。
 玉花卻在御榻上，
 榻上庭前屹相向；
 至尊含笑催賜金，
 圉人太僕皆惆悵，
 弟子韓幹早入室，
 亦能畫馬窮殊相；
 幹惟畫肉不畫骨，
 忍使驂驪氣凋喪。
 將軍畫善蓋有神，
 偶逢佳士亦寫真；
 即今漂泊干戈際，
 屢貌尋常行路人。
 塗窮反遭俗眼白，
 世上未有如公貧；
 但看古來盛名下，
 終日坎壈纏其身。

In the poem, Tu Fu traces Ts'ao Pa's artistic lineage and supreme achievements, but ends with a lamentation on the old painter. Though the poem focuses on Ts'ao Pa, the reader is ready to see Tu Fu himself in the poem as well: "Only let him consider that from of old famous men, / All their lives, were disappointed and constrained."

The series of eight poems "Autumn Meditation," in which the poet meditates on himself as an old man and his country on the verge of collapsing, exemplifies Tu Fu's late work. It has been almost universally recognized for its complexity of imagery as well as its stylistic innovation.

I
 Gems of dew wilt and wound the maple trees in the wood:
 From Wu mountains, from Wu gorges, the air blows desolate;
 The waves between the river banks merge in the seething sky,
 Clouds in the wind above the passes touch their shadows on
 the ground.
 Clustered chrysanthemums have *twice opened tears* of other
 days:

The forlorn boat, once and for all, tethers my homeward thoughts.
 In the houses quilted clothes speed scissors and ruler.
 The washing blocks pound, faster each evening in Pai Ti high on the hill.

2

On the solitary walls of K'uei-chou the sunset rays slant,
 Each night guided by the Dipper I gaze towards the capital.
 It is true then that tears start when we hear the gibbon cry thrice:
 Useless my mission adrift on the raft which came by this eighth month.
 Fumes of the censers by the pictures in the ministry elude my sickbed pillow,
 The whitewashed parapets of turrets against the hills dull the mournful bugles.
 Look! On the wall, the moon in the ivy
 Already, by the shores of the isle, lights the blossom on the reeds.

3

A thousand houses rimmed by the mountains are quiet in the morning light,
 Day after day in the house by the river I sit in the blue of the hills.
 Two nights gone the fisher-boats *still* come bobbing on the waves,
In the cool autumn swallows wilfully flit to and fro.
 ...A disdained K'uang Heng, as a critic of policy:
 As a promoter of learning, a Liu Hsiang who failed.
 Of the school-friends of my childhood, most did well.
 By the Five Tombs in light cloaks they ride their sleek horses.

4

Well said Ch'ang-an looks like a chess-board:
 A hundred years of the saddest news.
 The mansions of princes and nobles all have new lords:
 Another breed is capped and robed for office.
 Due north on the mountain passes the gongs and drums shake,
 To the chariots and horses campaigning in the west the winged dispatches hasten.

While the fish and the dragons fall asleep and the autumn river
 turns cold
 My native country, untroubled times, are always in my thoughts.

5

The gate of P'eng-lai Palace faces the South Mountain:
 Dew collects on the bronze stems out of the Misty River.
 See in the west on Jasper Lake the Queen Mother descend:
 Approaching from the east the purple haze fills the Han-ku
 pass.
 The clouds roll back, the pheasant-tail screens open before the
 throne:
 Scales ringed by the sun on dragon robes! I have seen *His*
Majesty's face.
 I lay down once by the long river, wake left behind by the years,
 Who so many times answered the roll of court by the blue
 chain-patterned door.

6

From the mouth of Ch'u-t'ang gorges here, to the side of Crook-
 ed River there,
Ten thousand miles of wind-mist links the pallid autumn.
 Through the walled passage from Calyx Hall the royal splendour
 coursed.
 To Hibiscus Park the griefs of the frontier came.
 Pearl blinds and embellished pillars gathered the yellow cranes,
 Embroidered cables and ivory masts startled the white seagulls.
 Look back and pity the singing, dancing land!
 Ch'in from most ancient times was the seat of princes.

7

K'un-ming Pool was the Han time's monument,
 The banners of the Emperor Wu are here before my eyes.
Weaving Maid's loom-threads empty in the moonlit night,
 And the great stone fish's scale-armor veers in the autumn wind.
 The waves toss dandel seeds, drowned clouds black.
Dew chills lotus calyxes, dropped powder pink.
 Over the pass, all the way to the sky, a road for none but the
 birds.
 On river and lakes, to the ends of the earth, one old fisherman.

8

The K'un-wu road by Yü-su river ran its meandering course,
 The shadow of Purple Turret Peak fell into Lake Mei-p'i.
Fragrant rice plants, pecked and dropped parrot grains.
Green wu-t'ung trees, perched and aged phoenix branches.
 Beautiful girls gathered kingfisher feathers for spring gifts:
 Together in the boat, a troop of immortals, we set forth again in
 the evening....

This brush of many colours once *vied with* the elements.
And now, peering into the distance, in anguish my white head
*droops.*¹⁵

秋興八首（一）

玉露凋傷楓樹林
 巫山巫峽氣蕭森
 江間波浪兼天涌
 塞上風雲接地陰
 叢菊兩開他日淚
 孤舟一繫故園心
 寒衣處處催刀尺
 白帝城高急暮砧

秋興八首（二）

夔府孤城落日斜
 每依南斗望京華
 聽猿實下三聲淚
 奉使虛隨八月查
 畫省香爐違伏枕
 山樓粉堞隱悲笳
 請看石上藤蘿月
 已映洲前蘆荻花

秋興八首（三）

千家山郭靜朝暉
 一日江樓坐翠微
 信宿漁人還泛泛
 清秋燕子故飛飛
 匡衡抗疏功名薄
 劉歆傳經心事違
 衡學少年多不賤
 五陵衣馬自輕肥

秋興八首（四）

聞道長安似弈棋
百年世事不勝悲
王侯第宅皆新主
文武衣冠異昔時
直北關山金鼓振
徵西車馬羽書遲
魚龍寂寞秋江冷
故國平居有所思

秋興八首（五）

蓬萊宮闕對南山
承露金莖霄漢間
西望瑤池降王母
東來紫氣滿函關
雲移雉尾開宮扇
日繞龍鱗識聖顏
一臥滄江驚歲晚
幾回青瑣照朝班

秋興八首（六）

瞿唐峽口曲江頭
萬里風煙接素秋
花萼夾城通禦氣
芙蓉小苑入邊愁
朱簾繡柱圍黃鶴
錦纜牙檣起白鷗
回首可伶歌舞地
秦中自古帝王州

秋興八首（七）

昆明池水漢時功
武帝旌旗在眼中
織女機絲虛月夜
石鯨鱗甲動秋風
波漂菰米瀋雲黑

露冷蓮房墜粉紅
關塞極天唯鳥道
江湖滿地一漁翁

秋興八首（八）

昆吾禦宿自逶迤
紫閣峰陰入漢陂
香稻啄余鸚鵡粒
碧梧棲老鳳凰枝
佳人拾翠春相問
仙侶衝舟晚更移
彩筆昔游乾氣象
白頭吟望苦低垂

Pai Chü-yi's 白居易(772–846) poem "Painting Bamboo: A Song" (ca. 810) is another good example of a poet's reflection on an aging artist. He first praises Master Hsiao's achievement as a painter:

Of all the plants, bamboo is the most difficult to paint.
Among ancient and modern painters, none has caught its
likeness.

Master Hsiao's brush alone brings out the similitude—
He's the one supreme artist in the history of painting.¹⁶

But, at the end, he laments the artist's physical decline:

Elegant airs, deep thoughts, are appreciated by few;
We look at each other, and I sigh in vain.
What a pity Master Hsiao is getting old,
His hands tremble, his eyes dim, his head the color of snow!
He says that this is his last painting;
From now on such bamboos will be the hardest to find.¹⁷

Han Yü 韓愈 (768–824) often wrote about his own aging. His acceptance of aging, despite exile, can be seen in this light-hearted poem titled "In the Apricot Garden I Take Leave of the Censor Ch'ang Ch'e Returning to His Post," written in 821, three years before he died.

Trees blooming—
the east
wind warming
and goodbye Ch'ang-an

Old age
each spring cuts keen—
your leaving keener.

Exile
over, moody
still, I maundered till
you chased the blues

Said write!
let's have a drink—now
gone, who else

Will be left
to invite me old
exile, be
young again!¹⁸

杏園送張徹侍御歸使

東風花樹下，送爾出京城。
久抱傷春意，新添惜別情。
歸來身已病，相見眼還明。
更遣將詩酒，誰家逐後生。

His poem "Losing Teeth," written in 803, exemplifies his self-examination of life, acceptance of aging, and contentment with life:

I lost a tooth last year, lost a tooth this year,
Lost, all of a sudden, six or seven. Looks like it's not over.
All the rest are loose, in the end they'll all fall out.
I recall when I lost the first, the gap shamed me;
After losing two or three, I thought I was far gone.
When one was about to fall out, I always blamed myself.
With them in disarray, it was hard to eat, so jumbled I feared to
rinse them.

When finally one abandoned me, it was bad as a mountain falling in.

By now I'm used to it; when they're lost they're all the same.

Twenty or so left, but they'll fall out in their turn.

If one's lost every year, they'll last a couple of decades;

Once all are lost, does it matter, fast or slow?

People say when your teeth are lost you can't expect to live long;

I say life always has its limit—long or short, we die.

People say gaps in your teeth scare those who look;

I say, like Master Chuang, what's useless at least survives.

When you can't talk clearly, silence is quite all right; when you can't chew, soft food has its charm.

So my song has become a poem, to shock my wife and children.¹⁹

落齒

去年落一牙，今年落一齒。
 俄然落六七，落勢殊未已。
 餘存皆動搖，盡落應始止。
 憶初落一時，但念豁可恥。
 及至落二三，始憂衰即死。
 每一將落時，櫟櫟恒在已。
 又牙妨食物，顛倒怯漱水。
 終焉舍我落，意與崩山比。
 今來落既熟，見落空相似。
 餘存二十餘，次第知落矣。
 倘常歲落一，自足支兩紀。
 如其落並空，與漸亦同指。
 人言齒之落，壽命理難恃。
 我言生有涯，長短俱死爾。
 人言齒之豁，左右驚諦視。
 我言莊周雲，水雁各有喜。
 語訛默固好，嚼廢軟還美。
 因歌遂成詩，持用詫妻子。

Written in 824 (the year he died, at the age of fifty-seven), "Floating on South Creek for the First Time: Three Poems" exemplifies Han Yü's late style, in which the poet looks closely at his life in old age with clarity and accepts what is to come.

“Floating on South Creek for the First Time: Three Poems”

I

I paddle my boat onward beneath South Mountain,
 Upward and upward, never getting the desire to return.
 Feelings of seclusion grow many, following my goings,
 Who cares whether it's near or far?
 I pass under joined trees, thick and shady,
 High and then low, I come to a slope across my path.
 Stones harsh, wantonly rubbing and grinding me,
 Waves evil, stubbornly dragging at me.
 Sometimes I'm a fisherman on an inclined bank,
 Then finally reaching a sandflat I'll eat my meal.
 Spot after spot, the evening rain spreads out,
 A faint sliver, the new moon lies flat.
 Apprehensive that the years remaining to me are not many,
 And grieved that my day to quit service is already late.
 It's only because sickness makes it so,
 And not from any desire to transcend the world.

II

South Creek is also clear rushing,
 But there are no boats or oars on it.
 Mountain farmers are startled to see this one,
 And following me, they won't stop staring.
 No just a group of young boys—
 Sometimes there are white-haired men learning on staffs.
 They offer me melons in a basket,
 And urge me to linger here.
 I say that I've come home on account of sickness,
 And feel particularly on my own here.
 I hope I'll have a chance to use my remaining salary
 To set up a dwelling here on the western fields.
 Rice and grains shall fill the granaries,
 And I'll have no worries from dawn to dusk.
 I never got any satisfaction from rising to a high position,
 Coming down from it, I'm also perfectly at ease.
 I only fear that I'd be a nuisance to the village,
 At times troubling them when there is urgent business.

But I would like to be one who shares their cult,
And with pigs and chickens, feast the springs and autumns.

III

My feet are weak—I cannot walk,
Naturally it's fitting I cease my visits to court;
My frail form could be taken by palanquin,
But how could I give up seeing these lovely sights?
It's right here beneath the slope of South Mountain,
Where so long I've heard there are stones and waters—
I've brought my boat into their midst,
Right where the current of the stream is strongest and clearest.
I'm not able just to follow the waves,
Far better to thrust my pole into the jutting rapids.
An egret rises as if to lead me on,
Flying ahead of me twenty or thirty feet.
High and splendid, the willows belt the sand,
Round, pines crown the cliffs.
When I return home it's already the end of the night—
Who could say this isn't as hard as court service?²⁰

1.
榜舟南山下，上上不得返。
幽事隨去多，孰能量近遠。
陰沈過連樹，藏昂抵橫阪。
石粗肆磨礪，波惡厭牽挽。
或倚偏岸漁，竟就平洲飯。
點點暮雨飄，稍稍新月偃。
餘年懷無幾，休日愴已晚。
自是病使然，非由取高蹇。

2.
南溪亦清駛，而無楫與舟。
山農驚見之，隨我勸不休。
不惟兒童輩，或有杖白頭。
饋我籠中瓜，勸我此淹留。
我雲以病歸，此已頗自由。
幸有用餘俸，置居在西疇。
困倉米谷滿，未有旦夕憂。
上去無得得，下來亦悠悠。
但恐煩裏閭，時有緩急投。
願為同社人，雞豚燕春秋。

3.
 足弱不能步，自宜收朝跡。
 羸形可興致，佳觀安事擲。
 即此南阪下，久聞有水石。
 拖舟入其間，溪流正清澈。
 隨波吾未能，峻瀨乍可刺。
 鷺起若導吾，前飛數十尺。
 亭亭柳帶沙，團團松冠壁。
 歸時還盡夜，誰謂非事役。

Su Tung-p'o lived in exile for decades (from 1079 to 1101, with very brief relief) and yet he maintained a sense of humor and accomplished in the end a courageous transcendence of personal turmoil. Here is "Improptu Verse Written in Exile," a light-hearted poem written in 1099, when he was 64:

I, lonely Master of Eastern Slope, lie ill in bed;
 My straggling white beard flows in the wind like frost.
 Seeing my crimson face, my son is glad I'm fine;
 I laugh, for he does not know I have drunk wine.²¹

縱筆

寂寂東坡一病翁，
 白須蕭散滿霜風。
 小兒誤喜朱顏在，
 一笑那知是酒紅。

Toward the end of his life, beginning in 1095, during his exile to Hui-chou (in modern Kwang-tung province), Su Tung-p'o composed a series of poems to "emulate" or "match" (*ho* 和) Tao Yüan-ming's (365–427) poems. As Su Tung-p'o himself wrote about his artistic intention, addressing T'ao Yüan-ming from time to time:

Alas, let it be! My life is destined; my return timed. I in my original state neither go nor stay. Let me say: I will go wherever you go. How can I, in following the teachings of Chuang Tzu, neglect to follow An-ch'i's suit! How can I, because crops planted in the drought will ultimately wither, refuse to water or to cultivate the sprouts! I have taken T'ao Yüan-ming's elegant abandonment as my example and have written hundreds of new poems in matching rhymes. I also write the pure prelude of "Return!" — I must be his reincarnation, no doubt!²²

已矣乎，吾生有命歸有時，我初無行亦無留。駕言隨子聽所之，豈以師南華而廢從安期。謂湯稼之終枯，遂不溉而不籽。師淵明之雅放，和百篇之新詩。賦歸來之清引，我其後身蓋無疑。

Indeed, as Zhiyi Yang has argued, “ ‘Emulating Tao’ helped the formation of Su Tung-p’o’s ‘mature style’ (*lao-ching* 老境), characteristic for its deliberate limpidity, suppressed tension, and understated aesthetics, all of which make its apparent simplicity belie rich subtlety. By stylistically ‘returning’ to Tao’s purported simplicity, Su Tung-p’o declared himself to have fulfilled a trajectory of life ‘returning’ to its original spontaneity. His stylistic choice was hence simultaneously a moral choice.”²³

The philosopher-poet Chu Hsi wrote in 1184 a series of ten poems on his journey to the Wu-yi Mountain, in Fukien. Compared with poems he wrote in his younger years, this series of poems exemplifies his “tranquil, self-controlled mode” of expression and a “free synthesis,” as Zhiyi Yang has convincingly argued.²⁴

There are immortals and spirits lodging on Mount Wu-yi.
Beneath the mountain a cold stream flows curvy and clear.
If you want to know its hidden marvels, sir,
Please listen in your idleness to two or three boat songs.

By the first curve of the stream please ride on my fishing boat,
The reflection of Curtained Pavilion Peak tinges a sunlit river.
No message has come since the Rainbow Bridge was broken;
A myriad of gullies and thousands of cliffs lock in emerald mists.

By the second curve stands the graceful Jade Maid Peak.
Wearing blossoms by the water—for whom does she adorn herself?
The Man of the Way no longer dreams the Sun Terrace dream;
Ride your spirits to enter the forward mountains, the layered green!

By the third curve, sir, behold the boats high above the cliff;
No one knows for how many years their oars have been at rest.
Mulberry fields have turned into an ocean, now so vast—
Amid floating foam and lamps in the wind, dare we pity ourselves?

By the fourth curve stand two rocky cliffs to the east and to the
west,
Dewy blossoms on the cliffs stoop and glitter amid the lush green.

The golden rooster has finished its crowing, but no one is there to see;
Moonlight fills the empty mountain, and water brims the deep.

By the fifth curve stands a mountain high, where clouds densely gather,
Where in long seasons the misty rain darkens low-rising woods.
In the woods lives a sojourner whom no one knows,
Who in the creaking song of oars lodges his mind in eternal antiquity.

By the sixth curve, the Dark Screen Peak embraces an emerald bay;
Where a thatched hut closes its brushwood door through the long day.
When the guest arrives by oar, blossoms are falling from the cliff;
Gibbons and birds are not startled, the spring mood is at ease.

By the seventh curve, tow the boat to the emerald shoal,
And turn around to see the Screen of Reclusion and the Divine Palm.
People say this place lacks fine scenery:
There is only an empty stone hall in verdant chill.²⁵

武夷山上有仙靈
山下寒流曲曲清
欲識箇中奇絕處
棹歌閑聽兩三聲

一曲溪邊上釣船
幔亭峰影蘸晴川
虹橋一斷無消息
萬壑千巖鎖翠煙

二曲亭亭玉女峰
插花臨水為誰容
道人不復陽台夢
興入前山翠幾重

三曲君看架壑船
不知停櫂幾何年
桑田海水今如許
泡沫風燈敢自憐

四曲東西兩石巖
 巖花垂露碧
 金雞叫罷無人見
 月滿空山水滿潭

五曲山高雲氣深
 長時煙雨暗平林
 林間有客無人識
 欸乃聲中萬古心

六曲蒼屏遶碧灣
 茅茨終日掩柴關
 客來倚櫂巖花落
 猿鳥不驚春意閑

七曲移船上碧灘
 隱屏仙掌更回看
 人言此處無佳景
 只有石堂空翠寒

Lu Yu, who called himself “The Old Man Who Does What He Pleases” (Fang-weng 放翁), began to write about being an old man at a young age. For example, the following poem was written when he was only 39 years old:

“Crossing a Boat-bridge to South Tower”

Traveller, midroad, sick,
 forsakes landscapes.
 Heard tales of South Tower,
 might give it a try;

nine-rutted path,
 I walk slow where wrath waves rise,

countless hulls, sidelong,
 gird the great stream’s hub.

Kirk’s height, bell and drum
 incite dusk and dawn;

hamlet’s dooryard of clouds,
 from of old till now,

white hair not yet
wiped out my nerve's worth:

wine, play side-blown flute beneath banyan shade.²⁶

度浮橋至南台

客中多病廢登臨，
聞說南台試一尋。
九軌徐行怒濤上，
千艘橫系大江心。
寺樓鐘鼓催昏曉，

墟落雲煙自古今。
白髮未除豪氣在，
醉吹橫笛坐榕陰

Lu Yu's poem "Can't Get to Sleep" from 1181 was written after he retired from office:

Town far off, too far to hear its bells and drums;
lone village, wind, rain noisy in the night.
Sad—how the green wine jeers at my many ailments.

Dare I scold the blue lamp for laughing at my sleeplessness?
Water gone cold: on the toad inkstone, first signs of thin ice;
fire still in it: the duck censer goes on faintly smoking.
Vacant windows suddenly tell me the east is growing brighter—
before the embroidery Buddha once more I open the sutra scroll.²⁷

不睡

城遠不聞鐘鼓傳
孤村風雨夜騷然
但悲綠酒欺多病
敢恨青燈笑不眠
水冷硯蟾初薄凍
火殘香鴨尚微煙
虛窗忽報東方白
且複繙經繡佛前

The following poem was written in 1209, one year before Lu Yu died at the age of eighty-five:

“In Sickness, Cheering Myself Up”

A lone crow flaps its wings, cawing,
and suddenly the window's the color of white silk.
One after another the other birds come,
each boasting how well it can speak.
Sick fellow only buries himself in covers,
like a small child wrapped in swaddling.
The barefoot maid tends to my robe and jacket,
the boy in braids carefully cleans up after.
Red sunshine already filtering the blinds,
how can I go on complaining it's too early?
With deliberation I down a bowl of rice gruel,
fool that I am, hoping to keep myself alive.²⁸

病中自遣

一鴉振羽鳴
窓色忽已縞
眾鳥次第來
各矜語言好
病夫正擁被
宛若兒在襁
跣婢織衣襦
丫童謹除掃
紅日已入簾
吾豈尚恨早
悠然一盃粥
頑鈍聊自保

As Lu Yu himself wrote in a poem composed when he was eighty-three, he achieved in his late poems a quality like “autumn waters”: “leisured and calm” (*hsien-tan*).²⁹

Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555–1636) called our attention to the artists who lived a long life because, as Tung argued from his biased position as a literatus, they did not try hard to be artists but simply did art for its own sake. Many more artists were over eighty when they died: Ou-yang Hsün (557–641), eighty-five; Yü Shih-nan (558–638), eighty-one; Ho Chih-chang (659–744), eighty-six; Liu Kung-ch'üan (778–865), eighty-eight; Yang Ning-shih (873–954), eighty-two. Unfortunately, although Li Yung (678–747) and Yen Chen-ch'ing (709–785) died at seventy and seventy-five respectively, they died by violence; Li Yung was flogged

to death by the corrupt prime minister Li Lin-fu; Yen Chen-ch'ing was killed by the rebels.

The longevity of modern and contemporary artists is well known. Yü Yu-jen (1878–1964), Ma I-fu (1883–1967), Shen Yin-mo (1883–1971), and Sha Meng-hai (1900–1992) are among the best-known calligraphers of the twentieth century. Yü Yu-jen died at eighty-six, Ma I-fu died at eighty-five, Shen Yin-mo died at eighty-nine, and Sha Meng-hai died at ninety-two. Wu Ch'ang-shuo (1844–1927), Ch'i Pai-shih (1863–1957), Huang Pin-hung (1865–1955), and Chang Dai-chien (1899–1983), and Lin Feng-mien (1900–1991) all died in their eighties or nineties while still creating art.³⁰ Many aging artists, however, struggled with illness and physical disabilities (low vision, hearing loss, or even the ability to use their hands to write or paint).

On the other hand, some artists died unexpectedly and prematurely at a fairly young age and we would never know what their "old age" style would look like. Ni Yüan-lu (1593–1644), serving as the Minister of Revenue for barely one year under the Ming emperor, hanged himself, at the age of fifty-two, soon after the rebel forces captured the capital city in 1644 and the emperor committed suicide; Huang Tao-chou (1585–1646) and Yang Wen-ts'ung (1597–1646), both military officials in the Ming dynasty, were captured by the conquering forces of the Ch'ing dynasty and executed when they refused to surrender. Li Hsi (1979–2016?), a mother of two children, disappeared during her vacation in Norway in the summer of 2016 (at the age of thirty-seven) and has not been found.³¹