

The Chinese Painter Muqi

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Muqi 牧谿 was a Chinese painter. It is not a paradox, but literally he deserves to be designated as one of the great painters of the late Southern Song 南宋 -early Yuan 元, a period of significant change in the history of Chinese painting. He was not a minor Chinese painter who was not highly regarded in his own country, nor was he a minor painter who only achieved great acclaim abroad in Japan. Muqi was one of those amazing monk painters like Juran 巨然 (?-976-992-?) of the late Five Dynasties 五代 -early Northern Song 北宋 period, or Bada shanren 八大山人 (1626-1705) and Shitao 石濤 (1642-1707) of the late Ming 明 -early Qing 清, who while not having the power and influence of literati or court painters, appeared at the turning point of eras and led the way, executing creative works that caused Chinese painting to develop in new directions.

Muqi, however, was subjected to adverse criticism by Yuan dynasty painting-theoreticians of approximately the same time period, who wrote:

He excelled in painting dragons and tigers, figures, geese and reeds, and miscellaneous subjects, but he was not so interested in mountains and fields. They are certainly not elegant or pleasurable, and are suitable only for Buddhist and Taoist monasteries, where they can assist in [creating an atmosphere of] pure tranquility. (Zhuang Su 莊肅, *Huaji buyi* 畫繼補遺, preface dated 1298, Vol. 1)

His ink play works are coarse and vulgar, and do not follow the ancient rules. (Tang Hou 湯垕, *Huajian* 畫鑑, 1328).

He also received favorable reviews:

He likes to paint dragons and tigers, monkeys and cranes, birds, landscapes, trees and rocks, as well as figures. He never employs color, but uses strained sugarcane and bundledgrass. All of his works are done with sketchy strokes and dots of ink. His conceptions are simple and he does not overdecorate. His pines, bamboo, plum blossoms, and orchids do not resemble the forms. When he paints lotuses and reeds they are equally of high quality. . . He paints a lot. Only his *Album of Three Friends: Pines, Bamboos, and Plum Blossoms* 三友帳 can be considered a masterpiece. . . At pre-

sent some works exist in the homes of scholar-officials in Jiangnan 江南. There are only a few bamboos, but many forgeries of lotuses and reeds. (Wu Taisu 吳太素, *Songzhai meipu* 松齋梅譜, 1351, Vol. 14)

These favorable and unfavorable critiques resulted in the following passage concerning Muqi in Xia Wenyan's 夏文彥 *Tuhui baojian* 圖繪寶鑑 (preface dated 1365):

He likes to paint dragons and tigers, monkeys and cranes, reeds and geese, landscapes, trees and rocks, as well as figures. All of his works are done with sketchy strokes and dots of ink. His conceptions are simple, and he doesn't overdecorate. (based on translation by Howard Rogers)

By excerpting and quoting Wu Taisu's favorable remarks concerning Muqi in the *Songzhai meipu*, Xia Wenyan's appraisal seems to be positive. But in the end it was his blend of the partially negative critiques in Zhuang Su's *Huaji buyi* and Tang Hou's *Huajian* that changed entirely negative ones.

However, [his works are] coarse and vulgar, and do not follow the ancient rules. They are certainly not elegant or pleasurable. (Vol. 4)

If these final remarks were eliminated, the entirely negative image of Muqi would be completely changed. Of course this "critique" does not derive from Xia Wenyan himself actually looking at Muqi's works. Rather he has cut and pieced together the approving and disapproving texts of Zhuang Su, Tang Hou, and Wu Taisu containing concrete descriptions of Muqi's works. It is obvious that Xia Wenyan's text should be censured as a fabrication composed by piecing together literary fragments.

The entrenched notion that Muqi had a poor reputation in his home country, which has been widely circulated inside and outside of China, is a misunderstanding deriving from the following bibliographical source. The *Tuhui baojian* is an extremely convenient book, widely disseminated in the Ming period, which collects and brings together into one volume the preceding *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記, *Tuhua jianwen zhi* 圖畫見聞誌, *Huaji* 畫繼, etc. On the contrary, both the *Songzhai meipu* which is positive towards Muqi and the *Huaji buyi* which is negative, had become rare books. So the entrenched notion is thought to be a mistake deriving from such kind of bibliographical facts.

The paintings forming the triptych *Guanyin, Monkeys, and Crane* 觀音猿鶴圖 (Daitokuji 大德寺, Kyoto, Figure 1), beginning with the center scroll of *Guanyin*, the right-hand scroll *Monkeys*, and the left-hand scroll *Crane*, all faithfully follow the "ancient methods." The most direct evidence showing this are the respective forms of the Guanyin, monkeys, and crane themselves. The Guanyin can



Fig. 1 Muqi, *Guanyin, Monkeys, and Crane* 觀音猴鶴圖



Fig. 2 *White-robed Guanyin* 白衣觀音圖

be interpreted as following a prototype based on Li Gonglin 李公麟 (1049-1106) of the Northern Song period; the monkeys are modeled after Yi Yuanji 易元吉 (?-1064) of the Northern Song; and the crane follows either the Tang 唐 artist Xue Ji 薛稷 (649-713) or the Five Dynasties artist Huang Quan 黃筌 (?-965).¹⁾

Evidence that Muqi's Guanyin follows a prototype by the Northern Song painter Li Gonglin, who developed a new type of Guanyin image and successively brought about major changes in a diversity of fields including religious deities, figures, landscapes, and animals, is the image of a *White-robed Guanyin* 白衣觀音圖 (Figure 2) illustrating the preface to the *Engraved Stone Guanyin Sutra*

石刻觀音經, donated by the early Southern Song vassal, Dong Zhongyong 董仲永 (1104-1165), and housed in the Liuheta Tower 六和塔 at Kaihuasi Temple 開化寺 in Hangzhou 杭州. This *White-robed Guanyin* is the reverse of Muqi's Guanyin figure, and was transmitted by Dong Zhongyong on the occasion of the engraving of the Guanyin Sutra in stone. From the following passage in Xiaochang's 曉常 "Memoirs of *Engraved Stone Guanyin Sutra* 石刻觀音經勸緣記" (1132, 7th month, 15th day), we know that the model transmitted to the present day must be based on a prototype by Li Gonglin: "Furthermore, Dong Zhongyong found a marvelous rubbed copy of the bodhisattva by Li Gonglin. He also engraved the image in stone and practiced innumerable charities."

The form of the monkey is supposedly based on a prototype deriving from the mid-Northern Song painter of flowers, birds, and animals, Yi Yuanji. Yi is known to have gone hiking in the fields and mountains to observe the mode of life of animals and plants, and he even raised some at home in order to make more detailed observations. However, since there are no definite extant models as in the case of *Guanyin*, this demands careful consideration. Yi Yuanji hoped to capture the public's attention by painting monkeys, a subject not often depicted in art. His wish came true and he actually became a well known painter who had a special interest in portraying the affection between mother and child. The following appraisal of a handscroll by Yi Yuanji in the collection of Zhang Qian 張謙 (1264?-1297?) is recorded in the *Yunyan guoyan lu* 雲煙過眼錄 by the late Southern Song-early Yuan literatus Zhou Mi 周密 (1232-1298): "On 20 sheets or more of paper mother monkeys and her children are painted

... really beautiful.” This suggests that monkeys were a particular favorite theme among Yi Yuanji’s paintings depicting affection between mother and child. Since it is known that an extremely large *Handscroll of Monkeys with Children* 子母猿圖卷 by Yi Yuanji existed in Muqi’s time, it is quite feasible to speculate that Muqi’s *Monkeys* may be a copy of a portion of a large work like *Handscroll of Monkeys with Children*, a copy of a portion of another painting of the same subject (which were probably plentiful), or even a copy of an entire work.

As for the crane, we can put forward a rather likely assumption that it is modeled after either the Tang painter Xue Ji, the alleged creator of the *Screen Painting of Six Cranes* 六鶴圖屏風, or the Five Dynasties artist Huang Quan, whose works established the foundation for Northern Song academic flower and bird painting. The latter existence of a wall painting of *Six Cranes* by Huang Quan from the Six Cranes Palace 六鶴殿 dating to 944 of the Later Shu 後蜀 kingdom is known through the following record by the mid Northern Song poet, Mei Yaochen 梅堯臣 (1002-1060): “Six poems using the same rhymes as those composed by Pan Shuzhi for *Xue Ji’s Six Cranes* painted by Daoist Liu Fang 和潘叔治題劉道士房畫薛稷六鶴圖” (*Chronologized and Annotated Works of Mei Yaochen* 梅堯臣集編年校注, Vol. 14). Based on this document and such works as the Tang dynasty *Lacquered Chest with Design of Plants and Cranes* 草木鶴圖漆櫃 in the Shosoin 正倉院 collection (Figure 3), the forms of the six cranes can be considered as fundamentally deriving from Xue Ji. It is possible to do a reconstructive study based on records such as the Northern Song Guo Ruoxu’s *Tuhuajian wenzhi* (ca. 1074)



Fig. 3 *Lacquered Chest with Design of Plants and Cranes* 草木鶴圖漆櫃

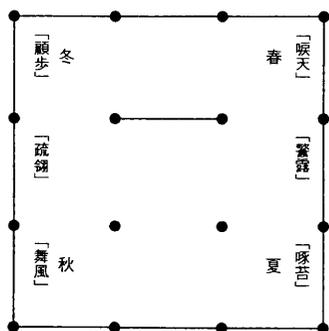
Fig. 4 *Cranes* 仙鶴圖

Fig. 5 Plan of the Wall Painting of Six Cranes Palace 六鶴殿

and paintings such as *Cranes* 仙鶴圖 from Liao Tomb No. 1 of Kulun Banner 庫倫旗一號遼墓 (Figure 4).²⁾ The following passage from the *Tuhuaqian wenzhi* describes the composition of each work. We can surmise that the paintings in the Six Cranes Palace (Figure 5) were arranged accordingly.

A description of Huang Quan's *Six Cranes*:

The first is called "Crying to Heaven 唳天"; raising its head, and stretching out its bill, it cries.

The second is called "Watchful for Dewdrops 警露"; turning its head and drawing in its neck, it

looks upward.

The third is called "Pecking at Moss 啄苔"; bowing its head it points its bill down to the ground.

The fourth is called "Dancing in the Wind 舞風"; riding in the wind, it flaps its wings and dances.

The fifth is called "Preening Feathers 疏翎"; rotating its neck it arranges its plume feathers.

The sixth is called "Looking Back"; walking 顧步, it turns its head and looks downward.

Later generations modeled their paintings after these. (Vol. 5)

The arrangement of the cranes in Huang Quan's *Wall Painting of Six Cranes* in the Later Shu kingdom Six Cranes Palace is 45 degrees counter to corresponding to the four directions and four seasons based upon the *Yingyang wuxing shuo* 陰陽五行說, or theory of the two negative and positive forces and the five elements. We can infer from extant wall paintings of the four directions and four seasons datable to the Sui 隋 and Tang dynasties that theoretically, spring is located in the east, summer in the south, autumn in the west, and winter in the north, so that the four seasons progress in a clockwise fashion. The form of Muqi's *Crane* corresponds with the example for spring, "Crying to Heaven." Moreover, the branch of willow inserted in the vase in the middle scroll of *Guanyin* is indicative of summer. In the right-hand scroll of *Monkeys*, if we take the old tree in which the monkeys sit, swaying in the cold wind, to represent autumn, then in this triptych spring and autumn are the reverse of the customary arrangement so that the progression is from left to right, following the same time and spatial organization as wall paintings of the four directions and four seasons. Muqi's triptych is convincing evidence showing the possibility that the walls in the *fangzhang* 方丈 (abbot's quarters) in Southern Song *chan* 禪 temples were decorated with wall paintings of the four directions and four seasons.

The respective forms of the Guanyin, monkeys, and crane themselves, grounded in the "old methods", attest to the fact that they are not rendered with "coarse and vulgar" ink brushwork. They are not placed in the middle of two-dimensional, abstract picture planes but rather in three-dimensional, tangible spaces suffused with light and air. The diverse images are depicted based on a mode of representation that reproduces light and atmosphere, and are given definite form following orthodox Tang and Song painting methods. Nowadays, any person viewing the *Triptych of Guanyin, Monkeys, and Crane* from close range who looks at just the brushwork in the rocks and trees and criticizes it as "coarse and vulgar" is showing a low level of appreciation ability. At first glance the brush methods may seem careless, but such viewers are ignorant of the subtleties directly connected with the voluminous representations of rock clusters and trees, as well as the realistic depiction of light and atmosphere. The foregoing "review" of Muqi in Xia Wenyan's *Tuhui baojian* must be considered with the same level of suspicion.

In the same sense, *Evening Glow over Fishing Village* 漁村夕照圖 (Nezu Museum 根津美術館, Figure 6) is by no means a "coarse and vulgar" work. The accurate recreation of the light and atmospheric effects of dusk with only ink is not so different from *Early Spring* 早春圖 (The National Palace Museum 故宮博物院,

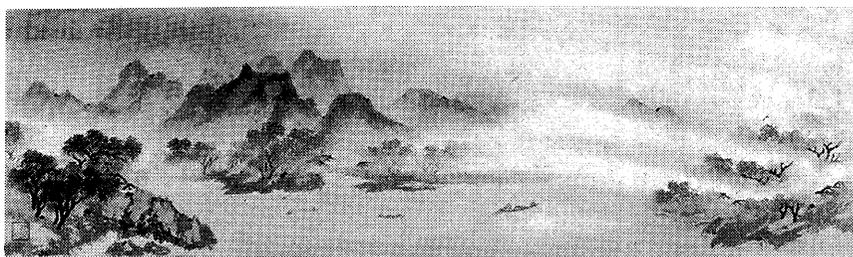


Fig. 6 Muqi, *Evening Glow over Fishing Village* 漁村夕照圖

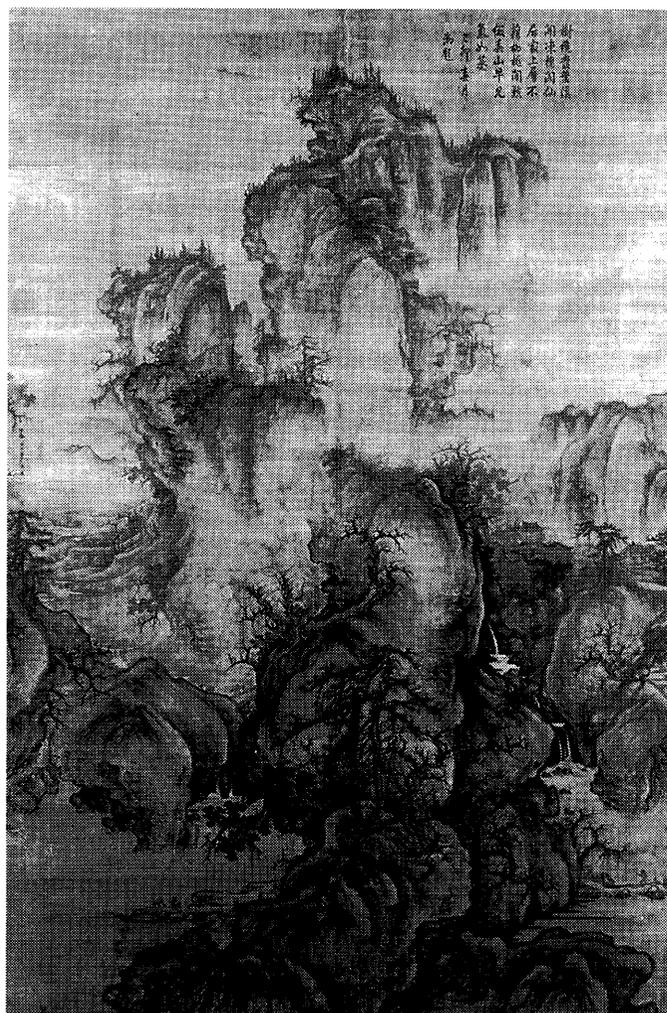


Fig. 7 Guo Xi 郭熙, *Early Spring* 早春圖

Fig. 8 Mi Youren 米友仁, *Cloudy Mountains* 雲山圖卷

Fig. 9

Taipei 臺北, Figure 7) by the exemplary Northern Song court painter Guo Xi 郭熙 (?-1054-1087-?). What can be called a high level of subtlety exceeds that of *Cloudy Mountains* 雲山圖卷 (Cleveland Museum of Art, Figure 8), a painting rendered in color by the Southern Song literatus Mi Youren 米友仁 (1074-1151). Critics who look at just the brushwork in portions of this landscape painting which could be regarded as rough and call it “coarse and vulgar” are open to the criticism that they are completely lacking in understanding the painterly qualities in which this aspect is balanced with subtle ink brushwork recreating the effects of light and air. *Guanyin, Monkeys, and Crane* falls into the same category.

If we turn our attention to composition, it is readily known that *Evening Glow over Fishing Village* faithfully follows the “ancient methods.” If we rearrange the left half and right half of Mi Youren’s handscroll of *Cloudy Mountains* (Figure 9), the composition becomes almost the same as Muqi’s painting.³⁾ Thus Muqi can be regarded as an heir to the orthodox lineage of Mi-style landscape painting. However, the steep precipices in *Evening Glow over Fishing Village* are different from the mountain forms in Mi Youren’s *Cloudy Mountains*. The former follows the manner of *Xiao Yi Stealing the Lanting Preface* 蕭翼賺蘭亭圖 (The National Palace Museum, Taipei, Figure 10) attributed to Juran, and the latter follows the rounded forms in *Wintry Forest amid Waters* 寒林重汀圖 (Kurokawa Institute of Ancient Culture 黑川古文化研究所, Figure 11) attributed to the Five Dynasties painter Dong Yuan 董源 (? - 949 - ?). In other words, not only did Muqi have a thorough knowledge of the different mountain forms of Dong Yuan and Juran within the orthodox Jiangnan landscape painting tradition, but he employed the overall composition of Mi Youren, who was a successor to this tradition. The mountain forms themselves, to the extent that they shift from



Fig. 10 Attributed to Juran, *Xiao Yi Stealing the Lanting Preface* 蕭翼賺蘭亭圖

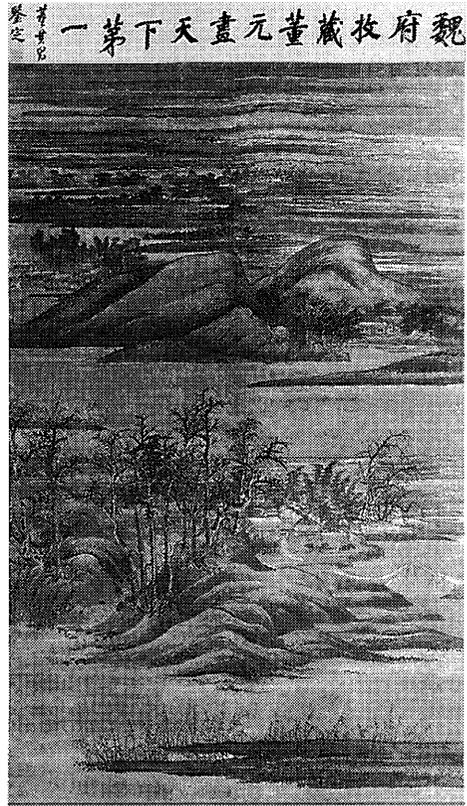


Fig. 11 Attributed to Dong Yuan, *Wintry Forest amid Waters* 寒林重汀圖



Fig. 12 Muqi, *Returning Sails off Distant Shores* 遠浦歸帆圖

Dong Yuan to Juran, reveal his deep understanding of the “ancient methods.”

I would like to briefly examine six other paintings in the format of large and small two scrolls, which in addition to *Evening Glow over Fishing Village* are among the seven extant paintings originally part of Muqi's handscroll of *Eight Views of Xiaoxiang* 瀟湘八景. *Returning Sails off Distant Shores* 遠浦歸帆圖 (Kyoto



Fig. 13 Wang Hong, *Eight Views of Xiaoxiang*



Fig. 14 Muqi, *Wild Geese Descending to Sandbar* 平沙落雁圖

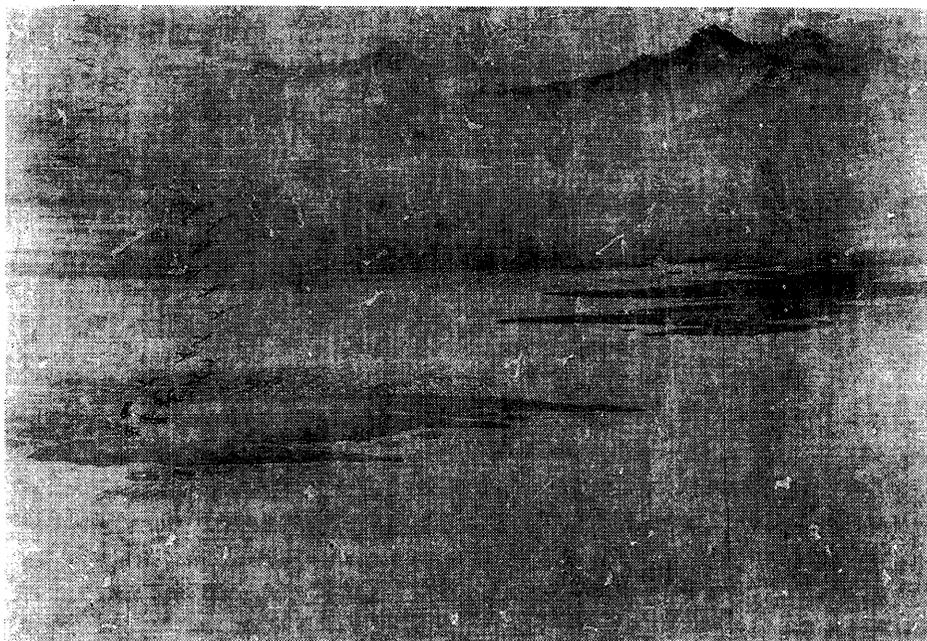


Fig. 15 Wang Hong, *Eight Views of Xiaoxiang* 瀟湘八景

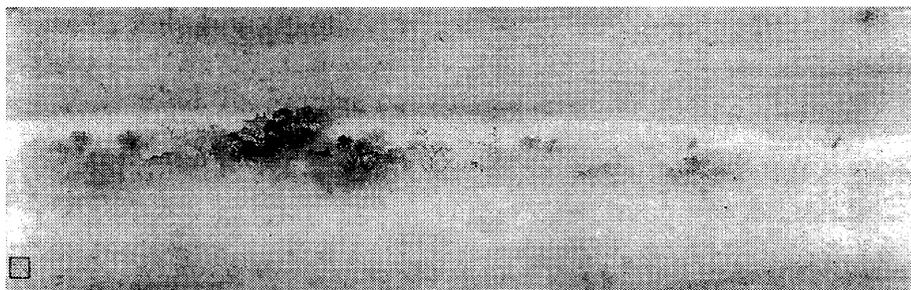


Fig. 16 Muqi, *Evening Bell from Mist-shrouded Temple* 煙寺晚鐘圖



Fig. 17 Li 李, *Dream Journey to Xiaoxiang* 瀟湘臥遊圖卷

National Museum 京都國立博物館, Figure 12), if reversed, is almost the same composition as the corresponding section from the oldest existing painting of the *Eight Views of Xiaoxiang*—a set of two handscrolls by the Southern Song painter Wang Hong 王洪 (The Art Museum, Princeton University, Figure 13). *Wild Geese Descending to Sandbar* 平沙落雁圖 (Idemitsu Museum of Art 出光美術館, Figure 14) shares the same subject matter with the corresponding section (Figure 15) from the same *Eight Views of Xiaoxiang* handscroll by Wang Hong, as well as *Evening Bell from Mist-shrouded Temple* 煙寺晚鐘圖 (Hatakeyama Memorial Museum 畠山記念館, Figure 16) and a section from *Dream Journey to Xiaoxiang* 瀟湘臥遊圖卷 (Tokyo National Museum 東京國立博物館, Figure 17) by the Southern

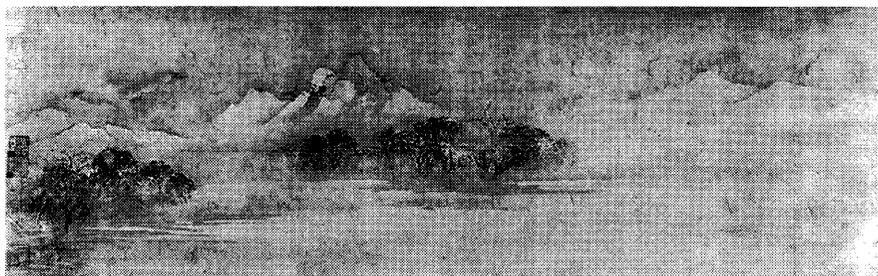


Fig. 18 Attributed to Muqi, *River and Sky in Evening Snow* 江天暮雪圖



Fig. 19 Attributed to Muqi, *Autumn Moon over Lake Dongting* 洞庭秋月圖

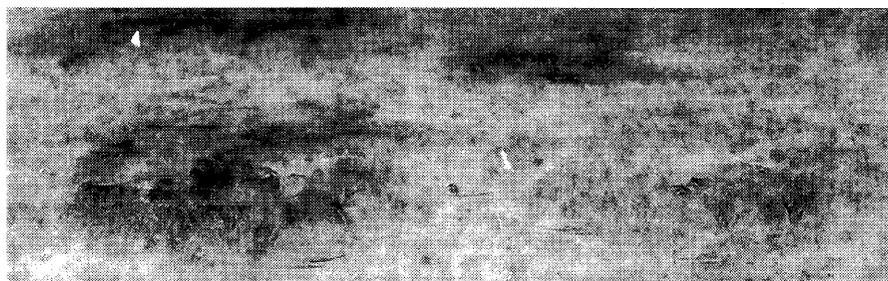


Fig. 20 Attributed to Muqi, *Night Rain on Xiaoxiang* 瀟湘夜雨圖

Song artist Li (ca. 1170). Moreover, in *River and Sky in Evening Snow* 江天暮雪圖 (Private collection, Figure 18) Muqi has modified the composition of his own *Evening Glow over Fishing Village*, taking the left half and stretching it to the right. *Autumn Moon over Lake Dongting* 洞庭秋月圖 (Tokugawa Museum of Art 德川美術館, Figure 19) and *Night Rain on Xiaoxiang* 瀟湘夜雨圖 (Private collection, Figure 20) are also composed of selected elements from *Evening Glow over Fishing Village*. From these examples we can see how Muqi first took expressive motifs such as descending geese; second, he pieced together various motifs such as the roofs of the temple buildings seen from a clump of trees, the shoreline and sailboats, etc. to create a space for the subject matter; and third, constructed a larg-

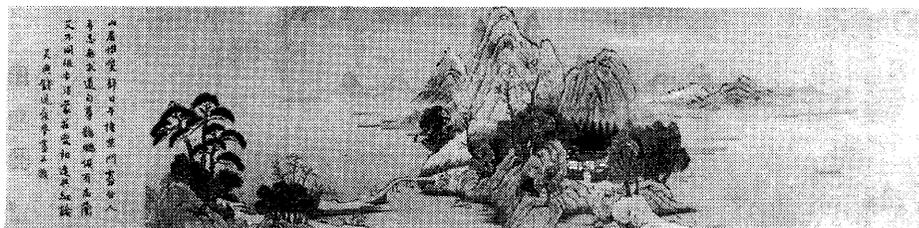


Fig. 21 Qian Xuan 錢選, *Dwelling in the Mountains* 山居圖卷

er painting space from these motifs and their spaces. The creation of landscape paintings through this kind of synthesizing was a particularly notable organizational method in Chinese landscape painting at this time which we can see was conscientiously followed by Muqi.⁴⁾

As for Muqi's art historical position, as noted above his works concretely demonstrate his dependence on traditional compositions in Chinese landscape painting. Using only ink he accurately reproduced the effects of light and atmosphere, and he was faithful to Tang and Song painting models. The truth is that because he actually faithfully followed tradition—his works being “not coarse and vulgar, but according to ancient methods”—from the Yuan dynasty on, Muqi became set in sharp opposition to the mainstream of Chinese landscape painting.

For example, let's examine the brush methods of two literati artists of the same era who are said to have established the period style of Yuan landscape painting—Qian Xuan 錢選 (ca. 1235-1301-?) and Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254-1322). The former's *Dwelling in the Mountains* handscroll 山居圖卷 (Palace Museum 故宮博物院, Beijing 北京, Figure 21) is modeled upon the left half of Mi Youren's *Cloudy Mountains* handscroll, and the composition of the latter's *Water Village* 水村圖卷 handscroll (Palace Museum, Beijing) seems to be in part based upon a portion of *Wintry Forest amid Waters* attributed to Dong Yuan. Yet a new painting expression is carved out within the two-dimensional, abstract painting surfaces of both handscrolls, which actively deny the representational depiction of light and atmosphere observed in *Cloudy Mountains* and *Wintry Forest amid Waters*. The transformations carried out by Qian Xuan and Zhao Mengfu resemble the transmission of traditional brush methods and compositions found in Muqi's work, but Qian and Zhao completely denounced the essential qualities of landscape representation and declared that they were establishing a new classicism.

Cotton Roses 芙蓉圖 (Daitokuji, Figure 22) is another work by Muqi which faithfully follows “ancient methods” and in no way could be construed as “coarse and vulgar”. Originally part of *Handscroll of Flowers, Plants, and Miscellaneous Subjects* 花卉雜畫卷, it was cut and mounted separately as a hanging scroll. If we remove the conspicuous white leaf and the leaf pointing down to the left



Fig. 22 Muqi, *Cotton Roses* 芙蓉圖

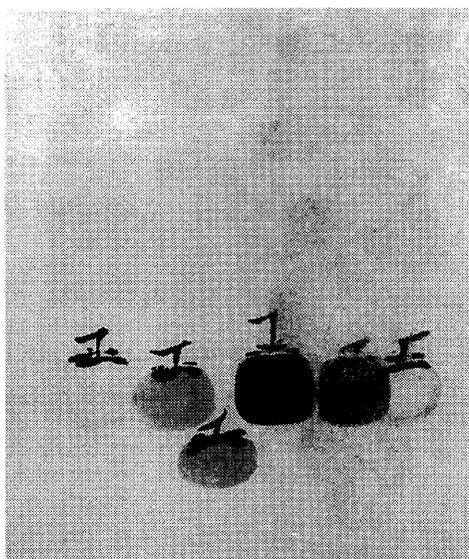


Fig. 23 Muqi, *Persimmons* 柿圖

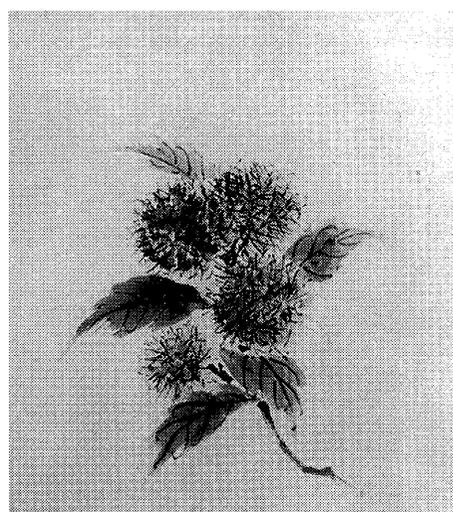


Fig. 24 Muqi, *Chestnuts* 栗圖

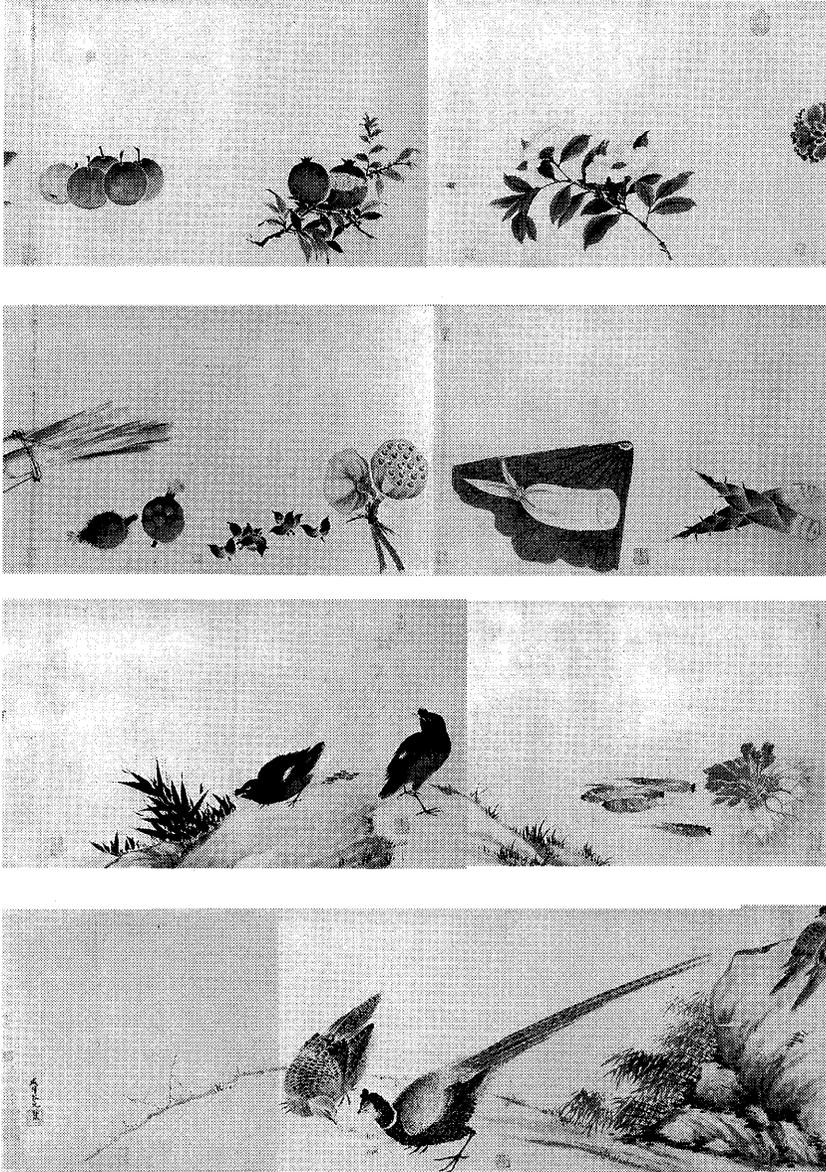


Fig. 25 Attributed to Muqi, *Nature Sketches* 寫生卷

thought to be later additions, the cotton roses reaching upward from outside the lower part of the picture plane are an accurate, tangible representation. The painting of leaves in the boneless technique with medium gray ink and the veins in darker ink suggests overcast, rainy conditions.

Persimmons 柿圖 (Ryukoin 龍光院, Figure 23) and *Chestnuts* 栗圖 (Ryokoin, Figure 24) are painted utilizing the same brush methods, but by looking down upon the persimmons from above and the broken branch of chestnuts from the side, and by eliminating the representation of a table or walls, Muqi has adopted a kind of abstract spatial expression. Since *Cotton Roses*, *Persimmons*, and *Chestnuts* were probably included in the original *Handscroll of Flowers, Plants, and Miscellaneous Subjects*, painted with singular and multiple applications of ink washes in the boneless technique, we can surmise that depictions of tangible as well as abstract space coexisted in one work.

The original *Handscroll of Flowers, Plants, and Miscellaneous Subjects* which possessed both of these special features is unfortunately no longer extant, but it has been transmitted through copies: *Handscroll of Nature Sketches* 寫生卷 in the National Palace Museum, Taipei (Figure 25) and *Handscroll of Nature Studies of Vegetables and Fruits* 寫生蔬果卷 in the Palace Museum, Beijing. In these works, the two-dimensional, abstract painting surface which was extensively pursued from the Yuan dynasty on, and the three-dimensional, representational mode of painting exhaustively developed through the Song, are joined together in one continuous scroll. Thus the two traditions found in landscape painting—the old and the new—coexisted in Muqi's *Handscroll of Flowers, Plants, and Miscellaneous Subjects*.

The Southern Song literatus Deng Chun 鄧椿, in Volume 8 of his *Huaji* (preface dated 1167), records a work in the collection of Wang Lu 王陸 in Chengdu 成都 titled *Handscroll Attached to a Wall with Miscellaneous Paintings, Birds, Animals, Grasses, and Trees* 雜畫鳥獸草木橫披圖 by Wen Fuzhou 文湖州. This is what is perhaps more properly titled *Birds, Animals, Grasses, Trees, and Miscellaneous Paintings* by Wen Tong 文同 (1018-1079), the Northern Song literati painter who makes up a chapter in the history of ink bamboo painting. Thus we know that this work, in the format of a long handscroll attached to a wall depicting flowers, plants, and miscellaneous subjects, existed in Shu 蜀 (Szechwan 四川), the birthplace of Wen Tong and Muqi, at the beginning of the Southern Song.

Moreover, there is an extant example of wall painting in the tomb of Xiawanzi 下灣子 thought to date from the late Liao 遼 dynasty. On the east and west walls of the spirit path are paintings of *Two Chickens* 雙雞圖 and *Two Dogs* 雙犬圖 (Figures 26 and 27) Aohan Banner Museum, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region; on the northeast and northwest walls of the tomb chamber are paintings of *Ladies in Waiting* 侍女圖, in which can be seen two single panel screen paintings of *Acridotheres Cristaellus* 叭叭鳥圖 and *Pigeons* rendered in ink in the boneless technique. In addition to predating *Acridotheres Cristaellus* (Figure 28,



Fig. 26 *Two chickens* 雙雞圖



Fig. 27 *Two dogs* 雙犬圖



Fig. 28 Attributed to Muqi, *Acridotheres Cristaellus* 呱呱鳥圖

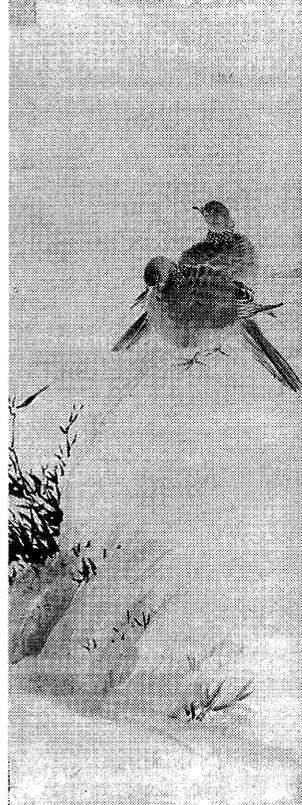


Fig. 29 Attributed to Muqi, *Pigeons* 鳩圖

Fujita Museum of Art 藤田美術館) and *Pigeons* 鳩圖 (Figure 29, Private Collection) by Muqi, who favored these subjects, and *Bamboo and Cock* 竹雞圖 (Tokyo National Museum) by his pupil Luochuang 蘿窓, these single panel screen paintings depicted in the wall paintings are important evidence showing the change in format from the small painting surface of the handscroll or handscroll attached to a wall to a larger format wall painting, and the fact that paintings of flowers, plants, and miscellaneous subjects which flourished in the late Northern Song were also adopted by the Liao dynasty painting world around the same time.

In addition, like the handscroll *Riverbank in Autumn Evening* 池塘秋晚圖卷 (The National Palace Museum, Taipei, Figure 30) attributed to the aesthetically inclined emperor of the fallen Northern Song, Huizong 徽宗 (r. 1100-1125), the viewpoint shifts from the side to a bird's eye view. Taking notice of this feature, along with the shift from abstract space making use of the surface of the *yahua* paper 研花紙 (a kind of paper used for calligraphy) in the first half to a more



Fig. 30 Attributed to Huizong 徽宗, *Riverbank in Autumn Evening* 池塘秋晚圖卷

descriptive representation of a lotus pond in the latter half, we can understand how Muqi created his own works by bringing together in one painting elements seen in works by the late Northern Song artists Wen Tong and Huizong—*Birds, Animals, Grasses, Trees, and Miscellaneous Paintings* and *Riverbank in Autumn Evening*—as well as the late Liao dynasty *Wall Painting in the Tomb of Xiawanzi* influenced by them.

Another important aspect of Muqi's *Handscroll of Flowers, Plants, and Miscellaneous Subjects* is that it can also be regarded as handscroll of nature sketches, linking together images of camellia flowers, pomegranates, apples, loquats, Chinese cabbage, bamboo shoots, etc.. However, it is different from the *Riverbank in Autumn Evening* handscroll, which corresponds to the seasons from late summer to early autumn, for it does not go through the cycle of seasons. Concerning the Northern Song literati painter Mi Fu's 米芾 (1051-1110) painting of *Plum, Pine, Orchid, and Chrysanthemum*, the previously cited *Huaji* records the following:

Plum, pine, orchid, and chrysanthemum are rendered together on one sheet of paper. The leaves intermingle, yet they are not confused. They are profuse, yet they are simplified. They are simplified, yet they are not sparse. It is great and wonderful, truly a marvelous work unequalled by contemporaries. (Volume 3)

The literati method of painting spring and autumn flowers and trees in one work can be considered as another source for Muqi's handscroll. Thus, *Handscroll of Nature Sketches* and *Handscroll of Nature Sketches of Vegetables and Fruits*,

Fig. 31 Xu Wei 徐渭, *Flowers and Miscellaneous Paintings* 花卉雜畫卷

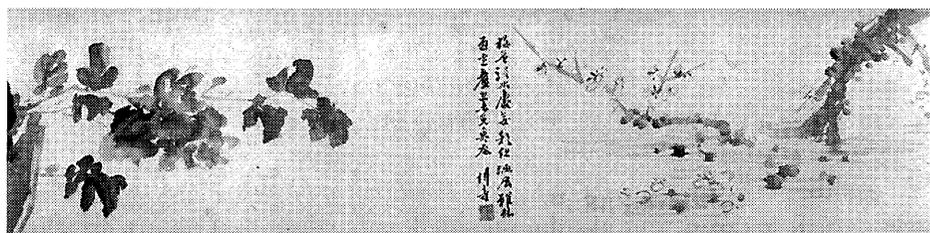
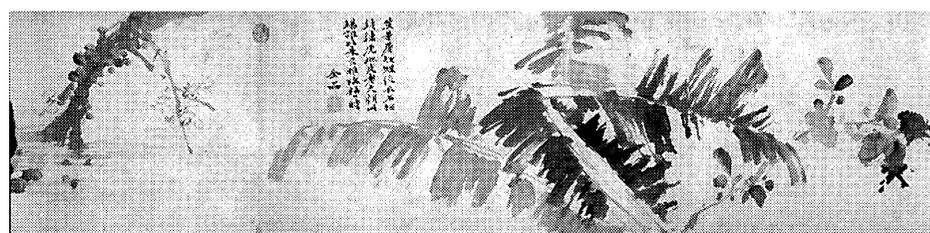


Fig. 31



which are believed to be copies, integrate elements from three late Northern Song works: *Handscroll Attached to a Wall with Birds, Animals, Grasses, Trees, and Miscellaneous Paintings*; *Riverbank in Autumn Evening*; and *Plum, Pine, Orchid, and Chrysanthemum*. Muqi's handscroll occupies an extremely important historical position as the oldest extant example among the type of painting exemplified by *Handscroll of Flowers and Miscellaneous Paintings* (Tokyo National Museum, Figure 31) by the Ming painter Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521-1593), which links together lotus flowers, pomegranates, plum blossoms, peonies, etc. without adhering to the cycle of the four seasons. The subject matter of flowers, plants, and miscellaneous paintings, as well as the elements of representation underlying them, while linked to the Song dynasty painting tradition, themselves cannot be found prior to Muqi. One cannot find a composite representation gathering everything into one painting before Muqi's handscroll. Rather it was a pioneering effort stemming from the flourishing of paintings of flowers, plants, and miscellaneous subjects in the Ming and Qing periods.

If we try to compare *Cotton Roses* (belonging to the category of paintings of flowers, plants, and miscellaneous subjects) and also *Evening Glow over Fishing Village* (included in category of landscape painting) and *Guanyin, Monkeys, and Crane* (deriving from the three categories of religious figure painting, flower-and-bird painting, and animal painting), regardless of the differences in the painting genres, we can see that all of these works are grounded in classical, traditional subject matter. Moreover, they share the fact that imagery has been pieced together, and the spaces of the combined elements have been further integrated in order to construct a larger painterly space. In that sense, the cutting up and remounting as hanging scrolls of *Handscroll of Eight Views of Xiaoxiang*

and *Handscroll of Flowers, Plants, and Miscellaneous Subjects* was not a phenomenon peculiar to the art appreciation world in Japan. It is an act harking back to the foundation of Muqi's creative methods, in which new works are presented in accordance with post-Song compositional methods. One could even say that it is an act equal to the creation of paintings in China and Japan.

While each scroll of *Guanyin, Monkeys, and Crane* independently strictly preserves the classic tradition (for example, even though a triptych, the paintings are faithful to the sequence of the four seasons), as a whole the resulting set of scrolls, in which animal painting and flower-and-bird painting are combined with religious painting, is by no means classical. Moreover, in *Handscroll of Eight Views of Xiaoxiang*, which includes the scene *Evening Glow over Fishing Village* employing traditional forms and subject matter, representation is carried further than the works it was based upon, including the recreation of the subtleties of light and atmosphere of the yearly cycle of four seasons and the rising and setting of the sun, so that on the contrary it cannot be called a traditional work. As for *Cotton Roses*, along with other post Northern Song subject matter, in the creation of *Handscroll of Flowers, Grasses, and Miscellaneous Subjects* both abstract and tangible spaces inconsistent with the progression of the four seasons are made to coexist in one scroll. As an independent work such kind of *Handscroll of Flowers, Grasses, and Miscellaneous Subjects* does not seem at all like a Northern Song painting. However, Muqi's attitude toward painting on one hand was to be extremely faithful to the past, and on the other hand he strongly breaks away from tradition. His works can be understood as having in common the fact that they are comprised of features realized on top of this delicate balance.

This undeniably symbolizes a fundamental change in the tide of Chinese painting history at the turning point of the Song and Yuan dynasties. Muqi's classicizing representations are without question the exact opposite of the critique that his works "were coarse and vulgar, and not following ancient methods". In landscape painting, Muqi occupies a halfway position, distinct from Zhao Mengfu and Qian Xuan, who while professing to be classicizing, were pointing toward a new kind of expression. Muqi adopted a similar halfway position in his paintings of flowers, plants, and miscellaneous subjects. By persistently utilizing a classicizing approach, his works are also anti-classical; one can clearly view them as anti-classical, but they are also classicizing. Admittedly they have a complex nature.

Let's reexamine the viewpoints of the three men who criticized Muqi unfavorably: Zhuang Su, Tang Hou, and Xia Wenyan. Xia Wenyan's remarks, as discussed earlier, are not relevant. There is a strong possibility that Tang Hou, who criticized only Muqi's ink play as being "coarse and vulgar, and not following the ancients", was speaking of works in which the trunk, branches, and leaves were painted with smooth and sharp brushlines. The reason is that works belonging to the category of flowers, grasses, and miscellaneous subjects by



Fig. 32 Zhao Mengjian 趙孟堅, *Narcissi* 水仙圖卷



Fig. 33 Shen Zhou 沈周, *Frog*



Fig. 34 Shen Zhou, *Chicken*

other late Southern Song-early Yuan painters contemporary with Muqi, such as Zhao Mengjian 趙孟堅's (1199-1295) *Handscroll of Narcissi* 水仙圖卷 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Figure 32), Li Kan 李衍's (1245-1320) *Four Stalks of Bamboo* 四季平安圖 (National Palace Museum, Taipei), and Zou Fulei 鄒復雷's handscroll *The Breath of Spring* 春消息圖卷 (Freer Gallery of Art) all have similar features. However, if one looks at the brush methods employed in Shen Zhou's (1427-1509) *Album of Nature Sketches* (National Palace Museum, Taipei, Figure 33 and 34) or Xu Wei's *Handscroll of Flowers, Grasses, and Miscellaneous Subjects*, one can easily see that the brushwork is rather rough. Since this is very close to Muqi's brushwork, Tang Hou's criticism does not seem to be historically accurate.

As for Zhuang Su, he criticized not only Muqi but also the Southern Song court academic painter Xia Gui 夏珪, saying: "his painted landscapes and figures are extremely worldly and vulgar." (Volume 2) Such derogatory remarks do not correspond at all with existing works, are conspicuous examples of the trend toward biased criticism according to social position, in which court academic painters and monk painters were looked down upon and literati painters praised. If we wish to change the position of Zhuang Su like that of Tang Hou based on the view of painting embraced by literati painters that largely prescribed the history of Ming and Qing painting, and also to view artists of diverse social positions such as literati painters, court academic painters, professional painters, monk painters, etc. equally, since the history of Chinese painting in its entirety is viewed through a largely prescribed viewpoint, how is the evaluation of Muqi as a painter to be determined?

To reiterate, Muqi was truly a great Chinese painter. He was a superior artist, possessing a wide range of painting skills, who created primarily large-scale scrolls resembling wall paintings which depict religious deities that seem to break with tradition. He also painted long handscrolls of flowers, grasses, and miscellaneous subjects that seem to be prospering, and landscape paintings, the main avenue of artistic expression from the Song through the middle Qing period. Muqi was a great painter not only of the late Southern Song and early Yuan periods in which he was active, but a great painter in terms of all the periods in the history of Chinese painting.

It can be said that the unswerving veneration of Muqi in Japan throughout the centuries has continued to pave the way to reassessing him as a great artist in his own country. What needs to be done now is not to eulogize him as an artist to whom the history of Japanese painting is greatly indebted. While his contribution to the history of Japanese painting should be sincerely accepted as a contribution, the indispensable as well as fundamental position he occupies in Chinese painting history needs to be seen in a new light. Understanding the true greatness of Muqi as a painter should be our starting point, not other considerations.

Notes

- 1) 「牧谿—古典主義の變容「上」『美術史論叢』4, 1988年 “Mokkei-Kotenshugi no Hen'yo Jo (Much'i: Transformation of Classicism vol. 1)” *Bijutsushi Ronso* (Studies in Art History)
「薛稷六鶴圖屏風考」『(東京大學) 東洋文化研究所紀要』117號, 1992年 “Sesshoku Rokkakuzu Byobu ko (On the Screen Painting of Six Cranes by Xue Ji)” *Toyobunka Kenkyusho Kiyo* (The Memoirs of the Institute of Oriental Culture)
- 2) 「黃筌六鶴圖壁畫とその系譜 (上)」『國華』1165號, 1992年 “Kosen Rokkakuzu Heki-ga to sono Keifu Jo (Six Cranes Wall Painting by Huang Quan and Its Geneology vol. 1)” *Kokka*
- 3) “The Relationship between Landscape Representations and Self-Inscriptions in the Works of Mi Yu-jen”
Alfreda Murck & Wen C. Fong ed. *Words and Images: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy and Painting* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Princeton University Press, New York & Princeton, 1991)
- 4) “The Continuity of Spatial Composition in Sung and Yuan Landscape Painting” Maxwell K. Hearn & Judith G. Smith ed. *Arts of the Sung and Yuan* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1996)