Masterpieces of Chinese Painting 700-1900

Teachers' Resource: Image Bank

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INTRODUCTION

Masterpieces of Chinese Painting 700–1900 is the first international exhibition in the UK since 1935 to bring together some of the finest examples of Chinese painting created in successive periods from the beginning of the 8th to the end of the 19th century. The works come from major public collections in America, Britain, China, France, Germany, Sweden and Japan.

The exhibition explores the recurrent characteristics of Chinese painting as well as its innovation throughout history. By highlighting the aesthetic quality and expressive power of the individual works, it seeks to open viewers' minds to one of the world's great artistic traditions.

The exhibition is organised chronologically and thematically into six main sections. It also includes a display that explains painting techniques and studio practices.

Cover image: Mi Youren (1074/86–1151/65), *Cloudy Mountains* (detail), 1140–50, ink on paper, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Museum no. 1973.121.1)© 2013. Image copyright The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource/ Scala, Florence

Objects of Devotion

700-950

OBJECTS OF DEVOTION

The exhibition will begin by exploring paintings made for temples during the Tang (618–907) and Five Dynasties (907–960) periods. The majority of images from this period were made for Buddhist liturgies or as votive offerings. Most surviving pictures from this early period are Buddhist banners and screens, painted on silk and characterised by their bright colours. These are predominantly drawn from Dunhuang, a remote region in the North West which was far from Tang dynastic control during the period of Buddhist persecution in the mid 9th century.

Not all the paintings in this section are Buddhist; the long illustrated manuscript *The Five Planets and Twenty-Eight Constellations* is a secular handscroll which is the earliest surviving painting of astronomy.

The Quest for Reality

950-1250

THE QUEST FOR REALITY

Section two looks at the growing artistic enthusiasm for the visible world and the rise of landscape painting. Here we find mountain and river scenes, depictions of flowers and animals, studies of fishermen and travellers, and pictures exploring the cycle of the seasons, changing weather and the shifting qualities of natural light. Many works were by court painters and made for the interiors of official buildings and imperial palaces. These paintings present new and compelling images of the real world.

This section will also explore the shift from a preference for bright colours to a more monochrome aesthetic, as seen both in monumental landscape paintings and in small-scale vignettes featuring animals and human figures. Preference for the monochromatic did not completely preclude the use of colour, however, and we see how during the second part of this period, Emperor Huizong played a key role in maintaining the interest in polychromy and in developing a distinctive painterly lyricism.



Mi Youren (1074/86–1151/65), *Cloudy Mountains*, 1140–50, ink on paper, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Museum no. 1973.121.1)

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Ma Yuan (active 1175–1225),
Bare Willows and Distant Mountains,
About 1175–1200, Ink and colour on silk, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Museum no. 14.61)

Photograph © 2013 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Possibly Emperor Huizong (1082–1135), *Court Ladies Preparing Newly Woven Silk*, About 1101–26, ink, colour and gold on silk, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Museum no. 12.886)

Photograph © 2013 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Probably Emperor Huizong (1082–1135), *Auspicious Cranes*, 1112, ink and colour on silk, Liaoning Provincial Museum (Museum no. zong 4848; shu 150)
© The Liaoning Provincial Museum Collection

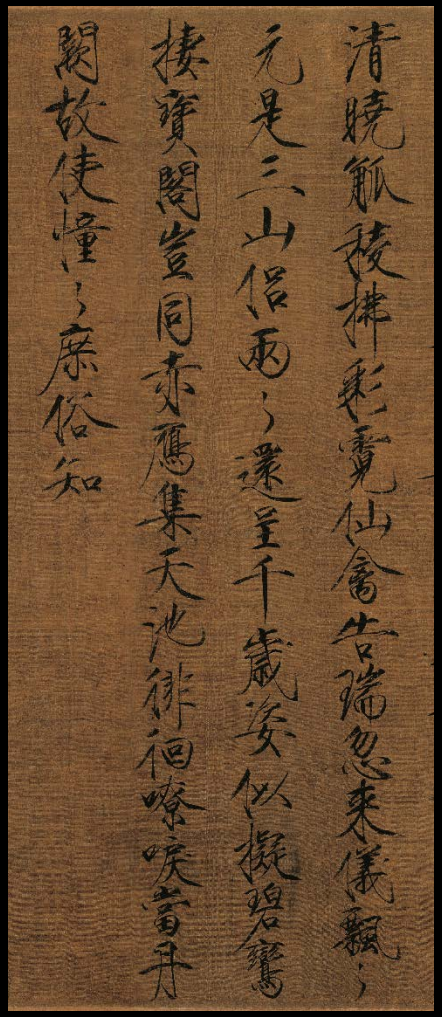
Just as the sky grows light,
rainbow-hued clouds brush
the roof ridge.

Immortal birds, proclaiming
good news, suddenly appear
with their measured dance.

Soaring windborne, truly
companions of the isles of
immortality,

Two by two, they show their
noble forms.

From the poem inscribed on
Auspicious Cranes



Probably Emperor Huizong (1082–1135), *Auspicious Cranes* (detail), 1112, Ink and colour on silk, Liaoning Provincial Museum (Museum no. zong 4848; shu 150) © The Liaoning Provincial Museum Collection



Chen Rong (about 1189 – 1268), *Nine Dragons* (detail), 1244,
ink and touches of red on paper
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Museum no. 17.1697)

Photograph © 2013 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Probably Mao Song (active 1127–50), *Monkey*, About 1127–50, Ink, colour and gold on silk, Tokyo National Museum, Japan (Museum no. TA-297)

Image © TNM Image Archives

Embracing Solitude

1250-1400

EMBRACING SOLITUDE

While court patronage continued despite the disruption caused by the Song-Yuan dynastic change of the late 13th century, the most striking innovations of this period took place at the hands of monks and scholars. These new groups of artists did not depend on commissions for palaces and official buildings for their livelihood. Their paintings were made for private use, often as personal gifts, and were displayed in the houses of their owners. Even works with religious subject matter painted by these artists were not intended for public display.

The subject matter used by monk and scholar painters was very selective and often had literary, philosophical and personal associations. The interest in representing external reality was replaced by a concern for exploring inner thoughts and emotions. This in turn gave rise to powerfully expressive styles of brushwork and an austere approach to the use of colour. Black ink on white paper was regarded as the most appropriate vehicle of expression.



Anonymous, *Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangzi on a Reed*, Before 1363, ink on paper, The Cleveland Museum of Art (Museum no. 1964.44)

© The Cleveland Museum of Art



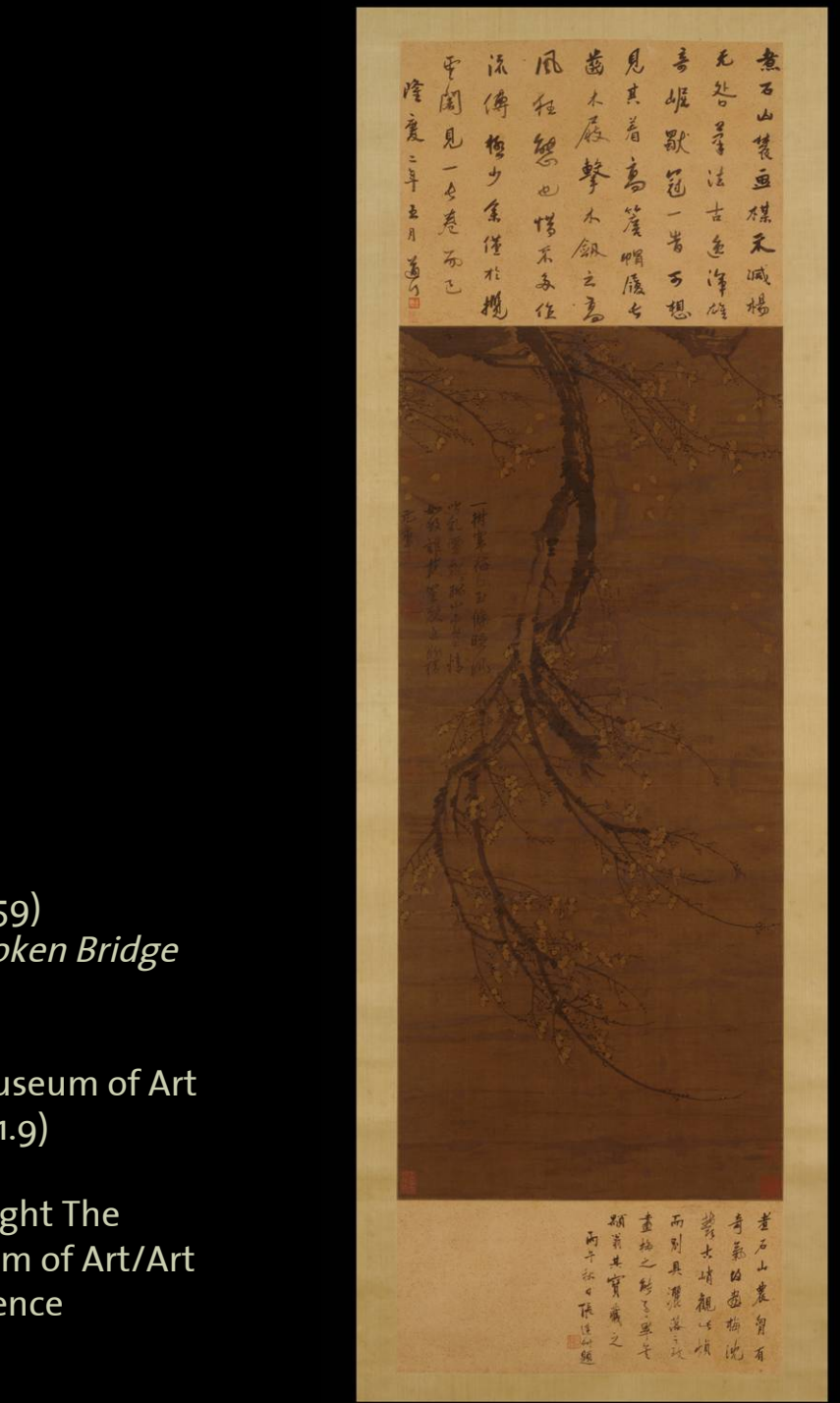
Traditionally attributed to Shi Ke (active 934–65), *Two Chan Patriarchs Harmonising Their Minds* (from a diptych), 1200–1300, Ink on paper, Tokyo National Museum, Japan (Museum no. TA 162)

Image © TNM Image Archives



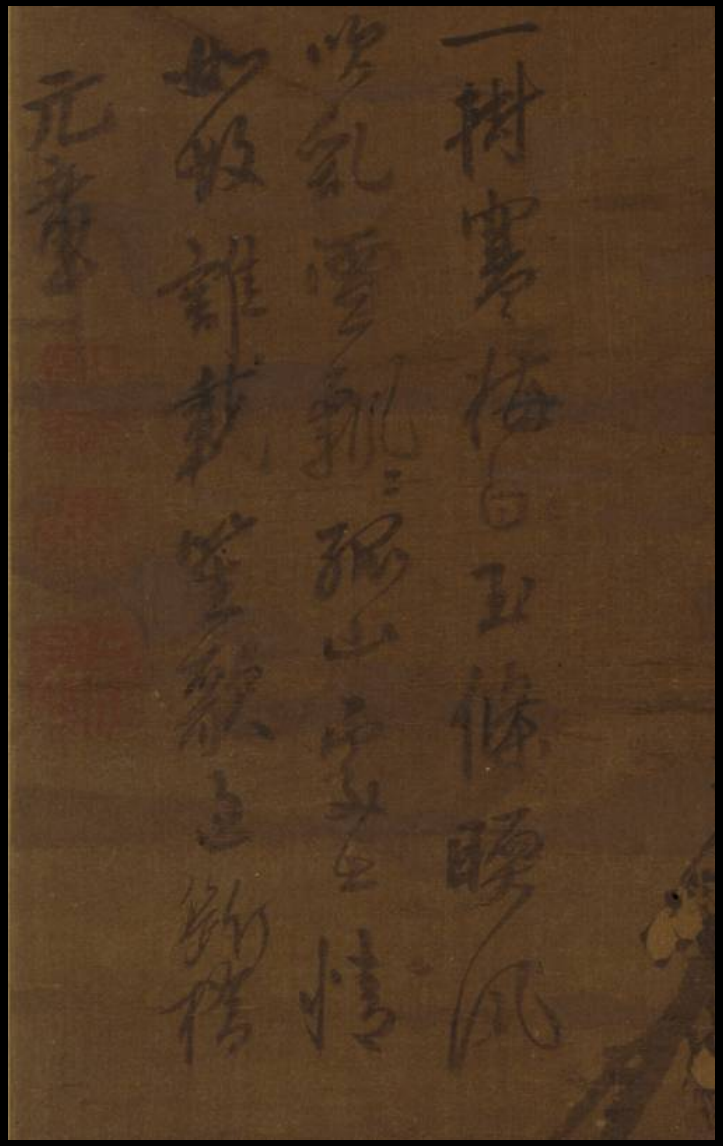
Ni Zan (1306–74),
Woods and Valleys of Mount Yu, 1372
Ink on paper
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
(Museum no. 1973.120.8)

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Wang Mian (1287–1359)
Fragrant Snow at Broken Bridge
About 1310–59
Ink on silk
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
(Museum no. 1973.121.9)

© 2013. Image copyright The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource/Scala, Florence



Wang Mian (1287–1359), *Fragrant Snow at Broken Bridge* (detail), About 1310–59, Ink on silk, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, (Museum no. 1973.121.9) © 2013. Image copyright The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource/Scala, Florence

Chilly plum blossoms fill branches
of white jade;

Scattered by a warm breeze,
[petals] flutter like snowflakes.

The Recluse of Solitary Hill remains
true to himself,

But who carries the song of reed
pipes across Broken Bridge?

Poem inscribed on
Fragrant Snow at Broken Bridge



Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322), *Groom and Horse* (detail of a handscroll), 1296, Ink and colour on paper, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, (Museum no. 1988.135) © 2013. Image copyright The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource/Scala, Florence

The Pursuit of Happiness

1400-1600

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

An artistic explosion took place in the 15th and 16th centuries. As well as in Beijing in the north, major cities in the lower Yangzi River region such as Hangzhou, Nanjing and Suzhou became important new centres for painting.

The political stability and economic prosperity of the Ming dynasty stimulated demand from all levels of society for paintings that would delight the eye and the heart. Painting on silk resumed its former popularity, expensive pigments reappeared on artists' palettes, and images became increasingly decorative. Subject matter ranged from romantic characters or episodes in history and literature, through to topographical views of famous sites and gardens, rare animals and plants. Many pictures were made for seasonal festivals or other auspicious occasions.



Du Jin (active about 1465–1509), *Court Ladies in the Inner Palace* (detail), About 1465–1509, ink and colour on paper, Shanghai Museum (Museum no. 31919)
© Shanghai Museum



Possibly Qiu Ying (1494/5–1552), *Saying Farewell at Xunyang* (detail), About 1500–52, ink and colour on paper, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City (Museum no. 46-50).

Photo: John Lamberton



Anonymous
Portrait of Shen Zhou at Age Eighty
1506
Ink and colour on silk
The Palace Museum
(Museum no. xin 16641)

© The Palace Museum Collection



Tang Yin (1470–1523),
Pure Dream beneath a Paulownia Tree, 1500–23,
Ink and light colour on paper,
The Palace Museum (Museum no. xin 101314)

© The Palace Museum Collection

The *paulownia* shadows cover the purple moss.

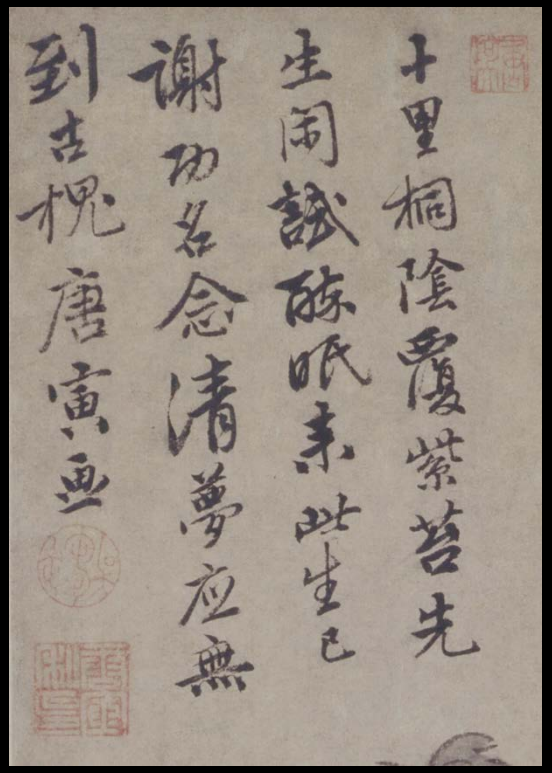
The gentleman is in a deep sleep.

For this lifetime, he has no chance of rank and fame.

This pure sleep is no longer filled with the dreams of grandeur.

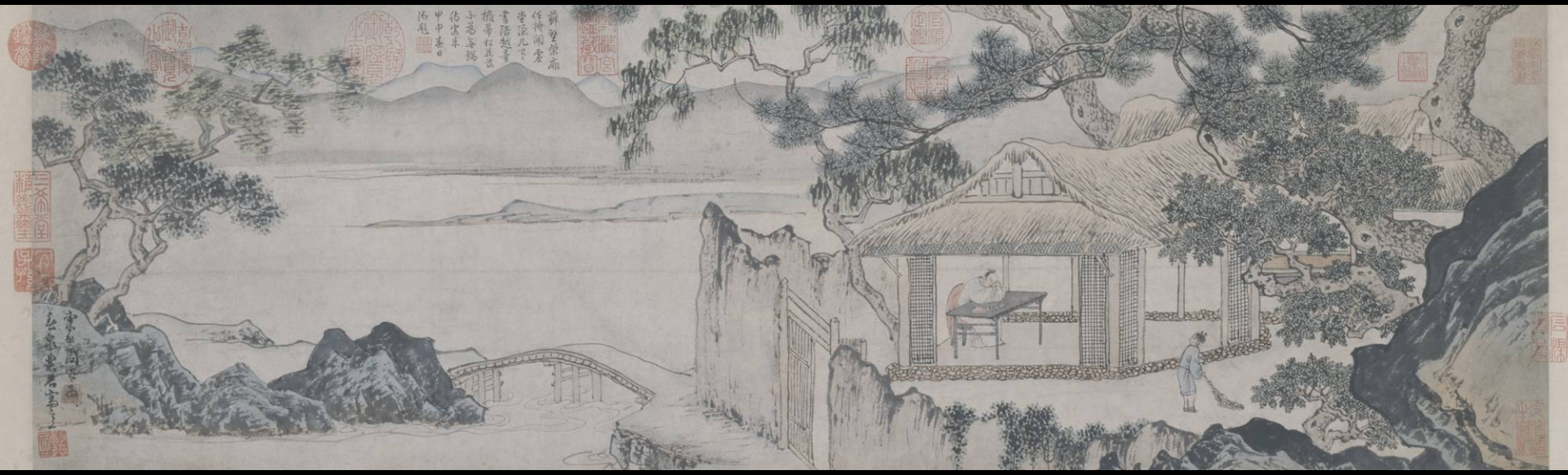
From the poem inscribed on

Pure Dream beneath a Paulownia Tree



Tang Yin (1470–1523) , *Pure Dream beneath a Paulownia Tree* (detail), 1500–23, Ink and light colour on paper
The Palace Museum

© The Palace Museum Collection



Zhou Chen (about 1450–1535), *Dwelling by the Stream in Spring*, 1475,
Ink and colour on paper, The Palace Museum (Museum no. xin 47084)

© The Palace Museum Collection

Challenging the Past

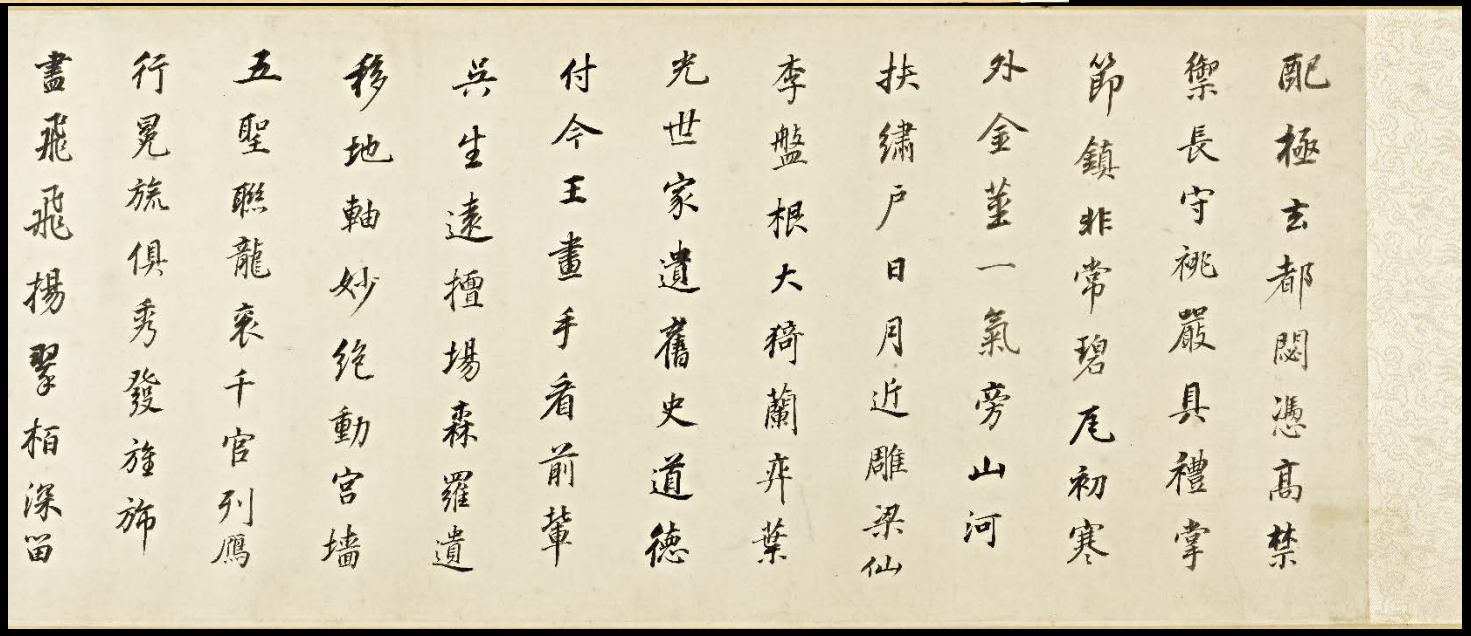
1600-1900

CHALLENGING THE PAST

The second half of the 16th and the 17th century was an age of great artistic rivalry, especially in the fields of landscape painting and the depiction of animals and plants. Painters competed directly not only with their contemporaries, but with their predecessors as well. The most competitive of them entered into a life-long duel with the great masters of the past.

Different strategies were adopted to achieve individual ambitions. Some painters were passionate students of the grand tradition of Chinese painting and were obsessed with a sense of mission as heirs to that heritage. Others took up the great subjects of the past, turning them into something entirely their own. In doing this they sought to prove they were as good as, if not better, than the old masters they so admired.





Dong Qichang (1555–1636), *Twin Marvels of Calligraphy and Painting* (details), painting: 1617, calligraphy: 1619, ink on paper, Liaoning Provincial Museum (Museum no. zong 4840; shu 142)
© The Liaoning Provincial Museum Collection



Wang Hui (1632–1717), *The Colours of Mount Taihang* (detail), 1669, Ink and colour on silk, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Museum no. 1978.423)

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Bada Shanren (1626–1705), *Flowers on the River* (detail),
1697, Ink on paper, Tianjin Museum (Museum no. 58.5.372)

© Courtesy Tianjin Museum

The 108 rosary beads
Can be made of great diamonds,
Or little jade stones,
But how can they compare with, in my picture,
A single lotus seed that is visible but does not exist?
Alas! The entire world is within my lotus.

From the poem inscribed on
Flowers on the River



Bada Shanren (1626–1705),
Flowers on the River (detail),
1697, Ink on paper,
Tianjin Museum
(Museum no. 58.5.372)
© Courtesy Tianjin Museum

Looking to the West

1600-1900

LOOKING TO THE WEST

The European painting tradition was introduced to China in the late 16th century. During the 18th and 19th centuries, when the country was ruled by the Qing, it became an increasingly significant artistic force. Chinese court painters interacted directly with European missionary-artists, from whom they avidly learnt the laws of linear perspective and *chiaroscuro*. These techniques, modified to suit the Chinese aesthetic, were adopted to create the illusion of depth and light.

Fascination with European painting was not confined to the Imperial Court. In the new artistic centres of the south, Chinese painters looked to newly imported European prints and illustrated books, which inspired methods of painting and the incorporation of subject matter unknown to their predecessors.



Zeng Jing (1564–1647),
Portrait of Wang Shimin, 1616
Ink and colour on silk
Tianjin Museum (Museum no. 65.5.3741)

© Courtesy Tianjin Museum



Ren Yi (1840–95),
Portrait of Gao Yongzhi, 1887,
Ink and light colour on paper,
The Palace Museum, Beijing
(Museum no. xin 100465)

© The Palace Museum Collection



Xu Yang (1712–about 79), *Prosperous Suzhou* (detail), 1759, ink and colour on silk, Liaoning Provincial Museum (Museum no. zong 4938; shu 240)

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