

Wu Zhen's poetic inscriptions on paintings¹

TZI-CHENG WANG
School of Oriental and African Studies

Introduction

Wu Zhen (1280–1354), style name Zhonggui, also called himself Meihua Daoren (Plum Blossom Daoist Priest), Mei Shami (Plum Priest) and Meihua Heshang (Plum Blossom Priest). He came from Weitang, now known as Chengguan, in Zhejiang Province. Along with Huang Gongwang (1269–1354), Ni Zan (1301–74), and Wang Meng (1308–85), he is known as one of the 'Four Great Painters of the Yuan Dynasty'.² Wu Zhen was also one of the leading figures of Chinese literati painting at the height of its popularity. When painting landscapes, or bamboo and rocks, he would usually inscribe his works with poems, and his contemporaries praised his perfection in poetry, calligraphy and painting, or the phenomenon of *sanjue*, 'the three perfections'.³ Research to date has concentrated on Wu Zhen's paintings,⁴ but his poetic inscriptions have been relatively neglected. This article seeks to redress the balance by focusing on Wu Zhen's poetic inscriptions on paintings, both his own and those of past masters, and argues that inscriptions and colophons are an essential key to understanding literati art.

Wu Zhen's family background is difficult to ascertain, since only very limited accounts of his life can be found in Yuan period sources.⁵ Sun Zuo (active mid to late fourteenth century) mentions Wu Zhen's residential neighbourhood, painting skills and character, without going into any depth.⁶ After the mid-Ming period, legends about Wu Zhen developed, and these provide us with some useful material. There are also scattered accounts in essays and colophons in books and paintings of various Ming and Qing literati.⁷ Some of their statements are, however, questionable. These include the place of

¹ A Chinese version of this article has been published. See Tzi-cheng Wang, 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', in *Zhongguo gudian wenxue yanjiu*, December 1999, 135–66.

² Dong Qichang, *Rongtai bieji* (Taipei: Guoli zhongyang tushuguan, 1968), 2096.

³ See Gu Sili, *Yuan shi xuan erji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 710. For discussions on the 'three perfections', see articles in Alfreda Murch and Wen C. Fong, (ed.), *Words and images: Chinese poetry, calligraphy and painting* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

⁴ See for example, Chen Qingguang, *Yuandai huajia Wu Zhen* (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 1983); Li Shumei, *Yuanchao Wu Zhen yufutu zhi yanjiu* (M.A. thesis, Taiwan University, 1985); Cahill, James F., *Wu Chen, a Chinese landscapist and bamboo painter of the fourteenth century* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1958); Han, Sungmii Lee, *Wu Chen's Mo-chu-p'u: literati painter's manual on ink bamboo* (Doctoral dissertation, Princeton University, U M I no. A A C 8318720, 1983); Lew, William, *Fisherman in Yuan painting as reflected in Wu Chen's Yufutu scroll in Shanghai* (Doctoral dissertation, Ohio University, U M I no. A A C 7710463, 1976); Joan Stanley-Baker, *Old masters repainted: Wu Zhen (1280–1354), prime objects and accretions* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1995).

⁵ These include, for example, Xia Wenyan (fl. 14th c.)'s *Huitu baojian* (*A precious guide to paintings*) and Tao Zongyi (1316–99?)'s *Shushi huiyao buyi* (*A supplement to the essentials of the history of calligraphy*). See Xia Wenyan, *Tuhui baojian* in Yongrong et al. (comp.), *Siku quanshu* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe), Vol. 814, *juan* 3, 10; Tao Zongyi, *Shushi huiyao buyi*, in Yongrong et al. (comp.), *Siku quanshu*, Vol. 814, 33.

⁶ Sun Zuo, *Cangluoji*, in *Siku quanshu*, Vol. 1229, *juan* 3, 6–7.

⁷ See, for example, Chen Jiru (1558–1639)'s *Meihua'an ji* (*The Plum Blossom Hut*), Qian Shisheng (?–1651)'s *Xiu Meihua'an yuanqi* (*On the building of the Plum Blossom Hut*), Xie Yingxiang's *Xiu Meihua'an muji* (*On building the tomb of the Plum Blossom Daoist Priest*), Sun Maozhi's *Meihua mu kao* (*A study of the tomb of the Plum Blossom Priest*), and Qian Fen (*juren* degree 1642)'s *Meihua Daoren yimo xu* (*Preface to the posthumous works of the Plum Blossom Priest*) in Wu Zhen, *Meihua Daoren yimo* (Xiaoshantang ms. edition, Taipei: Xuesheng shuju reprint, 1970), 1–4, 60–71, and Wu Zhen, *Meidaoren yimo*, in Huang Binhong and Deng Shi (comp.), *Meishu congshu* (Shenzhen guoguang she, 1911–47), Vol. 3, 4th collection, 13–15, 55–61.

origin of Wu Zhen's ancestors; whether Wu Zhen was an expert on the *Book of changes* and worked as a fortune teller; whether he built his own tomb, wrote his own tombstone and foretold his own date of death; whether he had a descendant; and if and when he became a monk.

In 1981, the *Yimen wushi pu* (*Genealogical record of the Wu clan of Yimen*), compiled in 1668 by a descendant of Wu Zhen's elder brother, was discovered in Pinghu County, Zhejiang Province. Research revealed that the family had been quite influential in the Song Dynasty and had been in the shipping trade for several generations in the Yuan Dynasty. This is in contrast to the established view that Wu Zhen had been frustrated and poor throughout his life, but the reliability of the clan record needs further study.⁸

When studying Wu Zhen's poetic inscriptions on paintings, the biggest obstacle is the question of the authenticity of the inscriptions. For example, an editor of the *Siku quanshu* (*Collectanea of the four treasuries*) compiled in the eighteenth century mentioned that the poem *Ti zhu* (*Inscription on bamboo*) was written by Xianyu Shu (1256–1301) rather than Wu Zhen, and also noted that the poem *Tihua dulou* (*Inscription on painting a human skeleton*) and poems on the scroll *Jiahe bajing* (*Eight views of Jiahe*), which I will look at in more detail later, were forgeries.⁹ This view is, however, far from unanimous. The modern scholar Zhuang Shen defends the authenticity of *Inscription about a human skeleton* and points out the errors of the editor,¹⁰ while I would argue that we cannot dismiss *Eight views of Jiahe* lightly simply because it looks more like a map than a painting. Wu Zhen mentions in his foreword that he was reading geographical books and, amongst their maps found eight famous scenic spots and so painted them. In this painting based on maps, the artist seems to have adopted a practical purpose from the very beginning, which is why the poetic inscriptions have such a strong explanatory nature. There are also several allusions to the classics and local folklore, which make the poems more interesting. While these poems are not superb, the editor calling them shallow hardly seems appropriate, and we cannot prove from this that the poems are forgeries.

The modern scholar Yu Shaosong also argues that many of Wu Zhen's poetic inscriptions in the *Mozhu pu* (*Manual of ink bamboo*) were adapted from Li Kan (1245–c. 1320)'s *Zhupu* (*Manual of bamboo*), and doubts the authenticity of the *Moze pu*.¹¹ Joan Stanley-Baker also discusses the authorship of the *Manual of ink bamboo* and the *Moze ce* (*Album of ink bamboo*), and argues that they are not by Wu Zhen but date instead from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.¹² These arguments, although *prima facie* reasonable, leave certain doubts. It is true that, from a literary perspective, the wording of the poetic inscriptions in the *Manual of ink bamboo* and the *Album of ink bamboo* is repetitive and lacks creativity, and so does not live up to Wu Zhen's fine reputation in poetry. However, by the Yuan Dynasty, bamboo had been used as a poetic symbol for almost two thousand years, having first been associated with outstanding virtue and beauty in the *Book of poetry*.¹³ Its imagery had stabilized, and later poets may have found it difficult to be

⁸ See Li Dexun, *Wu Zhen shixi tiba jizhu* (Jinan: Shandong meishu chubanshe, 1990), 179–98; Yu Hui, 'Wu Zhen shixi yu Wu Zhen qiren qihua' in *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan*, No. 4, 1995, 51–67.

⁹ Hu Yujin et al. (comp.), *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao*, (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1971), *juan* 168, 3537.

¹⁰ Zhuang Shen (comp.), *Meihua Daoren shichao*, in *Yuanji sida huajia shi jiaoji* (Hong Kong: Xianggang daxue yazhou yanjiu zhongxin, 1972), 120–21.

¹¹ Yu Shaosong, *Shuhua shulu jieti* (Beijing: Guoli Beiping tushuguan, 1932), *juan* 5, 11b.

¹² Stanley-Baker, *Old masters repainted*, Chapter 15.

¹³ Zhu Xi, *Shi jizhuan* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji kanxingshe, 1955), *juan* 1, 9b.

constantly creative in writing about this topic. These inscriptions cannot be dismissed and, in any case, it is as well to bear in mind that an editor of the *Collectanea of the four treasures* said:

Even if there are many forgeries, genuine works exist. One will often find treasures if one sifts the sand to pick out the gold.¹⁴

If nothing else, these doubted works give us an idea of the image of Wu Zhen in the minds of later literati, thus serving as an indirect source from which to research his character and style. This article includes, with suitable caution, Wu Zhen's poetic inscriptions on bamboo paintings as well as his inscriptions on the theme of fishermen.

There are at least eight different editions of Wu Zhen's inscriptions on paintings,¹⁵ and the material presented in this article is drawn mainly from the following three works which, between them, contain all of his extant inscriptions:

1. The *Mei Daoren yimo* (*Posthumous writings of the Plum Daoist Priest*). This was from the collection of the bibliophile Bao Tingbo (1728–1814) and copied into the *Collectanea of the four treasures*. It contains eighty-five *shi* and *ci* poems. The work was compiled by Qian Fen in the late Ming period, but Qian did not check each poem in detail, and so some spurious works have been included.¹⁶
2. The *Meihua'an gao* (*Manuscript of the Plum Blossom Hut*), compiled by Gu Sili (1665–1722) and containing 108 titles, comprising 143 poems.¹⁷ The poems here are very different from those in *Posthumous writings of the Plum Daoist Priest*, but similar to those found in *Yuding lidai tihua shilei* (*Categories of poems on paintings selected by the Kangxi emperor*).¹⁸ The most important poems collected by Gu include eighty that Wu Zhen had written on the paintings of famous artists, and these are not in the *Posthumous writings of the Plum Daoist Priest*. They are of very high quality, and provide rich material for research.
3. The *Meihua Daoren shichao* (*Collected poems of the Plum Blossom Daoist Priest*), compiled by Zhuang Shen. This includes 158 titles of poems, and comprises 166 poems.¹⁹ This work is mainly based on the two titles mentioned above, but it is strange that the most interesting poetic inscriptions on famous paintings in the *Manuscript of the Plum Blossom Hut* are not included. Zhuang has drawn widely from various collections of inscriptions, books and paintings. Compared with the *Posthumous writings of the Plum Daoist Priest* and the *Manuscript of the Plum Blossom Hut*, there are many more inscriptions on bamboo paintings. Since the authenticity of some of these poems seems questionable, one should be careful in using this work.

¹⁴ *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao*, 3538.

¹⁵ The eight editions are the following: (1) Wu Zhen, *Meihua Daoren yimo*, in *Siku quanshu*, Vol. 1215, 491–507; (2) Wu Zhen, *Mei Daoren yimo* (Xiaoyuan edition, 1876); (3) Wu Zhen, *Meihua Daoren yimo* (Xiaoshantang ms. edition), 1–72; (4) Wu Zhen, *Mei Daoren yimo*, (*Meishu congshu* edition); (5) Wu Zhen, *Mei Daoren yimo*, in Yang Jialuo (comp.), *Meishu congshu* (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1962), Vol. 1, No. 11 (this is a reprint of the *Meishu congshu* edition); (6) Wu Zhen, *Mei Daoren yimo*, in Yu Junshi (comp.), *Meishu congkan* (Taipei: Zhonghua congshu bianshen weiyuanhui, 1964), Vol. 2; (7) Wu Zhen, *Meihua'an gao*, in *Yuan shi xuan erji*, 710–34; and (8) *Meihua Daoren shichao*.

¹⁶ *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao*, 3537.

¹⁷ The poem entitled *Youcheng wangchuan tu* lists three poems, but only two are recorded. See *Yuan shixuan erji*, 718.

¹⁸ See Chen Bangyan et al. (comp.), *Yuding lidai tihua shilei*, in *Siku quanshu*, Vol. 1435–6.

¹⁹ This is counting the two *gathas*, but not individual lines. The title *Tihua* lists nine poems, but only eight are recorded. Zhuang Shen notes that he has collected a total of 205 poems, and this may be a miscalculation. See *Meihua Daoren shichao*, 40, 718.

These works, after eliminating recurrences, produce 225 poem titles, comprising 238 poems for consideration.²⁰ These are written in ancient or regulated verse (pentasyllabic or heptasyllabic), quatrain, ballad, or *gatha* form.

The two most important themes that emerge from Wu Zhen's poetic inscriptions on paintings are those of bamboo and landscape. Of the poems identified, sixty-one are specifically on bamboo, and eight are on bamboo and rocks or on ancient trees, bamboo and rocks. These amount to almost one-third of the total. A further 114, half the total, are on landscape paintings. Another notable theme deals with fishermen, and we find, for example, sixteen *ci* poems in Wu Zhen's long *Yufu tu juan* (*Fishermen scroll painting*),²¹ while the *Collected poems of the Plum Blossom Daoist Priest* contains another five *ci* poems on fishermen and three regulated verses entitled *Qiujiang yuyin* (*Hermit fisherman on an autumnal river*) (Plate 1), *Jiangcun yule* (*Fisherman's joy on a river beside a village*) and *Dongting yuyin* (*Hermit fisherman on Lake Dongting*) (Plate 2). The poems dealing with fishermen provide a valuable source for understanding Wu Zhen's ideas and moods.

Poetic inscriptions on paintings can be studied from many angles, from style, to content, compositional skills, aesthetic form and so on. This article will look at the literary function of Wu Zhen's inscriptions, including their lyrical qualities, depiction of objects, narrative and discursive aspects, and their expansion of the vision of the paintings. This will help to clarify the role that Wu Zhen's poetic inscriptions play in the paintings, as well as the relationship between the two media, in order to appreciate their wholeness.

1. *Poetic inscriptions to describe a painting's context*

Traditionally, prose inscriptions by literati painters include the time, place and occasion on which a work was completed, as well as the artist's state of mind or motive. These inscriptions provide us not only with a record of the painter's experience, but also give the viewer a better understanding of the work. Poetic inscriptions augment this, perhaps describing the reason for the work's creation, and enriching the other inscriptions and the painting itself. A typical example is one of Wu Zhen's inscriptions, entitled *Hua zhu* (*Painting bamboo*):

[Su Dongpo] passed a night intoxicated in Haiyue Hut;
As [Mi Fu] stuck a piece of paper on the icy wall, what inspired Dongpo?
A bamboo growing from the ground was painted, but one cannot see the
joints;
I confess that I try to learn from Dongpo, but I cannot paint as well.²²

Another colophon by Wu Zhen on the same painting reads:

One evening, Old Po visited Mi Yuanzhang (Mi Fu) in his Haiyue Hut. Mi took out a piece of paper made by Chengxin Hall, and asked Po to paint an ink bamboo. Po was drunk by then, and asked him to stick the paper to the wall, then dipped his brush in ink and painted the stem from bottom to top without joints in one stroke. Mi asked why it did not have joints, to which Po replied: 'When we look at bamboo, do we ever notice the joints?' When it was finished, Mi treasured this work and judged it a

²⁰ The poems in the *Siku quanshu* edition of *Meihua Daoren yimo* are all collected in Zhuang Shen's *Meihua Daoren shichao*, but there are sixty-seven titles comprising seventy-two poems in the *Meihua'an gao* not collected in Zhuang's work.

²¹ This scroll is in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

²² *Meihua Daoren shichao*, 87. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 1. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 139.



PLATE 1. *Hermit fisherman on an autumnal river* (Courtesy of the National Palace Museum, Taipei). Wu Zhen's poem is in the top right-hand corner.



PLATE 2. *Hermit fisherman on Lake Dongting* (Courtesy of the National Palace Museum, Taipei).
Wu Zhen's poem is second from the top right-hand corner.

‘famous painting’. Later Commandant Wang Jinqing (Wang Shen (c.1048–1104+)) bartered for it and took it away.²³

From this second inscription we know that the first three lines of the poem tell us about the friendly relations between Su Shi (style name Dongpo) (1036–1101) and Mi Fu (1051–1107) and the origin of the painting of bamboo without joints. With this information, we begin to appreciate both the painting and the poem, learning an interesting story and seeing that Wu Zhen was trying, with dissatisfaction, to model his bamboo after Su Shi. At the same time, Su Shi and Mi Fu’s great achievements in calligraphy and painting also come to mind.

Another of Wu Zhen’s poems is entitled *Ti ji hua zhu* (*Inscribing a poem on my bamboo painting*):

I have a zither like Yuanming’s,
and lived in a desolate valley for many years.
A guest asks about the music’s meaning;
Embarrassed, I can only clear my throat and stroke the frets.
One cannot cure the ignorance of the masses,
And there is no need to blame it on their deep-rooted habits.
I am feeling lazy now and want to sleep,
and a gentle breeze sways the tall and slender bamboo.²⁴

The first six lines of this poem all touch upon the background of the painting and its poetic inscription. Li Rihua (1565–1635) records that Wu Zhen’s friend Yinbing (dates unknown) came to visit Wu Zhen and stood in his living room holding up a wood carving inscribed with the phrase ‘laughing at worldly matters’. After this, Wu Zhen called his living room ‘The Humble Room that Laughs at Worldly Matters’. This led to a discussion with Yinbing about the carving’s message. Yinbing lamented the fact that human conduct was always affected by the environment, and even the virtuous could not stay above worldly fame and gain. He wondered whether human nature was capable of defeating worldly matters, and whether worldly matters should be laughed at at all.²⁵ Thus inspired, Wu Zhen created a painting and inscribed it with this poem.

The first two lines of the poem contain two allusions, one to Tao Yuanming (365–427) playing a stringless zither²⁶ that nobody could appreciate. The second allusion is to ancient trees growing in deep mountains, which carpenters overlook because of their uselessness.²⁷ Wu Zhen is saying that people are often narrow-minded and unable to appreciate unusual things, such as the value of apparently useless things. In the third line Yinbing poses questions, while the fourth line shows that the poet does not know what to reply and could only smile while stroking his zither’s frets. Lines five and six emphasize that each person has his natural disposition and endowment, which cannot be changed. The last two lines indirectly express the poet’s tiredness with worldly people, and suggest that he would rather dream surrounded by rustling bamboo.

In Wu Zhen’s long scroll *Eight scenes of Jiahe*, we find an unusual composition of eight independent scenes accompanied by *ci* poems. The painter uses

²³ *Meihua Daoren shichao*, 87.

²⁴ *Meihua Daoren shichao*, 70. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 2. See also ‘Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan’, 139.

²⁵ Li Rihua, *Liuyanzhai sanbi*, in *Siku quanshu*, Vol. 867, *juan* 4, 25–6.

²⁶ Xiao Tong, *Jinshu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 2463.

²⁷ Chen Guying, *Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 498.

space and light ink to indicate mist and water, but the important parts of the scenery are painted realistically for emphasis. At the same time, the names of mountain peaks, buildings, temples and so on are indicated. This scroll is, as we have seen, strongly explanatory, and is like a map to help travellers to find scenic spots. The poems also concentrate on introducing the geographical location of the relevant scene, adding information on its history and on visits made by famous people. The inscription on the first scene, *Kongcui fengyan* (*Breezy mist around Kongcui Pavilion*), reads:

In front of Wanshou Mountain
 Stands a pavilion known as Zuili.
 The acres of bamboo in the shadow of the Hall of Three Visits look lovely,
 And wind and mist entwine Kongcui Pavilion.
 Poets and hermits have left inscriptions here;
 Mundane matters do not disturb the green moss paths.
 Zizhan (Su Shi) visited Abbot Wen three times,
 And poetic inscriptions cover the wall.²⁸

An original note to the poem reads:

Twenty-seven *li* west of the prefecture stands Kongcui Pavilion, surrounded by a few acres of bamboo; and nearby sits Benjue Buddhist Temple, behind Zuili Pavilion and north of the Hall of Three Visits.

Benjue Monastery's background is the mountains, pavilions and the Hall of Three Visits. Xu Wen of the Southern Song describes the quiet and beautiful scenery around the temple in his *Benjue chanyuan ji* (*Record of the Benjue Chan Buddhist Temple*) as follows:

There is an expanse of farmland, and a river encircles [the temple]. Layers of tall pavilions loom faintly through the grey mist and white reeds, and the place is gently permeated with an atmosphere of seclusion. Such is the outstanding scenery of Zuili.²⁹

Coming back to the *ci* poem, the first half describes the understated and pleasant scenery, and the second concentrates on the relationship between Su Shi and the temple. Abbot Wen, who came from the same town as his good friend Su Shi, was once in charge of the temple; Su Shi visited him on several occasions and it was through his poems that the temple became famous. In Su's poem *Xiuzhou Baoben Chanyuan xiangseng Wen Zhanglao Fangzhang* (*Abbot Wen of Baoben Chan Buddhist Temple in Xiu Prefecture, a priest from my native area*), he writes:

Every time I come across the old man from Shu [Abbot Wen], I chat with
 him all day long,
 And I feel that I can see Mount Emei's emerald green stretch across the
 sky.
 He has no more use for words, having truly possessed the Way;
 While I can only search fruitlessly for a line.³⁰

This poem was written in 1072 when Su Shi first visited Abbot Wen to express his admiration. A year later Wen left the temple because of illness, and this inspired Su to write the following on a second visit:

²⁸ *Meihua Daoren yimo*, (*Siku quanshu* edition), *juan* B, 2. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 3. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 140.

²⁹ Xu Shuo, *Zhiyuan Jiahe zhi*, in *Siku quanshu*, Vol. 491, *juan* 22, 14.

³⁰ Xu Xu, *Su Shi shixuan* (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1986), 43.

It was night when I heard that the old man from Shu was bed bound in
the deserted village,
And at midnight I knocked on his door under the moonlight.
We met a year ago, but it seems like yesterday;
Both of us are still alive, so we can talk again.
We appreciate one another, not because we are old and like to reminisce
about our hometown;
You are ill and cannot deliver a sermon, but your culture is respected more
than ever.
I see only the lonely crane, which I met before,
Raise its head and look at me, as if it desires a long conversation.³¹

The poem is filled with deep affection for his friend. When Su passed through
the same area a third time, Abbot Wen had already died. In his grief Su wrote:

I was alarmed by the crane's slim appearance last time,
And soon after that you passed away, a cloud, and there's no place to look
for you.
I visited you three times—first old, ill, then dead;
And in an instant it is the past, the present and the future.³²

Wu Zhen's poem encapsulates the story of Su Shi, the abbot and the Hall of
Three Visits.³³

2. Poetic inscriptions that express thoughts and feelings about paintings

In general, a painter relies on technical features such as layout, brushstrokes,
and the arrangement of ink and of colours, to reveal his thoughts and feelings.
However, his state of mind may often seem rather obscure and difficult to
ascertain for the viewer. A literati painter, however, can express his state of
mind and feelings relatively freely and clearly through his inscriptions. In the
case of Wu Zhen, his poetic inscriptions add another dimension of ideas and
feelings to his paintings. This is illustrated in his poem *Ti jihua caoting shiyi
tu* (*Inscribing a poem on my own painting 'Poetic feelings of the thatched
pavilion'*):

I paint a thatched cottage alongside the village;
I take it seriously, and my planning is meticulous.
The forest is deep, the birds happy;
This is far from the dusty world, and the bamboo and pines are pure.
I could contemplate the springs and rocks without thinking of time;
And the zither and books delight my nature.
But when will I be able to fulfil my lifelong wish, to retreat from worldly
matters
And feel at ease wherever I am?³⁴

Wu Zhen was a serene and aloof person, self-content and indifferent to
fame and gain. This painting should be seen as a physical representation of
the kind of seclusion he longed for, while the poem tells us how the author
sees the pleasures of a reclusive life. The first line indicates the location of the
thatched pavilion and, since it is next to a village, we know that Wu Zhen

³¹ *Su Shi shixuan*, 67.

³² *Su Shi shixuan*, 71.

³³ For the background of the three visits, see *Zhiyuan Jiahe zhi*, *juan* 22, 14–17.

³⁴ *Meihua Daoren yimo*, (*Siku quanshu* edition), *juan* A, 4. For the Chinese text, see appendix,
item 4. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 141–2.

desired a spiritual rather than a physical hermitage; the latter would have forced him to abandon the world. In the second line, we can see how singlehearted about and devoted to painting he is. This line also explains that his choice of this way of life was made after serious thought. Lines three to six describe his feelings about the scenery, where words like 'happy', 'pure' and 'delight' express his pleasure in finding himself in the company of birds, pines and bamboo, springs and rocks, music and books. The last two lines tell us that, while painting, Wu Zhen was still troubled by worldly affairs, and the world in the painting existed only in the poet's imagination.

In Wu Zhen's poems, one often finds verbs, adjectives or nouns which directly express his feelings towards objects or scenery, such as those quoted above. Other examples (underlined) can be found in the following lines:

I only regretted [that] no green mountain could be seen on the horizon,
But I was delighted by winding waters.³⁵

I admire and appreciate the fishermen most,
With their fishing rods and small boats, beside a pool.³⁶

The west wind soughs and sighs and leaves fall;
There are blue mountains by the river and the gloom piles up like them,
layer on layer.³⁷

People desire to live in mountainous areas,
Because there is no other place as suitable.³⁸

I build a thatched cottage on the bend of a stream in the shade of the
mountain;
What I love most is my window that faces the tall and slender bamboo.³⁹

The tranquil old man could have companions,
He prefers the company of the gulls on the stream.⁴⁰

In these lines, the poet states his likes and dislikes, which are much more difficult to reveal in a painting.

Besides expressing personal feelings towards objects and scenery, Wu Zhen often uses his poems to express thoughts and feelings which are stimulated by the themes of paintings, a good example of which is his poem *Mocai (Ink cabbage)*:

Chinese cabbage breaks through the ground with moist green leaves;
The snowflakes are overturned, and the leaves drip jade-like tears.
Wulou Pavilion and Jingu Garden pale into dust,
What has become of former heroes and beauties?
A hermit shaved the hair from turtles for a long time to weave a felt rug;
Although my pouch is empty, I do not keep money given insultingly.
When I face the butcher's shop, I chew and drool;
But I am at ease with the taste of plain food.
You, vetch, how many years has it been [since I've enjoyed your taste]?
I laugh, and not only with [Su] Dongpo.⁴¹

³⁵ *Meihua Daoren yimo*, (*Siku quanshu* edition), *juan* B, 3.

³⁶ *Meihua Daoren shichao*, 82.

³⁷ *Meihua Daoren shichao*, 105.

³⁸ *Yuan shixuan erji*, 719.

³⁹ *Yuan shixuan erji*, 716.

⁴⁰ *Yuan shixuan erji*, 732.

⁴¹ *Meihua Daoren yimo*, (*Siku quanshu* edition), *juan* A, 3. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 5. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 142.

A colophon to this painting reads:

Plum Blossom Taoist Priest was eating wild vegetables, and he painted this scene in a playful mood. My friend dropped by and asked for a painting. I inscribed a poem and gave the work to him, for the sole purpose of making people with the same views laugh. [Painted in the] *jichou* year of the *zhizheng* period (1349).⁴²

In the first two lines of the poem, the refreshing beauty of the Chinese cabbage set against the white snow is praised. The poet then introduces in the third and fourth lines the story of Lian Jian allaying Emperor Guangwu's hunger at Wulou Pavilion in contrast to the luxurious surroundings of Jingu Garden.⁴³ As a grand garden pales into dust, so do beauties and heroes of the past fade. The next four lines show that the poet has chosen a quiet and simple lifestyle, having realized that the world is ever changing, and that wealth and fame are only temporary. Thus line five points out that Wu Zhen was involved in nothing solid or with practical value.⁴⁴ Line six then explains that he would rather live in poverty than lose his dignity. In the seventh and eighth lines we learn that the poet once found wealth and fame enjoyable, poverty and loneliness sad; but even though he has yearned for the taste of delicious meat,⁴⁵ in his heart he knows that only with simple and plain food can he gain purity of body and mind, and that is why he would rather live in poverty. In the last two lines, the vetch (*yuanxiu*) alludes to the story of Su Shi and Chao Yuanxiu, who both enjoyed the taste of this vegetable.⁴⁶ This is why Wu Zhen sees eye to eye with Su Shi, and this sharing of tastes is referred to again in the colophon. In conclusion, one might say that this poem is Wu Zhen's ode to simplicity.

The following poem is the first of a group of four in a painting entitled *An ink painting of four friends: plum, pine, orchid and bamboo*, and is on pine trees:

Quietly grinding ink on the inkstone, the ink flows;
Dark green beard-like pine-needles summon the wind and mountain spirits
weep.

The sound of waves breaks one's dreams, the iron-like branches are cold;
The green needles grow damp in the shadow of the mist, which stretches
across the sky.

Acres of pines on Culai Mountain age in the clouds and mist;
The groves of nine *li* of pines in the West Lake Mountains murmur keenly.
When can I move these trees to a place before my bright window,
To face the poet and sway their cold green branches continuously?⁴⁷

In the first line, the painter is grinding the ink and composing thoughts with which to wield his brush later. The next three lines break through the time and space constraints of the painting, and create a new time-space dimension for the work as a whole. The majestic and magnificent pine trees are described swaying in the whistling winds on mountains and against surging waves. In the last four lines, it is asked when the pines of Culai Mountain⁴⁸ and West Lake mountains⁴⁹ will move to keep the poet who appreciates them

⁴² *Meihua Daoren shichao*, 102.

⁴³ For Wulou Pavilion, see Fan Ye, *Hou Han shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 641. For Jingu Garden, see *Jinshu*, 1006.

⁴⁴ See Gan Bao, *Sou shen ji*, in *Siku quanshu*, Vol. 1042, *juan* 6, 2.

⁴⁵ See Huan Tan, *Huanzi xinlun*, in *Sibu beiyao* (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1927-36), 14b.

⁴⁶ Su Shi, *Su Dongpo quanji* (Shanghai: Guoxue zhenglishe, 1936), 185.

⁴⁷ *Yuan shixuan erji*, 716. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 6. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 143.

⁴⁸ For these pines, see Jin Qihua, *Shijing quanyi* (Jiangsu: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1984), 881.

⁴⁹ For these pines, see Tian Rucheng, *Xihu youlan zhi* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1958), *juan* 10, 122.

company. The poet in the verse refers, of course, to Wu Zhen, and these lines reveal his pursuit of virtue and steadfastness and his regret at the rarity of true friends in this world.

Thoughts and feelings in response to the themes in paintings often appear at the end of Wu Zhen's poetic inscriptions, as the following examples show:

Where in this world escapes the intense heat of summer?
The fiery clouds glare without respite.
I spread out the painting in my airy studio, and before I have even finished
enjoying it,
I can feel a gentle breeze seep from the white silk [painting].⁵⁰

A soaring seagull in this vast universe,
Enjoying oneself for a hundred years, like a guest.⁵¹

Where are the five hundred Arhats of the Tiantai sect?
I turn to the painting to find out whether they existed or not.⁵²

Who says that scenes in the golden house are splendid?
Listen to the rain splatter on the green bamboo, and one will feel that the
night grows longer.⁵³

I laugh at myself, bustling about like the moon,
Coming and going, when can I rest?⁵⁴

Water flows to the east below Yanling Sandbank;
It flows to Wusong River, but I am afraid that it will still not be pure.⁵⁵

The small boat is steady, the straw cape is light,
Fishing only for sea perch and not for fame.⁵⁶

These lines all serve to deepen and elevate the meaning of the paintings.

In some poems by Wu Zhen, however, we find that the lines have no direct relationship with the paintings. Instead, they express his own thoughts and feelings as a result of a sudden creative intuition, using a compositional technique similar to that of *xing* (stimulus) in the *Book of poetry*.⁵⁷ One such poem is entitled *Ti zhu* (*Inscription on bamboo*):

I used ink to play,
And unexpectedly became its slave.
If then I had changed my mind rashly,
How can a hermit now spend his time?⁵⁸

Here Wu Zhen does not describe the bamboo, but how he began painting as a hobby and ended up regarding it as his lifeblood. The second line seems to indicate that he regrets having indulged himself in painting, but in the third and fourth lines, he changes his attitude and congratulates himself on having stuck with his original passion, because painting has become his main comfort in seclusion.

⁵⁰ *Yuan shixuan erji*, 714.

⁵¹ *Yuan shixuan erji*, 717.

⁵² *Yuan shixuan erji*, 728.

⁵³ *Yuan shixuan erji*, 731.

⁵⁴ *Yuan shixuan erji*, 734.

⁵⁵ *Meihua Daoren shichao*, 90.

⁵⁶ *Meihua Daoren shichao*, 108.

⁵⁷ For an explanation of *xing*, see Pauline Yu, *The reading of imagery in the Chinese poetic tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

⁵⁸ *Meihua Daoren yimo*, (*Siku quanshu* edition), *juan* A, 7. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 7. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 144.

Let us look at another poem by Wu Zhen entitled *Ti zhu* (*Inscription on bamboo*):

Facing these gentlemen each day,
I do not stroke and play with them for trivial reasons.
I ask the young horse [unaccustomed to pulling and] stuck between the
carriage shaft,
'Are you better off than the fish stuck in the rut?'⁵⁹

Bamboo can grow in the mountains, by water, on rocks and cliffs, and can sometimes reach the clouds. They are unrestrained and at peace no matter where they grow. Compared with the young horse and the fish,⁶⁰ the bamboo is naturally more comfortable and carefree. Not enslaved by pursuit of material things, this poem describes a carefree and self-content Wu Zhen.

Sometimes Wu Zhen also takes the opportunity of inscribing poems on paintings to express his admiration for those for whom he has high regard, such as in the following:

I often recall Li Jiqu from a previous dynasty,
His outstanding style of ink bamboo was unequalled in this world and set
the pace for generations.
His hundred-year-old works have been preserved in the world of men,
Painting in powerful strokes autumn bamboo in the dream of Xiangtan.⁶¹

Li Jiqu was the famous bamboo painter Li Kan (1244–1320). His *Manual of bamboo* survives still and explains how to capture the spirit of the bamboo, as well as describing how to use brush and ink, colours, composition, and it also grades various types of bamboo.⁶² Wu Zhen's bamboo painting was deeply inspired by this work, and he pays homage to Li's great achievements in this in his poem.

3. *Poetic inscriptions that expand time–space boundaries and the vision of paintings*

Painting, being a spatial art form, depicts things that are relatively concrete. The painter captures the poetic quality of a moment, and transforms it into a painting. The fact that an event becomes static is a characteristic of painting as a medium, and also its limitation. Poetic inscriptions can overcome these fetters—as well as adding additional imaginary space and expanding the time boundaries frozen by the painting. The static quality of the scenery comes alive, to the verge of moving. Wu Zhen's poetic inscriptions bring these concepts into play ingeniously, as we can see in the following poem entitled *Ti Wang Jinqing wanhe qiuyun* (*Poetic inscription on Wang Jinqing's 'Myriad ravines and autumn clouds'*):

The mountains wind around each other;
Sweet-smelling groves smother the blue-grey cliffs.
The wild apes scream, the trees turn red;
The birds in the woods build nests, the new growth of bamboo shows a
bluish green.

⁵⁹ *Meihua Daoren yimo*, (*Siku quanshu* edition), *juan* A, 9. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 8. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 145.

⁶⁰ For the horse, see Sima Qian, *Shiji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 2851. For the fish, see *Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi*, 705.

⁶¹ *Meihua Daoren yimo*, (*Siku quanshu* edition), *juan* A, 12. Xiangtan is in Hunan Province and is famous for its bamboo. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 9. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 145.

⁶² Li Kan, *Zhupu*, in *Siku quanshu*, Vol. 814, 317–418.

Clouds embrace the emerald mountain tops;
 Spring water streams down the ancient stones.
 An old man chants a poem contentedly;
 Travellers trudge on with their journey.
 The returning boats sail towards the east;
 Smoke from kitchen chimneys rises to the sky and vanishes.
 Before me, the doors to the village homes have not been closed,
 The residents are not aware that dusk is approaching.⁶³

We encounter many verbs in this poem. The mountains encircle the scene, the apes scream and birds perch, spring water gurgles across the stones, an old man sings poetry obliviously, boats return and smoke rises from chimneys. The moment frozen in time by the painting has been transformed into a series of movements. A single moment in time and the limited space on the piece of paper have been extended into a work of art without boundaries in space and time. Without a doubt, the artistic appeal and interest of the painting have been increased.

Wang Wei (701–761)'s *Xuexi tu* (*Painting of a stream in snow*) principally depicts a winter landscape. Wu Zhen wrote two poems on this painting. In the first he describes what the artist Wang Wei sees and feels when he ascends the terrace to gaze into the distance, by re-creating the scenery in the painting through the eyes of Wang Wei in the poem. The second poem then goes completely beyond the painting itself:

Emerald trees embrace the houses beside the river,
 Where red curtains are rolled up to bring in the green mountain mist.
 All day long, not a single guest passes by;
 At dusk scattered fishermen return.
 The mountain ranges are brightened by layers of white plum blossoms;
 The embankment seems more winding when willow catkins fly about.
 If you can wait to appreciate this painting in the silent evening,
 The pure white colours appear even more radiant.⁶⁴

This poem imbues the ink painting with yet more lustre. The emerald trees, red hanging curtains, and the green mountain mist (first four lines) not only transform the black and white washes the mere eye sees, but at the same time reveal the sense of vitality beneath the chilly winter scene. The last four lines all concentrate on describing the colour white, but words such as 'brighten', 'winding', 'fly' and 'radiant' add an additional brightness and sense of movement to the scenery and, in this way, the thoughts of the viewer become actively engaged in a world where time and space change continually.

Wu Zhen's *Fishermen scroll* is a long hand scroll with a simple and clear layout. In the first section we see fishing boats and the faint outline of river banks. In the middle section, mountains extend into the distance and two trees in the foreground reach the top of the scroll. In the last section, there are a few thatched cottages and a temple built into the mountains. A vast expanse of space forms the river, on which fifteen small fishing boats are scattered about. Fifteen poems are inscribed, imbuing this fine composition with extra layers of meaning. By way of illustration, the second *ci* poem reads:

⁶³ *Yuan shixuan erji*, 710–11. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 10. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 145–6.

⁶⁴ *Yuan shixuan erji*, 718. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 11. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 146.

He winds the fishing line and tidies up the boat and oars;
 Beyond the river the moon hangs bright and round.
 Wine bottle empty, straw rain cape hanging,
 He puts down the fishing rod and drifts into sleep beneath the moonlight.⁶⁵

In the painting, half-hidden behind a river bank, we find a small fishing boat with a fisherman sleeping at one end, his head facing downwards. Everything described in the poem is an addition. At the beginning of the poem, the writer describes the end of a hard working day when the fisherman clears away his equipment. The second line describes mooring the boat and the scenery under the bright moonlight. The empty wine bottle in the next line appeals to the senses of taste and smell of the viewer, who can vicariously enjoy hanging up the straw cape without a worry, while the last line again emphasizes the fisherman's peace with himself and with the world. In the ninth *ci* poem we find the following:

Winds stir up the Yangzi River, and waves the wind;
 Fish and dragons mingle in the same river.
 Hiding in a cove, moored to a tall pine tree,
 I wait till the clouds retreat and the moon re-appears in the sky.⁶⁶

Beneath this *ci* poem, the painting shows a tranquil range of mountains in the middle distance, and boulders in the foreground. Alongside one of the boulders is a small boat, and in it a fisherman holds an oar, seemingly waiting. However, unlike the scene described in the poem, we do not see waves or water dragons. The fisherman's boat is not hiding in the depths of the bay, and there is no tall pine tree where the boat can be moored (Plate 3). What the poet wants to reveal then is the calm before the storm, and he thus indirectly alludes to the hardship of the fisherman's life. The last line reveals the fisherman's longing for peace and serenity in life—he is able to forget his sorrows in real life, which is perhaps also the desire of the poet.

In Wu Zhen's painting *Shanzha bentuan* (*The rapids at Green Fir Sluice Gate*) (Plate 4), from his *Eight scenes of Jiahe*, the *ci* poem enriches the painting with personal feelings and allusions to history:

The rapid waters at Green Fir Sluice Gate roll on;
 The water of the reservoir flows into distant Wusong River.
 An avenue of drooping willows, luxuriance like billowing clouds;
 Since ancient times, this has been the place to say goodbye.

Here we find the Tomb of Shame, where the wife of [Zhu] Mai[chen] hid herself, ashamed for remarrying;
 And Qiumao Courier Station where [Maichen] sent the letter divorcing her.
 If you come across a woodcutter across the road, do not call out his name,
 For this will startle the spirit in the tomb.⁶⁷

In the first part of this poem, the emphasis is on the geographical aspect of the scenery and its special features. Taking the canal north from Jiaying

⁶⁵ This poem is not in *Meihua Daoren yimo*, or *Meihua'an gao*. I follow the version on the painting and not the wording in *Meihua Daoren shichao* which is slightly different. See *Yuandai huajia Wu Zhen*, 147. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 12. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 146–7.

⁶⁶ This poem is not in *Meihua Daoren yimo*, or *Meihua'an gao*. I follow the version on the painting and not the wording in *Meihua Daoren shichao* which is slightly different. See *Yuandai huajia Wu Zhen*, 148. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 13. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 147.

⁶⁷ *Meihua Daoren yimo*, (*Siku quanshu* edition), *juan* B, 4. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 14. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 147.



PLATE 3. *Fisherman's scroll* (section) (Courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.). Wu Zhen's poem is second from the top right-hand corner.

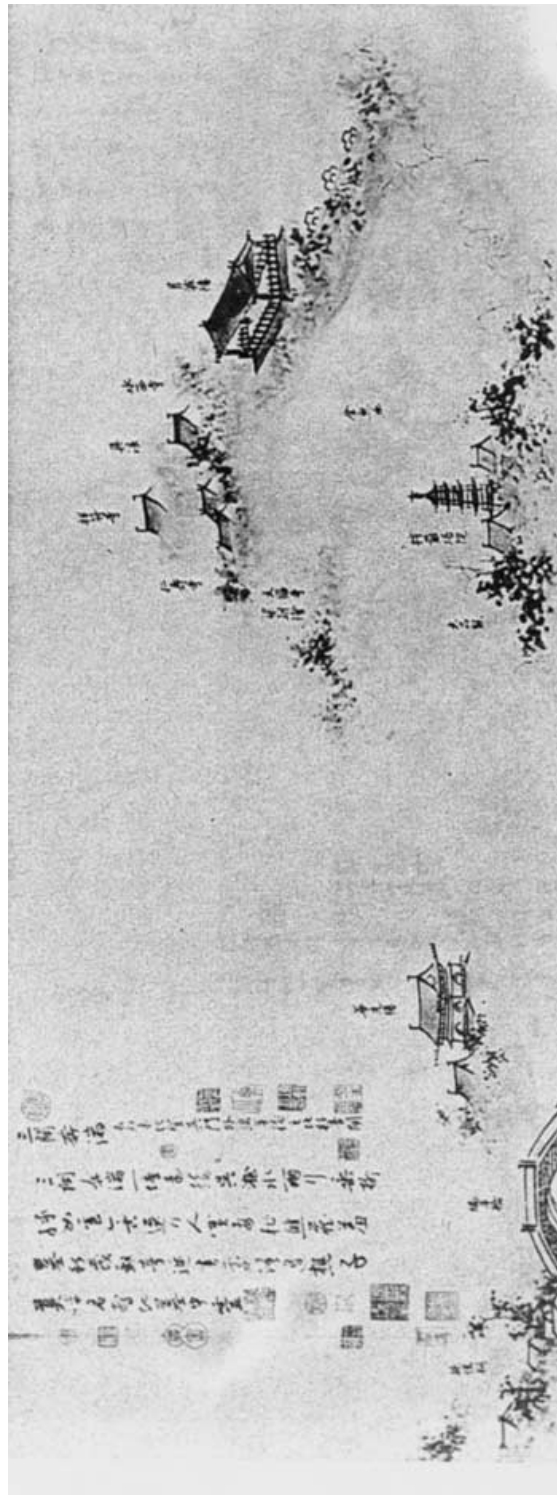


PLATE 4. *The rapids at Green Fir Sluice Gate* (Courtesy of the National Palace Museum, Taipei).
Wu Zhen's poem is in the top left-hand corner.

and passing Duanping Bridge leads you to Lake Tai and further on towards Suzhou. The route passes Upper Sluice Gate, Green Fir Sluice Gate, and Lower Sluice Gate. Next to Lower Sluice Gate is Qiumao Courier Station which is near to where the boats moor. On both sides willows cover the shores densely.⁶⁸ These willows allude to the ancient custom of breaking a willow-twig when separating, and further increase the melancholy in the fourth line.

In the second half of the poem, the sadness of parting is brought into full play. The poet alludes to the story of Zhu Maichen's wife from the Han Dynasty, who was unwilling to live in destitute circumstances and thus left her husband to marry someone else. Later, Zhu returned to the village as a wealthy official, and she felt so ashamed that she hanged herself.⁶⁹ Wu uses this as an indirect comment on the affairs of human life and the sorrow of parting and of dying.

The story of Zhu Maichen has been handed down and transformed over time. By the Song and Yuan periods, the story had been recast in various forms, such as opera and classical tales, and had become widely known.⁷⁰ The Tomb of Shame and the sending of the letter are later additions to the drama which are not in the *Han shu* (*History of the Han Dynasty*).⁷¹ Wu's poem thus imparts into the scenery of *The rapids at Green Fir Sluice Gate* a well-known story of sorrow and regret.

4. Poetic inscriptions that reveal the symbolic meaning of paintings and some that end with a twist

After Song literati painting had become established, the 'Four Gentlemen', the plum, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum, became the literati painter's favourite motifs. Because of their symbolism, they provided the perfect means for the literati to display their culture and integrity, as well as their power and agility of thinking. In the Yuan period, ink bamboo painting was especially popular, and two-thirds of Yuan painters were very well versed in this genre.⁷²

Wu Zhen was one of the famous painters of this genre, and fine examples of his work such as *Zhu shi tu* (*Bamboo and rock*), *Yundang qingying* (*Pure shadows in Yundang Valley*), *Mei zhu shuangqing* (*The purity of bamboo and plum blossom*), *Feng zhu tu* (*Bamboo in the wind*) and those in his *Album of ink bamboo* and *Manual of ink bamboo* (Plate 5) can still be seen today.⁷³ A large number of Wu Zhen's poems on bamboo may be found in the *Collected poems of the Plum Blossom Daoist Priest*.⁷⁴ When we read some of the poems on these paintings, however, we find that there are no direct descriptions of actual features of bamboo. Instead, the poet's main intention is to praise

⁶⁸ *Yuandai huajia Wu Zhen*, 29.

⁶⁹ Ban Gu, *Hanshu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 2791-4. Wu Zhen has probably also drawn on other sources such as Song and Yuan drama.

⁷⁰ See Qian Nanyang, *Song Yuan xiwen jiyi* (Shanghai: Shanghai gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1965), 55.

⁷¹ Qian Nanyang notes that the *Xiumu ting ji* in *Wanjin qinglin* describes Zhu Maichen's wife committing suicide by jumping into the river, and Zhu burying her. The tomb was known as the Tomb of Shame. See *Song Yuan xiwen jiyi*, 55. The *Zhui bai qiu* notes that when Zhu Maichen returned home in glory, he asked Zhang Biegu from his home town to bring a letter to his former wife to ask her to remarry. Although this anthology collects excerpts from Ming and Qing opera, the story may have a basis in an earlier version. See Wang Xieru (ed.), *Zhui bai qiu* (Kunming: Zhonghua shuju, 1940), Vol. 1, 154-8.

⁷² See Zheng Wuchang, *Zhongguo huaxue quanshi* (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1985), 290.

⁷³ The *Feng zhu tu* is kept in the Freer Gallery of Art, and the rest are in the Palace Museum, Taipei.

⁷⁴ In the 166 poems collected by Zhuang Shen, 61 are on bamboo, and eight are on bamboo and rock, or ancient trees, bamboo and rock.

virtues symbolized by the bamboo in order to expand the vision of the painting. We have, for example, the following poems:

[Bamboo] naturally embraces high moral principles,
It seems to reach out to the clouds with a purpose.
Silently, and in the desolate mountains,
This gentleman's ambition seems even more worthy.⁷⁵ (Plate 6)

When the trees shake and drop their leaves,
This gentleman remains particularly green.
With moral integrity and its mind more modest still,
It cherishes solitude to keep its nature intact.⁷⁶

The first poem praises the moral integrity and lofty ambition of bamboo. In the second poem, the writer expresses his admiration for the bamboo's tenacity, its refusal to yield to outside pressure, its modesty, and the preservation of its own true nature.

The following poem talks about other aspects:

The [bamboo] stands upright in the frost,
Its shadows are slim and graceful under the moonlight.



PLATE 5. From *Manual of ink bamboo* (eighth in series) (Courtesy of the National Palace Museum, Taipei).

⁷⁵ *Meihua Daoren yimo*, (*Siku quanshu* edition), *juan* A, 8. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 15. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 149.

⁷⁶ *Meihua Daoren yimo*, (*Siku quanshu* edition), *juan* A, 8. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 16. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 149.

If you understand the principle of self-effacement,
Then what matters will [still] weigh on your mind?⁷⁷

In the first two lines, the poet emphasizes that bamboo can preserve its faithfulness and integrity in adverse circumstances. In the following lines he reminds us that if we are humble and open-minded, external matters will not be so threatening. In the next poem, we read:

Each leaf dances in the pure wind;
Droplets swell on every tip.
Who can appreciate this feeling with me?
Chao Fu and Xu You were on the mountain too.⁷⁸

The first two lines indicate that the bamboo is content in its natural environment. In the following lines, the poet personifies the bamboo and compares it to the two hermits Chao Fu and Xu You,⁷⁹ praising its noble nature and contentment in its reclusiveness.

Wu also praises the quiet, graceful and elegant manner of the bamboo, as well as its aloofness from the world with lines such as:



PLATE 6. From *Manual of ink bamboo* (eleventh in series) (Courtesy of the National Palace Museum, Taipei). Wu Zhen's poem, first two lines from the right.

⁷⁷ *Meihua Daoren yimo*, (*Siku quanshu* edition), *juan* A, 7. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 17. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 149.

⁷⁸ *Meihua Daoren yimo*, (*Siku quanshu* edition), *juan* A, 9. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 18. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 149.

⁷⁹ Chao Fu and Xu You are two legendary hermits of the time of Emperor Yao. Yao wanted to abdicate in favour of the two, but they refused. However, there is a possibility that the two may be the same person. See Wang Yinglin, *Kunxue jiwen*, in *Siku quanshu*, Vol. 854, *juan* 12, 390.

The bamboo is really like a beauty, its charm is not of this world;
And the pure wind strokes its emerald green branches.⁸⁰

Upright, it does not face vulgar things;
Pure and graceful, it is clean and unsullied.⁸¹

In the following poem, *Ye zhu (Wild bamboo)*, Wu Zhen gathers together many of the qualities of the bamboo:

Wild bamboo, wild bamboo, lovely without peer;
Their luxuriant and spreading branches and leaves show their integrity.
Having vowed to keep far away from thistles and thorns,
They roam cliffs and cling to precipices, penetrating the stone cracks.
Self-effacing, embracing virtue, they live on the mountain slopes,
Dancing leisurely in the pure breeze and white moonlight.
What will happen to these wintry tips a thousand *chi* tall?
They will be like those along Wei River and the bend of Qi River,
enveloped in wind and mist.⁸²

Qualities such as sincerity, purity, self-sufficiency, forbearance, modesty and lofty integrity are praised here, as well as the bamboo's breezy elegance, while the last two lines ingeniously allude to the *Shi ji (Historical records)* which record,

There are a few hundred acres of bamboo at Wei River ... This person is equal to a marquis who governs a thousand households.⁸³

Another allusion is to the poem *Qi ao (Bend of Qi River)* in the *Book of poetry* which uses the luxuriant bamboo along the bend of Qi River to praise the virtues of Duke Wu of Wei.⁸⁴

Apart from praising the lofty virtues of bamboo in order to encourage himself to improve, one also finds in some of Wu's poems bold shifts towards the end that create new visions and convey his own ideal of life. For example, in his poem entitled *Lu Hong xianshan taixie (Lu Hong (early eighth century)'s immortal mountains and pavilions)*, we read:

I am blessed, for my dusty footsteps to roam about this [immortal] place,
Where numerous blue mountains circle around the temple tops.
Smoke rises from the incense burner to merge with the early morning mist;
Clouds above the stream join the trees in the evening, both laden with moisture.
The flowers smell sweet along the winding paths and a group of deer gather;
Fragrant grasses grow all over the field where a crane roams alone.
If you want to know the place of true happiness of the Immortals,
It is a clear stream with autumn mountains all around.⁸⁵

The first six lines describe a scene that is not of this world, but the crux of this poem is in the final couplet which says that the paradise in the painting is not the only place to find peace. One can be as happy as an immortal beside a clear stream and autumn mountains. In the last line, the poet takes us out

⁸⁰ *Yuan shixuan erji*, 729.

⁸¹ *Meihua Daoren yimo*, (*Siku quanshu* edition), *juan A*, 7.

⁸² *Meihua Daoren yimo*, (*Siku quanshu* edition), *juan A*, 3. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 19. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 150.

⁸³ *Shiji*, 3272.

⁸⁴ *Shijing jinshi*, 123.

⁸⁵ *Yuan shixuan erji*, 722. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 20. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 150.

of the imaginary painted world to the world of mortals, hinting that he is pursuing happiness and fulfilment in the world we live in, and not in an imaginary one.

In the following poem, entitled *Shuizhu shanju tu* (*Mountain dwelling and bamboo beside water*), the last lines go beyond the reader's expectations:

I build a thatched cottage on the bend of the stream in the shade of the mountain,
 What I love most is a window facing the slender bamboo.
 They dance in the pure brisk breeze throughout the four seasons;
 And the cool stems chime melodiously together along the paths of the hermitage.⁸⁶
 I know that I cannot be without them for even one day,
 But how can we avoid the mundane matters of this world?⁸⁷
 At dead of night I will fly across Xiang River⁸⁸ and roam there in my dream,
 And listen to the pure notes of the *Autumn water* tune played on the zither with twenty-five strings,⁸⁹ turning the autumn waters ever more green.⁹⁰

The deeper meaning of the relationship between the bamboo along the river and the dwelling in the mountains cannot be fully expressed by painting techniques alone, which is where Wu Zhen's poem comes into play. From the hermit's viewpoint, we experience a kind of virtual reality. We perceive the elegant bamboo swaying gracefully and musically in the wind, in front of a window or beside a secluded path. In line five, Wu tells us that the hermit cannot live for a day without bamboo by his side, and since the bamboo likes to live along water or lofty mountains, away from the mundane world, the hermit and the bamboo are linked together. However, since neither of them can entirely escape the mundane world, Wu poses the question of how one can avoid the mundane matters of this world. Lines seven and eight give the answer. The poet imagines the hermit escaping the real world as depicted in the painting, by falling asleep and dreaming. He enjoys to his heart's content the sight of the bamboo along Xiang River, at the same time listening to the *Autumn water* tune played by the Goddess of Xiang River.⁹¹ In this way, he is completely aloof from this world, and becomes an incarnation of Wu Zhen.

⁸⁶ For the hermit's path, see Zhao Qi, *Sanfu jue lu*, in Huang Shi (comp.), *Hanxuetang congshu* (preface dated 1893), 5–6.

⁸⁷ These two lines allude to Su Shi's poem entitled *Yuqian seng luyunxuan* (*The Green Bamboo Studio of the monk at Yuqian*), which reads: 'I can go without meat, but I cannot live in a place without bamboo. No meat will make one thin, no bamboo will make one vulgar. A thin person can become fat, a vulgar person cannot be cured. A bystander laughed at this, and said it seemed lofty and also silly. But I say if you want to face bamboo and still eat meat, it's not possible, as there are no [perfect situations] in this world like riding a crane to Yangzhou [with lots of money]'. See *Su Shi shi xuan*, 52. Riding a crane to Yangzhou refers to the story of four friends, one of whom wanted to be Prefect of Yangzhou, one wanted to be rich, one wanted to ascend to heaven on a crane, while the fourth wanted to ride a crane to Yangzhou carrying lots of cash. See Zhou Lengjia (ed.), *Yinyun xiaoshuo* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1984), 131–2.

⁸⁸ The Xiang River alludes to the story of Emperor Xun and one of his concubines. When he died, his concubine wept, and her tears stained some bamboo. She died and became the goddess of Xiang River, and the speckled bamboo became known as Fragrant Concubine bamboo. See Xu Jian *et al.* (comp.), *Chuxue ji*, in *Siku quanshu*, Vol. 890, 458.

⁸⁹ Emperor Tai asked Sunü to play the zither with fifty strings. The music was sad, and the Emperor stopped her, and changed the zither into one with twenty-five strings. See *Hanshu*, 1232.

⁹⁰ *Yuan shixuan erji*, 716. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 21. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 151.

⁹¹ The goddess could be the one mentioned in *Chu ci* (*Songs of the south*). See Zhu Xi, *Chu ci jizhu* (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), 7–8. It could also be the concubine of Emperor Xun. See *Hou Han shu*, 1964, 1966.

5. Poetic inscriptions on the appreciation and creation of paintings

Like colophons on paintings, poetic inscriptions on paintings sometimes also contain elements of criticism. If one studies the poetic inscriptions along with the colophons, the ideas of the painter can be even better understood. Wu Zhen's inscriptions deal with both the appreciation of paintings and their creation. For his views on art appreciation, the eighty-two poems inscribed on paintings of famous artists provide us with much information, while his views on artistic creation can be seen in his poetic inscriptions on bamboo.

5.1 Wu Zhen's appreciation of paintings

In appreciating famous paintings, Wu Zhen usually paid attention not only to the painting as a whole, but also its various details, and his poetic inscriptions therefore give general opinions about a painting and also a more detailed analysis. We have an example in his poem entitled *Zhao Qianli shanshui changfu* (*The long scroll of mountains and streams by Zhao Qianli* (twelfth century)):

There was [a famous painter] from the Song ruling house called [Zhao] Qianli;
 People suspected that he came from Penglai Palace.
 His instinct for painting was natural;
 And after serious study, he became even more skilful.
 His mountains are high, concealing stone steps;
 His caves are old, [mouths] densely covered with green wisteria.
 Autumn winds blow through the forests and valleys;
 The leaves of countless trees have almost all fallen down.
 Only the pines and stones,
 Do not change in the cold at the close of the year.
 The travellers are in a rush, where do they come from?
 Could they be the four old men who lived secluded on Shang mountain?
 There is an empty pavilion by the river;
 In the distance, teeming waves.
 The light boats sway gently;
 The setting sunlight turns red on the western mountain range.
 Jing [Hao] and Guan [Tong] bow reverently to him, hands clasped;
 His achievement is equal to that of the two Lis (Li Sixun and Li Zhaodao).
 Mundane paintings are too numerous to count;
 Fresh ones [of high quality] are not easy to come by.
 For in those years his paintings were kept in the government's storehouse;
 And since they have become precious and rare, they are praised even more highly.
 As I finish this poem, I let out a contented sigh,
 And the gentle wind lifts my spirits.⁹²

In the middle section of this poem (lines 5–20), Wu Zhen describes the scenery and expresses his thoughts and feelings, but in lines one to four, he expresses his appreciation and judgement of Zhao Qianli, and this is echoed from line seventeen onwards, when two famous painters bow to him reverently. While lines one and two praise Zhao Qianli's outstanding genius and immortality as an artist, lines three, four, seventeen and eighteen are more detailed judgements, and we can see that Wu Zhen is not only envious of Zhao's talents,

⁹² *Yuan shixuan erji*, 711. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 22. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 152.

but he also praises his technical skills such as his brushwork, his composition and his hard work in expressing a vision, and considered Zhao's position in landscape painting as equal to that of Jing Hao and Guan Tong (both early tenth century) and of Li Sixun (651–716) and Li Zhaodao (?–697).⁹³ Even though Wu Zhen's own style of landscape painting is based upon the techniques of Jing Hao and Guan Tong, he also praised the two Lis who had a different style. From this we can see that he always keeps an open mind to other painting styles.

A structure similar to that of the previous poem can be found in Wu's *Li Cheng jiangcun qiuwan* (*Li Cheng (919–967)'s Autumn evening in a river village*). At the beginning of the poem we again find some general comments on the painter's historical position in his field. In the middle section he describes the scenery while the final part compares the artist to other famous painters and thus underlines the importance of his position. His judgement on Li Cheng's painting is as follows:

There are no paintings equal to those of Xianxi (Li Cheng),
His are rarely handed down and are loved by many.
After the two Lis, there were few other good painters;
His works were especially treasured in the days of the Xuanhe period
(1119–25).
Once his fresh pictures (of high quality) fall into the world of men,
The Palace of the Immortals feels lonely, so when will they return?
His planning and ingenuity go beyond the ordinary world,
Who can equal him, five hundred years before or after?

...

Clearly we see again a person from Wangchuan (Wang Wei),
With my disorderly and confused words, how dare I lightly append them
to this painting? ...⁹⁴

In the Song Dynasty, Li Cheng, Guan Tong and Fan Kuan (c. 960–1031) were known as the 'Three masters of landscape painting'.⁹⁵ Li Cheng's achievements were especially outstanding, which was why his contemporaries already ranked him as the foremost of his era, and some even as the best of all time.⁹⁶ Wu Zhen also supported this view, and because Li Cheng's surviving works were rare, this made them all the more precious.⁹⁷ Wu Zhen compared Li's style to the lofty and far-reaching nature of the landscapes of Wang Wei. In line seven Wu mentions that his planning and ingenuity go beyond the ordinary world, which hints at the fact that technical expertise also plays a major role in the creation of a good painting. 'Planning and ingenuity' can only be reached through careful preparation of the composition, which forms the basis from which the work of art can evolve. In order for the work to move beyond this level and reach new heights, the artist's temperament, cultivation and devotion play an important part. In Wu Zhen's opinion then, technical skills

⁹³ Wu Zhen wanted to compare Zhao Qianli with former masters, so the two Lis should refer to Li Sixun and Li Zhaodao. Li Sixun was the originator of the northern school of landscape painting, and he painted gold and green landscapes. Zhao was also good at blue and green landscape. See Zhao Xigu, *Dongtian qinglu*, in *Siku quanshu*, Vol. 871, 290.

⁹⁴ *Yuan shixuan erji*, 714. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 23. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 153.

⁹⁵ Guo Ruoxu, *Tuhua jianwen zhi*, in *Siku quanshu*, Vol. 812, 15–16.

⁹⁶ *Xuanhe huapu* (Compiler not listed), in *Siku quanshu*, Vol. 813, *juan* 12, 4; Li Daochun, *Songchao minghua ping*, in *Siku quanshu*, Vol. 812, *juan* 2, 1.

⁹⁷ *Songchao minghua ping*, *juan* 2, 2; Mi Fu, *Huashi*, in *Siku quanshu*, Vol. 813, 6; and *Xuanhe huapu*, *juan* 11, 5.

should ideally be combined with the artist's ability to reach an 'other-worldly' quality, and only then will the work be truly outstanding, as is the work of Li Cheng.

In summary, we can see that Wu Zhen expresses his opinions in three different ways. The first involves giving general opinions by quoting already established critical sources. The second compares paintings with works by Gu Kaizhi, Lu Tanwei, Li Sixun, Li Zhaodao, Wang Wei, Jing Hao, Guan Tong, Dong Yuan (early 10th century), and Ju Ran (c. mid-10th century), whom Wu Zhen regards as leading painters. The third way is to express his views in occasional lines.

When Wu Zhen expresses his own views in occasional lines, a point worth mentioning is that he refers to Xie He's (c. 450–550) *liu fa* (*Six Methods for Judging Paintings*)⁹⁸ several times, as can be seen in the following examples:

In the poem entitled *Gu Kaizhi qiujiang qingzhang* (*Gu Kaizhi's autumn river and bright mountains*), he writes:

The paintings of Changkang (Gu Kaizhi) were valued highly by those who
judge paintings by the Six Methods,
[This] makes us feel that his rare paintings are even more vibrant.⁹⁹

In the poem entitled *Lu Tanwei cenghuan quwu* (*Lu Tanwei's layers of mountains and winding pockets*), he writes:

We can see the Six Painting Methods in this painting,
Marvellous details emerge from his hands.¹⁰⁰

In the poem entitled *Zhang Sengyou cuizhang yaolin* (*Zhang Sengyou's green mountains and jade forest*), he writes:

Spreading ink on white silk, the mountains look blue in the faint distance,
Deeply proficient in the 'Six Methods', wonderful colours combine.¹⁰¹

Wu Zhen probably had a reason when he put special emphasis on the importance of the Six Methods for Judging Painting in the above examples to judge Gu Kaizhi, Lu Tanwei and Zhang Sengyou (early 6th century). First of all, they were regarded as the three leading painters of the Six Dynasties period. In Xie He's *Guhua pinlu* (*Evaluation and classification of ancient painters*), painters are judged according to the 'Six Methods'. Gu Kaizhi ranks third, while Lu Tanwei is put in first place.¹⁰² In Yao Zui's (535–602 or 531–601) *Xu hua pin* (*A sequel to the evaluation of paintings*) which also uses the 'Six Methods' for judgement, Zhang Sengyao is valued quite highly.¹⁰³ In Zhang Yanyuan's *Lidai minghua ji* (*Famous paintings of successive dynasties*) completed in 847, which again uses the 'Six Methods' for judgement, Zhang is also ranked a first-class painter.¹⁰⁴ Wu Zhen is thus following in the footsteps of previous critics in applying the 'Six Methods' for judging painters. Although he praises all three painters, the nuances in his poems still hint at whom he estimated most highly. In saying that the paintings of Changkang (Gu Kaizhi) were valued highly by the 'Six Methods', he is saying that Xie He ranked Gu

⁹⁸ For the 'Six Methods', see Xie He, *Guhua pinlu*, in *Siku quanshu*, Vol. 812, 3. Scholars have given various readings for the 'Six Methods', and I follow Qian Zhongshu's reading. See Qian Zhongshu, *Guanzhui bian* (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 1353.

⁹⁹ *Yuan shixuan erji*, 721.

¹⁰⁰ *Yuan shixuan erji*, 717.

¹⁰¹ *Yuan shixuan erji*, 722.

¹⁰² *Guhua pinlu*, 1, 3. Zhang Sengyou came after Xie He, and therefore was not graded by Xie.

¹⁰³ Yao Zui, *Xu hua pin*, in *Siku quanshu*, Vol. 812, 14.

¹⁰⁴ Zhang Yanyuan, *Lidai minghua ji*, in *Siku quanshu*, Vol. 812, 334.

Kaizhi rather highly. We note, however, that Xie He criticized Gu Kaizhi rather seriously when he wrote the following:

The planning and structure of his painting is fine and detailed. He does not make any reckless strokes, but his brush work [seems] unable to express his ideas fully, and his reputation has been exaggerated.¹⁰⁵

However, both Xie He and Wu Zhen agree that Lu Tanwei and Zhang Sengyao have mastered the 'Six Methods', and thus rank above Gu Kaizhi. We can thus say that Wu is an ardent follower of Xie He's method, deeming it a most useful tool in judging paintings.

The *Wen Huzhou zhupai* (*Bamboo painters of the school of Wen Tong* (1018–79)), attributed to Wu Zhen,¹⁰⁶ is considered by some to be the most important source for research on his appreciation of paintings. However, the contents of this work largely overlap with those of the *Treasured mirror of paintings*, which indicates that it might not be Wu Zhen's work at all. Therefore, Wu Zhen's poetic inscriptions on famous paintings provide the most reliable source for considering his views on painting.

5.2 Wu Zhen's concept of artistic creation

Most of Wu Zhen's ideas on artistic creation can be found in the colophons to his *Manual of ink bamboo*.¹⁰⁷ Further material can be found in his inscriptions on bamboo paintings, and can be read in conjunction with the former. The following poem reads:

When I first took up painting, I did not know how to start;
[One day] I suddenly forgot that I held a brush in my hand.
Do Cook Ding and Wheelwright Bian
Still remember this process of evolution?¹⁰⁸

This poem uses stories in *Zhuangzi*, namely *Cook Ding cutting the ox* and *Wheelwright Bian*,¹⁰⁹ to emphasize the fact that in painting one also has to follow the laws of nature, carefully observe the essence of a subject, and imitate life. One should study with great concentration over an extended period of time, and only through strict adherence to these points can one reach a level where technical skill is replaced by intuition which merges with creation. In a few lines, this poem includes the key points to understanding Wu Zhen's concept of artistic creation. His other ideas all extend from this.

Like those before him, Wu Zhen supported the theory of 'the idea comes before the brush'¹¹⁰ and 'to have well thought out designs in one's mind in coping with a certain matter'.¹¹¹ In his poem entitled *Zhujuan fengwei Songyan Heshang zhuxi* (*Bamboo painting for Monk Song Yan's enjoyment*), he writes:

Every bamboo is of a different length;
And the leaves cannot be counted.

¹⁰⁵ *Guhua pinlu*, 3.

¹⁰⁶ *Wen Huzhou zhupai*, (attributed to Wu Zhen), in Huang Binhong and Deng Shi (comp.), *Meishu congshu*, Vol. 3, 4th Collection, 7–12.

¹⁰⁷ *Meihua Daoren yimo*, (*Siku quanshu* edition), *juan* B, 7.

¹⁰⁸ *Meihua Daoren yimo*, (*Siku quanshu* edition), *juan* A, 6. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 24. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 155.

¹⁰⁹ *Zhuangzi jinzhuyi*, 95–6, 357–8.

¹¹⁰ See Luo Zhufeng (ed.), *Hanyu dacidian* (Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe, 1993), Vol. 7, 638.

¹¹¹ See Yu Jianhua (comp.), *Zhongguo hualun leibian* (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 1026.

Without roots they grow by themselves [on the paper];
And the leaves seem to have transformed into the eyes of the gods.¹¹²

The first three lines in this poem are influenced by four lines from Bo Juyi's (772–846) poem entitled *Hua zhu ge* (*Ballad of painting bamboo*):

People paint bamboo that is weak and lifeless;
Xiao [Yue] paints branches that are vigorous, and each leaf moves.
The bamboo comes from his mind, and not from a root;
It is formed by his brush, and not by the bamboo shoot.¹¹³

Bo Juyi thinks that Xiao Yue's bamboo is full of life and vitality because before he took up the brush, Xiao Yue already had a picture of the bamboo in his mind; he then followed the picture in his mind, and succeeded in capturing the bamboo's natural charm. In Wu Zhen's poem, the long and slender leaves are then compared to the eyes of the Buddhist gods, and filled with spirit.

From the Song Dynasty onwards, the capturing of the spirit in a painting became essential, and mere outer resemblance was frowned upon, since this aspect was easy to achieve. Wu Zhen, however, regarded these two aspects as equally important. In his poem *Hua zhu* (*Painting bamboo*) he writes:

When I first looked at it, I did not feel it was a [bamboo] painting;
When I stepped forward, it seemed to emit a sound.
Upright, it does not face vulgar things;
Clean and bright, it keeps its purity all the time.¹¹⁴

The first two lines again borrow from the lines in Bo Juyi's *Ballad of painting bamboo* which read:

I raise my head and at first sight it does not look like a painting;
I listen to it quietly, and it seems to emit a sound.

The main theme in Wu's poem is the interaction between form and spirit. The first line describes the bamboo painting as lifelike, giving the viewer a feeling of finding himself in the actual scene. Without a perfect combination of form and spirit, this state could not be achieved. The second line carries our thoughts beyond the painting itself. The viewer is placed in an imaginary world on hearing the sweet melodies of the pure wind caressing the bamboo. Wu Zhen's views on form and spirit were influenced by Li Kan's *Manual of bamboo*. At the age of sixty-nine, Wu wrote a preface to his *Album of ink bamboo* for Kexing, in which he mentions that he was reading the manual.¹¹⁵ The gist of Li Kan's views on painting can be summarized by the line 'The spirit lodges in the form', and this is what Wu Zhen upheld. In the foreword to the *Manual of bamboo*, Wu wrote:

If a painter does not follow rules when depicting the bamboo stems, joints, branches and leaves, his effort is wasted and his painting cannot succeed.¹¹⁶

Again, he praises Wen Tong's bamboo painting:

¹¹² *Meihua Daoren yimo*, (*Siku quanshu* edition), *juan* A, 9. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 25. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 155.

¹¹³ Liang Jianjiang, *Bo Juyi shixuan* (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1985), 184–5. Xiao Yue is a contemporary of Bo Juyi.

¹¹⁴ *Yuan shixuan erji*, 727. For the Chinese text, see appendix, item 26. See also 'Wu Zhen tihuashi chutan', 156.

¹¹⁵ *Meihua Daoren yimo*, (*Siku quanshu* edition), *juan* B, 11–12.

¹¹⁶ *Meihua Daoren yimo*, (*Siku quanshu* edition), *juan* B, 7.

Galloping within the rules, but free beyond the dusty world, he follows his heart's desires but does not exceed the boundaries of nature.¹¹⁷

The so-called rules indicate pursuing the resemblance of forms, while the second line emphasizes the spiritual layer where one can roam freely.

Since Zhang Yanyuan discussed the relationship between calligraphy and painting, this topic became very popular in the painting field. Concepts such as 'Calligraphy and painting are of the same origin', and 'Applying calligraphy to painting' became maxims for literati painters. The following examples underline Wu Zhen's emphasis on their close relationship:

Painting comes from calligraphy;
Enjoyable moments preserved through brush and paper.¹¹⁸

Ancient trees, slender and tall bamboo, and rocks like clouds,
These are formed naturally through the eight basic vertical and horizontal strokes.¹¹⁹

Wu Zhen excelled in poetry, calligraphy and painting, and it was therefore most likely that his painting skills were based on his skill in calligraphy.¹²⁰ Even though his concept of creation is based primarily on former theories, he confirmed these theories through outstanding practice.

6. Concluding remarks

For the sake of clarity, the functions of Wu Zhen's poetic inscriptions have been dealt with separately in this article. However, we have seen that some of his longer poetic inscriptions are quite complicated and rich in meaning, and one poem can often cover more than one aspect. A good example is his *Ink cabbage*, where I laid emphasis on the narrative aspects, but lyrical aspects are also present. In his *Long scroll of mountains and streams*, the discursive aspect has been analysed, but the depiction of the actual motif, the expansion of time-space boundaries, and the lyrical aspect could all have been discussed. Further examples include his poems on *Dong Yuan xiashan shenyuan* (*Dong Yuan's deep and distant summer mountains*), *Gu Kaizhi qiujiang diezhang* (*Gu Kaizhi's autumn rivers and layers of mountains*), *Zhang Sengyao shuanglin yunxiu* (*Zhang Sengyao's white forests and shrouded mountains*), *Wang Jingqing hua* (*Wang Shen's painting*), and *Fanghu songyan xiaosi* (*Fang Congyi* (c. mid-14th c.)'s *desolate temple by a cliff with pine*).¹²¹ When reading these poetic inscriptions, one has to read carefully to be able to appreciate the complementary nature of poem and painting. Ni Zan (1301 or 1306–74) once praised his contemporary Wu Zhen as follows:

His paintings are pure and lofty,
[But] his poems are even more steeped in meaning.¹²²

Wu Zhen's achievement in poetry has been overshadowed by his fame in painting. This article maintains that his poems on paintings should not be ignored.

¹¹⁷ *Meihua Daoren yimo*, (*Siku quanshu* edition), *juan* B, 7.

¹¹⁸ *Yuan shixuan erji*, 712.

¹¹⁹ *Meihua Daoren shichao*, 89.

¹²⁰ Wu Zhen was proficient in cursive script, and most of his inscriptions are in this style. Three former models, Gong Guang (died 930–933), Huai Su (725 or 733–785) and Yang Ningshi (873–954) are mentioned. See Tao Zongyi, *Shushi huiyao*, in *Siku quanshu*, Vol. 814, 33; *Liuyanzhai sanbi*, *juan* 1, 21; and *Meihua Daoren yimo* (*Xiaoshantang* edition), 61.

¹²¹ *Yuan shixuan erji*, 713, 722, 724, 725.

¹²² Ni Zan, *Qingmige ji*, in *Siku quanshu*, Vol. 1220, *juan* 2, 21–22.

Appendix: Chinese text of main poems by Wu Zhen

1. 海岳庵中夜醉過，紙粘雪壁興如何？
一竿從地不見節，慚我學人難似坡。
2. 我有淵明琴，長年在空谷。
客來問宮商，盧胡捫軫足。
士俗不可醫，那使積習熟。
我懶政欲眠，清風動修竹。
3. 萬壽山前，屹立一亭名構李。
堂陰數畝竹娟娟，空翠鎖風煙。
騷人隱士留題詠，紅塵不到蒼苔徑。
子瞻三過見文師，壁上有題詩。
4. 依村構草亭，端方意匠宏。
林深禽鳥樂，塵遠竹松清。
泉石供延賞，琴書悅性情。
何當謝凡近，任適慰平生。
5. 菘根脫地翠毛濕，雪花翻起玉脂泣。
蕪萋金谷暗塵土，美人壯士何顏色？
山人久刮龜毛氈，囊空不貯挪揄錢。
屠門大嚼知流涎，淡中滋味我所便。
元修元修今幾年，一笑不直東坡前。
6. 硯池漠漠墨吐汁，蒼髯呼風山鬼泣。
濤聲破夢鐵骨冷，露影溲空翠毛濕。
徂徠百畝老雲煙，湖山九里甘蕭瑟。
何當置此明窗下，長對詩人弄寒碧。
7. 我以墨爲戲，翻因墨作奴。
當年若鹵莽，何處役潛夫？
8. 日日對此君，攀挹非細故，
爲問轅下駒，何如轍中鮒。

9. 長憶前朝李薊丘，墨君天下擅風流。
百年遺跡留人世，寫破湘潭夢裏秋。
10. 眾山互回繞，芳叢滿蒼壁。
野猿啼樹紅，林鳥巢筠碧。
雲來擁翠鬟，泉瀉激古石。
吟翁自拘拘，行人走役役。
歸舟向東去，炊煙上空滅。
前村未掩門，不知日將夕。
11. 碧樹擁江扉，朱簾卷翠微。
崇朝無客過，傍晚有漁歸。
嶺耀梅重白，堤縈絮正飛。
若留清夜賞，鉛粉更光輝。
12. 重整絲綸理棹船，江頭明月正明圓，
酒瓶倒，草衣懸，拋卻漁竿踏月眠。
13. 風攬長江浪攬風，魚龍混雜一川中，
藏深浦，繫長松，直待雲收月在空。
14. 杉間奔湍，一塘遠接吳淞水，
兩行垂柳綠如雲，今古送人行。
買妻恥醜藏羞墓，秋茂郵亭遞書處，
路逢樵子莫呼名，驚起墓中靈。
15. 抱節元無心，凌雲如有意。
寂寂空山中，凜此君子志。
16. 眾木搖落時，此君特蒼然。
節直心愈空，抱獨全其天。
17. 挺挺霜中節，亭亭月下陰。
識得虛中理，何事可容心？

18. 葉葉舞清風，稍稍溽白雨。
此懷誰共賞？山中有巢許。
19. 野竹野竹絕可愛，枝葉扶疎有貞態。
平生素守遠荆榛，走壁懸崖穿石罅。
虛心抱節山之阿，清風白月聊婆娑。
寒梢千尺將如何，渭川淇澳風煙多。
20. 塵踪何得此中游，無數青山繞殿頭。
爐篆浮煙朝靄靄，溪雲連樹晚油油。
花香曲徑群麋聚，芸芷平田獨鶴遊。
欲識仙家真樂處，一泓清瀨四山秋。
21. 結茅山陰溪之曲，最愛軒窗對修竹。
四時設設動清風，三徑蕭蕭戛寒玉。
也知一日不可無，彼且惡乎免塵俗。
夜深飛夢繞湘江，廿五清弦秋水綠。
22. 宋室有千里，疑自蓬萊宮。繪事發天性，深研境益工。
山高藏石磴，洞古青蒙叢。秋風遍林壑，萬樹葉欲空。
唯有松與石，不改歲寒窮。行行何處客，豈是商山翁？
臨江有虛閣，一望波溶溶。輕舟徐蕩漾，西嶺夕照紅。
荆關爲揖讓，二李堪與同。庸物奚足數，新圖不易逢。
當年置長府，珍秘更爲崇。書竟發長嘯，兩腋來清風。
23. 咸熙畫圖無與共，傳世希微愛者眾。
二李之後已寥寥，宣和當日尤珍重。
新圖一旦落人間，神宮寂寞何時還？
經營匠意出塵表，上下五百誰能攀？
……分明再見輞川人，蕪詞何敢輕爲附！……
24. 初畫不自知，忽忘筆在手。
庖丁及輪扁，還識此意否？

25. 竿竿有參差，葉葉無限量。
不根而自生，換卻諸天眼。
26. 忽見不是畫，近聽疑有聲。
落落不對俗，涓涓長自清。