

**Ji: Traces in Chinese Landscape and Landscape Painting**

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En Chine, les traces visibles de l’antiquité sauraient depuis longtemps un grand intérêt, donnant naissance à des pratiques culturelles très diverses. On peut en distinguer quatre types : les « traces divines » qui étaient censés manifester, de manière souvent assez ambiguë, l’activité des puissances surnaturelles ; les « traces historiques » que relevait l’étude des antiquaires érudits ; les « traces substantives » auxquelles s’attachaient des mémoires et des attitudes politiques ; et les « sites historiques célèbres » où se rencontrent la culture des élites et la culture populaire. Comme le montrent les exemples de chaque type présentés dans cet article, les sentiments nostalgiques que stimulaient la méditation ou la lamentation sur l’antiquité (xunyu) sont un élément fondamental à la production artistique et littéraire dans la culture traditionnelle chinoise.

The original meaning of Ji was “footprints,” and from here it gained the expanded meaning of “trace.” The memory of Ji as concrete footprints was still very much alive during the Zhou: a temple hymn begins by recalling the earliest trace in Chinese dynastic history: “Wide and long Yu left his footprints (fēi), / When he laid out the Nine Provinces / And through them opened up the nine-fold route.” These lines refer to the pacification of a devastating flood and the subsequent establishment of the first dynasty Xia. The legend goes that when the deluge came, Yu’s father Gun was assigned to tame the raging water. He built earthen dikes everywhere in the hope of containing the flood. But these man-made structures easily collapsed and more people were killed. Taking over his father’s position while adopting a new strategy, Yu dredged river channels to provide outlets for the torrential waters, and after thirteen years finally restored order and became the king. People imagined that he travelled all over the country during these years and left his footprints in various places. Later on, the term “Yu Ji” — Yu’s footprints — also came to refer to any mark he left on the land, not only with his feet but also with his giant spade and axe. This connection with Yu’s legend also helps us discern a subtle difference between Ji’s two written forms (簡, 畳), one furnished with the “foot” radical (足) to signify a tangible sign, the other with the “walking” radical (走) to emphasize the sense of movement. Whereas these two meanings have always adhered to Ji, the character is also used in traditional Chinese as a transitive verb,

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meaning “to trace” or “to search for” tangible clues of a past person or event. This usage adds another layer of subtlety to the character: when someone is searching for traces of the past, he also leaves his own footprints along the way.

Based on these root meanings, the words guī 古迹 and yǐ jiāng 古跡 — literally “old trace” and “leftover trace” — have become standard terms for ancient sites of historical interest. In qualifying such sites as concrete historical remains, both terms emphasize survival and physical display, in contrast to jīng 墟 or “ruins,” which also refers to historical sites but emphasizes the erasure of human traces. A guī or yǐ jiāng is a paradox in itself; however, on the one hand, it is an integral element of a timeless landscape — an inscription on a sheer cliff, a pictorial carving inside a deep valley, an ancient ruin in an open field, or a Buddhist grotto on a sacred mountain. On the other hand, because it acquires its identity as a trace from a documented association with a particular historical or mythological figure or event, it is always a fragment (or a collection of fragments) of the past which can be isolated as such. In this way, a ji transforms nature into a human work and vice versa. For the same reason, an inscription, a carving, or a building stops being a ji when it is removed from its original setting; although still signifying the past, it has become a disembodied fragment severed from nature.

One finds numerous ji in famous scenic spots and historical sites, sometimes so crowded that they cover the surface of a mountain and compete for the visitor’s attention. Some ji are more famous than others and have consequently triggered a chain of representation and duplication. Other ji are more private, meaningful only to a smaller circle of like-minded people. Their images and significance are often not immediately recognizable, but demand inside knowledge or historical research. This essay discusses four types of ji: (1) “divine traces” (shenji 神迹) as ambiguous signs of supernatural power, (2) “historical traces” (guī in a narrow sense) as subjects of antiquarian interest, (3) “remnant traces” (yǐ jiāng in a narrow sense) as loci of political memory and expression, and (4) “famous historical sites” (shenji 史迹) as meeting places of elite and popular culture. Imbued with different temporalities and connected with different activities, these historical sites nevertheless coexist and can transform from one to the other. Perceived as general signs of the past, any of these traces can stimulate the sentiment of bai xiang 怨想 — “lamenting the past” or “meditating on the past.”

Shenji (Divine Traces)

Two distinct “divine traces” at Mt. Hua 華山 in present-day central Shaanxi 陝西 provide an exemplary case to think about a type of topographical mark whose origin is attributed to supernatural or semi-divine powers. Li Daoyuan 靈道元 (d. 527) first recorded them in his Annotated Classic of Waterways (Shuijing zhu 水經注) in the early sixth century:

2. See Fan Ye 孫盛, Hau Han shu 後漢書 [History of the Later Han], (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 2590, n. 9: “ji means xun 尋 [to search for].”


5. Besides Yu, Cang Jie 仓颉 is said to have invented Chinese characters (This legend is recorded in many historical records, Shuowen jiezi 說文解字). For some examples of this see the Representation of Mt. Wutai 般台山 in Chinese Art and Literature.
A past person or event. This can be when someone is searching for historical remains, both formal to feixi (遗址) or "ruins," the erasure of human traces. On one hand, it is an integral ele-}

Two striking similarities relate this myth to Yu's legend. Like Yu, the anonymous Divine Giant split a mountain to let water go through; also like Yu, he left his imprints there as a proof of his heroic deeds. In fact, the same book credits Yu in similar narratives as the creator of the Dragon Gate on the Yellow River and the Three Gorges on the Yangzi River. My interest here, however, is not to prove the historical relationship between the two legends, but to explore the kind of which the two stories together typify. Differing from antiquarian "historical traces," which I will discuss later, a divine trace is characterized by certain inherent ambiguities in its origin and representation. Because of their extraordinary physique and supernatural strength, the creators of such traces are not ordinary human beings; but they are also not invincible gods who need no hard labor to realize their mighty wills. Half divine and half human, such megademos are found in any mythology. Emerging in the twilight zone between the celestial and human worlds, they began to shape the earth for the benefit of mankind. Consequently, the traces they left are often half-natural and half-artificial. While they are distinguished by special shapes and colors from the surrounding environment, they also constitute part of the natural landscape.

Such ambiguity gave rise to different representations of the divine traces on Mt. Hua. One tendency is to amplify the supernatural origin of the signs. In a woodblock print designed by the Ming painter Ding Yunpeng (丁雲鵬, 1547-ca. 1621), the hand and foot prints of the Divine Giant are rendered in a graphic manner on two separate mountain peaks (Fig. 1). Perfectly isolated and discernible, these images are based on literary accounts, not on empirical observation. They have little to do with what one would actually see, but reinforce the mystery surrounding the sacred mountaintop. In this way, this picture can be connected to the tradition of "miraculous images" in Chinese religious art.6


4. Li Daoyuan, Shufu zhuo "Heshui 4" (Shufu zhuo [笔墨], 4.103-104); "Jiangshui 1"江水 (Shufu zhuo [笔墨], 33.1063); translated in Strassberg, Inscribed Landscapes, 78-79, 85.

5. Besides Yu, Cang Jie 竹相, the creator of writing, also falls into this category, as legends tell that "he invented Chinese characters from observing the traces [of] the footsteps of birds." This legend is recorded in many books, including Diaoang shiji 剔購世紀 (A genealogy of ancient rulers), Shuwu fenzhi 說文辨字 (Explaining the graphs and analyzing the characters), and others.

6. For some examples of this pictorial tradition, see Dorothy Wong, "A Reassessment of the Representation of Mt. Wutai from Dunhuang Cave 61," Archives of Asian Art, 46 (1993),
Then there is an almost opposite tendency, in which the "immortal palm" — the handprint of the Divine Giant — is represented as an integral feature of the landscape. The image is no longer defined by a coherent outline, and the five fingers, though still vaguely discernible, merge into the folds of mountain rocks. We find the earliest example of this representational mode in an album by the early Ming artist Wang Lü 王履 (ca. 1332-?), which records the painter's journey to Mt. Hua in 1381 (Fig. 2). Three centuries later, a panoramic map of Mt. Hua further developed this tendency by obliterating the "immortal palm" almost completely (Fig. 3). It is significant that Wang Lü, who was a famous physician in his day, provided a detailed scientific account of the formation of the "immortal palm" in the colophon attached to the album leaf. Rejecting the legend of the Divine Giant, he explains that the five fingers were actually formed by the grease flowing down the cliff from separate cracks, which soaked the rock surface with pale yellowish-brown and off-white pigment. When the streams of grease joined together, they constituted a flat shape vaguely resembling a "palm."  


7. For a detailed discussion of this album and the artist, see Kathryn M. Liscomb, Learning from Mount Hua: A Chinese Physician's Illustrated Travel Record and Painting Theory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).  

Although admirable in scale people's fascination with this image has to a large extent been conditioned by the album's composition, which reveals a dynamic interaction between natural and supernatural elements. The album was once housed in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and another celebrated representative of the genre, Wang Shitao 王石濤 (1641-1718) painted to record one of the scenic spots while discovering the album's central peak (Fig. 5). Near the center of the
the "immortal palm" an integral feature of its outline, and the fives of mountain rocks. In an album by the early painter's journey to Mt. Hua, the "immortal palm" almost completely "physician in his day, the "immortal palm" legend of the Divine by the grease flow-rock surface with pale grease joined together, by Saint and the Invention (96), 32-43.

John M. Liscomb, Learning Theory (Cambridge:

Fig. 2: Wang Lü (ca. 1332-?), "The Immortal's Palm," from Mt. Hua Album (Huashan tu 画山圖). Ca.1381. Ink and colors on paper, 34.7 x 50.6 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.

Although admirable in scientific spirit, Wang's explanation failed to discourage people's fascination with strange natural images. Not only did the "immortal palm" retain its popularity in later Chinese travel painting, but the concept of shenji routinely inspired artists to create landscape images that transcend the boundary between natural and supernatural. In an anonymous sixteenth-century handscaI now housed in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, for example, some crags of Mt. Huang (Huangshan 黄山) are shaped as shadowy stone giants (Fig. 4). Standing in the foreground or emerging from gorges, these eerie figures animate the mountain and bestow it with a magical, primordial power. The concept of shenji also underlies another celebrated representation of Mt. Huang, an album which Shi Tao 石濤 (1641-1718) painted to record one of his journeys to the mountain. Each of the eight pictures in the album shows the artist traveling through the mountain's famous scenic spots while discovering its secrets. One of the leaves represents his ascent of the mountain's central peak, called Tiandufeng 天都峰 or Celestial Capital Peak (Fig. 5). Near the center of the composition, rock boulders configure a stone giant.

8. There are different opinions about the date of the album. Richard Edwards suggests that it was probably made around 1670, when Shi Tao was thirty years old. But he also cautions that Shi Tao often depicted a journey long after the event. See Richard Edwards, The Painting of Tao-chi, 1641-ca. 1720 (Ann Arbor: Museum of Art, University of Michigan, 1967), 31-32, 45-46. Other scholars have dated the album to the 1680s based on stylistic evidence.
Fig. 3: Anonymous, *Panoramic Map of Mt. Hua* (Taihua quantu 太華全圖). Dated 1700. Hanging scroll, ink rubbing from a stone stele, 135 x 69 cm, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago.

Fig. 4: Anonymous, *Peaks of the World* (Shijie dingju 地界定局). Handscroll, ink and light color on paper, 106 x 55 cm, St. Louis Art Museum.

Fig. 5: Shitao (1642-1707), *Spots on Huangshan* (Huangshan xiangli 黃山寫照). Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 26.8 x 20.2 cm, Seattle Art Museum.
Fig. 4: Anonymous, *Peaks of Mt. Huang* (黄山峰), detail, first half 16th century. Handscroll, ink and light colors on silk, 24.3 x 340.5 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Fig. 5: Shitao (1641-1718), "Celestial Capital Peak," from the *Eight Scenic Spots on Huangshan* (黄山八景) album. Ink and colors on paper, 26.8 x 20.2 cm. Sen'oku Hakkkkan, Kyoto.
Shitao wrote an inscription next to it: "Ice his heart and jade his bones, stone and iron make this man. He is the master of the Yellow Mountain and the minister to Xuanyuan 西王母." Here Xuanyuan refers to the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi 黃帝), China's mythical founder, who had gone to Mt. Huang thousands of years before to collect herbs for making an elixir of immortality. In the picture, the stone giant's head and shoulders are covered with vegetation; cracks and erosion on its rock body further betray the endless years which have passed: this is indeed a "ruin" left from the remote past. Interestingly, Shitao also portrayed himself as a traveler below the stone giant in the same pose, thus making himself an incarnation of the master of the immortal mountain.

Guji (Historical Traces in a Narrow Sense)

At the juncture of a "divine trace" and a "historical trace" is a strange inscription called the King Yu Stele (Yu wang bei 禹王碑), also known as Goulou Stele (Goulou bei 岐柳碑) because of its original location on the Goulou Peak at Mt. Heng 衛山 in Hunan 湖南. (Here "stele" refers to an inscription carved on a natural cliff.) Stories about it already circulated between the first and fourth centuries. One of these tales, now preserved in the Annals of the Wu and Yue Kingdoms (Wu Yue chunqiu 吳越春秋), relates that after taking over his father's position to pacify the flood, Yu traveled to Mt. Heng — the sacred Southern Marchmount — to seek instructions from Heaven. There, a divine messenger dressed in an embroidered red robe visited his dream and taught him where to discover a secret text in the mountain. During the Tang, possibly related to a movement to regain literature's classical roots, there appeared a heightened interest in this mysterious text. Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824), the leader of the movement, actually went to the mountain to search for it. Returning empty-handed, his failed effort nevertheless inspired a poem imbued with deep fascination and disappointment:

On the summit of Goulou Mountain
is the stele of the divine Yu,
emerald characters in red marble,
marvelously shaped:
tadpoles bending their bodies,
leeks spread upside down,
smurfs soaring, phoenixes resting,
tigers and dragons contending.

10. According to Wang Yaoshun 王堯臣, who lived in the eleventh century, the Wu Yue chunqiu was first written by Zhao Ye 畢鴻 in the first century and substantially abridged by Yang Fang 楊方 in the fourth century. About the complex issues involved in dating the text, see Michael Loewe (ed.), Early Chinese Texts: A Biographical Guide (Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China and the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California at Berkeley, 1993), 473-475.

So grave was its text, so hard
the very spirits ceased to know
yet once a man of the Way
and saw it by chance.
I came sighing in admiration
with tears swelling into eyes
looking, searching, seeking
for the place it might be
in thick forests of green
gibbons wall.

Following Han Yu's famous inscription, Zhu and Zhang Some 50 years later, however, as we read in Wang Xianglin's Famous Places (Yiandian yizhan 一覽遊覽)
The Yu Stele is located on Goulou Mountain in Hunan. No one was able to find it again. During the Tang, a gentleman from Sichuan made an ink rubbing of the engraved inscription in the stone.

Compared with Han Yu's mysterious object. In fact, its aura as a divine trace, natural destruction and construction, Places, as well as his earlier
records many such Southern Song China. The Yu Stele at Mt. Yuelu 岳麓山 near Changsha, as well as others
many duplications: at least seven.

11. Han Yu, "Goulou Stele" (1707) (ed. Beijing: ZH N. Hartman, Han Yu and the Tang 哈特曼, Han Yu 66. Han's contemporary, Liu (Shen Yu ming 神鵰翁) in his poem, then writing to relatives or a senior secretary Li the eighth century)
354-27, 3968-3969).
12. Wang Xianglin, Yiandian yizhan (Yiandian yizhan in four categories), Vol. 2 (1221), 10, 78.
Jade his bones, stone and sustain and the minister to Emperor (Huangdi 黄帝),

thousands of years before the picture, the stone giant's

and erosion on his rockred: this is indeed a "ruin"

trayed himself as a traveler

mself an incarnation of the

So grave was its text, so hidden its form,

even the spirits espied it not;

yet once a man of the Way ascended alone

and saw it by chance.

I came sighing in admiration

tears swelling into ripples,

looking, searching, seeking everywhere

for the place it might be —

in thick forests of green trees

gibbons wail.\textsuperscript{11}

Following Han Yu's steps, prominent Song scholars such as Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-

1200) and Zhang Shi 张栻 (1132-1180) also tried — but again failed — to find the

inscription. Zhu and Zhang likely conducted their search in the winter of 1167.

Some 50 years later, however, the inscription was finally spotted and reproduced,

as we read in Wang Xiangzhi's 王象之's works (1163-1320) geographical work *Records of

Famous Places* (*Yü t’ieh fore* 瑤地紀勝), which he completed in 1227:

The Yu Stele is located on Goulou Peak. Alternatively, it is said that it is on Mi Peak

山 in Hengshan 衡山 county. A woodcutter once saw it in the past; but afterward no one

was able to find it again. During the Jiading 嘉定 era of the Song (1208-1224), however,

a gentleman from Sichuan 四川 reached the place with the help of a woodcutter. He

made an ink rubbing of the inscription’s seventy-two characters on a piece of paper, and

engraved the inscription in a Taoist temple at Kuimen 銭門.\textsuperscript{12}

Compared with Han Yu's poem, Wangg's record projects no fantasy aroused by

a mysterious object. In fact, his plain narrative completely strips the inscription

of its aura as a divine trace, and redefines it as an ancient stone carving vulnerable

to natural destruction and subject to human reproduction. The *Records of Famous

Places*, as well as his earlier *Stèles in Various Places* (*Yü t’ieh fore* 瑤地紀勝; pref ace

1221), records many such ancient cultural relics scattered in different locations in

Southern Song China. The duplicated King Yu Stele, now housed in a small shrine

at Mr. Yuelu 岳麓山 near Changsha 長沙, Hunan, (Fig. 6), became the source of further

duplications: at least seven "third-generation" King Yu Stèles were established.

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\textsuperscript{11} Han Yu, “Gouloushan” 岔嶢山, in *Quan Tang shih 全唐詩* (Complete collection of Tang


66. Han's contemporary, Liu Yuxi 刘禹锡 (772-842), also mentions the "Divine Yu inscription"

(Shen Yu ming 神禹铭) in his poem "Seeing off Licentiate Li Ce on his return to Hunan and

then writing to relatives or acquaintances in the office as well as to Mr. Jian from Hengzhou

and senior secretary Li the eighth" 旻季韦秀才張湖南第四官幕中執敬親衡州呂八郎中

(Quan Tang shih, j. 354.27, 3968-3969).

\textsuperscript{12} Wang Xiangzhi, *Yü t’ieh fore* 瑤地紀勝 (Sequel to Complete library in four categories), vol. 584, j. 56, 506. According to Zhang Shizian’s 鄭振鐸 (thirteenth

century) *Yü t’ieh fore* (Record of learn by a traveling official), the gentleman from

Sichuan mentioned in the passage is He Zhi 何貞, who found the inscription in 1212 and made

an ink rubbing from it. *Zhehuizhong* 知足堂 edition (Shanghai: Gushu bu tongzhong

gu shu xuan, 1921), j. 8, 7b.
in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Yunnan, Zhejiang, Sichuan, Jiangsu, Henan, Shannxi, and Hubei. The context, script, dating, and authenticity of the original inscription also became the subject of intense scholarly debates. Diverse opinions include, in addition to the traditional claim for Yu’s authorship, that the text’s "tadpole script" (kedou wen 蝌蚪文) is actually a type of Taoist writing invented much later, that the script preserves an ancient writing system even older than the Shang oracle bone inscriptions, that the stele is a forgery, probably made by the Ming scholar Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488-1559) who purportedly rediscovered it in the sixteenth century, that the inscription was created in 611 BC to praise a military official; and that it was fashioned as a sacrifice to Mt. Heng. None of these arguments have been convincing.

The beginning of this antiquarianism, a type of empiricism, was important role in transforming the study of bronzes and stone carvings. Although interest in the past in the mid-eleventh century had been sporadic, the observation of ancient carvings, observed in common culture, had recorded in the "Annals," valleys filled, and the elements of the period had been lost. To Hong Guo 鴻固 (1117-1184), it was a serious scholarly imperative to collect historical data that could be cross-examined through different texts. This approach is clearly illustrated in this statement:

When archaeological materials, official titles, and genealogical textual materials are all present, and cannot fail to contain some time the events took place and may be discovered.

This and many similar examples themselves primarily as historical information. This orientation of "historical traces." It encouraged Song antiquarians to articulate a new way of thinking about past and other cultural relics. This led to the major catalogue of stone inscriptions by the Song scholar and government official, "Lihuang shi" (Lihuangshi) and the second volume of "Lihuang shi" (Lihuangshi), 7202. These two books together were published in 1270.

14. Zhao Mingchong, "Lihuang shi" (Lihuangshi), shi, 8700.
in 611 BC to praise a military victory of King Zhuang of Chu (r. 613–591 BC); and that it was fashioned by Prince Zhugou 朱勾 of Yue 越 in 456 BC during a sacrifice to Mt. Heng. None of these opinions are conclusive; but all have helped transform the inscription from a mystical phenomenon into a subject of antiquarian interest and historical inquiry.

The beginning of this transformation coincided with the emergence of antiquarianism, a type of empirical study of ancient objects and texts which played an important role in transforming many similar “divine traces” into “historical traces.” Although interest in the past had always existed in Chinese culture, only from the mid-eleventh century on did antiquarianism, called jinshu shu 金石書 (studies of ancient bronzes and stone carvings) in Chinese, become a scholarly movement in its own right. A major motivation behind this movement was to preserve texts engraved on old monuments that might be destroyed by the elements, by vandalism, or by war.

Hong Gua 洪穎 (1117–1184), the author of two comprehensive catalogues of stone carvings, observed in commenting on the Han dynasty steles which Li Daoyuan had recorded in the Annotated Classic of Waterways: “But mountains are leveled and valleys filled, and the elements wreak their destruction. By the time of the Zhenghe 政和 to Xuanhe 宣和 periods (1111–1125), eight-tenths of those ancient objects had been lost.” To Hong and his colleagues, the preservation of the inscriptions was a serious scholarly imperative, because these documents constituted authentic historical data that could be used to complement and even to correct transmitted texts. This approach is clearly articulated by Zhao Mingcheng 趙明誠 (1081–1129) in this statement:

> When archaeological materials are used to examine things such as chronology, geography, official titles, and genealogy, three- or four-tenths of these data are in conflict with textual materials. That is because historical writings are produced by latter-day writers and cannot fail to contain errors, but inscriptions on stone and bronze are made at the time the events took place and can be trusted without reservations; thus discrepancies may be discovered.

This and many similar statements demonstrate that Song antiquarians viewed themselves primarily as historians who treated stone carvings as sources of textual information. This orientation both encouraged and restricted an emerging culture of “historical traces.” It encouraged this culture because through their writings, Song antiquarians articulated a general historical framework for ancient monuments and other cultural relics. This historicizing tendency already characterized the first major catalogue of stone inscriptions by Ouyang Xiu 欧陽修 (1007–1072). After

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13. Hong Gua, *Li shi* 石史 (Interpreting Han Clerical writings), 1166, in *Shihe shiliu xinbian* 石刻史料新編 (A new compilation of historical materials on stone carvings) (Tibet: Xiwenfeng chuban gongsi 新文豐出版公司, 1957), 6749; see also C. Rudolph, “Preliminary Notes on Sung Archaeology,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 22 (1963), 170. Hong Gua’s other work is *Li xu* 聖域 (Addendum to Interpreting Han Clerical Writings), 1168–1179, in *Shihe shiliu xinbian*, 7087–7202. These two books together catalogue 258 inscriptions.

completing the catalogue in 1062, Ouyang wrote a preface for it, in which he defined the book's scope chronologically as extending "from King Mu of the Zhou 周穆王 down to the Qin, Han, Sui, Tang, and the Five Dynasties."15 It is significant that he omitted the Xia, the Shang, the early Zhou, and all legendary rulers recorded in transmitted texts, not because he considered them unimportant but because no corresponding inscriptive evidence had been found. Other Song antiquarian writers shared this historiographical approach and conventionally organized their materials into a dynastic sequence. Consequently, although the fascination with divine traces never disappeared from popular religion and poetic imagination, an old monument became a "historical trace" once it was brought into this dynastic framework.

However, because of their primary identity as textual historians, Song antiquarians typically based their research on ink rubbings of inscriptions, which they passionately collected from all available sources. For this reason, these scholars rarely visited ancient monuments in situ. While their comments in the catalogues made frequent references to the sources of the rubbings, such writing contributed little to the study of the original monuments as cultural and material constructs. This situation changed dramatically in the eighteenth century, when antiquarian studies reached a new height. Prompted by the "evidential scholarship" (kazehengxue 考證學) movement,16 "visiting steles" (fangbei 方碑) became a shared passion among antiquarians, and many catalogues of ancient inscriptions were structured according to the provenance of the source materials. Qing antiquarians often described their visits to ancient monuments in writing; some of them even helped preserve ruined stone carvings in local places. They frequently exchanged research materials and commented on each other's work. An old pictorial motif of "reading the stele" was also reinvented to convey real travel experience.17 Through these activities, Qing antiquarians played a much more active role than their Song predecessors in forging a culture of "historical traces." A key person in this process was Huang Yi 黄易 (1744–1802), a middle Qing period calligrapher, seal carver, painter, and collector of rubbings.

Several recent studies on Huang's engagement in antiquarian scholarship and his travel paintings have provided valuable information about his relationship with ancient ruins.18 This relationship reflects both intellectual currents and personal


18. These includes Qianshen Bai, "The Intellectual Legacy of Huang Yi and His Friends:
initiative, and it can be approached from several angles; Huong was remarkable, *inter alia*, for fusing the study of ancient inscriptions and cultural geography, promoting the preservation of architectural ruins in local settings, disseminating research data collected from field trips, and using “travel painting” as a means of scholarly communication. Crucial to this study, these interventions initiated an important transformation of a historical site, which gradually attracted public attention and finally became a certified site of national cultural heritage.

In contrast to the limited interest of early antiquarians in visiting ancient sites, from at least the sixth century on another group of scholars considered such trips a professional necessity. We may call these men early “cultural geographers,” whose first representative, Li Daoquyan, examined many ancient shrines, steles, tombs, and the remains of old cities, and recorded his observations in the Annotated Classic of Waterways. During the Song, this tradition was continued by scholars like Wang Xianzhi, whose description of the King Yu Stele was cited above. The development of local gazetteers (*di'angzhi* 地方志) and travel literature (*yunti* 游記) further encouraged the survey and recording of local *gufu*; a subject indispensable to these two types of writing. During the Qing, these separate interests in *gufu* — as historical signposts, as local landmarks, and as targets of individual exploration — became intertwined, stimulating people like Huang Yi to take many *fanggu* 談古 journeys in search of ancient monuments.

Huang recorded such journeys in both pictures and words. The former include a number of album paintings, each consisting of multiple images and postscripts; the latter is exemplified by a diary he wrote when he traveled to the antiquities-rich area around Luoyang in 1796. Following the conventions of travel literature, these works present his search for ancient sites as personal explorations highlighted by exciting findings. He frequently specifies the sources of his information about the locations of the sites: sometimes he relied on a social network of antiquarians; other times he found clues in historical records including geographic writings. A postscript on his *Twelve Paintings of Obtaining Stelae*, for example, tells how he was guided by a local gazetteer to discover the famous Wu Family carvings in Shandong 山東 (Fig. 7):


19. These albums include: *Twelve Paintings of Obtaining Stelae* (Debei shi'er tu 得碑十二圖), *Visiting Stelae in the Song-Luo Region (Song Luo fanqieh tu 隋洛訪碑圖)*, and *Visiting Stelae in the Mount Tai Area (Taiyue fanqieh tu 峳岳訪碑圖)*. The first album is in the collection of the Tianjin Municipal Museum of Art (天津市藝術博物館). The other two are housed in Beijing’s Palace Museum (故宮博物院). For images, see Zhongguo gude shubua tums 中國古代書畫圖目 (An illustrated catalogue of selected works of ancient Chinese painting and calligraphy), (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe 文物出版社, 1986-2001), 10: 215-216, 23: 223-238.
In the autumn of the year bingwu 半午, during Emperor Qianlong's 乾隆 reign [1786], I read a passage in the gazetteer of Jiaxiang 嘉祥 county, which records some ruined stone chambers and an ancient stele with a hole [on top] at Purple Cloud Mountain 紫雲山 [near the county seat]. Having ordered ink rubbings made [from these structures] and examined them, I determined that the stele was dedicated to Wu Ban 武班, a Han dynasty chief clerk, and that the pictorial images are from the Wu Liang Shrine 武梁祠. Together with Liu Tienqiao 劉鐵樵 of Jining 濟寧, Li Meixun 李梅村 of Hongdong 洪洞, and Gao Zhengyan 高正巖 of Nanning 南明, I then went to the site to conduct an investigation. One by one we found [remains of] three stone chambers, which I named the Front, Rear, and Left Shrines, as well as carvings of auspicious omens, the stone pillar gate of the Wu family [cemetery], and a pictorial carving representing Confucius' meeting with Laosi. On no other occasion had I ever obtained so many ancient carvings [in a single exploration]. It was indeed the most satisfactory event in my life! I then collaborated with antique-loving gentlemen within the four seas to erect a shrine for the Wu family, storing the stone carvings we had found in this building. We also moved the "Confucius Meeting Laosi" slab into the Mingzun Hall 明倫堂 in the academy of Jining 濟寧 Prefecture, preserving it there forever.20

In a previous study I proposed that Huang Yi's finding and preservation of the Wu family carvings are among the most important events in Chinese archaeology, because they represented the beginning of planned excavations and public archaeological museums in China.21 The "Wu Family Shrine" (Wushí cítáng 武氏祠堂) Huang and his colleagues built served the dual function of a preservation hall and an exhibition gallery. Huang Yi describes these two roles in an essay which

20. For a transcription of this colophon, see Cai Hongru 蔡鴻恕, "Huang Yi Debei shí'er tu" 黃易得碑十二圖 (Huang Yi's Twelve Paintings of Obtaining Steles), Wenwu, 1996.3, 72-79. This colophon appears as a summary of a longer essay by Huang Yi, translated in Wu, The Wu Liang Shrine, 5-6.
was engraved inside the hall: "We have erected this Wu Family Shrine to protect the carvings. People will find it easier to make rubbings from these carvings, and the reproductions will spread far and wide. People will recognize the importance of giving care to these objects, and the carvings will exist forever. Would not this be more important than if only two or three antiquarians could enjoy them?"

For similar purposes he had erected steles moved to nearby temples and academies, but never to his home (Fig. 8). What he brought back from field trips were ink rubbings, which he shared with other antiquarians, often famous scholars with deeper epigraphic learning. He also showed his painting albums to these men and invited them to comment on them. Lillian Lan-yung Tseng has reconstructed a series of such situations surrounding Huang's album *Visiting Steles in the Song-Luo Region*, which records a trip he took in 1796 to the Longyang 洛陽 area. Based on his memory and a detailed diary, Huang composed twenty-four pictures for this album, each representing his fanggu activities at a specific place; the name of the place is inscribed on each album leaf as its title. A long postscript after each picture supplies further information about the ancient monument, especially about the engraved text and its date. The entire album is therefore anchored in specific geographic locations, which are individualized by the datable gōu found there.

22. Huang Yi, "Xu Wu Shi Citang jīliè" 修武氏祠堂記略 (Commemorating the construction of the Wu preservation hall), in *Shēn shìjiào xùjiàn*, 7429.

23. The last image in the Twelve Paintings of Obtaining Steles, for example, depicts his finding a ruined stele on the roadside in 1792. Only three characters in the inscriptions could be deciphered. He then moved this stele to the local academy. Similarly, the second leaf in the album represents his moving a Han stele to the nearby Longhua Temple 龍華寺. See Hsu, "Huang Yi’s Fenghe Painting: A Legacy of Qing Antiquarianism."

24. Lillian Tseng, "Retrieving the Past, Inventing the Memorable."
Soon after Huang Yi completed the album in 1797, he presented it to Weng Fanggang (翁方綱, 1733-1818), a senior official and a prominent antiquarian at the time.25 Weng not only wrote comments after each picture/postscript, but also displayed the album at a literati gathering. In the same year, Huang also showed the album to Sun Xingyan (孫星衍, 1753-1818), another important antiquarian who was then collecting materials for his Records of Visiting Sites around the World (Huangyu jiangbi lu; 黃子江碑錄, published in 1802). Two years earlier, Huang Yi had guided Sun to visit three Han dynasty sites in Shandong. This time, Sun examined the album carefully and inscribed the title page. From 1799 to 1800, Huang Yi showed the album to more scholars and celebrities, including Liang Tongshu (梁同書, 1723-1815), Xi Gang (奚閭, 1746-1803), Song Baochun (宋寶沖, 1748-1818), Wang Niansun (王念孫, 1744-1832), and Li Rui (李翹, 1769-1817).

There is no question that Huang, a low-ranking official and semi-professional artist, engineered these occasions to promote himself and his art. But through these activities he also effectively disseminated knowledge about gui sites. His audience described their experience in viewing the album as a "dream journey" to the sites; some expressed their desire to see the ruins in person. Throughout the nineteenth century, the fame of these places as important sites of Han stone carvings continued to grow. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when the first group of European and Japanese archaeologists, including Édouard Chavannes, Sekino Tetsu (関野善), and Omura Seigai 大村西崖, began to survey China's historical monuments, they naturally started from these places.26 Today, almost all ancient ruins depicted in Huang Yi's albums are registered "heritage sites" under the administration of the government departments of cultural relics.

Yijí (Remnant Sites — "Leftover Sites" in a Narrow Sense)

Huang Yi lived at a time when the Qing imperial power reached its zenith. "The persistence, sophistication, and extravagance with which the Qianlong court pursued its role as universal cultural patron," the historian Pamela K. Crossley writes, "produced the indelible image of the period as the height of the power of the Qing — indeed, it could be and has been argued, as the period unrivaled by any in Chinese imperial history for sheer magnificence."27 Under imperial patronage, studies of antiquities acquired a highly sophisticated, scholarly style, characterized by meticulous attention to evidence and nearly complete detachment from politics. Antiquarian writings from this period betray little sentimentialty. Confronted with an inscription written one or two thousand years earlier, the initial impulse was always to identify the characters, to read the passages, to date the text according to its content and calligraphy, and to relate it to other textual evidence. It was a meticulous, rational process based on empirical observation and historical scholarship.

25. This and the following events are described in detail in ibid., 46-50.
26. For a summary of these surveys, see Wu Hung, The Wu Liang Shrine, 7-10, 46-49.
In this way, the eighteenth-century antiquarians differed markedly from their seventeenth-century predecessors, whose attitude towards historical ruins was strongly influenced by the fall of the Ming in 1644. Many of these scholars were Ming loyalists, called yimin 遺民 or “remnant subjects” from the fallen dynasty. Far from idle objects of dispassionate historical examination, ruins, to them, embodied rich symbolism and evoked strong emotional response. In an excellent study of these people’s relationship with the stele, Qianshen Bai has identified the image of a “broken stele” (chunbi 斷碑) as a poetic metaphor for the former dynasty. One piece of his evidence is a poem written by the famous scholar and Ming loyalist Gu Yanwu 郭鴻武 (1613–1682), commemorating a trip he took with his student Hu Ting 胡廷 (active 1640–1670) to visit an ancient stele in 1674, the poem ends with these two lines: “Reading this broken stele with my friend, we mourn the past and the present with sorrowful hearts.” As Bai has noted, this and similar expressions in the early Qing deliberately echoed an historical episode in the thirteenth century: three years after the Mongol army captured the Southern Song capital at present-day Hangzhou 杭州, the poet Zhang Yan 張炎 (1248–1320) visited the famous West Lake in the city. Facing an abandoned stele he wrote: “So much misfortune had befallen my former country. / Touching this broken stele, / My heart is stricken for the present.”

To my knowledge, no seventeenth-century yimin artist depicted the image of a broken stele. But enough evidence demonstrates that in their paintings an intact stele conveys the meaning of a broken stele, as we have found in Gu Yanwu’s poem. One of these works was made by Zhang Feng 張鳳 (d. 1662), a “wild gentleman” (kuangshi 狂士) who once traveled to the north to pay respect to Ming imperial tombs after the Manchu takeover. Dated to 1659, this small painting on a folding fan depicts a man in Ming attire standing before an enormous stele (Fig. 9). Considering the artist’s political attitude, the painting seems to convey a certain autobiographical significance, and the stele’s extraordinary size seems to allude to something weighty and grand in the past. The contrast between the stele’s monumentality and the desolate environment is highlighted in the poem that Zhang inscribed above the picture:

Fig. 9 (left): Zhang Feng 張鳳 (d. 1662), *Reading a Sicle* 閱書圖. Dated 1659. Folding fan mounted as an album leaf, ink and color on paper, 16.6 x 50.1 cm. Suzhou Municipal Museum.

Fig. 10 (left): Wu Li 吳歷 (1632-1718), *Clouds White, Mountains Blue* (Yunbai shanqing 興白山青). Dated 1668. Handscroll, ink and color on silk, 25.9 x 117.2 cm. Taipei: National Palace Museum.
Fig. 9 (right)

Fig. 10 (right)
Chilly mists, withered grass;
Old trees, remote mountains.
An imposing stele stands
In a place devoid of human traces
— Seeing this I feel [I face] the past and the present.32

Whereas this fan painting is personal and intimate, Wu Li’s 吳歷 (1632-1718) Clouds White, Mountains Blue (Yinbai shuangqing 雲白山青), a 117.2 cm long handscroll now housed in the National Palace Museum, Taipei, is a serious and thoughtful work charged with hidden emotion (Fig. 10). Commonly considered a major master of early Qing painting, Wu studied literature, philosophy, and music from famous yimin scholars in his youth and became a committed Ming loyalist himself when he grew up.33 In an undated poem he compares himself with a “sick horse” loyal to its deceased master: “ [...] My energy becomes exhausted with unlimited remorse over the past. / My voice gets hoarse as my years are getting short. / When I think of the boundless graces of my Lord, / My tears of blood wet the sparkling grains of sand.”34 As Laurence Tam has commented, “This is the cry of an old soldier lamenting his incapability of going to the battlefield and to die for his own master. The thought of the master brought tears to his eyes. The 'master of the sick horse' could never be interpreted as the Qing emperor but the dead Ming emperor, Siyong思宗” (the Chongzhen崇禎 Emperor, r. 1627-1644).35

Created in 1668, the handscroll painting conveys the same feeling of tragedy and helplessness, but in a much subtler manner. It has been suggested that the painting’s “green-blue” (qingtai 青綠) style is traditionally associated with isles of immortals or Tao Qian’s 道潜 (365-427) ”Peach Blossom Spring.”36 This connection is substantiated by the painting’s composition: opening the scroll, we find a group of flowering trees half blocking a mountain cave. Similar images are frequently seen in Ming-Qing representations of Peach Blossom Spring and immortal mountains. A seventeenth-century viewer would readily take the cave in Wu Li’s scroll as the entrance to a mythical oasis free from human strife and warfare. The story of ”Peach Blossom Spring” relates that a fisherman passed through a cave and emerged ”into the open light of day. He faced a spread of level land. Imposing buildings stood among rich fields and pleasant ponds all set with mulberry and willow, linking paths led everywhere, and the fowls and dogs of one farm could be heard from the next. People were coming and going and working in the fields. [...] White-haired elders and tufted children this story had become familiar.”37

“Peach Blossom Spring of the Ming and the early Qing are lost, others have been regarded as the pictorial formula of their dream.”38 To those in a nightmare, it is the formula, in which the other side of the mirror is what he finds in the garden. Instead, it is a memorial to an old tree. There is no mist, no crows hovering over a wisp of smoke in Wu Li’s poem at the top of the ocean smells of blooming flowers.

We do not know the originality but only describe it as a political and intellectual perished Ming. By substituting “Peach Blossom Spring,” it resurrects the former dynasty, it does not represent a “reading the stele” form of the painting’s history. It is the one gradually unrolls the wintry landscape generation’s symbol of a recent past.39

Here we arrive at an “divine traces” and “faded” and what posedly registers a suggestion.40

33. See Laurence G. S. Tam, Six Masters of Early Qing and Wu Li (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art, 1986), 34-58.
34. Wu Li, “Sick Horse” 病馬, in Meiying shucha 墨韻詩抄 (Wu Li’s poetry collection), Congshu jicheng xubian 散書集成續編 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian 上海書店, 1994), vol.174, 5. Translation from L. Tam, Six Masters of Early Qing and Wu Li, 34.
35. L. Tam, Six Masters of Early Qing and Wu Li, 34.
Traces in Chinese Landscape and Landscape Painting

Wu Li's 画作 (1632-1718)

117.2 cm long handscroll

a serious and thoughtful
considered a major master
music and painting
with unlimited remorse
short. / When I think
wet the sparkling grains
the cry of an old soldier
to die for his own master.
"master of the sick horse"

The Ming emperor, Sizong,

the same feeling of tragedy
been suggested that the
ly associated with isles of
This connection
the scroll, we find a group
images are frequently seen
immortal mountains.
Fre in Wu Li's scroll as the
affaire. The story of "Peach
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imposing buildings stood
berry and willow, linking
could be heard from the
fields. [...] White-haired

Suzhou Municipal Museum
[Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe,

Wu Li (Hong Kong: Hong

[Wu Li's poetry collection],

Nacional Palace Museum, Taiwan

elders and tufted children alike were cheerful and contented."37 Long before Wu Li, this story had become the most famous Chinese fable of an ideal, utopian society.

"Peach Blossom Spring" was a favorite narrative subject for painting at the end of the Ming and the early Qing. Wu Li himself did several versions; some of them are lost, others have survived. According to Lin Xiaoping, these paintings "can be regarded as the pictorial presence of Ming loyalists' fantasy for the untouched land of their dream."38 The 1668 Clouds White, Mountains Blue, however, turns the fable into a nightmare.39 As just mentioned, the painting's first half adapts a traditional pictorial formula, in which a cave invites the viewer into an utopian world hidden on the other side of the mountain. Unrolling the scroll, however, the viewer is stunned by what he finds in the second half of the painting. There are no happy farmers or fairies. Instead, a memorial stele, made of pure, white stone, stands silently beneath an old tree. There is no spring and no flowers. The trees are leafless; hundreds of crows hover over a wintry landscape and block the sun—a terrifying scene described in Wu Li's poem at the end of the scroll: "The rain is over, the skies are distant, the ocean smells of blood. [...]

We do not know the exact significance of Wu Li's stele: his poem does not mention it but only describes a chilly, silent landscape. Understood in the contemporary political and intellectual context, however, the stele unmistakably symbolizes the perished Ming. By substituting a symbol of death for the utopian dreamland of "Peach Blossom Spring," Wu Li announces a painful realization, that any hope to resurrect the former dynasty had ended. A significant feature of the painting is that it does not represent a visitor in front of a stele and seems to violate the standard "reading the stele" format (see Fig. 9). I would argue, however, that the gaze inherent in the painting's handscroll format substitutes for the image of a visitor.40 As one gradually unrolls the scroll, the shifting images from the mountain cave to the wintry landscape generate a strong sense of moving forward to "meet" the stele. The climax of viewing the handscroll is the viewer's encounter with the stele, the symbol of a recent but irretrievable past.

Here we arrive at an important factor which separates "remnant traces" from "divine traces" and "historical traces." In terms of temporality, a divine trace supposedly registers a supernatural event beyond human history, while a historical


39. It is perhaps not a coincidence that, according to Lin Xiaoping, during this period, from the 1660s to 1670s, Wu Li experienced "the most significant change" in his life. Ibid., 127.


trace pinpoints a specific moment in dynastic chronology. A remnant trace, on the other hand, stands for the recent dead; the response it seeks is neither religious wonderment nor scholarly devotion, but continuous loyalty in the form of prolonged mourning. Indeed, various kinds of "remnant traces" in the seventeenth century all pertained to dynastic death. In addition to the stele, Jonathan Hay has convincingly demonstrated that the palace and tomb of the first Ming emperor T'ai Tsu (r. 1368–1399) constituted a "symbolic geography of dynastic memory" in post-conquest Nanjing. The two structures both fell to ruin soon after the Qing takeover. A report written in 1684 notes that "Where palace gates once stood so imposingly, there were instead ruined walls. When once the Jade Rivers had curved around, there were instead dried-up channels with collapsed banks." T'ai Tsu's Xiao Ling Mausoleum suffered less destruction, but when Gu Yanwu visited it in 1653 he already saw "ruins of the old ritual buildings and shrines." To a Ming loyalist, these places bespoke the tragic fate of both the former dynasty and themselves. But for the Qing ruler, these ruined sites provided evidence of military victory, dynastic transition, and the changing mandate of Heaven. When Emperor Kangxi (r. 1661–1722) paid a visit to the Xiao Ling Mausoleum in 1684, for example, he lectured on the reasons for the Ming's fall and the lessons the Qing could learn from them: "If one fearfully studies the remains bearing witness to the rise and fall of earlier dynasties, and becomes daily more wary and prudent, then one may succeed." What was a "remnant trace" to the loyal subjects of a former dynasty was thus a vehicle of legitimacy to the conqueror.

**Shengji (Renowned Places)**

A shengji is not a single trace, but a timeless place which has attracted generations of people to visit and to leave their marks there, and which has become a persistent subject of literary and artistic commemoration and representation. Unlike other traces that imply various kinds of retrospective gazes, a shengji as a whole belongs to a perpetual present. This is because a "famous historical site" — as the term shengji is translated in dictionaries — cancels the historical specificity of individual traces by incorporating them into a whole. People may go there to study ancient inscriptions, to commemorate past figures or events, or just to have a delightful outing. This type of ji is summarized by Meng Haoran 孟浩然 (689–740) in a famous poem, which he wrote:

> "When taking leave of Friends, I sail through various parts of China and see the mountains; When returning to home, I step on a slope of hills and keep my gaze to the view." The shengji here is a" heaven on earth" and would comprise countless layers.

We can use Mt. Tai as an example to illustrate this concept. The Dai Temple tablets supported by the three emperors since the Tang dating from the Qing are here are treasured as ancient and antique "bontai". The (Xiao) Liuchao song height of three feet.

A broad avenue, the axis northward, and the boundary of the mountain path, it is a verticality that begins to appear along the visitor's path and to read their walking foot are relatively recent. He feels that he is to encounter the the silent bottom of the world.

This journey is a pilgrimage to the Heavenly Gate (天門), and the South Island landmarks — the "Five Gentlemen" of Emperors of Qin and Han and the Imperial Canopy 天子 (r. 997–1022) often constructed for

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43. These lines are from "Guo Jinling lun" (An essay on passing through Jinling), which Emperor Kangxi 顧炎武 wrote when he visited the former palace in 1684. "Da Qing Shengen jilu" 大清聖運記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 117, 2.226. Translation from J. Hay, "Ming Palace and Tomb," 15.


47. The *Essai de Monographie des Reliques Chinoises*. 
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poem, which he wrote in front of an ancient stele on Mt. Xian 崤山: “In human
affairs there is succession and loss; / Men come and go, forming present and past. / Rivers and hills keep traces of their glory [shengji], / And our generation too climbs here for the view.”26 The poet knew clearly that other people had been there before him and would come after him. A shengji is thus not an individual expression but comprises countless layers of human experiences.

We can use Mt. Tai 泰山, the sacred Eastern Marchmount in Shandong, to illustrate this concept.27 A modern visitor to this mountain finds himself starting from the Dai Temple 岱廟 inside the city of Tai’an 泰安. Huge commemorative tablets supported by stone turtles — tributes to the sacred mountain by various emperors since the Tang dynasty — stand in the yard. Other stone carvings, some dating from the Qin and Han, form a long row along the corridors. Everything here is evaluated and appreciated with reference to its age: five enormous juniper trees, said to have been planted by Emperor Wu of the Han 漢武帝 (156-87 BC), are treasured as ancient monuments. The temple was famous for its collection of antique bonsai. The oldest one, called the “Petite Pine from the Six Dynasties” (Xiao Liuchao song 小六朝松), has spent more than 500 years achieving its current height of three feet.

A broad avenue, the Road to Heaven (Tongtianjie 遙天街), extends the temple’s axis northward and leads the visitor to Daizongfang 崤宗坊, a gate which marks the boundary of the sacred mountain. The road continues. Rather than a winding mountain path, it is a grand highway that runs almost vertically to the summit; its verticality reinforces the mountain’s monumentality. Engravings on cliffs begin to appear along the road. Attracted by familiar names and striking calligraphy, the visitor stops here and there to identify the writers, to place them in chronology, and to read their writings (Fig. 11). He finds that the inscriptions at the mountain’s foot are relatively recent; the closer to the top, the older they become. Gradually, he feels that he is traveling into the past. When he climbs onto the mountain top and encounters the “Wordless Stele” (Wuzibei 無字碑), he seems to have reached the silent bottom of history.

This journey is punctuated by repeated gates and paihou 牌樓-arches — the First Heavenly Gate (Yitianmen 一天門), the Middle Heavenly Gate (Zhongtianmen 中天門), and the South Heavenly Gate (Nantianmen 南天門), as well as by numerous landmarks — the “Place of Confucius’ Ascent” (Kongzi denglinchu 孔子登臨處), the “Five Gentlemen Pines” (Wu Dafu song 五大夫松), which sheltered the First Emperor of Qin 秦始皇 [r. 221-209 BC] during a sudden storm, and the “Ground of the Imperial Canopy” (Yuzhangpian 仰帳坪, where Emperor Zhenzong of the Song 宋真宗 [r. 997-1022] stopped to enjoy the scenery). Although these landmarks were often constructed far later than the events they commemorate, they still revi


47. The classic work of scholarship on this mountain is Édouard Chavannes, Le T'ai Chan : Essai de Monographie d’un culte chinois (Paris: Leroux, 1910).
memories of an earlier history. Indeed, Mt. Tai as a shengji typifies a particular kind of "memory site": instead of being dedicated to a single person and for a definite cause, it commemorates numerous historical personages and events, and conveys the voices of different ages. Unlike an architectural or sculptured monument built at a definable historical moment, the mountain achieves its monumentality over the course of time. Its elaboration, though having continued for centuries, can never be finished. It has thus become a supreme metaphor of history itself.

Visual forms representing a complex shengji like Mt. Tai include topographical paintings, travel albums, and tourist maps, which depict or index famous sites and scenery spots in multiple or single compositions. Another kind of shengji painting focuses on the historical event which made a place famous and thus has strong narrative component. One such place is Red Cliff 赤壁 on the Yangzi River 江, whose recorded history started in AD 208, when the fire ships of Wu 烬 destroyed Cao Cao's galley ships moored by the cliff and ended Cao's hope to conquer the South. Some 870 years later, in 1082, the Northern Song poet Su Shi 苏轼 (1037-1101) wrote his famous "First Poetic Exposition on Red Cliff" ("Qian Chibi fu" 前赤壁賦), describing a small literary gathering riding a boat under the cliff. The core of the text is a conversation between Su and one of his guests, who unexpectedly played a melancholy tone on the flute and saddened the party. The mood of the music reflected his "meditation on the past" stimulated by the place. As the guest recalls, there:

The prows and sterns of Cao Cao's galley ships once stretched a thousand leagues, his flags and banners blotted out the very sky; he poured himself some wine and stood over the river, hefted his spear whole age, and yet riding a boat as small as mayflies lodging beneath the blue sea. We grieve over the great river."

Su Shi's piece, as with the Exposition on Red Cliff painting, has been studied by a number of composition: a multi-narrative, and a single-narrative, the latter often cited as "Expositions" and "the Yuanzhi 武元直 (twelfth-century) Su Shi's party with Ban 端."
river, hefted his spear and composed a poem — he was indeed the boldest spirit of that whole age, and yet where is he now? Consider yourself and I by comparison, [...] we go riding a boat as small as a leaf and raise goblets of wine to toast one another. We are but mayflies lodging between Heaven and Earth, single grains adrift, far out on the dark blue sea. We grieve that our lives last only a moment, and we covet the endlessness of the great river.

Su Shi’s piece, as well as a sister composition by him called “The Second Poetic Exposition on Red Cliff” (“Hou Chibi fu” (後赤壁賦)), inspired a whole tradition of Red Cliff painting, partly because of their buaiyu sentiment so strongly felt in the passage cited above. This sub-genre of Chinese landscape/narrative painting has been studied by a number of modern scholars. Generally, it consists of two types of composition: a multi-framed handscroll which renders Su’s text as a pictorial narrative, and a single-framed picture which focuses on the moment when Su’s boat is carried beneath Red Cliff. Paintings of the second type can refer to both “Expositions” and thus possess an emblematic significance. Starting from Wu Yuanzhi 武元直 (twelfth–thirteenth century), this type of painting always juxtaposes Su Shi’s party with Red Cliff (Fig. 12). The physical appearance of the cliff, which

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49. These include Stephen Wilkinson’s Ph. d. dissertation on this subject and an article based on his dissertation: “Painting of ‘The Red Cliff Prose Poems’ in Song times,” Oriental Art, 27.1 (Spring 1981), 76-89; Chibi fu 赤壁賦 (Poetic Exposition on Red Cliff) (Taipei: Guoli guongong bowuyuan 国立故宫博物院, 1984).

50. In some paintings, such as Wu Yuanzhi’s 武元直 “Red Cliff” in the National Palace Museum, both “Expositions” are inscribed after the painting.
plays no role in the “First Exposition” and is only briefly described in the “Second Exposition,” becomes the focus of the pictorial representation. Often shown as a giant stone boulder hanging above the river, its grandeur is reinforced by the tiny boat below. The contrast between these two images seems to echo the voice of Su’s guest: “[...] we go riding a boat as small as a leaf and raise goblets of wine to toast one another. We are but mayflies lodging between Heaven and Earth, single grains adrift, far out on the dark blue sea.” Interestingly, although in the text this baijigu pessimism is eventually overridden by Su Shi’s philosophical argument, it remains the central theme of the painting, in which the cliff stands for both nature and history. Although its size and strength easily overpowers a mortal man, its rugged surface nevertheless suggests erosion through the ages.

Wu Yuanzhi’s composition was continued and revised by numerous later artists. This pictorial composition was also adapted to enrich autobiographical representations. In such cases, Su Shi is replaced by the artist’s self-image, and Red Cliff as a famous historical site conveys three layers of memory: the place is still associated with the “Battle at Red Cliff” in the third century and Su Shi’s outing in the twelfth century, the painting also commemorates the later visitor’s own journey to the ancient site. Not every painter who made such pictures had actually gone to Red Cliff, however. The making of such works thus amounts to a symbolic pilgrimage to the site through an artistic performance. Commenting on the fictionality in these paintings, the Ming artist Chen Chun 陈淳 (1483-1544) playfully wrote a colophon on his 1537 Red Cliff painting, now housed in the Osaka Art Museum: “A visitor brought a calligraphic copy of the ‘First Exposition on Red Cliff’ to my cottage. I did not remember when I had written it. He asked me to add a picture to it. But I had never seen Red Cliff; how could I portray it? The visitor insisted and insisted; and reluctantly I picked up my brush. Looking at the picture I have just completed: the Cliff seems no more than a piece of fragmented rock in the river; and who can tell that the figures in the boat are Su Shi and his guests? This is like telling about a dream in a dream; isn’t it ridiculous?”

In a broad sense, Chen Chun’s self-parody suggests the inevitable dead-end of any “picture of a famous site” (shengjitu 帝陵圖) as a genuine baijigu expression. In his case, the sense of “lamenting the past” had completely disappeared from the painting; what is left is merely a standard pictorial formula which satisfied a consumer’s demand for a tourist picture. This formula could be revitalized, however, when it was reinvented with fresh and personal experience — when a landscape image regained its significance as a “trace” to bear real memories of the past. Thus, whereas the “Red Cliff painting” itself had become hopelessly stereotyped, its basic pictorial composition still inspired later baijigu works, including many remarkable paintings which Shitao composed to commemorate his visits to historical sites.

51. An illustration of this painting can be found in Min Shin no bijutsu 明清の美術 (Chūgoku bijutsu Series 中国美術館シリーズ 5; Osaka: Osaka shiritsu bijutsukan 大阪市立美術館 and Asahi shinbunsha 朝日新聞社, 1981), 69, cat. no. 4-31.