

# Debating Wang Meng's (1308-1385) Undated Handscroll: The Continuous Dialogue between Images and Texts in China

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Why do historians try to clarify the dates of the events that happened in the past? Such studies seek clearer answers than what is currently accepted. Art historians attempt to identify an artwork's plausible historical, political and social background, artistic style and date of execution in order to consider its significance as fully as possible. Chinese art, due to its long history, offers many such examples. This research focuses on one undated Chinese work, in particular, to consider the broad impact on understanding the

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social communication and continuous dialogue between painted images and texts.

Contemporaries of Wang Meng (王蒙, 1308-1385), as well as later generations, admired him as one of the Four Yuan Masters, along with Wu Zhen (吳鎮, 1280-1354), Huang Gongwang (黃公望, 1269-1354), and Ni Zan (倪瓚, 1301-1374). Born in Wuxing (吳興), Hangzhou (杭州) in southeastern China around 1308, he was a grandson of Zhao Mengfu (趙孟頫, 1254-1322), who was an eminent official, poet, calligrapher, and painter, and one of the period's leading cultural figures.<sup>1</sup> Wang Meng held a low office under the Yuan dynasty (元朝, 1279-1368) as a provincial prosecutor.<sup>2</sup> By the early 1340s, Wang had retired to Yellow Crane Mountain (黃鶴山), northeast of Hangzhou. Due to the expressive brushstrokes of his *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui* (惠麓小隱, *Huilu xiaoyin*), art historians Zhang Chou (張丑, 1577-1634) and Sherman E. Lee (1918-2008), assumed it to be one of his late works;<sup>3</sup> however, there is a great possibility that the Indianapolis handscroll was produced much earlier, in the early 1340s, as will be proven through an analysis of the image, colophons and inscriptions (fig. 1).<sup>4</sup>



Fig. 1 Wang Meng, *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui*, Handscroll, ink and light color on paper, 28.5 x 74cm. Courtesy of Indianapolis Museum of Art

<sup>1</sup> Richard Vinograd, "Wang Meng's *Pien Mountains*: The Landscape of Eremitism in Later Fourteenth Century Chinese Painting," (Ph. D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1979), p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> James Cahill, *Hills Beyond a River: Chinese Painting of the Yuan Dynasty, 1279-1368*, (New York: John Weatherhill, Inc., 1976), p. 120.

<sup>3</sup> Zhang Chou, *Qinghe shuhuafang* (清河書畫舫), Vol.3 (Taipei: Xuehai chubanshe 學海出版社, 1975), p.35 and Sherman E. Lee, "The Art of the Yuan Dynasty," in Sherman E. Lee and Wai-kam Ho, *Chinese Art Under the Mongols: The Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368)*, (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1968), p. 57. Zhang Chou's original book was written in the seventeenth century.

<sup>4</sup> I deeply would like to thank you to a curator of Asian Art in the Indianapolis Museum of Art, John Teramoto for offering me very nice images of this handscroll. I deeply appreciate it.

At first glance, the spontaneous and expressive brushstrokes seem similar to his later paintings, but this work's colophons and inscriptions by other Chinese critics, scholars, and painters support another plausible explanation. While paying attention to *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui* that was neither widely documented in past resources nor fully published in more present ones, this paper first proposes that this handscroll was produced in the early 1340s as one of Wang's rarely extant early works, or probably the earliest one in his career. *Dwelling in Seclusion in the Summer Mountains* (夏山隱居, Xiashan yinju) of 1354 in the National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian is generally considered as the earliest of his surviving paintings, but if it is proved that the Indianapolis handscroll was produced in the early 1340s, *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui* will be the earliest Wang Meng's extant work. There are relatively many Wang's later works are existed, but few earlier works were remained. Thus, proving that *Retreat* reveals young Wang's artistic genius will help us understand Wang Meng's overall artistic style. In other words, this work will offer the gradual change, growth, or transformation of Wang Meng's artistic idiom throughout his lifetime, which enriches a broader understanding of his works. Second, through analyzing its artistic style, this handscroll shows Wang's inspiration from the Li-Guo tradition.<sup>5</sup> It further strengthens the claim that not only *Retreat* was painted during the 1340s and 1350s, but also it will be a representative example of the prevalence of the Li-Guo tradition during that time. Along with other Yuan masters, Wang Meng deeply delved into this famous artistic idiom in the 1340s. This painting thus should be highly regarded in that it shows an aspect of the culture and society of the Yuan dynasty beyond the painters' imitation and transformation of the past artistic tradition. Finally, *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui* addresses that the artworks were used as a medium of social communication in terms of appreciating and sharing each other. The ink play and self-expression are generally regarded as Yuan's major artistic manner. However, when Wang Meng painted this scroll as a gift to his friend, Meng Shujing (孟叔敬, Yuan dynasty), Wang highlighted his respect to Meng, who let Wang stay in the mountain rather expressing his personal emotion that is frequently shown in his later works. Then, this work was introduced to many literati such as relatives and literati friends of the time and allowed them to share their thoughts and appreciations. Furthermore, later generations, including us, are able to imagine the moment when the painting was executed during that time and to understand their artistic activities and social communication through painted images and texts. *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui* is therefore a good

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<sup>5</sup> Maxwell K. Hearn, "Shifting Paradigms in Yuan Literati Art: The Case of the Li-Guo Tradition," *Ars Orientalis* 37 (2009), p. 78-106.

representative of how the role of art is important in our lives and society, showing that the works of art were used as a medium for sharing empathy with people in the Yuan dynasty.

## I. The Actual History of *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui*

*Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui* is a handscroll painted in ink, 28.5 by 74 cm. The painting is identified by the artist's signature and poem in the upper right: "The Yellow Crane Mountain Woodcutter, Wang Meng, painted this for the foolish and lazy old man." The poem that follows reads:<sup>6</sup>

"In white hair following the examples of Shao Ping, he [Meng Shujing] starts to learn to grow melons. He is a descendant of a former general who lived 400 years ago; While awakening from his spring dream by the Second Spring [at the foot of Mount Hui]; The misty water of [Mount] Dongting [in Lake Tai] is merging with the far horizon. Wang Meng wrote this for a respected family friend, [Meng] Shujing (fig. 1)."<sup>7</sup>

The handscroll was painted for "a respected family friend, Meng Shujing." Wang Meng compared Meng Shujing to a well-known recluse, Shao Ping (邵平, Qin dynasty) to praise Meng's lofty spirit. Wang Meng seems to use the past close relationship, between Wang Wei (王維, 692-761) and Meng Haoran (孟浩然, 689-740), which was directly referred in Ni Zan's colophon of *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui* (fig. 3). Unfortunately, the original painted image was divided into two. A Yuan dynasty scholar, Qian Gui (錢逵, 1313-1384), wrote the title "*Huilu xiaoyin* (惠麓小隱)" in seal script and mentioned Meng Zongxin (孟宗心) as one of two recipients, adding that Meng Zongxin owned the first part of the painted image, Wang Meng's inscription and a poem, now in the Indianapolis Museum's collection (fig. 2).<sup>8</sup>

In the history of Chinese painting, colophons are usually written after the painting to offer historical

<sup>6</sup> Sherman E. Lee and Wai-kam Ho, *Chinese Art Under the Mongols: The Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368)*, (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1968), p. 256.

<sup>7</sup> The original text is translated by Wai-kam Ho and it was modified by the author. Yutake Mino and James Robinson, *Beauty and Tranquility: The Eli Lilly Collection of Chinese Art*, (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1983), p. 310.

<sup>8</sup> Choon Sang Leong, "Wang Meng's Development as an Artist as Seen Through His Depiction of Scholar's Retreats," (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, Lawrence, 1988), p. 99.



Fig. 2 Part of Retreat Handscroll Wang Meng's *Retreat at the Foot of Mt. Hui*. Handscroll, ink and light color on paper, 28.5 x 74cm. Courtesy of Indianapolis Museum of Art.

information, such as the intended viewers and their notes of appreciation. For example, a colophon of this scroll, written by Gao Ming (高明, 14th century), noted that the second half of the scroll that contained colophons had entered the collection of the other recipient, Meng Zongzhen (孟宗振), which is unfortunately missing (fig. 3). These two brothers, Meng Zongxin and Meng Zongzhen, were two sons of Meng Shujing, each of whom inherited half of the painting.<sup>9</sup> When Qian added the title, “*Huilu xiaoyin*”,



Fig. 3 Colophons of *Retreat at the Foot of Mt. Hui*. Courtesy of Indianapolis Museum of Art (\*\*I revised the order of the Figure 3. The order was the opposite in previous version.)

he copied the inscriptions originally located in the second half. This historical information is supported by a seventeenth-century Chinese art historian, Zhang Chou reported in 1616 that the original scroll was divided and that the first half contained an inscription, painted images, and poem, while the second half carried

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 99 and Zhang Chou, *Qinghe shuhuafang*, p.35. For more information about the relationship between Meng Zongxin and Meng Zongzhen, see Zhang Chou's book, *Qinghe shuhuafang*, p. 35-37.

colophons.<sup>10</sup> More specifically, Zhang stated that Wang's *Retreats* was already divided into two parts before Wang Meng's death in 1385 and Qian Gui's death in 1384. Zhou Nan's (周南, 1301-1383) colophon followed Qian's transcribed colophons on ruled paper, revealing that Wang Meng's handscroll had been divided before Zhou Nan's death in 1383. The colophons of Wang's scroll thus include seventeen scholars' inscriptions that were written in the fourteenth century and four by later generations. According to a twentieth-century Chinese collector, Chen Rendao, after Wang Meng's handscroll had left Chen's collection, he heard that an anonymous person disliked its sparseness and filled the empty area behind the building with bamboo trees and leaves (fig. 4).<sup>11</sup> Fortunately, Wang Meng's original painted image is preserved in *Tang Song yilai minghuaqi: Yunhui zhaicang* (唐宋以来名畫集：韞輝齋藏) (fig. 5).<sup>12</sup>



Fig. 4 Detail of Fig. 1



Fig.5 Wang Meng. *Retreat at the Foot of Mt. Hui*. Handscroll, ink and light color on paper, 28.5 x 74 cm. (Source: Zhenduo Zheng, *Yunhui zhaicang Tang Song yilai minghuaqi*, (Shanghai: Shanghai chuban gongsi, Minguo 36, 1947), 36.)

<sup>10</sup> Zhang, *Qinghe*, p. 35-37.

<sup>11</sup> Mino and Robinson, *Beauty*, p. 313.

<sup>12</sup> Zheng Zhenduo, *Tang Song yilai minghuaqi: Yunhui zhaicang* (唐宋以来名畫集：韞輝齋藏) (Shanghai: Shanghai chuban gongsi 上海出版公司, 1947), p. 36. For more about Wang Meng's *Retreat at the Foot of Mt. Hui*, see Theodore R. Bowie, *One Thousand Years of Chinese Painting: T'ang to Ch'ing (800 to 1800): An Exhibition of Fifty Representative Works Borrowed from Major American Collections, Indiana University Art Museum, February 14 through March 31, 1968* (Bloomington, Ind.: The Museum, 1968), p. 19, Smith College, Museum of Art, *Chinese Art: An Exhibition of Paintings, Jades, Bronzes and Ceramics: Being a Contribution Made by Smith College Museum of Art to the College Interim Session, 1962* (Northampton, Mass.: The Museum, 1962), p. 4, and Sun Chengze, *Gengzi xiaoxiaji* (庚子消夏記) Vol.8 (Taipei: Hanhua wenhua shiye gufen youxian gongsi 漢華文化事業股份有限公司, 1971), p. 100.

## II. Highlighting a Central Figure and Eremitic Life

After Qian Gui's calligraphy and Wang Meng's poem were inscribed in the upper right of the painting, the visual image of Mount Hui (惠山, Huishan) was shown (fig. 1). Mount Hui is located west of Wuxi, Jiangsu Province and was also known as 'Jiulongshan (九龍山, Nine Dragons' Mountain).' As is suitable for the mountain's name "Nine Dragons," Wang expresses the front of the mountain in very wavy lines. The original version in *Tang Song yilai minghuaqi* clearly reveals the shape of the mountain stream using an S-curved composition (fig. 5); the painted image begins in the upper right corner of the distant mountains and stretches to the upper left path behind the building, continuing alongside the building and ending at the stream. This S-shaped line creates dynamic movement and depth despite the limits of the handscroll format, while also seeming to suggest a close relationship between human life and nature (fig. 6). Thus, the painting begins with scenes of nature—a river and mountain—then naturally turns toward human life. This suggestion of harmony between human and nature leads to a focus on a particular human figure believed to be the original recipient, Meng Shujing. The compositional contrast between the foreground and background allows an increased enjoyment of the visual image. The painting, moreover, exemplifies Wang's artistic cleverness through his depiction of Meng Shujing, who was a recluse of Mount



Fig.6 Detail of Fig.5

Hui. First, as described, the building is located in the area of greatest contrast between the rough and calm strokes, leading the viewer to the building and the human figure. Second, the figure is drawn much larger than usual compared to the size of the building. Third, the wooden foundation of the building is the only part of the painting colored light brown, which highlights the figure of Shujing. Finally, trees around the building—particularly the willows and pines—create a semi-circular shape. There is also a small empty space between the top of the willows and pines, which further enhances the focus on Shujing by leading the viewer's eyes from the top of the trees to the bottom. The handscroll thus demonstrates Wang Meng's compositional skill and

cleverness in highlighting the Shujing figure in multiple ways.

### III. Inscriptions on Ruled Paper in *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui*

*Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui* contains twenty-one colophons and thirty-seven seals; as mentioned above, the title of the scrolls was written by Qian Gui (fig. 2). After Wang Meng's painted image, thirteen colophons—those of Yang Weizhen (楊維禎, 1296-1370), Wu Kegung (吳克恭, d.1341-), Ni Zan (倪瓚, 1301-1373), Liu Guan (1270-1342), Yue Yu (岳榆, fourteenth century), Qian Liangyou (錢良佑, 1278-1344), Cao Rui (曹睿, mid-fourteenth century), Ke Jiushi (柯九思, 1312-1365), Monk Huijian (惠鑑, fourteenth century), Youzhan jingnan (游詹景南, unidentified), Zhan jingnan (詹景南, unidentified), Sun Hua (孫華, fourteenth century), Li Jie (李節, fourteenth century), and Gao Ming (late fourteenth century)—followed, which were later transcribed by Qian Gui in seal script on ruled paper (fig. 3).<sup>13</sup> Most writers of colophons describe their appreciation for the recipients and Wang Meng's painted image. They refer to the friendship between Wang Meng and Meng Shujing; the next recipient, Meng Zongxin, praises the natural scenery of Mount Hui and the beauty of Meng Shujing's property that Wang Meng painted. Taken as a whole, these colophons and seals reflect the popularity of Wang Meng's scroll, *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui*, as well as the continuity of literati tradition, appreciating paintings together and their social network.

This study pays more attention to writers of the colophons, which provide more plausible evidence for the suspected date of *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui* (fig. 3). After the scroll was divided, Qian Gui transcribed the colophons on ruled paper like an appendix in the first half scroll. His contribution is very important to ascertain the painting's date; Qian wrote the title and copied thirteen colophons uniformly in seal script to preserve the original text of the second part. Right after these thirteen colophons, the individual scripts of Zhou Nan, Wang Mingji and Zhu Sheng appear. Moreover, since Zhou Nan and Qian Gui lived until 1383 and 1384, respectively; these colophons suggest that the handscroll was likely divided into two

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<sup>13</sup> After the Qian's copied colophons, there are eight more colophons, each written by a different individual. The more detailed information about eight colophons are; one colophon and two seals of Zhou Nan (1301-1383); one colophon by Wang Mingji (王鳴吉, late fourteenth century); one colophon and one seal of Zhu Sheng; one colophon (dated 1634) and two seals of Qian Gui; one colophon and three seals of Xu Shouhe; one colophon (dated 1849) and one seal of Yue Changlie; and one colophon (dated 1852) and two seals of Wu Quanzui. There are also twenty-four seals, which were imprinted between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries.

parts before Wang Meng's death in 1385.

#### IV. Plausible Date of the Painting by Analyzing Colophons

The colophons of Liu Guan and Qian Liangyou support that the Indianapolis scroll was produced in the early 1340s. Liu Guan lived from 1270 to 1342; as a noted scholar, he attained the highest rank in the Hanlin Academy.<sup>14</sup> As a poet and author, he wrote a book entitled *Liu Guan shiwenji*, which introduced various kinds of poems from the past.<sup>15</sup> Liu participated in literati activities at that time. Some records reveal that Liu wrote colophons on the paintings of two prominent literati painters, Li Gonglin (李公麟, 1049-1106) and Zhao Mengfu (趙孟頫, 1254-1322).<sup>16</sup> Richard Vinograd has described Liu Guan as Zhao Mengfu's younger associate, which suggests that Wang Meng might have known Liu Guan well, since Wang's grandfather was Zhao.<sup>17</sup> In the colophon of the *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui* scroll, Liu mentioned, "West Sacred (Xishen) Mountain [Mount Hui] is like a Spring Mountain. Below the mountain, there is a residence around a small stream, which is shaped like a dragon returning to Meng's residence (fig. 3)." His writing enhances the painted image of wavy stream nearby Meng's residence while highlighting he enjoyed Wang Meng's visual representation. Next writer, Qian Liangyou, lived from 1278 to 1344, wrote a poem in Zhao Mengfu's painting, *Water Village*.<sup>18</sup> Their scholarly activities suggest that Liu Guan and Qian Liangyou were well-recognized scholars and their close relationship between these scholars and Wang Meng's grandfather, Zhao Mengfu during the Yuan Dynasty. Qian wrote, "At the end of this lake, the deep bluish wave returned to the mountain [Mount Hui] nearby a thatched cottage [Meng's residence] and wanted to see the forest

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Edwards, "Ch'ien Hsuan and "Early Autumn," *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 7 (1953), p. 82.

<sup>15</sup> Liu Guan, *Liu Guan shiwenji* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> See Helmut Brinker, "Shussan Shaka in Sung and Yuan Painting," *Ars Orientalis* 9 (1973), p. 27-30.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Vinograd, "River Village: The Pleasure of Fishing" and Chao Mengfu's Li-Kuo Style Landscape," *Artibus Asiae* 40, no. 2/3 (1978), p. 130-132.

<sup>18</sup> The poem reads: "It is a pity, I often say, that the style of Beiyuan [Dong Yuan] is so remote/ But under this brushwork, the same spirit carries on until this day. In the spring water and the lonely village, its meaning lingers forever, but in writing my poem I am no match for the Old Gentleman of Duling [Du Fu]." It is translated by Chu-tsing Li and C.T.L and slightly modified by the author. Chu-tsing Li and C. T. L., "The Autumn Colors on the Ch'iao and Hua Mountains: A Landscape by Chao Meng-Fu," *Artibus Asiae* 21 (1965), p. 67.

while drinking a tea with a distant guest (fig. 3).” Like Liu Guan, Qian described the painted image of Wang Meng and at the same time delivered the actual scenery of Mount Hui in the colophon of the *Retreat* scroll. Along with the contents, their participation in *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui* provides evidence that this handscroll could have been produced between 1340 and 1342, before Liu Guan’s death.

Additionally, the records about the literati who wrote the colophons are more reliable. This essay particularly deals with the two: Yang Weizhen and Ke Jiushi. Yang Weizhen lived from 1296 to 1370 and was born in Zhuji, Zhejiang. He was best known as a calligrapher and wrote colophons on many paintings.<sup>19</sup> Yang was a noted poet of the late Yuan period from a literary family and served as a magistrate of Tientai County in Taizhou and a salt administrator in Hangzhou, Zhejiang. After a decade of travel, he became an official again in 1343, but from 1352 onward was unemployed most of the time until eventually he became ill.<sup>20</sup> Yang was a writer and devoted all of his energy to the role of the Confucian recluse, which became popular in the Yuan period.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the order of the colophons begins with Yang Weizhen and because of that, Yang likely wrote his colophons in the early 1340s, which is the year of young Wang Meng’s retirement and the beginning of his travels, and 1342, the year of Liu Guan’s death. In the colophon, Yang referred to the famous relationship between two past scholars, Wang Wei and Meng Haoran to highlight the close relationship between Wang Meng and Meng Shujing, which is the same as that of Ni Zan’s inscription in this handscroll. Another writer of the inscription, Ke Jiushi, was born in 1290 in Taizhou, Zhejiang and died in 1343.<sup>22</sup> A prominent connoisseur of paintings, writings, and antiquities, he was ordered by the Jayaatu Khan (1304-1332) to appraise the imperial collection.<sup>23</sup> As a connoisseur, Ke was well read in poetry and literature, and could transcribe inscriptions on bronze and stone.<sup>24</sup> The colophon of *Retreat*, Ke revealed

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<sup>19</sup> Oswald Siren, *Chinese Painting: Leading Masters and Principles*, Vol.7 (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1973), p. 143.

<sup>20</sup> L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang, *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368-1644*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), p. 1548-1550 and Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), p. 347-348.

<sup>21</sup> Siren, *Chinese*, p. 143 and Leong, “Wang,” p. 101.

<sup>22</sup> James Cahill, “The Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368),” in *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting*, ed. Richard Barnhart, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 191.

<sup>23</sup> Pui-yi Leung, “Bamboo in Principle: Ke Jiushi’s (1290-1349) Paintings and Knowledge in the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368),” (Ph.D. diss., University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, 2016), p. 20-21.

<sup>24</sup> Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037-1101) to Tung Ch’i-ch’ang, (1555-1636)* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), p. 138-139.

his historical knowledge. It says, “When the King of Ancient Yao [Emperor Yao, c. 2356-2255 BCE] in the southern China faced the collapse of his family and country, his soul was broken. Whenever heroes witness the collapse of society, they think who save the poems and candlesticks, return those to them, and let people grow vegetables and fruits for settlement? (fig. 3)” Ke Jiushi died in 1343, so there is little possibility that Wang painted this scroll after the late 1360s, which is currently proposed as one of the painting’s possible execution dates.<sup>25</sup> Thus, if we believe that the thirteen transcribed colophons written by Qian Gui are reliable, Liu Guan’s colophon was surely written before 1342 when Liu died. Similarly, Qian Liangyou’s colophon must have been written before his death in 1344. Yang’s first transcribed colophon was written before 1342 if we are to assume that the order of the thirteen colophons is chronological. Zhou Nan’s inscription, which is next on the ruled paper, also suggests that this painting was produced before Zhou’s death in 1383. The colophons of *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui* provide more information about these writers, and these inscriptions lead us to deduce that the execution date should be the early 1340s.

## V. Tracing Wang Meng’s Life

The method of tracing Wang Meng’s life allows great accuracy in dating his work *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui*. I focus more on the period from 1340 to 1385 because, after 1340, a young Wang Meng retired from officialdom and became a recluse until 1368. Wang Meng, as Vinograd describes, began to paint seriously as early as 1341, the year he resigned from his official position.<sup>26</sup> These two periods, the 1340s and the 1370s are most crucial for determining the plausible date of the *Retreat*’s execution. In the early 1340s, Wang Meng retired from the public service and moved to the Yellow Crane Mountain, where he adopted the pen name *Huanghe Shanqiao* (黃鶴山樵, Wood Gatherer of the Yellow Crane Mountain), and after 1346 he spent much time traveling among Songjiang, Suzhou, and Wuxi in Jiangsu Province, making the acquaintance of famous poets and artists in the region, including Huang Gongwang, Ni Zan, Yang Weizhen,

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<sup>25</sup> A recent dissertation written by Ruby Pui-yi Leung about Ke Jiushi proposes Ke died in 1349. If we accept her new proposal, there is also little possibility that Wang painted his work after the late 1360s. For more information, see Pui-yi Leung, “Bamboo in Principle: Ke Jiushi’s (1290-1349) Paintings and Knowledge in the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368),” (PhD diss., University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, 2016).

<sup>26</sup> Vinograd, “Wang Meng,” p. 327.

Lu Yu, Lu Mingben, Ge Kejiu and Gu Dehui.<sup>27</sup> In 1347, Wang Meng saw Ni Zan's painting, *Forest Retreat in Mist*, at Ni's studio in Wuxi, which had been painted for Zhang Ziyong of Hangzhou.

The following year Wang Meng painted a version of a ninth-century master, Wang Wei's (699-759) *Wangchuan Villa*, entitling it *Thatched Dwelling of Jade Mountain*, which included a preface by Wu Kegong.

<sup>28</sup> This first period from the early 1340s to the early 1350s is very important as a possible execution date of *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui*. After retirement, Wang Meng toured Suzhou in 1340 and painted *Cengluan songcuitu* (層巒聳翠圖) on the fifteen day of the third month and *Songxi diaoyin* (松溪釣隱) in the eighth month of 1341, but unfortunately these paintings are now missing.<sup>29</sup> He was in Hangzhou in 1342 and painted three more paintings; on the twenty-first day of the twelfth month, Wang visited Huang Gongwang, bringing with him Ni Zan's painting.<sup>30</sup> In fact, during that time, Ni's work and Wang's *Retreat* show their stylistic affiliation. From 1341 to 1342, Wang Meng traveled in Suzhou and Hangzhou near Lake Tai. Mount Hui is located near Suzhou; thus, there is a great possibility that Wang Meng visited Meng Shujing, who lived in Mount Hui in the early 1340s.

In 1368 Wang Meng quickly found employment under the new Ming dynasty (1368-1644) established by Zhu Yuanzhang (朱元璋, 1328-1398), accepting an appointment as a magistrate of Tai'an in Shandong Province. He held this post for three years, living at the foot of Mount Tai, which is known as a sacred peak of the east. While a magistrate, Wang only painted when inspired, and as in one case, he spent three years producing only one painting.<sup>31</sup> Wang Meng had been in contact with Chan Buddhist masters as early as 1361, and his contacts with Buddhist monks occurred more frequently after 1371 when he returned south to the Ming capital, Nanjing, where he spent most of his remaining years.<sup>32</sup> During this period, his works, including *Dwelling in the Qingbian Mountains*, reflect his artistic maturity, emphasizing abstract and calligraphic style (fig. 7). In 1379, he met a group of people at the home of Prime Minister Hu Weiyong (胡惟庸) to look at

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<sup>27</sup> Wen C. Fong, *Beyond Representation: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy 8th–14th Century*, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), p. 457.

<sup>28</sup> Guoli gugong bowuyuan, *Yuan Si Da Jia: Huang Gongwang, Wu Zhen, Ni Zan, Wang Meng*, (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 1975), p. 34.

<sup>29</sup> Leong, "Wang Meng," p. 43.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>31</sup> Siren, *Chinese*, p. 91.

<sup>32</sup> Wen C. Fong and James C. Y. Watt, *Possessing the Past: Treasures from the National Palace Museum, Taipei*, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996), p. 319.

paintings. When Hu was accused of treason and executed in the following year, Wang Meng inadvertently aroused the emperor's suspicions because of this previous meeting, and was implicated in the incident and died in prison in 1385.<sup>33</sup> From these facts, it seems that Wang Meng would have been unable to paint *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui* during this time. The major figure of the painting, Shujing, as the painting's subject, may be related to the ideal of the reclusive literati life. Thus, the date of *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui* would be the early 1340s rather than the late 1360s to 1385.

## VI. The Execution Date by Analyzing Artistic Idioms

A fifteen-century Chinese art historian and painter, Dong Qichang (董其昌, 1555-1636), argued that the four great masters of the Yuan dynasty had all derived their styles from Dong Yuan (董源, 934-962), who in turn had followed Wang Wei.<sup>34</sup> In Wang Wei's *Preface on Painting*, he says, "when speaking of painting, what we ultimately are looking for is nothing but the [expressive] power contained in it."<sup>35</sup> This emphasis on expression of the painter's feeling is also quite related to the text of a prominent Chinese art historian, Jing Hao's (荆浩, 880-940) *Notes on Brushwork* (*Bifa ji* 筆法記), which states that the artist must select from among a wealth of natural detail only those forms and configurations that he feels are most significant. Martin Powers has stated that by the time that Gui Xi's text appeared in the late eleventh century, a new understanding of distance had replaced that which we find in Jing Hao's text.<sup>36</sup> In *An Essay on Landscape Painting*, Guo Xi described the



Fig.7 Wang Meng. *Dwelling the Qingbian Mountains*. 1366. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 141 x 42.2 cm. Courtesy of the Shanghai Museum, China.

<sup>33</sup> Cahill, *Hills*, p. 121.

<sup>34</sup> Wen C. Fong, "Rivers and Mountains after Snow (Chiang-Shan Hsueh-Chi) Attributed to Wang Wei (A. D. 699-759)," *Archives of Asian Art* 30 (1976/1977), p. 13-14.

<sup>35</sup> Max Loehr, *The Great Painters of China*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1980), p. 22-23.

<sup>36</sup> Martin J. Powers, "How to Read a Chinese Painting: Jing Hao's *Bifa ji*," in *Ways with Words: Writing about Reading Texts from Early*

importance of freedom in brush and ink: "A painter should be master over and not a slave to his brush. Brush and ink are trivial things, but if an artist does not handle them with freedom, how can he be expected to attain to the heights of skill."<sup>37</sup> One of the significant figures who promoted Wang's interest in past artistic styles was Wang Meng's grandfather, Zhao Mengfu brought back Dong's long handscroll from the north in 1295, and became familiar with the paintings of Li Cheng (李成, 919-967) and Guo Xi (郭熙, 1020-1090) during this journey.

In order to support the executed date of *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui*, this study only focus on the spread of the Li-Guo tradition that was widely spread to the southern area during the 1340s. Maxwell K. Hearn proposes why the Li-Guo tradition was developed in the Yuan dynasty. He states:

"The Li-Guo tradition's powerful images of ancient trees and wintry groves had long been metaphors for integrity, strength, and endurance in the face of adversity. These images took on new immediacy and relevance after the Mongol conquest when members of the southern Chinese elite were largely excluded from their traditional career of government service through active discrimination and the discontinuation of the civil service examination system. . . The Yuan rediscovery of the Li-Guo tradition was part of a broader revival of the painting style of the Five dynasties era, a period when the disintegration of the Tang dynasty (618-907) and subsequent political instability led artists to seek inspiration from the natural world, finding in mountains and rivers a permanence images that Yuan painters created were not descriptions of specific sites; rather, they were scholarly evocations of earlier images of reclusion and wilderness sanctuaries."<sup>38</sup>

After Wang Meng's grandfather, Zhao Mengfu (趙孟頫, 1254-1322) returned to Wuxing in 1295, following the government service in the northern China, Zhao took the dramatic step of accepting Li-Guo idioms.<sup>39</sup> According to Hearn, under the bad political and natural circumstances, the Li-Guo idioms such as the naturalistic, descriptive manner, rich ink washes, complex texturing, and meticulously described forms,

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*China*, ed. Pauline Yu (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p.233.

<sup>37</sup> Guo, *An Essay*, p.60.

<sup>38</sup> Hearn, "Shifting," p.79-80.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84. For more detailed information about how Zhao Mengfu accepted Li-Guo traditions, please see Hearn's "Shifting Paradigms," p.84-100.

became a new literati aesthetic.<sup>40</sup> Zhao's *River Village* includes clear references to the Li-Guo style (fig. 8).<sup>41</sup> In 1342, another Yuan master, Huang Gongwang commented: "When I was younger, I saw Dong Yuan's *Summer Mountains* many times at Zhao Mengfu's home. Now it has gone to Wang Meng, who keeps it in his collection."<sup>42</sup> It suggests the close relationship between Wang Meng and Zhao Mengfu, and that Zhao could have influenced Wang's style of painting.

*Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui* exemplifies Wang Meng's adoption of Li-Guo idioms during his early period. In the top third part of the painting are low, gently rolling and curving mountains and rocks diagonally approach the front; these two shapes are represented by softly rounded hemp-fiber stokes, surrounding the calm river. In the painted image, using the diagonal recession, layered distant mountains, and the paired trees clearly show Wang Meng's reference to the Li-Guo tradition. In the lower two-thirds of *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui*, Wang represents the Li-Guo style, while engaging with seasonal subjects, evocation of weather, and trees also represented in Wang Meng's poem; the small, short leaves of the willows and the young slender blades of the bamboo, everything except the pines indicates early spring. The thick, band-like rolling contours of the rocks and the variation of rock textures reflect Guo Xi's rendering of a landscape.<sup>43</sup> The two extremely tall pines and the dense forest around Shujing's house are represented in Li Cheng's manner.<sup>44</sup> In accordance with Li-Guo's style, there is level distance and the artist's emotion is important.

Although *Retreat* is painted in the handscroll format, the painting creates three zones of distance; the huge rocks in the front, large trees and houses in the middle, and small trees and mountains in the distance. At the same time, the building near the trees and the stream path enhance the spatial depth and sense of speed in the painting, creating an S-curved diagonal momentum. Wang Meng also expressed his spontaneous emotion



Fig. 8 Zhao Mengfu. *River Village: Fisherman's Joy*. 1295-99. Fan painting mounted as album leaf, ink and colors on silk. 28.6 x 30 cm. Courtesy of the Cleveland Museum of Art.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>41</sup> Vinograd, "River," p. 124.

<sup>42</sup> Barnhart, "Marriage," p. 48.

<sup>43</sup> Vinograd, "Wang," p. 277.

<sup>44</sup> Guo, *An Essay*, p. 66.

by using wriggling brushstrokes on natural elements, such as the rocks and trees in the foreground. Wang Meng therefore effectively combined the Li-Guo tradition. It thus can be deduced that the date of execution is likely during the early 1340s rather than the late 1360s.

## VII. Social Communication and Empathy

One might ask why it is important to debate the execution date of an undated handscroll. At first glance, Wang's handscroll seems to show the combination of past artistic tradition and his artistic expression; however, if we accept that *Retreat at Foot of Mount Hui* was produced in the early 1340s, the handscroll brings various aspects of artistic and social contexts during that time. First, *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui* will be Wang Meng's earliest surviving painting. Many scholars, including Richard Vinograd, assumed that Wang Meng began devoting himself to painting from the 1340s, but they regarded the earliest extant dated work is *Dwelling in Seclusion in the Summer Mountains* of 1354 in the National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian. In *Dwelling*, the use of soft hemp fiber brushstrokes and ropy lines illustrates his transitional style before Wang reached his own mature and emotional artistic representation after the 1360s. In other words, while showing his interest in the more abstract and calligraphic style associated with Dong Yuan and Juran (巨然, 10th century), Wang achieved his artistic maturity during the 1360s.<sup>45</sup> However, in *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui*, Wang used a much lighter and simpler brushwork that indicates his stylistic affiliation to not only Ni Zan's work but also the Li-Guo tradition. After Zhao Mengfu rediscovered the Li-Guo idiom, it became a new literati style to a number of southern artists, including Wang Meng. *Retreat*, thus, reflect the cultural mood of the Yuan dynasty beyond their love of eclectic archaism. Finally, the painted images and texts of *Retreat* shows how artworks were used as media of social communication and evoked empathy between people. Through the painting, Yuan literati shared their artistic idioms, thoughts, and appreciations. When we define the characteristics of the Yuan dynasty, social communication and empathy will be newly added along with the self-expression and ink play. Taken together, the painted images and texts vividly reflect the artistic and social situations of the time. This scroll's dialogue with the past was used to create new art forms and

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<sup>45</sup> Hearn, "Shifting," p. 100.

aspects of present culture, showing how historical and artistic events of the past contribute to the formation of contemporary culture and society. Thus, *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui* clearly shows detailed process comprehensively portrays plausible scenarios of the society, culture and people during that time. In other words, this detailed process expands the field of art history to the larger scale of academic study by visualizing the connections between the present and future in great detail.

**\*주제어(key words)**\_Wang Meng (王蒙), *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui* (惠麓小隱, Huilu xiaoyin), Indianapolis Museum of Art, Yuan dynasty (元朝), The Li-Guo Tradition, Empathy, Social Communication, Chinese Landscape Painting (中國山水畫)

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## 국문초록

왕몽(王蒙, 1308-1385)은 황공망(黃公望, 1269-1354), 오진(吳鎮, 1280-1354), 예찬(倪瓚, 1301-1374)과 함께 원사대가(元四大家)로 불리는 화가로, 그의 독특한 화풍과 더불어 조맹부(趙孟頫, 1254~1322)의 외손자로도 잘 알려져 있다. 그의 유명세만큼 많은 작품들이 당시와 후대의 많은 이들에게 영향을 주고 있지만, 현존하는 대부분 그의 작품들은 1360년대 이후에 그려진 것들이다. 인디애나폴리스 미술관에 소장되어 있는 왕몽의 혜녹소은도(惠麓小隱圖)도 일반적으로 그의 후기작으로 간주되어 왔다. 그러나, 왕몽의 혜녹소은도를 자세히 들여다 보면, 작품의 제작 년도에 의문을 가지게 된다.

우선, 그의 후기작에서 보이는 빈틈없이 꿈틀거리는 필선을 사용한 구도와 필체의 역동성과 내면 세계의 표출을 보이기보다는 그의 벗에게 선물로 그리는 그림 답게 예찬의 화풍과 흡사한 듯한 가법지만 정갈한 필체로 그림을 그리고 있다. 이 필체는 그의 후기작이라기 보다는 그의 초기작일 가능성을 높여준다. 두번째로, 작품 뒤에 붙어 있는 다양한 문인들의 간기들의 분석, 특히 간기를 쓴 문인들의 생애와 글의 분석해 보면, 왕몽의 혜녹소은도는 초기 1340년대에 그려졌다는 사실을 뒷받침하고 있다. 세번째로, 그의 작품구성과 나무들에 사용된 필체 등을 보면, 당시 조맹부의 소개로 중국 남동부에 퍼져있던 이성(李成, 919-967)과 곽희(郭熙, 1020-1090)의 예술스타일에 영감을 받은 이곽파(李郭派) 화풍을 엿볼 수 있다. 특히, 이곽파 화풍은 1340년대와 1350년대 크게 퍼지다가 점차 원대 후기에는 동원(董源, 934-962)과 거연(巨然, 10세기)의 화풍을 이르는 동거파(董巨派)가 퍼지게 되는데, 왕몽 또한 동거파의 화풍을 이어받은 후기작품들이 많이 존재한다.

마지막으로 왕몽의 혜녹소은도가 개인적인 목적이 아닌 그의 벗을 위한 선물로 그려진 만큼, 이를 선물로 받은 맹숙경(孟叔敬, 元朝)은 예찬과 더불어 동시대의 문인들과 함께 감상하고 그들의 생각과 느낌을 공유하였음을 알 수 있다. 다시 말하면, 그의 작품은 1340년대 원대의 문인화가들이 작품을 통해 개인적인 화풍 추구와 내면세계를 추구함과 동시에, 문인들 간에 서로 사회, 문화적으로 끊임없는 소통을 하고 있었음을 보여주는 의의가 있는 작품인 것이다. 무엇보다도 이 그림이 초기 1340년대에 생산된 작품임이 받아들여 진다면, 현재 그의 최초의 초기작으로 알려진 1354년도의 작품보다도 이른 왕몽의 첫 번째 초기작이 될 것이다. 따라서, 왕몽의 혜녹소은도는 그의 초년 시절의 화풍을 보여준과 동시에 이곽파의 화풍이 사회적으로 유행했고 당시 문인들의 활발한 문화 사회적인 소통을 하고 있었는지를 보여주는 중요한 가치를 지닌다.

## Debating Wang Meng's (1308-1385) Undated Handscroll: The Continuous Dialogue between Images and Texts in China

Kim, Mina \*

Wang Meng (1308-1385) is an artist of great renown, admired as one of the Four Yuan Masters—along with Wu Zhen (1280-1354), Huang Gongwang (1269-1354), and Ni Zan (1301-1374)—and also well known as a grandson of Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322) the prominent cultural leader of the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368). As if proving his reputation, a considerable number of paintings executed with his unique style have stood the test of time wielding strong influence on artists of contemporary and subsequent generations. Since most of Wang's surviving scrolls are dated to after the 1360s, *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui*, now in the Indianapolis Museum of Art, has been widely assumed to be one of his late works. Close examination of the Indianapolis scroll, however, raises a question as to when exactly Wang produced it.

First of all, the *Retreat* scroll, which Wang Meng made as a gift to his friend, displays light and simple brushworks, a style closer to that of Ni Zan than of Wang's late works that feature a compact composition teeming with writhing strokes, dynamic brushworks, and spontaneous self-expression. The noticeable brushworks in the scroll add to a possibility that it came from the early stage of Wang's artistic career. Second, a careful analysis of colophons by various Chinese scholars supports a reassessment that Wang Meng created the *Retreat* in the 1340s. Third, the arrangement of motifs and the brushworks used for drawing trees in the painting combine to show an influence from the Li-Guo tradition of the time, a hoard of

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artistic idioms inspired from styles of Li Cheng (919-967) and Guo Xi (1020-1090) that has enjoyed its popularity in southeastern China since Zhao Mengfu's introduction. The Li-Guo tradition prevailed in the 1340s and 50s until giving way to the Dong-Ju tradition (named after Dong Yuan (934-962) and Juran (10th century)) in the late Yuan period; and Wang also produced many paintings in the style of the Dong-Ju in his late years.

Last but not the least, Wang Meng's *Retreat*, a gift-painting to his friend rather than a self-expressive one, should be considered a medium through which the recipient Meng Shujing (14th century) shared thoughts and impressions with Ni Zan and other scholars of the period. In other words, Wang's painting illustrates that literati painters of the Yuan dynasty in the 1340s have sought a distinctive style of one's own to convey his inner-self and also that paintings have facilitated continuous social and cultural communication among the cultured intellectuals. Above all, if my argument—that the Indianapolis handscroll was produced in the early 1340s—gains wide academic approval, the *Retreat* will be recognized as the oldest Wang Meng's extant work, dated even earlier than the purported earliest painting from the year 1354. Then *Retreat at the Foot of Mount Hui* by Wang Meng will hold profound significance as the painting demonstrates his early style, the prevalence of the Li-Guo tradition in the Yuan society, and the socio-cultural dialogues among literati via the visual material.