NI ZAN AND HIS ASSOCIATES

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Abstract

Ni Zan (1301-1374) has been regarded as the paragon of Chinese scholar-painter since the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) by critics and scholars. He was praised as one of the four great masters of the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368). He was also an accomplished poet. His paintings are characterized by highly generalized simple compositions with minimal use of dry-ink brushstrokes. Stories and legends about his lofty personality and obsession for cleanliness were written by his contemporaries.

Most of contemporary studies of Ni Zan tend to follow the conventional Chinese biographical approach, sometimes isolating the artist from his contexts. Ni Zan's internal aspects such as his personality, genius in art are over stressed while the external aspects such as the historical context and his associations with people around him have not received enough attention. This paper attempts to reconstruct a contextual picture, making the connections between some aspects of Ni Zan's art with the historical facts of his time and his social relationships with some important scholars and artists to explain the development of his landscape painting.

Ni Zan lived in the Jiangnan region from the mid-Yuan to the beginning of the Ming. Born in one of the wealthiest families in Jiangnan, he engaged his time and energy in studying of art and literature, participating in and hosting literati activities in his earlier half life. During this period his associations with some of the important scholars and painters. For instance, Zhang Yu (1283-1350) and Huang Gongwang (1269-1354) had great impact on him in the formation of his aesthetic taste and in the direction of his style. As the results of natural disasters and political power struggling, there was an out-break of bandits throughout the
nation in the early 1350s. Facing financial difficulties and increased taxation, Ni Zan longed for dedicating himself to the arts. He chose to leave his family and estate behind, and began his second period of life as a wandering scholar painter in 1352. The dramatic change in life style also brought alternation in his associations, which prompted the artist to view his art and his relationship with other literati from a new perspective. He found his distinctive style in landscape painting and produced his best works in the following two decades.

The writings of Ni Zan and his contemporaries, be it a poem or inscription on a painting, provide the evidence of political and social contexts of his time, reveal Ni Zan's views on art and literature, and tell us about the artist and his life. By reviewing some of his works and other sources, I argue that both Ni Zan and his art were the products of his time. Without the influences from his associates, especially in his earlier career, he would not have become the artist he did. Nor would he have developed and established his personal style.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Ni Zan (Ni Tsan 1301-1374) is regarded as one of the best of literati painters in China since the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368). The development of the artist is affected by his personality, personal taste and external factors such as his heritage and the historical, social and geographical contexts of his time. Such external factors will be the focus of this thesis. Ni lived in the later half of the Yuan and the beginning of the Ming (1368-1644). Personal associations of the artist formed a significant portion of his life. Especially during his youth, Ni Zan was very impressed and influenced by some prominent figures among the literary associations of his eldest brother Ni Shaokui (1278-1328), who, in turn, also became Ni Zan's friends. The artist maintained his contacts with the most important and active literati in Jiangnan region throughout his life under different circumstances.

My research concentrates on the impact of these literati upon the artist within the political and social context of the fourteenth century. The main sources of my study include inscriptions by the artist on his own paintings, his poetry, the poetry and prose writings of his contemporaries and of later periods. I attempt to break away from traditional Chinese research approaches which have been for a long time emphasized the verification of dates
and works of the artist in isolation. During my discussion I will cover questions such as the disjunction of Ni Zan's education and the reality, the tension between what the artist should have been and what he was, the conflict between his seeking seclusion and the need of being recharged by artistic associations, the relation of his poetry, and inscriptions to his painting, and the critiques on Ni Zan.

As for Ni Zan's paintings, I have selected the ones that most scholars and critics have commonly accepted as genuine Ni Zan work or fine early copies. The matter of authenticity has long been an unsolvable problem in the study of early Chinese painting. Max Loehr once wrote: "For as long as we have no means of ascertaining the authenticity of individual works and attributions, the historian is constrained to concern himself with the question of the authenticity, not of discrete works but of their styles."¹ Therefore, it is impossible and unnecessary to determine whether the work is an original Ni Zan or a copy. Connoisseurship is not covered in my research. Since my concern is on the literary aspect of Ni Zan's work and the social context of the time, the question of authenticity is not of primary importance in our discussion here. As for the subject of the works, I will focus on Ni Zan's landscape paintings accepted by most scholars and collectors. Wang Jiqian's list of Ni Zan's painting in his article "Ni Zan's Painting"² is my primary source of choosing Ni Zan's works for discussion.


After the Mongol conquest of China in 1279, the Mongol rulers distrusted the Han Chinese, especially the Southerners, and adopted several discriminatory measures in politics. By contrast, the cultural and educational spheres were not under great coercive pressure. People, if they could afford to, were relatively free to pursue their intellectual ideas. As most Chinese scholars could not follow the Confucian tradition of taking up their official careers in the court, many instead diverted their energy to artistic and literary pursuits. The fruit of such efforts are great achievements in drama, calligraphy and painting during the brief period of the Yuan dynasty.

During the Song dynasties (960-1279), artists emphasized the representation of the object in an idealized manner. The Song paintings were predominantly concerned with the visual effects of atmosphere, space, and emptiness. Yuan painters more commonly concentrated on the personal inner self. Self-expression became the chief purpose of poetry and painting. In Yuan landscape painting the artist's feelings were the primary subject where the object was subordinate to self-expression. From the last half of the thirteenth century to the end of the fourteenth century, Chinese painting took a major turn. The late Yuan was a period of individualism and great innovation in the history of Chinese painting. Three of the so-called Four Great Masters of the late Yuan, Ni Zan, Huang Gongwang (1269-1354), and Wang Meng (1308-1385) together with Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322) were to supplant all the earlier artists as the favored models for later landscape artists.

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China in the final decades of the Yuan was divided and disordered by small and large rebellions. A group of the rebellions of this time called the Red Turbans managed to cut the Mongol empire in two and separated the north from the prosperous and densely populated southeast, known as the Jiangnan region, where Ni Zan lived and worked. It is interesting to note the fact that Ni Zan was active only within the Jiangnan region even though he spent most of his time traveling in his life.

During the last decade of Yuan and early Ming many artists gathered in Suzhou. The new ideas they had brought with them helped to push painting in Suzhou to its climax in the Yuan.\(^4\) The consolidation of the basic ideas of literati painting already prevalent in Suzhou merged the more radical ideas from various artists to develop into a new stream based on the art of the artists in the past, especially Dong Yuan (fl. ca. 945-ca. 960) and Juran (fl. ca. 960-ca. 986), both of the tenth century. Dong Yuan and Juran had not been known as painters when they were alive, and had held little interest among painters and scholars prior to the Yuan period.\(^5\) During the Yuan when important literati painters such as Zhao Mengfu and Huang Gongwang (1269-1354), inspired by the works of Dong and Juran, initiated a completely different type of landscape painting than that of the Song period, Dong Yuan and Juran became the research sources for the Yuan literati painters.


Suzhou in the late Yuan and early Ming created the most progressive cultural atmosphere for poets and artists to work in. With its wealth and intellectual cravings, all the new ideas of the Yuan, in artistic theories, in bamboo painting, in flower and birds painting, and in landscape, flowed together into a main current. It was during this decade that Ni Zan's art developed to the fullest extent. Although influenced by earlier masters, he was able to go beyond mere emulation of the earlier masters and to establish his own style.⁶

Literati gatherings were quite active around the Jiangnan region throughout the Yuan dynasty. However, in the development in Suzhou in the late Yuan period, there was no single dominant figure such as Zhao Mengfu of the early Yuan in both theory and practice among the group of scholars. There were large groups of people, some natives of Suzhou, and many others from other parts of the south, working toward one goal. In their gatherings new ideas in art and literature were developed. People would engage in literary critique sessions or poetry contests, and often indulged in drinking and partying. Paintings may have been produced spontaneously on such occasions. Inscriptions would have been written by some of those present. A brief prose work may have been composed later to memorize the event. Or sometimes the inscriptions attached to the work may have mentioned the occasion.

During the mid-Yuan there were two important circles of poets and artists. One was in Songjiang, centering around Cao Zhibo (Cao Yunxi 1271-1355).⁷ Another circle was in

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⁶ See Chapters 4 and 5 of this paper.

⁷ See Chapter 2 of this paper.
Kunshan with Gu Ying (1309-1369) as the central figure. Among the regular visiting artists to both circles were Huang Gongwang (1269-1354), Zhang Yu (1283-1350), Yang Weizhen (1296-1370) and Ni Zan. Born in one of the wealthiest families in Jiangnan, Ni Zan was quite well off in his earlier life prior to 1352. He was also a generous host to literary men, despite his eccentric fastidiousness. His outstanding talents in arts, famous collection and beautiful residential complex attracted admiration from all sorts of people. Because of his lofty personality Ni Zan did not consider many of the participants of the literary activities being merited enough to be his close friends. During his later life Ni Zan maintained his association with other literati in a much less grandiose manner.

Ni Zan's elegant and extravagant life was brought to an end when he was about forty. The disorders of rebels upset the normally prosperous and comfortable Jiangnan region in the last decades of the Yuan. Ni Zan fell victim to the chaotic conditions. Around the 1340s the Yuan court began to impose heavier land taxes, especially to the Jiangnan region. Many rich landowners of the Jiangnan area had to divest themselves of their land holdings. Ni Zan was apparently one of them, although standard Chinese accounts of his life state rather that he foresaw the troubles that were to occur and acted prudently to escape them. For whatever reason, he dispersed his property among relatives and friends gradually from the late 1340s until around 1354, and thereafter led a wandering life.

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8 See Chapter 3.

Ni Zan spent his last twenty years traveling in a houseboat around the Taihu (Lake Tai) and other lakes in the district, staying with friends or at Buddhist monasteries. We can say that in his last decades Ni Zan lived entirely on the patronage of his relatives, friends and hosts, and on his paintings. Sometimes he reveals his feeling of rootlessness in poetry. It is during the last two decades of his life that Ni Zan produced most of his best works.

Most of Ni Zan's works were occasional creations, done for hosts with whom he stayed during his wandering, or produced spontaneously at parties and other gatherings and given to friends. The long inscriptions he wrote on his paintings usually include a dedication and often tell us the circumstances under which the paintings were done. His *Enjoying the Wilderness in an Autumn Grove* (Figure 1, dated 1339), for example, has two inscriptions by the artist, one made at the occasion the other written sixteen years later in 1354. Through his inscriptions, poetry and literature of his contemporaries we learn how close Ni Zan was to some of the major literati of the late Yuan, and what took place at those literati gatherings. A typical example work is *Old Tree, Bamboo, Rock, and Calligraphy* (Figure 2, finished in 1373) in the National Palace Museum in Taipei. A collaboration of Gu An (ca. 1295-ca. 1370), Zhang Shen (act. late 14th century), Yang Weizhen and Ni Zan over a period of time, the work bears three different inscriptions by Zhang Shen, Yang Weizhen

\[10\] See Chapter 4 of this paper.

\[11\] Further discussion on *Enjoying the Wilderness in an Autumn Grove* will be given in Chapter 4.
and Ni Zan. Each gives us some information about the occasion and the feeling of the individual artist.

In the Yuan dynasty no religious restriction was imposed because of the Mongols' own tradition of shamanism. The syncretism of "Three Teachings: Confucianism, Daoism (Taoism) and Buddhism" prevailed among Yuan dynasty intellectuals. Ni Zan, both as an individual and as a painter, was influenced by this trend. Some of his most respected close friends were also prominent Daoists and scholars. Both his literary and visual works were penetrated by desolate and bleak emotions (typically Daoist), hermitage (classic Confucian) and escapism (Buddhist), which will be treated in Chapter Five.

My thesis consist of six chapters. With an introduction as Chapter One, Chapter Two provides a general brief of historical, political, cultural, and social contexts of Ni Zan's time. Chapter Three deals with Ni Zan's life and art prior of 1352, the year the artist began to live a wandering over the Lake Tai region. Chapter Four reviews Ni's life and art after 1352. Chapter Five will discuss some of Ni Zan's paintings and poems, the relationships between the artist and his associates and that between his paintings and the colophons. The last chapter is the conclusion.

Ni Zan's art is the product of his time. He could not have made it were he to be cut off from all the associations with other Yuan intellectuals. The artist was inspired and

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nurtured by these personal associations, and similarly, other literati friends benefitted from his creativity, if not his company for everyone. It is this interwoven mutual dependence of the literati community that produced the favorable sphere for the development of landscape of the late Yuan period.

As a human being living of the fourteenth century in China, Ni Zan had his merits and demerits. As an artist, he was one of the best painters, but not the dominant figure of the Yuan period. Yet the critics and writers of later times have stressed his importance over the other painters in the development of painting in the Yuan period. He was placed on a pedestal as the purest, aloof and cool scholar-painter by Dong Qichang (1555-1636) since the seventeenth century. The subsequent critiques and critics to date have ignored the interaction of the associations around the artist, and the influence of some important figures in those artistic gatherings who contributed their share in the making of the artist Ni Zan.

Chapter 2

Political, Social and Cultural Contexts

Ni Zan was born in the mid-Yuan, and died in the first decade of the Ming. During the mid-Yuan, the period between the death of Khubilai (Emperor Shizu, r.1260-94) in 1294 and the accession of the last Yuan emperor Toghon Temür (r. 1333-68) in 1333, nine emperors ascended the throne in succession, causing frequent bureaucratic turnovers and inconsistent state policies. The history of Mongol succession in Yuan dynasty is marked by assassinations, coups d'état, enthronement of incompetent youths, fratricide, and domination of warlords. The unstable political climate eventually degraded the powerful empire built by Khubilai to a declining weak government.

Mongols rule in China was the rule of conquerors. Their goal was to enrich themselves. From the beginning, the Mongols had little anti-Mongol "nationalism" to contend with in establishing their realm. In the north, the former Han-Chinese had been under the rules of the Jurchens and the Khitans, and had grown accustomed to the rule by non-Han conquerors. In the south, the former territory of the Southern Song dynasty (1127-
Chinese literati who experienced the Mongol takeover were at first distressed by the defeat of the Song and the conquest of the Mongols. Many expressed their strong emotions in their paintings such as Zheng Sixiao (1241-1318), Gong Kai (1222-1307) and Qian Xuan (ca. 1235-ca. 1301). As years went by, Chinese literati came to accept the reality that the Mongols were there to stay. They adjusted their life style and redefined their places in society under the Mongols.

Having preserved their absolute political powers and privileged standing, the Mongols were willing to tolerate Chinese civilization in exchange for more benefits to their rule.

Khubilai (Emperor Shizu, r. 1260-94) set up the Yuan government after the Chinese model of tripartite division of authority among civil, military and censorial offices. Outside this tripartite framework were a number of agencies which worked around the emperor's own establishment and those of other managers of the imperial family. Among them were the Hanlin and National History Academy (Hanlin guoshi yuan) and the Mongolian Academy (Menggu Hanlin yuan). The former, in addition to the many directorates that oversaw the material well-being of the imperial household, served the emperor's ritual and intellectual activities. The latter drafted imperial decrees in Mongolian and translated state documents from Mongolian into Chinese and other languages and vice versa. The Academy of Scholarly Worthies (Hanlin jixien yuan) itself was detached from the Hanlin Academy in 1285 when it was assigned the additional responsibility to oversee Daoist affairs through state appointed Daoist administrators at all Daoist monasteries. The academy's supervision of Daoism by

state appointed Daoist administrators at all Daoist monasteries. The academy's supervision of Daoism by appointing Daoist "officials" in the temples was akin to the Yuan government's regulation of both the so-called public or state schools and the private academies. The Buddhist counterpart of the Academy of Scholarly Worthies was Xuanzheng yuan (the Bureau of Tibetan and Buddhist Affairs), which directly supervised the Buddhist clergy in China.\footnote{H. Franke and D. Twitchett, \textit{The Cambridge History of China}, Vol. 6, 604 - 7.}

During the Song dynasty (960-1279) the older pattern of elite by which great family wealth and advantage ensured de facto elite status and political position through successive generations gave way to a more Confucian ideal of an open society in which a new kind of elite of merit was recruited from a broad social base to rise into personally achieved, non-hereditary official rank, and so to dominate society. Although heritage privileges remained important, they were not the only condition to become members of the elite of society. The Song literati enjoyed the greatest measure of social prestige and favour from the state, and were the proper leaders of society and government.\footnote{H. Franke and D. Twitchett, \textit{The Cambridge History of China}, Vol. 6, 627.} The scholar-official elite ideology was even supported by the alien Jin or Jurchen rulers.

The Mongols overturned the Song social structure. They brought their nomadic social system into China and struggled to make it work. The tribal military society was organized on the principles and ideals of closed social classes, of hereditary privilege, of
inherited occupations and status, and of differentiation among people based on real or mythical blood lines. The Yuan ruler imposed a four-classe social structure. The Mongols, of course, held the ruling positions; but they rapidly came to accept many associates in their empire building. Many Inner and Western Asian peoples from non-Mongolian nomadic steppe groups were granted privileged status, along with duties and obligations, as companions in the great tasks of conquest. The semu ren, Western Asians, constituted a legally acknowledged second class in the Mongolian state. As that state spread, first, north and then to all of China, two more legally established class distinctions were created: han ren-- Chinese of north China and others resident in the region, and nan ren --- southerners. The Mongols, by imposing this notorious system of four legal classes to China, tried to create by the promulgation of laws, a social order that counteracted all the features of Chinese social structure and social ideology. The four legal class regulations were applied with discriminatory effect in all matters regulating the lives of people relative to the state: They affected taxation, determined qualification for appointment to office, differentiated rights and privileges in adjudicating civil and criminal disputes at law and in determining penalties, established exemptions from liabilities, and were the basis for granting many kinds of privilege. The imposition by force of a two-tiered privileged elite composed of Mongols and Western Asians who monopolized the benefits of status and authority struck directly at the existence of the old Chinese elite of learning and cultivation and their traditions of political and social leadership. The notorious "ten ranks" were said to be

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imposed on Chinese society: Mongols and Western Asians were, of course, outside the system and superior to the Chinese. With officials and clerks assigned to the top two ranks, Daoists were in the fourth; prostitutes in the eighth; Confucian scholars (ru) in the ninth; and beggars were the tenth and lowest ranking in society. This shows how insignificant the Chinese scholars had become in the eyes of the Mongols.

An interesting phenomenon in this Chinese elite adaptation is that the presence of an alien elite holding the real power did not eliminate the prestige literati in Chinese society, nor did it wholly dismantle the economic foundation of elite status among the conquered. Chinese scholars, even though they were cut off from holding higher office, continued to be accepted by the ordinary people as the leaders of local society. In fact, the new conditions of Yuan rule as systematized under Khubilai in the last decades of the thirteenth century permitted the coexistence of two elites, one de jure and one de facto. At first the former had many advantages, and the latter suffered great psychological and different degrees of material deprivation. 19

A principal consequence of Mongolian discriminatory regulations, although not the intended consequence, was to produce a general condition for the Chinese elite of idleness or underemployment, without destroying its group consciousness and cohesion. The Mongols meant to keep the Chinese out of the highest positions in government and to keep the civil service from becoming an arena of uncontrolled Chinese action. Throughout the dynasty no more than a handful of Chinese ever achieved the higher substantive offices in

administration. The restrictive regulations so altered the career prospects for self-identifying Confucian literati that many of them turned to varied and unusual careers. Those who could afford to live in idleness often devoted their lives to art or scholarship, to good works, or to frivolity. Many more could not afford to live such lives. They had to find work in humble occupations as clerks, teachers, medical practitioners, fortune-tellers, or lesser callings. Some entered the Buddhist or Daoist clergy, if not often as ordained monks, then as lay associates of the local religious institutions. The social conditions of the Yuan brought suffering to many individuals and certain kinds of social loss to the larger society, but they also created a great potential for new growth and change.

North and south China had undergone different patterns of social change following the Jin conquest of the Northern Song in the twelfth century. From the tenth century onward the differences in the natural setting accompanied with those caused by the alien incursions, the dislocations of warfare, altered networks of trade, and changes in the modes of government reflecting the interests of alien rulers. The Jurchen Jin conquest of the entire north in the 1120s deepened the division of north and south China. By the time when the Mongolian dynasty reunited China by force of arms, there were striking differences between

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the economically declining north and the flourishing south --- the Yangtze drainage area in central China and the southeast coastal provinces.\textsuperscript{22}

The cumulative effects of years of natural disasters throughout China, together with the continued spread of banditry and other signs of civil disorder had taken their toll. In the fourteenth century, major floods and droughts seem to have unusually frequented the greater Yellow River region. Serious epidemics broke out in the 1340s and 1350s. Famines were recorded for almost every year of the late Yuan. These natural disasters created huge numbers of uprooted and impoverished people, fodder for the revolts that wracked the realm in the 1350s.

After 1355 as the breakup of the Yuan realm was by then well under way, and the beleaguered central government no longer had effective political control of the country, although it still remained a focus of loyalty and a source of legitimacy even in some of the parts of China that it no longer directly governed. From 1344 to 1368, the Yuan central government did the best it could to retain at least the token loyalty of its self-supporting commanders in the field and to negotiate diplomatically the nominal surrender of former rebels, like Zhang Shicheng (1321-1367). Meanwhile, the leaders of other rebel movements e.g., Zhu Yuanzhang (1328-1398) emerged in 1354 to build new and stronger regional governments and to maintain consistently hostile attitudes toward the Yuan. Thus the Yuan central government became in many respects no more than a regional government, controlling in China only the capital and its outlying areas, although it retained to the end a

\footnote{Information in this paragraph comes from H. Franke and D. Twitchett, \textit{The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 6}, 657-9.}
residual legitimacy as the government of all of China. Provincial officials now enjoyed plenipotentiary powers.

During the Yuan period, although Dadu was the political center, major artistic activities were found in a number of important cities in the Jiangnan region, such as Hangzhou, Wuxing and Suzhou. All these three cities have long been known for their exceptional cultural inheritance and natural beauty. Hangzhou was the capital of the Southern Song. It greatly attracted Mongolian and Western Asian officials, religious personnel and merchants to its scenic beauties and mild climate, its luxury and entertainment. The high levels of its famous urban sophistication survived the conquest. But the city suffered destructive fires in the mid-fourteenth century and exchanged hands several times in the civil wars of the late Yuan. Hangzhou underwent a decline throughout the dynasty.

Situated between Hangzhou and Suzhou, Wuxing had been a cultural center in the Southern Song because of its geographical position and natural resources. It suffered a considerable amount of damage as a result of the Mongol conquest. However, following the collapse of the Song dynasty, many of the native intellectuals who had left to pursue official careers under the Song were forced to return there, bringing to the region ideas they had gathered from other parts of China. Zhao Mengfu (1254-1320), the leading artist of the early Yuan from Wuxing, maintained his connection with his hometown. As the result, the importance of Wuxing as a center of Confucian learning continued through the early Yuan.

Late in the Yuan period, the most important cultural center shifted from Wuxing to Suzhou. Suzhou seems to have been in a unique position in the Yuan period, not as a political but as an economic center. Located in the heart of the Jiangnan region, Suzhou had
become the most prosperous city of China then. Rice, silk, handcrafts, and book-printing were among its best known products. Suzhou attracted many people for two major reasons. One was the strong tradition of culture. The other was its special political position at the time. It became the center of contention among some of the rebel leaders. Zhang Shicheng (1321-1367), leader of one of the more powerful rebel bandits, chose Suzhou to be his headquarters. Zhang also set up an academy for recruiting and appointing scholars as officers in his administration. His charms and abilities attracted a large group of scholars who had been restless and eager to have the opportunity to apply their Classic training and skills to civil service. A lot more literati came to Suzhou from other areas just to be at the centre of cultural activities. It was during the decade just before the Ming period around 1360s when the most active and progressive development in art and literature took place in Suzhou during the Yuan.

From 1357 to 1365, Zhang Shicheng and Zhu Yuanzhang were locked in battles against each other. By prohibiting his army from killing and plundering, Zhu Yuanzhang distinguished himself from other rebels and Mongol officers. He made an effort to seek out the advice from scholars. Eventually, Zhu Yuanzhang won the popular support, overcame his rivals, and finally defeated Zhang Shichang in 1367. Zhu Yuanzhang became the first emperor of the Ming dynasty in 1368. Zhu is a controversial character. Suffering from both self-consciousness, inferiority complex and superiority complex, he was obsessed in maintaining his absolute control of power. He was ruthless in killing anyone who he suspected of undermining his power. Using his jinyiwei (Embroidered-uniform Guard) as his secret service, he set up an espionage network to spy upon his
subordinates throughout the empire, in both their public and private lives. Zhu Yuanzhang became the most powerful and despotic emperors in the history of China.\textsuperscript{23}

Zhu Yuanzhang was said to exempted common people from taxation when there was natural disaster or man-made catastrophe. But he ordered many rich families, especially those from Suzhou, to move to the capital (Nanjing) under his control as a penalty for their earlier adherence to the cause of Zhang Shicheng. Some of Ni Zan's friends such as Wang Meng (1308-1385), Chen Ruyan (1329-1371) and Gao Qi (1336-1374)\textsuperscript{24} were victims of Zhu Yuanzhang's ruthless.

Ni Zan lived in such political chaos. Although a few of his inscriptions and some of his poems mention or indicate the difficulties forced upon him, his painting seems to give away little clue of the unsettling situations of the late Yuan and early Ming such as bandit uprisings and Zhang Shicheng's seizure of Suzhou. We do know, from both writings of his contemporaries and those of his own, that the unstable situations and the combination of human factors and natural disasters did affect Ni Zan's life and his career. Under the circumstances, the artist adopted a certain life style. His art reflects his ideal image of \textit{shiwai taoyuan}, the Land of Peach Blossoms --- a fictitious land of peace, away from the turmoil of the world. It may look contrary to the real chaos, his art is the product of his time.


\textsuperscript{24} See Chapter 4 of this paper.
Ni Zan's Early Life and Art

Ni Zan, named originally Ting, later changed to Zan, also known as Yunlin, Yuanzhen and other names, was born in 1301(?) in Meili, Wuxi County of Jiangsu Province. His life can be divided into two periods: his early period prior to his abandonment of his estate in 1352 and later period after 1352. During the period when he was living at home, Ni Zan was a distinguished, admirable, and somewhat eccentric scholar.

Ni Zan was from an extremely wealthy family. One writer of the Ming wrote: "The richest of the Wu region were Cao Yunxi (Cao Zhibai 1262-1355) of Songjiang County, Ni Yunlin (Ni Zan) of Wuxi, Gu Ying (Gu Dehui 1309-1369) of Kunshan. The three families held the best collections of paintings, calligraphy and antiques of Jiangnan area." Ni Zan was the son of the concubine in the family. Soon after his birth his father died. Ni Zan and his elder brother were raised by their eldest half brother, Ni Shaokui (1279-1328).


26 Ho Liangjun [Ming], Shiyou zai congshu, quoted in Zhu Zhongyue, Ni Zan zuobin bian nian, Shanghai: Shanghai renming meishu chuban she, 1991, 1.
Ni Shaokui (1272 -1328), also known as Ni Shaokui and other names, was a learned scholar, an enthusiastic Daoist, and a generous host to literati and religious friends. His lavish contributions toward building temples earned him important positions in the Daoist hierarchy. It also assured that his family had privileges over mere landowners.

Under Ni Shaokui's supervision, Ni Zan was well educated in the typical Confucian tradition, which prepared a scholar for what was considered a proper occupation - official service in the government. Within such a scholarly tradition, poetry, calligraphy and painting were considered as leisure-time activity to the scholar. However, political and social changes under the Mongol rule brought the shift so that the once limited leisure-time activity became the most important activity to the scholar.

Besides a proper education, Ni Shaokui also initiated Ni Zan into Daoism. Ni Zan grew up in a family of strong Daoist tradition. Yu Ji (1272-1348) gave a brief history of Ni Shaokui's Daoist official career in his epitaph. As mentioned in Chapter One, Daoist officials were appointed by the government in Yuan dynasty. They were granted privileges and social status which were denied to non-Daoist literati. In the ethnic separating Yuan system, once he became a Daoist, a literary man could ascend to the fourth rank from the nine rank. As a fairly high Daoist official, Ni Shaokui could protect his family and family fortune, and could help his literati friends as well.

Among Ni Shaokui's close literati friends were Yu Ji (1272-1348), Ke Jiusi (1290-1343), and Zhang Yu (1277-1348). The literati activities were held frequently in Suzhou and Wuxi and their surrounding areas. Some prominent retired scholar-officials brought painting and calligraphy works by the earlier masters from Dadu to Jiangnan. There lived a few renowned literati and art patron families hosting the gatherings such as the Wangs
(Wang Tianjue, Wang Rixuan, Wang Rixing, Wang Rijin and Wang Lingxian) of Jingxi. The studio of their family teacher Zhang Jian (1291-1370) was the most popular meeting place. Through his brother, Ni Zan was introduced to some of the greatest Confucian scholars of his time. Some of them were associated with Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322), the leading artist of early Yuan. Being part of the literati elite, young Yunlin benefitted greatly from his brother's social circle.

Painter Guo Bi (also known as Guo Tianxi 1280-1335) was also among the circle of Ni Shaokui's Daoist and literati associates. He often stayed and painted at Daoist monasteries, some of which were once under Ni Shaokui's supervision. Young Ni Zan admired the murals Guo Bi painted at those Daoist monasteries, and had studied and admired them. Ni Zan also liked to stay at Daoist monasteries. He had opportunities to stay and study with Guo Bi at the same Daoist lodge. Ni Zan recalled his association with Guo Bi in a poem that Ni Zan inscribed on Guo Bi's landscape:

> Bearded Guo (Bi) was somebody I loved and admired.  
> His poetry and painting are of high quality.  
> The three-way path by the river bank amid mountains,  
> The tip of the brush brought rich tones like five-coloured mist light.  
> Mi Dian (Mi Fu 1051-1107)'s boat always docked;  
> Like Tao Ling (Tao Qian 365?-427) he could always get wine on credit.  
> I remember the places we visited each other,

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28 Mi Fu, scholar painter, calligraphor and connoisseur of the Northern Song. He was appointed shuhua xue baoshi, Academy Member of research on calligraphy and painting by Emperor Song Huizong (r. 1100-1125).

29 Tao Qian, also known as Tao Yuanming, Tao Ling and other names, was a great poet of the East Jin Period (317-420). Disillusioned by reality around him when he served at public office, he retired from his post and became a hermit living in a peaceful remote village called Taohua Yuan, The Garden of Peach Blossoms, where he produced his poetry will known for its simplicity and refinement. Tao Yuanming became the classic model of Confucian recluse for literati of later periods.
Chanted poetry, drinking tea till late night.\textsuperscript{30}

In the preface to this poem written in 1363 after Guo Bi's death, Ni Zan wrote: "Tianxi (Guo Bi) and I had a long standing friendship. It has been more than twenty years since we last saw each other. It was the last time I saw him alive. My fond memories of Guo Bi cannot be expressed by words..."\textsuperscript{31} From Ni Zan's poem we know that Guo Bi and Ni Zan discussed poetry and art and had similar aesthetic tastes. Guo Bi could have cultivated Ni Zan in developing his scholar amateur art critique knowledge. Guo Bi followed the manner of Mi Fu and Mi Youren (Mi Fu's son, 1074-1153) in landscape painting.\textsuperscript{32} Ni Zan also regarded Mi Fu as his paradigm of scholar artist. We may say that Guo Bi was an influential painter to Ni Zan's youth in the development of his scholar-artist foundation.

Cao Zhibai was another painter who had contributed to the growth of Ni Zan's artistic taste and knowledge. The Cao family was close to the Ni family, so Ni Zan's relationship with Cao Zhibai was closer and more casual than his other associations. Being from one of the wealthiest family in Jiangnan, Cao Zhibai had an impressive collection of antiques art works. His family estate was known for its beautiful landscape design. Cao


\textsuperscript{31} "Ti Guo Tianxi hua," \textit{Qingbi ge quan ji}, juan 3, 15, composed by Cao Peilin in 1713, reprinted in 1970 by Guoli zhongyang tushu guan in Taipei. \textit{Qingbi ge quan ji} is the most comprehensive collection of Ni Zan's literature. It also includes writings on Ni Zan by his contemporaries and by writers of the Ming dynasty.

\textsuperscript{32} Zhang Guangbin, \textit{Four Great Masters of the Yuan}, 25.
Zhibai was an accomplished writer and painter. His landscape painting followed the Li-Guo tradition. According to his contemporary, as a generous host, “Cao frequently invited literati to have party in his beautiful gardens. They performed poetic composing and reading. They discussed Buddhism and Daoism. They sang, played music and drank wine. Their artistic activities and achievements are compatible to the masters of the past.” Thus Cao Zhibai attracted a large group of literati, among them were Wang Mian (1276-1359), Zhang Yu and Huang Gongwang. Cao was thirty years senior of Ni Zan, of the same age as Ni Shaokui. As a family friend, Ni Zan must have studied Cao Zhibai's great collection of calligraphy and painting. He listened and participated in the discussions. All the experiences were part of his training to acquire knowledge and skills in art and connoisseurship. I think that Ni Zan might have been inspired by Cao Zhibai's beautiful gardens to start to build his Qingbi ge complex. Cao Zhibai was amiable, kind hearted and well respected by all the people around him including literati, Daoists, Buddhists and ordinary town folks. His gardens were destroyed by the rebels in 1352. Two years later he passed away.

Both Yu Ji, a distinguished scholar-writer, and Ke Jiusi, a prominent scholar-painter, were from the south and served during Tugh Temür's reign (r. 1328-32) as members of Kuizhang ge xueshi yuan (the Academy of the Pavilion of the Star of Literature). Tugh Temür showed a wide range of scholarly and artistic interests He had surrounded himself

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33 The tradition of Li Cheng (919-67) and Guo Xi (ca. 1020-90) of the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127).

34 Shao Hengzhen [Ming], ye chu ji, juan 2, quoted from Chen Gaohua, Yuandai huajia shiliao, Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chuban she, 1980, 391.
with many distinguished Chinese literati and artists when he was the prince of Huai before his ascending to the throne. Having been compared with the versatile emperor Song Huizong, Zhao Jie (r. 1101-25), Tugh Temür was known to have had a great knowledge of the Chinese language and history, and had been a credible poet, calligrapher, painter, collector and connoisseur of Chinese painting and calligraphy. He ordered the building of a house, Kuizhang ge, for the works of art, paintings and books in the court collection. He spent much of his leisure time in Kuizhang ge (the Academy of the Pavilion of the Star of Literature), practicing calligraphy and viewing the art collection. Yu Ji, the mastermind behind the academy, and Ke Jiusi, the painter, enjoyed Tugh Temür’s particular favour.

Yu Ji, also named Bosheng, a writer, Confucian scholar from Jiangxi, possessed eminent literary and Confucian credentials. He was from a prestigious family with a strong Confucian tradition. His mother, a daughter of a famous Song officer, started his classic education when he was very young. At the age of five, he could recite many classic books and poetry. He became Wu Cheng’s student in his youth. Yu Ji was a master-scholar with profound knowledge of Confucianism, Daoism and other scholarly traditions, exceeding the boundary of a Daoist scholar.

Beginning at the age of thirty, Yu Ji served as a loyal and dedicated official in Dadu under the Mongol rulers of the first three and a half decades of the fourteenth century. His public officer career span the reigns of seven Yuan emperors: Chengzong (Temür), Wuzong (Khaishan), Renzong (Ayurbarwada), Yingzong (Shidebala), Taiding Di (Yesün), Wenzong

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Yu Ji's career at court was impressive, although he never became a key decision-maker among the Mongols.36

Yu Ji and his famous mentor Wu Cheng (1249-1333) are perhaps the most prominent examples of China's leading Han Chinese literati who were extremely close to leaders of southern Daoism. They both wrote numerous laudatory essays on behalf of Daoist leaders such as the hereditary Celestial Master (Tianshi), and were highly regarded by the patriarchs of Xuanjiao. Xuanjiao, the "sublime teaching," was a branch of southern Tianshi Daoism that had been created by the edict of the Mongol rulers. It was the product, not of Daoists acting on their own, but of Daoists working with the active cooperation of prominent Confucian literati and under the endorsement and sponsorship of the ruling Mongols. Yu Ji's great influence can been seen in the general refinement of the literary capabilities of the religious Daoists in the south. Through his literary influence, Daoism became significantly popular in the south.37 Yu Ji kept in contact with many prominent scholars of the time though he did not live in Jiangnan.

The most significant achievement of Tugh Temür's rule is the editing and publishing of *Jingshi da dien, the Grand Canon for Governing the World*. Yu Ji was responsible to supervise the organization and implementation of the project. Most of the court documents

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37 For Yu Ji's connection with Daoism, see K'o-K'uan Sun, "Yu Chi (Ji) and Southern Taoism (Daoism) during the Yuan Period," *China under Mongol Rule*, ed. by John D. Langlois, Jr., 1981, 212-53.
during Tugh Temür’s reign were composed by Yu Ji. He was regarded as one of the Four Great Masters of the Yuan literature.\(^{38}\)

Yu Ji was a competent calligrapher. When Zhang Yu first met Yu in Dadu, Yu asked Zhang if and how many types of *zhuan* (the seal script) he could write. Zhang admitted of knowing nothing. Yu Ji said, “I shall show you the types I know. Do critique my writing.” Yu began to demonstrate seventy-two types of *zhuan* script. Zhang Yu was extremely impressed and bowed deeply to Yu and said: “You are truly my teacher.” The two scholars became fast friends. Since then Zhang Yu always called Yu Ji respectfully his teacher.\(^{39}\)

Yu Ji and Ke Jiusi’s close relationship with Tugh Temür caused jealousy and complaints from other colleagues at the *Kuizhang ge*. After Tugh Temür died, Yu Ji retired in 1333 giving the excuse of personal health, and returned to Jiangxi where he spent the rest of his life in literary activities.

Apparently Yu Ji was a close friend of Ni Shaokui. The fact that Ni Zan, after Ni Shaokui’s death, wrote to Yu Ji, asking him to write the epitaph for his deceased brother indicates the familiarity and bond between Yu Ji and Shaokui and the admiration from Ni Zan to Yu Ji.\(^{40}\)

\(^{38}\) The other three are Yang Zai (1270-1323), Fan Guo (1272-1330) and Jie Xisi (1274-1344); see Jiang Yihan, *Yuandai kuizhang ge ji kuizhang renwu*, 18.

\(^{39}\) Fang Wai [Qing], *Yongzheng xihu zhi*, juan 22. Quoted from Jiang Yihan, *Yuandai kuizhang ge ji kuizhang renwu*, 19.

\(^{40}\) One such example is Ni Zan’s poem to Yu Ji. *Qingbi ge quan ji*, juan 3, 6.
Yu Ji was a generation older than Ni, and there is no record of an incident in which the two attended the same literati gathering. Yet they did share many mutual friends, for instance, Zhang Yu and Ke Jiusi. Young Ni Zan must have heard about Yu through his brother and other friends, and he must have had access to Yu's works. As the result, Yu Ji's Confucian scholarship, literary achievement and Daoist thoughts may have impressed Ni Zan greatly during Ni's early life. From the correspondences between the two we can find expressions of respects and friendship.

Another important Daoist scholar in Ni Zan's early life was Zhang Yu (1283- 1350), also known as Waishi of Haoqu and Master Zhenju. Born in Qiantang, Zhang Yu was a descendant of an important Song official. At the age of twenty, he traveled expensively, visiting famous mountains. He became a Daoist. An important Daoist master, Wang Shouyan, a Daoist zhenren, the Perfected Immortal, went to the capital Dadu for an audience. He took Zhang Yu along as his assistant. At the age of thirty-one, Zhang Yu’s literary talent and knowledge on history and Confucian classics made him an instant success among the Chinese and non-Chinese scholar-officials in Dadu. Scholars and officials of the day like Yang Zai (1270-1323), Fang Deji (Fang Shu, 1271-1330), Yuan Bochang (Yuan Jue, 1264-1327) and Yu Ji competed for his friendship, wanting to detain him in the capital. The emperor even invited him to join the civil service, but Zhang declined.

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Zhang Yu held a prominent position among Daoists, scholars, and gentry of the Yuan. He was highly appreciated by Yang Weizhen, who, being a great poet and arrogant rich landowner, rarely paid respect to other scholars.\textsuperscript{42} Broad friendships made Zhang Yu an object of popular respect. Being a dignified man of letters, he is said to have injected his Daoist studies with Confucian elements. However, the only detailed account of his biography is an epitaph by Liu Ji (1311-1375). Some scholar believe that Zhang Yu's achievements in the literati realm were accomplished in part through the aid and advice of Yu Ji.\textsuperscript{43}

Zhang Yu visited Zhao Mengfu when he was in Dadu. Zhao Mengfu saw that Zhang Yu's calligraphy was strong and robust. Zhao showed him the "Stele Inscription for General Yunhui" so that Zhang Yu could practice its method.\textsuperscript{44} For personal reasons, Zhang Yu returned to Jiangnan to take up Daoist positions. There is evidence from the writings of both Ni Zan and Zhang Yu indicating that Zhang often visited Ni Zan, and the two of them travelled together to visit some Daoist temples or scholars in the area.

Zhang Yu became some sort of confidant to Ni Zan after Ni Shaokui's death. It is through Zhang that Ni acquired further knowledge of Daoism and Confucianism. Zhang was

\textsuperscript{42} Gu Sili [Qing], \textit{Yuan shi xuan, chuji}, preface dated 1693, reprinted by Zhonghua shuju, Beijing, 1987, p. 2409.

\textsuperscript{43} K'o-K'uan [Kekuang] Sun, "Yu Ji and Shouthern Taoism [Daoism] during the Yuan Period," 234-5.

\textsuperscript{44} Zhang Guangbin, "An Investigation into the Dates of Chang Yu, Wai-shih of Kou-ch'u," 4.
a significant link in Ni's early life: Zhang conveyed Yu Ji's Daoist and Confucian ideas, and perhaps Zhao Mengfu's new ideas on painting to Ni Zan. In return, Ni Zan was very generous to Zhang with financial support. Partially due to his family Daoist tradition, mostly because of Zhang Yu, Ni Zan was said to even have considered at one point becoming a professional Daoist on Mt. Mao.\textsuperscript{45} He did not carry out his desire probably for two reasons: as the only survived son in his family he was obliged to take over the family business; and Ni Zan was disappointed and disillusioned by Zhang Yu's unhappy final years on Mt. Mao. After Zhang Yu's death Ni Zan might have felt deserted by his closest friend.

An anonymous portrait of Ni Zan (Fig. 3)\textsuperscript{46} dated in the 1340s shows a fairly accurate image of the artist. At that time Ni Zan would have been over 40. The artist is portrayed seated cross-legged on a \textit{kang} (a couch), leaning on an arm rest, brush and paper in hand, dressed informally in white linen, flanked by two well-groomed attendants. Behind him there is a painted screen.\textsuperscript{47} A bundle of scrolls and a inkstone are on the \textit{kang} beside him. Next to the \textit{kang} is an exquisite table, on which there is an antique bronze vessel (\textit{jia}), a stoneware hill jar (\textit{lian}), a ceramic water dropper, a seal-pigment box (\textit{yinhe}), and a hill-shaped brush-rest (\textit{bijia}). The girl attendant is holding a jar of water, a container in each hand, and a towel on one arm. The boy attendant is holding a broom.

\textsuperscript{45} Zhang Guangbin, \textit{Four Great Masters of the Yuan}, 24.

\textsuperscript{46} Reproduction of the painting see Zhang Guangbin, \textit{Four Great Masters of the Yuan}, Fig. 327.

\textsuperscript{47} Wu Hong discusses this painting and has interesting comments on the screen in his book \textit{The Double Screen}, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, 168-172.
All the props in the painting are in fact matching with descriptions of the artist by his contemporaries. The scrolls, bronze 
\textit{jia} and stoneware jar represent the renowned collection in \textit{Qingbi ge}.$^{48}$ The brush, paper, inkstone and water dropper (for making ink out of ink stick) reassert him as an artist. The water utensils for hand-wash and the broom can be viewed as proofs of the artist’s obsession for cleanliness. Ni Zan seems to be contemplating, gazing into space beyond the material world into a world of his own. His face is expressionless, a typical character of the restraint of a Confucian. The written descriptions of the artist by contemporaries is given a vivid visual image here. This is also a classic image of a scholar-painter of the time: pure, scholarly and reclusive, reflecting the ideal of the Chinese literati. It tells us about Ni Zan's background, inclinations and life style then. This is certainly an accurate portrait of Ni Zan in his studio prior to his wandering life. The painter of this portrait must have been very close to Ni Zan, familiar with Ni’s life and art. It is pointed out that the landscape on the screen has a similar style and composition of Ni Zan’s works. Some critics says it bears the resemblance to Ni Zan’s \textit{Enjoying the Wildness of an Autumn Grove}.$^{49}$ (Figure 1) James Cahill suggests that the landscape on the screen may have been painted by Ni Zan himself.$^{50}$

\textsuperscript{48} Qingbi ge was the name of Ni Zan's studio. Further information of his house see below in this chapter.


\textsuperscript{50} James Cahill, \textit{Hills Beyond a River}, 116-117.
On the left of the painting is a eulogy by Ni's close friend the Daoist scholar Zhang Yu. Zhang's inscription offers further information about Ni's personality. Zhang Yu wrote:

...His thoughts are closer to Mojie (Wang Wei 701-761), in spirit he makes friends with Haiyue (Mi Fu). Because he is enlightened he appears proud, and plays a joke upon the world. Others compare him to Xie Xuan who adorned himself with a purple silk sachet. I alone think he even surpasses Fangshuo (Dong Fangshuo, 154-93 B.C.) under the Jinma Gate (of the Han Court).

Wang Wei, poet and painter of the Tang dynasty (618-906), and Mi Fu, scholar-artist of the Northern Song (960-1127) were regarded as the ideal models of scholar-painter, and of course, models for Ni. Beneath Ni Zan's cool and dandyish surface Zhang Yu saw a troubled but humane and wise person.

Ni Zan is said to have demonstrated his intelligence at an early age, and to have become well-schooled in the Classics and literature. In his youth Ni Zan was able to lead a carefree and well-off life of a scholar, traveling around the Jiangnan region, visiting other scholars and religious temples and monasteries. Artistic and personal associations were already an important part of Ni Zan's early life.

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51 Dong Fangshuo (154 B.C.-93 B.C.) was a writer of the West Han period. There were a lot of legends of him.

52 Complete Chinese text and English translation see Zhang Guangbin, *Four Great Masters of the Yuan*, 77.

After Ni Shaokui's death in 1328, Ni Zan had to take over the responsibility of managing the family fortune, even though the role ill suited his personal inclinations. With the family fortune at his disposal, he built a famous garden on the family estate with sumptuous pavilions and beautiful plants. The most unusual building of the garden is the *Qingbi ge*, the Pure and Secluded Pavilion, which is said to have housed a large library, and a collection of many paintings and calligraphic pieces, ancient bronze vessels, and other antiques. The garden became an attraction to the literati all over the country. There were a number of stories written in Ming and Qing dynasties about the impressive collection and the residence of the artist, about Ni's obsession for cleanliness in his life style and about his treatments of the people around him.

Ni Zan's generosity to friends was legendary. Yet his open and often impulsive behavior also brought him awkward moments. His eccentricity and passion, and an obsession for cleanliness made him less popular as a host among literati compared to other wealthy literary scholars such as Yang Weizhen (1296-1370) and Gu Ying (1309-1369). On the other hand, Ni Zan was recognized as a distinctive poet and talented painter, and thus he was welcomed to all the literary gatherings.

There is little record extant accounting for how Ni Zan learnt to paint and who actually ever gave him lessons on painting. Neither is there any original work extant by the artist done in his twenties or early thirties. The earliest entry of Ni Zan's painting is the title of a work: *Landscape at Sunset* with Ni's inscription in 1321.\(^\text{54}\) The painting was made for a

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certain Ye Dan, a native of Wuxi. We have no idea what that painting looked like, but the poem survives.55 As Ni Zan had received typical training for Confucian scholar, we can safely assume that he probably learned the basic techniques with his tutor Wang Wenyou, and acquired further knowledge through discussions with other literati such as Guo Bi, Cao Zhibai and Zhang Yu, and through diligent studies of calligraphy pieces and paintings by previous masters and his contemporaries. One of the main activities at Chinese literary gatherings of the Yuan was to appreciate and to critique art work. There were a number of works by masters such as Dong Yuan, Juran, Su Shi (1036-1101), Mi Fu in private collections in Jiangnan then. Oftentimes these works were shown at literati gatherings to share the appreciation of the work. With his family art collection, and his frequent participation in literati gatherings, Ni Zan had the resources and opportunity to study masterpieces of calligraphy and painting.

According to a list of paintings collected at Qingbi ge, the Pure and Secluded Pavilion (Qingbe ge canghua lu), there was a painting by Dong Yuan on the subject of Hebo (the Lord of River)’s marriage (Fig. 4).56 Although the work was not dated, it was believed to be a masterpiece of Dong Yuan. With such a painting in his collection, Ni Zan must have spent a great deal of time studying it. This painting of Dong Yuan came into Dong Qichang's collection in 1597, and was renamed Xiaoxiang tu by Dong Qichang.

56 Reproduction and discussion of the painting see Richard Barnhart, Marriage of the Lord of the River: A Lost Landscape by Tung (Dong) Yuan, Artibus Asiae Supplementum 27, Ascona, 1970.
By studying the writings by Ni Zan and his contemporaries, scholars are able to draw a list of the art works which were reviewed and studied by Ni Zan, for instance, in 1342 (the second year of Zhizheng Reign). In the first month of that year Ni Zan reviewed Lu Jishan's calligraphy piece, *Shuanggou Lanting Xu* (*Study of the Preface to the Orchid Pavilion*). Lu Jishan's family and Ni Zan's were very close. Lu Jishan's son Lu Jinyuan was Ni Zan's life long friend. Lu Jinyuan's son was Ni Zan's son-in-law. The calligraphy piece was a study of Wang Xizhi's (*Lanting Xu* (*The Preface to the Orchid Pavilion*). Ni Zan wrote a colophon on Lu Jishan's work, commenting that Lu retained the spirit of Wang Xizhi's brushwork. On the twenty-fifth day of the second month that year, a friend Lu Shanpu brought a poetic manuscript by Zhao Mengfu to Ni Zan's home for Ni Zan to appreciate the work. The manuscript was given to Zhang Dechang by Zhang Mengfu's second son Zhao Yong (Zhao Zhongmu 1289-?). After reviewing Ni inscribed on Zhao Mengfu's calligraphy manuscript to critique the work and to record the occasion:

Zhao Hanlin (Mengfu) had dignity with bright and hearty personality like a gentleman of the Jin, Liao and Song periods. Consequently, his writings and calligraphy are like coral and jade tree: to illuminate a pure age. There are only a limited pieces of Zhao Mengfu's calligraphy around. They are all treasured. Today some people study poetry, writing, calligraphy and painting producing works of little substance but loaded with decorative make-up. Despite their colourful outfit, they lack the true spirit and charm, like a wild chicken does not have the dignity and rich green of a peacock. There is only one Zhao Mengfu. One's style depends on one's personality and characteristics. Zhang Dechang got this manuscript from Hanlin (Zhao Mengfu)'s son Zhongmu. Lu Shanpu saw it at Zhang's on the twentieth of the second month and brought it to show

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57 Zhang Guangbin, *Four Great Masters of the Yuan*, 61 and Fig. 318.
me. Hereby I inscribe. Ni Zan. The year of renwu (1342), the second year of Zhizheng's reign. 58

This colophon is a typical work composed to commemorate the art activity. In the third month of that year Ni Zan called on Yang Weizhen and saw a painting by Cao Zhibai (1272-1355). Ni Zan was so fond of the painting that he composed and inscribed three poems with a postscript on Cao Yunxi's painting. 59 Cao Zhibai was also a close friend to Ni Zan. In the seventh month Ni Zan together with Ke Jiuxi appreciated Su Shi's inscription on a bamboo painting by Wen Tong (1018-1079) in ink-and-wash. Ke Jiuxi recorded the occasion and commented about the work. 60 In the ninth month Ni Zan and his friend Pan Zisu enjoyed a calligraphy work by Zhao Mengfu. 61 Ni Zan wrote a colophon to commemorate the occasion. In the same year he also inscribed a colophon on Wang Xizhi's calligraphy Ganhuai tie (Reflection). 62 From these records we can see how frequently had Ni Zan been engaged in such inspiring activities, through which the artist learnt from others and developed his style.

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59 Yuexue lou shuhua lu, juan 3. Quoted from Zhu Zhongyue, Ni Zan zuopin biannian, 24-5.

60 Zhang Cou [Ming]. Qinghe shuhua fang. Quoted from Zhu Zhongyue, Ni Zan zuopin biannian, 25.

61 Zhu Zhongyue, Ni Zan zuopin biannian, 27.

62 Bao hui lu, quoted from Zhu Zhongyue, Ni Zan zuopin biannian, 26.
It is generally accepted that Ni Zan followed the Dong-Ju tradition in his early period. Among the masters of the Dong-Ju school, Mi Fu (1052-1107) seems to have occupied a special place in Ni Zan's heart. Susan Nelson wrote:

Ni Tsan (Zan) seems to have had a special place in his heart for Mi Fu. Numerous colophons of his are recorded on paintings by Mi, and he named one of his libraries in honor of the Sung man. This admiration extended to Mi's follower Kao K'o-kung (Gao Kogong 1248-1310), and his words of generous praise for Kao were well remembered by later critics. One of Ni's associates during his twenties was Kuo Pi (Guo Bi 1301-1355), a painter strongly influenced by Mi, and Kuo may have been partly responsible for drawing Ni's attention to Mi Fu; but Ni's interest certainly went beyond the academic to a recognition of a spiritual kinship. There were, after all, remarkable correspondences in temperament and personal habits between the two men. Both were obsessively clean, given to wearing antique dress, and of a legendary cranky haughtiness.  

Nelson reconstructs the possible process how Ni Zan may have learnt from tradition and from his associates as well. Ke Jiusi, Huang Gongwang and Wang Meng were close friends of Ni Zan. Each of these artists, in a different way and to various degrees, contributed their shares in the development of the artist Ni Zan. I will discuss this aspect further later in this chapter.

The earliest existing work by Ni Zan is *Enjoying the Wilderness in an Autumn Grove* (Fig. 1, dated 1339). The painting declares the beginning of a so-called Ni Zan-type compositional formula (the three-sections scheme), of trees and rocks on a riverbank or lake

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bank. The rounded boulders and soft earthen forms described in hemp-fiber texture strokes, the ink-wash shoals extending out from the shoreline, and the densely clustered deciduous trees are all rooted in the manner of Dong-Ju school. The brush stokes can be recognized as deriving from Dong Yuan's *The Marriage of the Lord of the River* (Fig. 4). But the imposing foreground trees and boulders set against an expansive distance recall Zhao Mengfu's *Twin Pines and Level View* (Fig. 5) which, in turn, reveals a direct borrowing from the Li-Guo tradition. *Enjoying the Wilderness in an Autumn Grove* is a combination of a comprehensive study of different painting traditions with an abstraction of the literati ideology, e.g. a reclusive scholar contemplates in solitary. This familiar composition was repeated over and over by the artist throughout the rest of his life. *Enjoying the Wilderness in an Autumn Grove* shows that Ni Zan's art, at this point, had acquired two important characteristics: a personal compositional formula, and a distinctive simplicity. (These two characteristics will be discussed further in Chapter 4.) Pervading this painting is *yi qi*, an aloof and untrammeled elegance, for which Ni Zan has been credited as the best painter since in the history of art in China. The solitary scene presented by this painting is akin to the ideal setting for Daoist meditation. It is the direct result of Ni Zan's association with the Daoist-scholars.

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64 Reproduction of the painting see Richard Barnhart, *Along the Boarder of Heaven*, Fig. 53.

Ke Jiusi was an eminent painter, calligrapher and connoisseur from Taizhou (now Linhai) in Zhejiang. His father served under the Song as Tiju of Zhejiang Xingsheng (the Supervisor of the Zhejiang Province). Due to his father's contact, Ke was assigned to a post. He did not take the post, but went to Tugh Temüür, the prince of Huai then who was to become Emperor Wenzong of the Yuan. Ke followed Tugh Temüür through a heated power scramble, and was rewarded with high position in the prestigious Kuizhang ge xueshi yuan. Ke was appointed the chief appraiser in charge of calligraphic works and paintings in the collection. Tugh Temüür's fondness for Ke caused jealousy and hostility among his colleagues. He became the target of malicious attacks. Under unfavorable working atmosphere, he was forced to resign. With Tugh Temüür's death in 1332, Ke lost all hope of furthering his official career. He returned to Songjiang as a retired scholar, traveling over the Jiangnan region, and finally died in misery and unhappiness.

Ke Jiusi was recognized as a man of great talents. Well respected for his achievements in poetry, literature, painting, calligraphy and connoisseurship, he was best known for his bamboo paintings in ink and washes. Applying the approaches of calligraphy to painting, Ke developed it further to such an extent that his bamboo painting was highly regarded in his lifetime and by scholars and critics of later centuries for its integration of poetry, calligraphy and painting.

Bamboo was a favorite subject of a number of literati painters in the Yuan. The idea of painting bamboo was closely related to that of the orchid and horse in that it was symbolic of the spirit of the intellectuals at the time. Most of the known bamboo painters of the period such as Gu An, Zhang Shen, Ni Zan, Puming, Fangyai and others seem to have
lived in Suzhou and its vicinity at that time. Ke Jiusi chose to live in Suzhou after 1333 until his death in 1343. With his once prestigious association with the court, Ke might have helped to promote the interest in bamboo painting in Suzhou. He might have inspired Ni Zan in the integration of poetry, calligraphy and painting.

Ke Jiusi was a friend with Yu Ji and Zhao Mengfu. He and Yu Ji were very close. After his return to Jiangnan, Ke often visited Gu Ying (1310-69) in Kunshan, and was greatly respected by the group of literati. He participated in the gatherings of poetic contests and artistic production. Among the group were Yang Weizhen (1296-1370), Ni Zan and Huang Gongwang.

During the mid-Yuan, between 1321-1352, there were two richest families in Jingxi: Yue Jun family and Wang Tianjue family. Wang Tianjue was a relative as well as a close friend of Zhao Mengfu. He was an enthusiastic art patron and collector. He hired Zhang Jian to be his son's tutor, and built him a studio called Liangchang caotang, "the Good and Constant Thatched Hall," which in time became the most popular venue of the time for literati gathering during the mid-Yuan. Most of prominent scholars and painters were among the group, including Zhang Yu, Huang Gongwang, Ke Jiusi, Ni Zan, Yang Weizhen and Zhu Derun (1294-1365).

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67 Zhang Guangbin, Four Great Masters of the Yuan, 7.
Huang Gongwang\textsuperscript{68}, the oldest of the four great masters of the Yuan, had been influenced and inspired by Zhao Mengfu. Although Huang Gongwang was thirty-two years senior of Ni Zan, the relationship between the two artists can be described as one of mutual respect and devotion to each other, beyond the generation gap (\textit{wangnian zhi jiao}). The extant records of the incidents when the two artists inscribed on each other's painting state the fact that they often appeared at the same literati gatherings, and the two were very close friends.

In \textit{The Six Gentlemen} (Fig. 6), for example, dated 1345, Ni Zan's inscription reads:

Each time Lu Shanfu sees me, he urges me to paint for him. On the eighth day of the fourth lunar month of the fifth year of the Zhizheng era (May 10, 1345) I had just docked my boat on the Bow River when he greeted me with a lamp and a piece of paper, insisting strenuously that I paint for him. I was feeling extremely weary from the journey, but did my best to answer his request. When the old master Dachi [Huang Gongwang] sees this, he will have a good laugh over it.\textsuperscript{69}

This painting and the calligraphy reveal Ni Zan's charged emotional state. The painting shows six bleak looming spikes dominating the river bank. A thin mist seems to drift across the river, giving a sense of utter isolation from everything except the river and the lonely trees. The calligraphy displays a nervous energy and tensile strength.

Lu Shanfu, Ni Zan's host and the recipient of the painting, was a noted scholar and connoisseur in Suzhou who often played host to well known scholars and artists of the time.


It appears that when Ni Zan arrived at Lu's home that night, other distinguished guests were present, among them the old Daoist scholar and painter Huang Gongwang. It was Huang who gave the title to Ni's painting, by inscribing in the upper right corner of the painting a four-line poem:

Distant cloudy mountains range across the autumn river,
Nearby, ancient trees huddle by the sloping shore.
Six gentlemen stand facing one another,
Upright, straight, outstanding, and unbending. 70

Both Ni Zan's colophon and Huang Gongwang's poem are evidence of the close association between the two painters. The brushwork of *The Six Gentlemen* and that of Huang Gongwang's masterpiece, *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* (Fig. 7), 71 dated 1350, have a resemblance. Both painters followed the hemp-skin technique invented by Dong Yuan of the tenth century. It is interesting that the two artists looked back to the same old tradition to find new meaning, yet the outcome of their interpretation differs greatly in form and style. While many of the external factors were the same, the internal factors of each of the artists differed which lead to their different styles. Their interest, motivation in painting and what they hoped to achieve through the processing are different. Consequently, the differentiation


71 Reproduction of two copies of the work can be found in Zhang Guangbin, *Four Great Masters of the Yuan*, Plates 102 and 103. This work was so pressured by collectors over the centuries that it provoked more than a few copies of the painting. There has been a number of studies on the authenticity of the copies and on issues concerning the work. See James Cahill, Hills beyond a River, 111-3; and Zhang Guangbin, “Huang Gongwang Fuchun Shan ju tu yi wai de wenti, Issues beyond Huang Gongwang’s Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains,” Gugong xueshu jihkan, 9:4 (Summer, 1975), 57-67.
The friendship between the two might have begun around 1329. It was said that both Huang Gongwang and Ni Zan joined a new Daoist sect in that year. In 1334 Huang established a Sanjiao tang, or “Hall of Three Teachings,” in Suzhou. The Sanjiao (The Three Teachings) sect, founded in the eleventh century but reaching its greatest strength in the Yuan, incorporated elements of Confucianism, Daoism (in its original philosophical form), and Chan (Zen) Buddhism into a synthetic doctrine. The Sanjiao sect was concerned especially with the study of xingming, man’s inborn qualities and his destiny. Huang Gongwang was described as being solitary and lofty in temperament by his contemporary. He was renowned and admired as a scholar of old texts, as a poet in the late Tang style, as a philosopher, and most of all as a painter. He was also proficient in music.

Although the works of Ni and Huang are quite different in style, the two painters are close in spirit. They both searched for new approaches in order to express their feelings and ideas through their landscape paintings. Being older than Ni, Huang Gongwang may have been asked by Ni Zan to advise him on painting. On the poem inscribed on his painting, The Six Gentlemen, Ni Zan called Huang “old master” affectionately in the inscription. Apart from the respect and admiration to Huang Gongwang, Ni Zan might have thought that he had learned so much from Huang that he felt like regarding Huang as his teacher.

Huang Gongwang’s voice for “The Three Teachings” certainly was echoed warmly by Ni Zan. We can safely assume that Huang Gongwang may have influenced Ni Zan in their exchange of ideas and thoughts. But the impact is to be understood as a conceptual lineage instead of a visual lineage in style.

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The master most revered by the Yuan landscape painters in the tradition was Dong Yuan. The tradition he inaugurated in the 10th century, called after him and his supposed follower Juran the Dong-Ju school, was centered in the Jiangnan region below the Yangtze River. This tradition, however, was relatively neglected by most painters and commentators of the subsequent Song period (960-1279). One exception was the independent-minded Mi Fu, whose appreciation of the Dong-Ju style helped to keep it alive and renew respect for it.

In the early Yuan, as a phenomenon accompanying the rejection of the late Song landscape
styles, the Dong-Ju school of the Jiangnan region was revived, along with other early Song and pre-Song traditions. Zhao Mengfu's creative transformations in the early Yuan of the Dong-Ju traditions inspired artists of the late Yuan. In his “Xie shanshu jue, Secrets of Landscape Painting,” a short text composed around the middle of the 14th century, Huang Gongwang wrote: “Painters of the present time generally follow the styles of Dong Yuan and Li Cheng. The trees and rocks of these two schools are different in appearance, and students should pay careful attention to the distinction.” The Dong-Ju tradition was of amateurs in painting whose works have a more impressionistic effect, while the Li-Kuo tradition was of professionals whose paintings aim for representation. The more expressive characteristics of the Dong-Ju tradition appealed strongly to some of the Yuan painters, among whom were Zhao Mengfu, Huang Gongwang and Ni Zan.

*The Six Gentlemen* also bears Dong Qichang’s inscription. It reads:

Yunlin liked to paint solitary scenes of mist and fog which is not the ordinary vulgar things made by artisans. This work has Zijiu (Huang Gongwang)’s poem. Ni Yu (Zan) called Zijiu his master. The painting is original, thus is a rare treasure. Appreciated on the second day after Chongyang (the ninth day of the ninth month) of renyan year (1602). Dong Qichang.


75 Tao Zongyi, *Zhu geng lu, juan* 8. Translation quoted with slight change from *The Four Great Masters of the Yuan*, 17.

76 Li-Guo tradition refers to the styles of Li Cheng and Guo Xi of the Northern Song.

Wang Jiqian comments on *The Six Gentlemen*: “The strokes with which the artist painted the rocks and hills result from studies of Dong Yu and Ju-ran: simple and unsophisticated. Looking at the work is like tasting an excellent wine: pure and mellow. The exquisiteness of the brush work ranks it one of Ni Zan's best early works. It proves that Ni Zan had carried on the true spirit of Songxue (Zhao Mengfu).”

If *Enjoying the Wilderness in an Autumn Grove* initiates a compositional formula, *The Six Gentlemen* presents, for the first time, a three-sectioned scheme: imposing trees and soft boulders on the foreground, empty water in the middle and far-away maintains in the back. The solitary stillness in *The Six Gentlemen* is even more striking with its minimalism.

A powerful proof of the kinship between Huang Gongwang and Ni Zan is Huang Gongwang’s painting, *Jiangshan shenglan tu (Landscape)* (completed in 1348) dedicating to Ni Zan, which had taken ten years of Huang's time to finish. The painting was lost, but a number of sources have recorded the title of the painting and Ni Zan’s poem has survived. Ni Zan had written a number of poems and pieces of prose on Huang Gongwang to express his respect to Huang.

Ni Zan’s early life and career was significantly influenced by his close friends. Ni Zan was very particular about whom he associated with and who could be his close friends. Among his closest friends or his wanted-to-be-friends were some prominent Daoist scholars, such as his brother Ni Shaokui, Yu Ji, Zhang Yu and Huang Gongwang. In addition, some of the Daoist thoughts, such as cleanliness and taking care of oneself by enjoying one’s life,

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78 Wang Jiqian, “Ni Yunlin’s Painting,” 17.

79 Ni Zan’s poem on Huang Gongwang’s *Jiangshan shenglan tu* is collected in Zhuang Shen, *Poetry of the Four Landscape Masters of the Late Yuan Period*, 141.
appealed strongly to Ni Zan because of his own personality. As the result of a combination of these internal and external factors, Ni Zan showed enthusiastic interest in Daoism. While his art reflects his taste and preference for solitary contemplation in desolate nature, in real life Ni Zan depended on his associations with other literati to provide him new ideas and research sources. He needed to be recognized and respected by his fellow scholar-artists.
Chapter 4

Ni Zan’s Later Life and Career

By the late 1340s, Ni Zan's carefree days at Qingbi ge, the Pure and Secluded Pavilion, were increasingly threatened by financial deterioration, political turmoil and heavy taxes. In his autobiographical poem, *Shuhai*, Speaking My Thoughts, in late 1340s, Ni Zan revealed the pressures he was under:

...I pay taxes until I am bled dry.
I cope with government demands and worried about a sick child.
I am truly depressed that I served the defiled and vulgar.
I am upset and frightened by disturbing uproars.
Handing over everything, I must bow to government clerks....

Ni Zan went on in the poem to express his wish to escape from all these troubles in the poem. The poem reflects the pressures Ni Zan was under. He began selling the family properties in the late 1330s to meet all demands. While Ni was obliged to carry on his unhappy responsibilities at home, his contacts in art, literature and with Daoists were quite frequent.

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He enjoyed dealing with intellectuals whom he regarded to be erudite and refined enough as his friends. Ni was said to be very generous to his friends and relatives, giving away proceeds from the sales of properties. According the writer of Ni Zan's epitaph, Wang Bin during one of Zhang Yu's last visits to Ni, Ni had just collected a large sum of money after a sale. Ni gave all that money to Zhang, thinking that it might be the last time that the elderly Zhang Yu could come to visit Ni.81

Due to constant natural disasters and mismanagement, the tax revenues of the Mongol government were seriously reduced. Around the 1340s the government began to impose exorbitant land taxes, especially on the Jiangnan region.82 Under increasing government tax pressure, Ni Zan stayed away from home more and more to avoid the petty clerks and to seek spiritual consolation frequently in his associations with Daoist and Buddhist priests since the mid 1340s.83

As the result of famines, floods and heavy taxation, there was an outbreak of bandits throughout China in the early 1350s. The temporary peace in the Jiangnan region was shattered. People, rich or poor, could not escape the chaos. The once prosperous literati gatherings were interrupted for the rich hosts, such as Cao Yunxi and Ni Zan, were


82 Information is drawn from H. Franke and D. Twitchett' The Cambridge History of China, vol. 6, 561-586.

undergoing some dramatic changes in their lives and were not in the position to play party hosts.

Zhang Yu died in the seventh lunar month of 1350. Ni Zan, being so close to Zhang, must have been devastated by the blow. It might have been too painful for him to write anything in consolation of Zhang Yu. There is no memorial to Zhang by Ni Zan. In the tenth lunar month of that year, Ni Zan stayed for four months at a Buddhist temple, Chongju shi in Jingxi.\(^\text{84}\) It could have been a recuperative period for the artist.

By 1352 the rebels had taken over west Zhejiang. Hangzhou and Jingxi were trampled by battles between the government troops and rebels. Jiaxing and Huzhou soon also suffered from mutiny. By then Yu Ji, Ke Jiusi and Zhang Yu had passed away. Many scholars and wealthy landowners fled to Songjiang, Suzhou and Wujiang.\(^\text{85}\) In the spring of 1352, at the age of fifty-one, Ni Zan finally left his family behind and sailed out to Lize\(^\text{86}\) on a houseboat to begin a new phase of his life. Ni Zan lived the rest of his life wandering in the Lake Tai area, stopping at the homes of friends or relatives along the way. "His living was

\(^{84}\) Zhang Guangbin, *Four Great Masters of the Yuan*, 28.


\(^{86}\) Zhang Guangbin wrote, "Li-tse [Lize] was originally a general name Lake Tai." *Four Great Masters of the Yuan*, 28.
made partially by depending upon financial help from relatives and friends and partially from
his painting. 87

There have been different speculations on the reasons why Ni Zan disposed of his
properties and left his family. Most of historical writings of later periods say that Ni Zan had
foreseen the chaos of the era and that he, being a true recluse scholar, turned his back on
wealth. This type of comments is based on Zhou Nanlao's Epitaph of Master Yunlin of Yuan
(Yuan chushi Yunlin xiansheng muzhimin) 88 and Wang Bin's Epitaph of Master Yunlin Ni of
Yuan (Yuan chushi Yunlin Ni xiansheng luzan muzhimin). 89 Zhou Nanlao wrote: "...in his late
years, he became quieter and more withdrawn than ever. Having lost or given away
everything he ever owned, he did his best to forget his worries. Wearing a yellow (Daoist)
cap and country clothes, he roamed the lakes and mountains, leading a recluse's life."
Wang Bin also wrote: "At the beginning of the Zhizheng era (1341-1367), before the military chaos
broke out, Ni sold his property. He was not interested in expanding his family business, but
in poetry. He was laughed at as a fool. After the outbreak of the rebels, the rich landowners
were extorted. Their farms turned unyielding. Then people started to admire Ni's insightful
foreseeing." 90 However, reviewing Ni's writings before and after his abandonment of his
home, this argument is questionable. As we have covered above, with a brother being a
Daoist priest of high rank, the Ni family was granted and enjoyed many privileges. Yet after

87 Zhang Guangbin, Four Great Masters of the Yuan, 28.
88 Qingbi ge quan ji, juan 11, 8-10.
89 Qingbi ge quan ji, juan 11, 7-8.
90 Chinese origenal text see Qingbi ge quan ji, juan 11, 7.
the death of the eldest brother Ni Shaokui in 1328, the social status of Ni’s family was
degraded and they were deprived of their privileges. In addition, Ni Zan, having been raised
as a scholar, was not a capable manager of the family business. The wealth of his family
eventually became exhausted. Especially after 1340 Ni Zan spent a considerate portion of his
wealth to undertake the large-scale construction of the famous Qingbi ge, the Pure and
Secluded Pavilion complex, which included Qinghuai tang (the Hall of Pure Huai), Yunlin
tang (the Hall of Cloud and Forest), Qingbi ge (the Pure and Secluded Pavilion), Xiaoxian
guan (the Secluded and Leisure Room), Zhuyang guan (the Room of the Red Sun), Jingming
an (the Thatched Hut of Clear Reputition), Xuehe dong (the Chamber of Snow Crane),
Shuizu ju (the Lodge of Water and Bamboo), Xiaoyao xian ting (the Pavilion of Relaxation
and Leisure) and Haiyue weng shuhua xuan (Haiyue's Studio). The financial situation
deteriorated rapidly. Ni Zan's generosity in giving a lot of money to his friends accelerated
the financial decline. Finally, on the one hand there were the difficulties in finance, official
heavy taxes, and constant worries of being caught in the middle of government troops and
rebel forces. On the other hand, there was the appeal of being an unattached worry-free
hermit absorbed in poetry, calligraphy and painting. Ni Zan chose to walk away from all the
troubles, hoping to devote himself to the arts and literature.

In 1352 Ni Zan left his family behind and sailed out on a houseboat through the Lake
Take area, starting a new phase of his life. Ni Zan visited and stayed with friends and

\[91\] Zhu Zhongyue, *Ni Zan zuoping biannian*, 4.
Buddhist or Daoist temples along the way, continuing artistic activities without worrying about his family responsibilities.

At that time a number of bandits appeared in the Jiangnan region. In 1352, the same year when Ni Zan abandoned his estate, some rebellions sacked Jinxi, Ni's hometown. The richest Yu family and Wang Family were robbed. Their once outstanding antique collections were gone.92 Hangzhou also was lost to another rebellion gang. Looking back at all the chaos, many thought that Ni Zan had foreseen these coming disasters and thus disposed of the properties to avoid being robbed. Such opinion was just some sort of fabrication. Their remarks were made after the facts like locking the barn door after the horses are gone. If we analyze Ni Zan's mental and financial states, and the chaotic circumstances, we know that Ni Zan left home not because he had predicted the upcoming rebels. Ni Zan was facing financial difficulties and there was no solution for his dilemma. The timing was coincidental.

After a year of wandering Ni Zan sent for his family to join him in Lize in 1353.93 Having made the arrangement for his family to settle in a safer place, Ni Zan, missing his dear Pure and Secluded Pavilion, visited in secrecy his ancestral home. In 1355 Ni Zan was arrested and put in jail by the local authorities during one such visit.94 This incident was a turning point in Ni Zan's life. Ni Zan, shaken by his narrow escape with life, realized that


93 In a memorial poem of his late wife, Ni Zan mentions the year of kuiyi (1353) when his wife led the family flee to Jiangzhu. See *Qingbi ge quan ji, juan* 7, 21.

94 Ni Zan mentions his imprisonment and fears in his "Zhizheng yi wei suyi shi", Chinese text see *Qingbi ge quan ji, juan* 1, English translation see Wen Fong, *Image of the Minds*, 111-112.
being alive was more important than his ancestral home. Thereafter he disposed of all his properties and severed his attachment to his family estate. For the next ten years (1356-1366) Ni Zan and his family lived a simple life at a cottage in Lize he called Guoniu lu, the Snail Hut.

It was also the last decade of the Yuan dynasty. The nation experienced the warring turmoil and chaotic political power struggles. Soon after Zhang Shicheng's force seized Suzhou in 1356, Zhang established his base in Suzhou. Between 1356 to 1365 Suzhou and its surrounding prefectures, like the eye of a hurricane, were relatively peaceful. The Chinese elite in the area were able to continue their artistic activities. Some of them, including Chen Ruyan, were recruited to serve in Zhang Shicheng's administration. Ni Zan declined the invitation and courting from Zhang. He refused to have any association with Zhang Shicheng and his government because Ni considered Zhang and his men vulgar scoundrels. Ni Zan continued his wandering, sometimes visited friends and other literati, and sometimes stayed in Daoist and Buddhist temples.

In the following two decades or so Suzhou was the cultural, economic and political centre of the Jiangnan region. The literati gatherings also shifted along with the migration of scholars. The most popular literati gathering place was at Gu Ying's Yushan Caotang, the Thatched Hut of Mount Jade in Kunshan. Another less popular one was at Yang Weizhen's studio in Songjiang. The literati met frequently, usually accompanied with wine, music and other entertaining. Poetry was composed at the spot. Paintings and calligraphy were made as part of the activities and to commemorate the occasions.

Gu Ying was also named Gu Dehui and Gu Zhongying. Being one of the richest of landowners in Jiangnan and a great patron to Chinese literati, he delegated the family
business to his son when he was only about forty so that he could concentrate on hosting literati gatherings. The Mount Jade Thatched Hut was built for hosting literary activities. Plenty of wine and food were provided, day and night, for consumption. Gu Ying even set up two well-groomed prostitutes named Xiaojuhua and Nan Zhixiu to provide entertainment. Both were capable of composing poetry. Whenever there was gathering, the two women would be present and participated. Many of the prominent literati were visitors to the Mount Jade Thatched Hut, such as Zhang Zhongjiu, Yang Weizhen, Ke Jiusi, Li Xiaoguang, Zheng Mingde, Ni Zan, Zhang Yu, Yu Yancheng and Yiyuan Pu.95

Gu Ying collected and edited the poems and prose into a number of books, including *Yushan pu gao, Caotang ya ji* (14 juan in total), *Yushan mingsheng ji* (8 juan), and *Yushan mingsheng wai ji*. About seventy names of the participants and their poems appear in *Caotang ya ji*, including almost all the Chinese literati elite in Jiangnan. These books can be viewed as a collection of highlights of Chinese poetry of the late Yuan. Thus these books have been great sources for later scholars to study the literati, literature, and lives of the poets.

Although Ni Zan was not a regular participant at Gu Ying's circle, Ni maintained a respectful relationship with Gu. In his inscription of 1358 on a portrait of Gu Yushan (Gu Ying) Ni describes Gu as "Dressed in *ru* (Confucian) gown, *seng* (Buddhist) cap and Daoist shoes,"96 a metaphor of Gu's belief in the "Three Teachings." The colophon mentions how

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95 Gu Sili [Qing], *Yuan shi xuan, chu ji*, preface dated 1693, reprinted by Zhonghua shu jiu, Beijing, 1987, 2321.

96 Wang Keyu [Ming], *Sanhu wang, juan 10*, 31. For the complete inscription also see Zhuang Shen, *Poetry of the Four Landscape Masters of the Late Yuan Period*, 153.
well known Gu Ying had been for entertaining himself as well as his literati friends with
music, singing, and reading classic poetry; and how Gu suddenly detached himself from the
mundane world and sailed on the lakes of Jiangnan. Ni praises Gu having a bright and
cheerful disposition and being open minded, thus “Gu Ying must have studied thoroughly
and assimilated the ‘Three Teachings.’” 97 Coming from Ni Zan, this is indeed a high
comment on Gu Ying. Coincidentally, Gu Ying's change of life style paralleled with that of
Ni Zan's but in a less dramatic way and for a much shorter time.

Ni's friendship with Wang Meng, another one of the Four Great Masters of the Yuan,
was much closer than that with Gu Ying. In fact, there was a bond of kinship between these
two artists. Born in an important family of artists, Wang Meng was the grandson of Zhao
Mengfu, the great painter of the early Yuan. Both Ni and Wang developed their respective
distinctive styles from older traditions such as Dong-Ju tradition. Wang's painting was
known for their dense details as Ni Zan for his minimalism. In spite of their different
interests in interpretation, they had a very long lasting and warm friendship. It was with
Wang Meng that Ni Zan shared the most common background and artistic language. There
was a special kinship between the two, and they got along very well with each other. They
were compatible in terms of techniques, knowledge and refinement in arts. They often
exchanged opinions on works, and sometimes collaborated in painting. Songshi shanshu tu.

Landscape (Fig. 8)\(^9^8\) is an example of such collaboration. The painting was originally painted by Wang Meng for Ni Zan. Then Ni Zan added some strokes to the work and gave it to a friend. Wang Meng saw the painting at the friend’s studio and completed the work with his final touches. The work bears inscriptions of both artists. We can say that Ni Zan benefitted a great deal from his association with Wang Meng. Wang Meng was also an accomplished poet, especially his poems written in archaic style. From the writings of both artists we can find quite a number of poems to each other expressing mutual respect and admiration. The writings indicate a strong friendship/fellowship between Ni Zan and Wang Meng.

Ni Zan drifted in Lize and Puli most of the time. He corresponded with Gu Ying and Yang Weizhen, though he was not a regular visitor of either one. He was not an easy person to get along with, and was notorious for being fussy about whom he selected to be considered as his close friend. Following Zhang Yu's death a few years earlier, Huang Gongwang died in 1354. During this period his close friends were Zheng Yuanyou (1291-1364), Wang Meng, Wang Yunpu and brother Wang Gengyun, Lu Jishan's grandson Lu Yangzheng who became Ni's son-in-law, the brothers Chen Ruzhi (Chen Weiyan 1328-1384) and Chen Ruyan (Chen Weiyun 1331-1371), Zhou Nanlao (1300-1383), Zhang Dechang and his brother Zhang Deji and his sons Zhang Xuandu and Zhang Yizhong.\(^9^9\) His criteria of

\(^9^8\) Zhang Guangbin, *Four Great Masters of the Yuan*, 50-1 and Fig. 302.

selecting a friend seemed to depend on the high qualities of a classic Confucian scholar regardless of his political views or his age.

Once Ni Zan accepted a certain individual as his friend, he would be devoted and supportive to this individual whenever he could. For example, the brothers Chen Ruzhi and Chen Ruyan were much younger than Ni Zan. Ni appreciated the Chens' qualities and refinement as a classic Confucian, hence included them as his close friends.

When Ni Zan was sick for nearly six months in 1362, Chen Ruzhi (Weiyan) visited him twice. After Ni Zan recovered, he wrote a poem using the same rhyming words as Chen Ruzhi's previous poem composed in 1361. In his postscript to the poem, Ni praises Chen Ruzhi “Being content with living in poverty, Weiyun pursues his interest in classic studies. Having lived in Wushi [now Suzhou] for twenty years, he remains focused despite obscure dust of this world and separates the clear from the muddy. As I know him very well, hereby I write this postscript to tell others about him [and about his immunity to all pleas and temptation].” Chen Ruzhi was then staying with a friend, Rao Jiezhi, for Chen could not afford a home. In order to help Chen, Ni Zan wrote a prose (jiu wu shu, About Housing) especially for Chen Ruzhi, highly recommending the Chen brothers as well as canvassing funds for them. Ni Zan had written a lot of poems to and for the Chen brothers. Many of them sang the praises of the Chen brothers. During Zhang Shicheng's rule in Suzhou, the

100 Zhu Zhongyue, Ni Zan zuopin biannian, 58.

101 Zhu Zhongyue, Ni Zan zuopin biannian, 58.

younger brother Chen Ruyan was recruited by Zhang Shicheng's administration in Suzhou. Ni held a hostile attitude towards rebels from non-scholar backgrounds, including Zhang Shicheng and Zhu Yuanzhang, but he did not look down upon the Chen brothers for their involvement with Zhang Shicheng. Ni continued to show his support to the Chens and remained a close friend to them. The friendship was cut short by the tragic death of Chen Ruyan. A couple years after Zhu Yuanzhang established the Ming, Chen Ruyan was jailed and executed, thus paying his price for serving Zhang Shicheng.

Through the associations with other literati in Suzhou and its surrounding areas, Ni Zan carried on his studies of art, and received feedback responding to his art, based on which he might have set the strategies to become the painter of painters of his time. Towards the end of Yuan and beginning of Ming, most of the older artists and scholars had passed away, Ni Zan was one of a handful of established artists. He did not rely as much on his associations for support as he had done in his early period. By then he was mature and confident as an artist of distinguished style. Being popular may contradict Ni Zan's image of an aloof and arrogant recluse, but he needed this popularity among the elite so that he would be welcomed by literati hosts. He did not have to be worried about a lack of patronage for his art.

Ni Zan was regarded as the paragon of a carefree scholar artist of distinguished personality and integrity by younger literati associations. The famous poet Gao Qi (1336-1374)\textsuperscript{103} was a great admirer of Ni Zan. Ni Zan also recognized and respected Gao Qi's

\[\text{\textsuperscript{103} Gao Qi was regarded as the great poet of late Yuan and early Ming for his dignified grandeur and} \]
talents in literature. Although the two did not move in the same circle, they maintained their friendship through correspondence. Ni Zan stopped visiting Suzhou during Zhang Shicheng's occupation between 1357 to 1367. When Suzhou was surrounded by Zhu Yuanzhang's troops for quite a period of time in the final battle against Zhang Shicheng, the city and the people suffered a great deal. Gao Qi's young daughter died of terrible shocks during the encirclement. Having heard of the tragedy, Ni Zan sent a brief note to Gao Qi to express his sympathy.\(^{104}\) Gao Qi composed a number of poems on Ni Zan and his painting. One of Gao Qi's poems reads:

\begin{quote}
Yunlin's hair has turned gray
With dignity like that of the great scholar recluses of the Jin period.
He likes to depict the interesting scenes of Cangzhou.
He visits Daoist monasteries as his retreats,
The smoke from his tea is like light autumn.
Bamboos wave gracefully in the rain.
The pond water would flow to the south,
to retain the scholar's clean boat.\(^{105}\)
\end{quote}

Ni Zan also suffered from the unwanted attention and obligations incurred with the popularity. One such unpleasant experience is Ni Zan's conference with Zhang Shicheng's brother, Zhang Shixin. After Ni Zan rejected Zhang Shicheng's recruitment to join his government, Zhang Shixin sent Ni Zan some money and rolls of silk in exchange for a vigorous poetry. He was also known as Qingqu Zi. His heroic ideology and outspoken personality attracted many literati. He was recruited to be part of the team to compile the history of the Yuan. As a victim of Zhu Yuanzhang's suspicious personality, he was accused of a capital offence and died of a severe death sentence. See Frederick W. Mote, \textit{The Poet Kao Chi (Gao Qi)}, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1962.

\(^{104}\) Qingbi ge quan ji, juan 10, 10.

\(^{105}\) Qingbi ge quan ji, juan 11, 16.
painting. Ni returned the money and cut the silk into pieces to show his refusal to get involved with Zhang Shicheng. Later one day when Zhang Shixin was on an outing on the Lake Tai with a group of recruited scholars, he detected a special incense fragrance coming out of a hut. He followed the fragrance and found Ni Zan. Having been humiliated by Ni's previous refusal, Zhang beat Ni Zan heavily almost to death in revenge. Ni Zan was saved only because the accompanied scholars intervened. Ni remained silent during the whole incident. Afterwards when asked why Ni Zan answered: "I would be vulgar if I had uttered a word (to such vulgar man like Zhang)." This story has been cited by many critics as proof of Ni Zan's personality that he only dealt with refined and intelligent people. It also proves Ni Zan's obsession for special incense even in his simple life of his later years. Ironically, the special fragrance betrayed his whereabouts. However, the bottom issue here lies in the unwanted attention caused by the reputation of Ni Zan's art.

From a carefree genteel scholar and rich landowner, Ni Zan became a wandering homeless artist. The transition in life style was critical to both his outlook of life and to his art. The impact it brought on the development of the artist needs further study. The changes of living conditions induce the artist to look at the world from a different perspective. During his earlier life, as part of growing up, the artist needed reassurance, acceptance and recognition by the best of the scholars of his time before he became established. His associations with other scholars provided him with the contacts, information, guidance and support. Therefore the associations were essential to the artist. The artist was at the centre of

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106 "Jin lin cong ji xianxian zhuan," Qingbin ge quan ji, juan 11, 12.
intentioned attention as a host to others, showing off his art collection and beautiful gardens. He could look down upon others, for he was in a better financial position. He could afford to do whatever he would like to do most of the time. By the time when his later period of life started, Ni Zan was well-established and one of the best artists of the nation. On the one hand he no longer needed guidance and consolation and did not have to join the most popular literati groups. On the other hand, he no longer had his own house and did not have much wealth at his disposal. He had to live on his painting and on the hospitality of his relatives, friends and hosts. To make a living, he sometimes had to paint upon the request of others even when he did not feel like doing it. This may explain some of his works not up to the artist's quality. He must have produced works of less quality under unfavorable circumstances. A Yuan writer, Xia Wenyen commented that Ni Zan in his later years painted “in a sketchy and simple way to repay obligations. Thus [his works] seem to have come from two different hands.” Another reason for this might be the artist was too old to keep up with the demand of his painting.

Having experienced the hardships of life, with deeper Daoist and Buddhist studies Ni Zan detached himself from the world and looked at things from a detached position. He may have been regarded as an honoured guest by many literati and those who wanted to be included in the Chinese elite, yet Ni Zan, especially in the last decade of his life, lived sometimes in poverty not totally out of his choice. In a poem of 1369, Ni Zan wrote:

You and I are no different from the old peasant.
Wild people would ask why.

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Previously I threw away money like a knight errant;  
Now I am engaged in penance like a mendicant monk.\textsuperscript{108}

The poem is quite a revelation of Ni Zan's reflection on the change of his life style. It also tells us the strained circumstances Ni Zan found himself in.

From another Gao Qi's poem we can see a more vivid description of the aged Ni Zan:

Grass grows in the ruined hall where guests had been fed and wined. 
Now a lonely man stays in the bed at Buddhist lodges. 
He mourned the orchid bed. 
In evening rain he walks sadly complaining the bamboo ridge. 
A knight errant cannot live in harmony with shallow and vulgarity. 
Living in harmony is good for the bald [elderly]. 
Who will give thousands in silver to him for buying wine? 
Like Tao Jian he smells the yellow flowers [chrysanthemums] alone in sunset.\textsuperscript{109}

This poem painted a melancholy image of Ni Zan. It also states a fact that Ni Zan often stayed at Buddhist temples in his later years. The aspect brought some change to the artist. I will discuss it further later.

Compared to his early years, Ni Zan led a simpler life, but he was able to concentrate in developing his poetry, calligraphy and painting. His paintings of this decade such as 

\textit{Fishing Village after Autumn Rain} (Fig. 9, 1355), \textit{Mountains Viewed from a River Bank} (Fig. 10, 1363), \textit{The West Garden} (Fig. 11, 1365), \textit{Trees on the Riverbank with Mountains in Distance} (Fig. 12, 1365), \textit{Falling Maple Leaves on the Wu River} (Fig. 13, 1366), and

\textsuperscript{108} Chinese text see \textit{Qingbi ge quan ji, juan} 3, 23.

\textsuperscript{109} Gao Qi, "Ci Yunlin jian jiyun," \textit{Qingbi ge quan ji, juan} 11, 16.
Riverside Pavilion and Mountain Scenery (Fig. 14, 1368) give us the trace of his experiment with traditions in the process of developing his personal style. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, Ni Zan emulated traditions. These works show how the artist had worked with different — though just slightly — approaches until he found the most satisfying ones. Let us review some of these works, all of the three-sectioned composition, to retrieve the transformation of the artist's personal style.

Ni Zan's Fishing Village after Autumn Rain was painted in 1355, the same year when he was jailed for a brief period. The composition is a variation of that of The Six Gentlemen (Fig. 6). By now the three-sectioned formula — five trees on earthen foreground, open space indicating water in the middle and hills on the far shore — is more prominent. There is no trace of a human being, not to mention a village in the scene. The trees, stripped of leaves by the cold autumn wind and rain, stand gracefully. Both the near and far shores are barren except for the five trees. The rounded boulders become more squared. The Dong-Ju "pima cun, hemp fiber texture" strokes in The Six Gentlemen are transformed to Ni Zan's personal style characterized by the brushstrokes called zhedai cun, the "folded strip fiber texture". The composition is sparser, looser than that of Enjoying the Wilderness in an Autumn Grove (Fig. 1, 1339). The trees are less detailed with just enough foliage to be recognizable. The artist was trying to achieve a seemingly simplicity in his painting. Although this seemingly simplicity is not well developed yet in this painting, it corresponds with the artist's Daoist and Buddhist pursuits to look for the substance of the scenery and not to be distracted by the minor details. He tried to used the minimum brush strokes to present a highly generalized yet the essential image of the landscape.
Fishing Village after Autumn Rain was painted when Ni stayed with a friend, Wang Yunpu, at his house in a village thirty li southeast of Suzhou and north of Lize in 1355. (Ni seemed to have kept a long friendship with Wang Yunpu, for he had written and painted a number of works at Wang's place over the later period of his life.) Eighteen years later in 1372, when Ni Zan had been presented this painting, the artist added a poem on the painting:

The wind and rain over the town by the river stopped.  
Brush and inkstone cool down in the evening.  
The bag for painting has not been buried.  
Why his sad song so emotional? 
The autumn water is still as green as ever.  
The water in the lake is as clear as jade.  
Take care of yourself, my friend Zhang (Zhang Ziyi), Lying on the stone couch in your leisure time.  

In the postscript Ni Zan wrote: "This painting was executed in the year of jimo (1355) at the fishing village of Wang Yunpu’s Residence. It has been eighteen years since then. I have not expected that (Zhang) Ziyi has kept the work and could not dare to throw it away. The work prompts my memories and sentiments, for which I compose this poem. On the twentieth day of the seventh month of the year of renzi (1372). Zan." We can understand how the painting had brought a lot of sentimental memories to the artist when he thought of his life in those two decades.

Fishing Village after Autumn Rain is regarded as an important piece to study the development of the artist in his later career. The work also bears colophons respectively by


Sun Kehong (1533-1611) and Dong Qichang (1555-1636). Sun recalled: "Shitian\textsuperscript{112} said Ni Zan's painting was considered a must in a family collection by the Chinese elitist families in eastern Jiangsu. It became a yardstick to judge if the family were refined or vulgar." Dong Qichang commented: "In his youth Ni Yu (Zan)'s calligraphy was better than his painting. In his later years, his calligraphy was natural and unrestrained, unlike the calligraphy of Ou (Ou Yangxun 557-641) and Liu (Liu Gongquan 778-865). He accomplished great achievement in the art of painting [in his later years], transcending the Dong-Ju tradition, establishing his own tradition. His work of \textit{yi} (untrammeled) is ranked the highest of works of the \textit{shenmiao}, wonderful and ingenious category. This \textit{Fishing Village after Autumn Rain} is an excellent piece of his later period..."\textsuperscript{113} These two quotations also indicate that Ni Zan had been set up on the high pedestal as the paradigm of Chinese scholar painter by critics in the Ming, especially by Dong Qichang.\textsuperscript{114}

\textit{Mountains Viewed from a River Bank} (Fig. 10) was painted by the artist for Chen Ruyan which also bears a poem by the artist. The unique qualities of this work set it apart from Ni Zan's other paintings. It can be viewed as an experimental work. The most striking compositional difference is the steep mountains in the distance replacing the usual gentle

\textsuperscript{112} Shitian, Shen Zhou (1427-1509), a distinguished painter of the Ming period from Suzhou area.

\textsuperscript{113} Wang Jiqian, “Ni Yunlin's Painting,” 18.

slopes. The mountains are executed with relatively larger vertical strokes in *pima cun*, producing texture resembling hemp fibre with *fantou*, dots on the top of the mountains. An Qi (1683-1742), a prominent collector of the Qing comments:

...In Yunlin's painting, mountains and rocks are usually executed with *heng zhou*, horizontal folded texture. In this work [the composition in which] the peaks extend from one into the another and [the artist] uses *pima cun*, hemp-fibre strokes straight down. These are the result of Ni's following Juran's manner in techniques. This is a unique work of all Ni Zan's painting, therefore it is indeed a transformation of Ni's art.\(^{115}\)

If we look at Juran's *Landscape in Sunset* (Fig. 15)\(^{116}\), we can understand why An Qi said Ni Zan had followed Juran's style --- there is a direct lineage in the distant mountains in *Mountains Viewed from a River Bank* derived from Juran's mountains. Ni Zan was borrowing Juran's techniques in his work. Probably Ni Zan had not been satisfied with these Juran-mannered efforts, for he did not repeat the experiment afterwards. Despite the good execution of strokes and ink in this painting, Wang Jiquan thinks the slopes of the front riverside are constructed too loosely; the arrangement of the rocks on the river bank lacks variation and flow; the trees are weak and ungraceful.\(^{117}\)

*The West Garden* (Fig. 11), like *Fishing Village after Autumn Rain*, does not look like a garden. While the composition is of the three-sectioned scheme, the middle section in


\(^{116}\) Reproduction of this painting see J. D. Chen (Chen Rentao), *The Three Patriarchs of the Southern School in Chinese Paintings*, The Union Syndicate, Hong Kong, 1955, 19.

this work has a tiny island with some trees in stead of the usual empty water. The artist seems to continue his experiment with another section of his composition. The work also has the same shortcomings as the *Mountains Viewed from the Riverside* does.

Having experimented and developed further through a lot of practice, Ni Zan achieves his matured, distinctive personal style in *Riverside Pavilion and Mountain Scenery* (Fig. 14). The painting, as typical three sectioned Ni Zan, presents a tranquil scene: woods on gentle hills with rocks on the front ground, a thatched hut under the trees by the water; calm water and a few rocks as the mid section; mountains on the far shore. A divine and ideal wonderland for the secluded scholar. Technically, the artist transcends the Dong-Ju *pima cun*, "hemp fibre" strokes to his own smaller *zhedai cun*, horizontal folded texture. The lines are strong and forceful. *Riverside Pavilion and Mountain Scenery* marks the completion of the artist's transformation to his late style.

Throughout his life, Ni Zan lived in and saw only the Jiangnan scenery: waterways, lakes and rounded hills covered by green vegetation. His compositional formula certainly is a highly skillful generalization or summary of his surroundings. However, instead of portraying the dense green vegetation and moist scenes, Ni Zan turns the beautiful and prosperous Jiangnan into his ideal secluded land: a bleak and desolate corner in nature, for he scanned the scenery by instincts to look for the melancholy and desolate to his aesthetic taste. This indicates his inclinations, preference and influence of other scholars. Ni Zan was a pessimist in life, tended to look at or feel the depressing negative aspect of a matter. With his eccentric personality, he preferred tranquillity to splendidness, quiet secluded village to
exciting urban area. The Daoist and Buddhist thoughts in him lead to the artist's aesthetic view for the desolate, aloof, archaic in calligraphy, painting as well as literature.

The relationship between Ni Zan and Yang Weizhen (1296-1370) was not as close as that with the scholars discussed above. Like Ni Zan as the most admired artist in painting, Yang Weizhen is regarded as one of the Four Great Masters of the Yuan literature and calligraphy. Due to the opposite personalities, the two scholars, despite of their respective great learning, may have respected each other but did not always approve of some of the things done by the other. Ni Zan had known Yang Weizhen in the late 1330s. Yang admired and respected Zhang Yu very much. The two became friends and often traveled together in the Jiangnan region. Being a close friend of Zhang Yu, Ni Zan came to know Yang Weizhen.

Yang Weizhen also known as Yang Tieya and other names was born in Kuaiji, Zhejiang. Yang spent his early years studying and traveling around the region of his hometown. His father, not satisfied with his son's academic progress, locked him up in an elevated studio on the Tieya Mountain for five years, fed and supplied him by means of some system of pulleys. Hence the name Tieya. This secluded study of the Classics and history bore fruit in 1327 when Yang was at the top place among the eighty-five successful candidates in the Examination of Jinshi, a recruitment examination for officials, with his essay on Chun Qiu, Spring and Autumn Annals. Because his serious study on Chun Qiu in his youth, Yang Weizhen became known in his lifetime as a teacher of this Classic, attracting

118 Zhang Guangbin, Four Great Masters of the Yuan, 38.
many students. His career in public service was not remarkable and was beset with frustrations. He tried but failed to get further in office. Yang Weizhen retired to return home when his father died. Between 1334 to 1343, Yang spent the time travelling in Jiangnan, part of the time with Zhang Yu, and in literature pursuits. He was notorious for the carouses he organized.

An amusing story about Ni Zan and Yang Weizhen tells us something about the characters of the two. In the middle of one of Yang Weizhen's carouses, Yang took off a slipper of an entertaining girl, put a cup of wine inside, drank the wine from the slipper and insisted the rest of the people do so. Ni Zan was present and disgusted by Yang's demand. Ni upset the table and shouted “Dirty! Dirty!” He then walked out of the party.119 Ni Zan was obsessive about cleanliness, how could Yang expect Ni to drink from a slipper, not to say the slipper of an girl of low class? Yang Weizhen was thought eccentric for being outspoken and unhesitatingly candid. He believed in enjoying oneself excessively. His outlook of the world was strikingly different from Ni Zan's. No wonder the two did not always agree with each other.

In 1360, Yang Weizhen moved to Hangzhou and then to Songjiang. Many of his students followed him. Loving to have people around him, Yang Weizhen's place was another popular venue beside Gu Ying's in Kunshan. Wang Meng was among the regular visitors. Ni Zan kept a distance from Yang Weizhen though the scholars in Yang Weizhen's circle all respected Ni Zan and were associated with Ni in exchange of correspondence and

119 *Qingbi ge quan ji, juan* 11, 5.
painting. Ni maintained his relationship with Yang through writing rather than personal contracts.\textsuperscript{120}

Ni Zan's association with the Daoists and Buddhists throughout his life has a significant impact on him as well as on his art though the effects vary in different periods of his life. During his wandering life, he often stayed at Buddhist temples and at Daoist temples sometimes, which gave him the peace and shelter to recover his battered body and mind. It was the company of the scholarly and artistic kinship of the priests and monks that attracted Ni Zan most to those secluded places where he could be temporarily detached from the mundane world and indulge himself in his love of art and literature. Under the graduate influence of Buddhists he was resolved to lead a simpler life, learned to be more tolerant and more open minded. Besides his Daoist friends, we can find numerous poems written by Ni Zan to these Buddhist friends. To name a few: Wuning \textit{Fangzhang},\textsuperscript{121} Yuanpu \textit{Zhanglao},\textsuperscript{122} Wuxue \textit{Shangren},\textsuperscript{123} Xianghai \textit{Shangren}, Zhongshan \textit{Shouzuo}.\textsuperscript{124} In one of his poem on his bamboo painting, Ni Zan even borrowed some Buddhist terms to look at bamboo from a new, more Buddhist perspective.\textsuperscript{125}

After Zhang Shicheng was defeated in 1367, Ni Zan returned to Suzhou to visit some of his old friends. His wife died in 1364. The solitary and homeless Ni Zan continued his wandering. Finally he went back to Wuxi, his hometown in 1374. He stayed with his relative

\textsuperscript{120} Zhang Guangbin, \textit{Four Great Masters of the Yuan}, 29.

\textsuperscript{121-125} See Zhuang [Chuang] Shen, \textit{Poetry of the Four Landscape Masters of the Late Yuan Period}, respectively 154, 173, 188 and 158.
and fell ill shortly after his return. Th artist never recovered. Ni Zan, finished his journey in life. It is amazing that he had put a stop to his wandering life before he passed away, leaving behind him the great treasure of painting, calligraphy and poetry together with numerous legends about his life.
Chapter 5

Ni Zan's Painting and Poetry
— Records of His Associations

The paintings, poetry, colophons and writings by Ni Zan and his contemporaries are great sources for us to learn about and understand the artist and to reconstruct the different groups of associations around the artists. To Ni Zan visual and literary works are vehicles to express himself and to release the tensions he felt in life.

Ni Zan did not write systematically on art theories or techniques. We learn his critiques and opinions on art from the enormous brief writings or inscriptions he left. Most of his comments are more concerned about the spiritual aspect rather than about actual techniques or approaches.

By late Yuan many Chinese artists no longer regarded accurate representation of the objects as an important problem.\(^{126}\) Instead, painting became more expressive, and more allied with calligraphy. Representational elements in painting tend to derive more from the

\(^{126}\) For changes of ideas in landscape painting from the Song to the Yuan, see Max Loehr, Chinese Painting after Sung, Yale Art Gallery, 1967.
individual stylistic models of past masters than from nature and actual object. Eventually, painting became a form of ideographic expression. “Nature is never completely absent from paintings, but it is transformed through the temperament of the painter, carrying with it his knowledge and his aesthetic heritage.” In Ni Zan’s case this is very true.

Ni Zan’s view on the realist representation of a subject changed as he developed his art. In his inscribed poem on a landscape by a Buddhist monk Fangya (active end of Yuan), Ni Zan recalled:

...When I learned painting
I painted whatever I saw. 
Whether I was on an outing in the country or on a trip in the city. 
Everything was recorded as it was.

This part of the poem tells us that at the beginning the artist had painted his unscreened objects faithfully, without any artistic rearrangement. The poem continued:

Here I ask Master Fangya:
What is false [work] and what is true?
[Nowadays I] Apply a few drops of ink from the inkstone, 
To instill my own infinite spring.

By then Ni Zan was a mature artist with personal style. He understood that true work did not have to include every detail of the object. In accordance with his elegant deposition and

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128 Qingbi ge quan ji, juan 2, 4.
129 Qingbi ge quan ji, juan 2, 4.
obsession for cleanliness, he attempted to use minimum ink to depict the landscape to express his feelings and ideas.

After he had established his personal style, Ni Zan wrote his renowned inscription in 1368 on his ink bamboo painting:

[Zhang] Yizhong always likes my painted bamboo. I do bamboo merely to sketch the exceptional exhilaration in my breast, that's all. Then, how can I judge whether it is like something or not, whether its leaves are luxuriant or sparse, its branches slanting or straight? Often when I have daubed and smeared a while, others seeing this take it to be hemp or rushes. Since I also cannot bring myself to argue that it is bamboo, then what of the onlookers? I simply don't know what sort of thing Yizhong is seeing.\(^{130}\)

Susan Bush points out that to Ni Zan, subject matter simply served as a vehicle for expression and had no importance in itself. Although Ni was talking about his ink bamboo, the comment reflected his idea of representation in painting. Like his landscapes, his bamboo painting is a simplified impression of bamboo that the artist acquired after painstaking practice and observation. Zhuang Shen has a different point of view on this particular passage. He thinks Ni Zan was lamenting that his image of bamboo had not been widely accepted as he thought it deserved.\(^{131}\) These contradictory interpretations of the two critics may both be right. These thoughts might have been indication of the complex mind of the artist.

As for Susan Bush's view that Ni Zan was not concerned with the subject when he was painting. I would argue that subject matter may have served as a vehicle but Ni Zan


\(^{131}\) Zhuang Shen, *Poetry of the Four Landscape Masters of the Late Yuan Period*, 134.
definitely had chosen his subjects carefully. Most of the works credited to him are landscapes or bamboo paintings sometimes with a rock or a tree. As the metaphor of bamboo to the scholar painters had existed long before the Yuan, it is understandable why Ni Zan liked to paint bamboo. Especially in the last years of his life, Ni is said to produce more bamboo paintings than landscapes. However, Ni Zan's landscapes are the focus of my study. We will concentrate on the subject of landscape.

Landscape painting was regarded as the highest form of painting by the later Chinese literati. As part of his classic Confucian training, Ni was introduced to and fascinated by landscape painting. A thorough study of landscape traditions of old masters and recent innovators formed part of Ni Zan's endowments to become a great landscape painter. He set out to establish his style and in the process he develop a new type of landscape on the basis of traditions.

Ni Zan may have chosen landscape out of convention to be his major interest in painting, but eventually his landscape became a visual expression to embody his ideology. The paintings gave vent to his thought, and I suspect that the process of a painting may have meant more to the artist. The desolate and bleak scene that catches major elements in real Jiangnan such as hills in a distance and extensive water is the ideal place in his mind where he could contemplate and devote himself to literary and artistic pursuits. We will see how he used various approaches --- technical, stylistic and representational ones --- to create his personalized landscape.

The personal style of an artist is like a statement revealing his/her personality, interests, and ideology. An old saying in Chinese, *hua ru qi ren*, a painting is like the artist,
can be used to describe Ni Zan and his art. His background, personality and the associations he had affect each other and made him the artist as he was. Richard Barnhart's comment on Ni Zan is the most accurate in this aspect:

Ni Tsan [Zan]'s obsessiveness with cleanliness, chasteness, and restraint in all things is part of his legend, but his paintings confirm the truth of the legend with devastating certainty. When we read these paintings as we are intended to read them --- as images of the minds of their makers --- they are startling revelations of inner reality.  

The most striking character of Ni Zan and his art agreed unanimously by ancient or contemporary art critics and historians is the yi, for which I find it impossible to find its English equivalent word. “Free” or “untrammeled” are usually used to translate this term. While each of these words conveys part of the real meaning in Chinese, they do not communicate the whole comprehensive meaning of the term. Susan Nelson's article “Yipin in Later Painting Criticism” gives us a history how the meaning of the term had altered in China from the Tang dynasty (618-907) to the Qing dynasty (1616-1911). I agree with her discussion of Ni Zan and his work. The quality of yi has an extensive connotation, including the controlled-free spirit, “high-minded purity,” spontaneous creativity, graceful behavior, refined manner and a lot more. It has a lot to do with the making of a person rather than just an artistic style. The issue has been addressed by a number of writers, though I think it still

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132 Richard Barnhard, Along the Border of Heaven, 133.

133 Susan Nelson, “I-p’in (Yi pin) in Later Painting Criticism,” 397.

134 Susan Nelson, “I-p’in (Yi pin) in Later Painting Criticism,” 414.
needs further clarification. The issue is beyond the range of this paper. It is insightful to read the historical writings on Ni Zan. Besides the ones quoted in Nelson's article, here is another by a Ming writer Chen Jiru (1558-1639):

Ni Yu (Zan)'s paintings were called *yipin* in *Shengguo* (the defeated Yuan dynasty). The people then placed *yipin* ahead of *shenpin*. Throughout dynasties only Zhang Zhi and Lu Hong can have the honour. Among Song artists, Mi Xiangyang (Mi Fu) had been beyond the path. Everything came from their refining process. Although capable painters of the Yuan were like this, they had mainly inherited the [Northern] Song tradition and loosened up a little bit: Wu Zhonggui (Wu Zhen 1280-1354)\(^{135}\) for known for his unrestrained naturalness; Huang Ziju (Huang Gongwang) for his spectacular grandeur; and Wang Shuming (Wang Meng) had some of the profound root. They had not washed away all the reveived mannerism. Only Yunlin had achieved an archaic and natural style. Ni was the truly solo successor of Mi Dian (Mi Fu).\(^{136}\)

Examples of some of Ni Zan's legend were given in Chapters Three and Four. From the writings by the artist and his contemporaries we learn that Ni Zan developed his three-sectioned landscape scheme and personal style by absorbing older traditions like Dong-Ju and borrowing ideas of his contemporaries such as Zhao Mengfu and Huang Gongwang. Ni Zan's three-sectioned composition was based on *ping yuan shanshui*, the "level distance" landscape scheme used by many artists both prior to him such as Qian Xuan's *Wang Xizhi*.

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135 Wu Zhen was a Daoist priest, one of the Four Great Masters of the Yuan.

136 Chen Jiru, "Nigu lu," *Qingbi ge quan ji, juan* 12, 32-33. Chen Jiru regarded Ni Zan's works as *yipin*, lumping them into the conventional classification which no longer existed.
Watching Geese\textsuperscript{137} and Zhao Mengfu's *Twin Pine and Level Distance* (Fig. 5)\textsuperscript{138} and of his contemporaries such as Huang Gongwang's *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* (Fig. 7). What made Ni Zan's landscape composition unique was that Ni Zan used, especially in works after 1360s, a long vertical format rather than the more traditional horizontal format. This change increased the mid-section, the water stretch greatly and magnified the "level distance" wide vision to a closer look of landscape. Once this three-sectioned formula was established Ni Zan kept applying it to almost all his landscapes. It was fully developed by 1363. He chose to explore the possibilities and potentials within a set territory. One may say that Ni Zan "was attempting to achieve expressive freedom within narrow boundaries." \textsuperscript{139}

Regardless of the titles, for instance *Fishing Village after Autumn Rain* (Fig. 9, 1355) and *Riverside Pavilion and Distant Mountains* (Fig. 14, dated 1368), the compositional scheme remained the same with slightly different rendition of trees, distant mountains and sometimes without an empty pavilion. Only the inscriptions and titles provide information: the former one is a scene of a village after the rain and the later one is a river landscape. In fact, the later title can have been applied to all Ni Zan's three-sectioned landscapes.

The absence of human figures in Ni Zan's landscape has been noticed and discussed by many art historians and critics. The empty hut indicates the residence of human beings. Even in the works without the hut, like *Fishing Village after Autumn Rain* we can still sense

\textsuperscript{137} Qian Xuan, ca 1235-after 1300, a painter of the late Song and early Yuan. Reproduction of the painting see Richard Barnhart, *Along the Border of Heaven*, Fig. 47.

\textsuperscript{138} R. Barnhard, *Along the Border of Heaven*, Fig. 53.

\textsuperscript{139} Richard Barnhard, *Along the Border of Heaven*, 157.
the presence of the artist. James Cahill believes that the absence of human figures “is crucial to his artistic purpose. The painting itself represents so completely a subjective experience that it is unnecessary, would in fact be inimical to the expression, to represent someone having that experience.” Viewers feel like standing next to the artist, looking at an ideal quiet corner --- a visual picture of the mind and the ideology of the artist --- away from the mundane world. The experience and interpretation of the work vary according to individual viewer. We may not know exactly the private thoughts of the artist, but we notice the obvious features of his art, given the historical literature, and can pinpoint the characteristics that were related to the internal and external factors which had affected the making of Ni Zan, the artist.

Another distinctive feature of Ni Zan's painting is the spareness of his pale dry brush, which may be resulted from his obsession with cleanliness. His forms are precise, not a single brushstroke is abundant. This minimal brushwork and restrained forms give his work an seemingly icy simplicity. However, when viewed under close attention, in his three-sectioned landscapes from 1350s to the end of his career, the dry lines and rubbings of brushstrokes, like the composition, had developed over the years. The Rongqi Studio (Fig. 16) dated 1372, one of Ni Zan's masterpieces, presents the interplay between a subtle variety of grays and untouched painting surface. The richness of the textures is remarkable. Just like the artist, under his aloof and remote temperaments there was a person with strong emotions.

140 James Cahill, Hills beyond a River, 118.

141 Reproduction of the painting see Zhang Guangbin, Four Great Masters of the Yuan, Plate 314.
If we compare *The Six Gentlemen* (1345), *Fishing Village after Autumn Rain* (1355), *Mountains Viewed from a River Bank* (1368), *Riverside Pavilion and Distant Mountains* (1368) and *The Rongqi Studio* (1372), we find that the three-sectioned scheme remains the same in general composition but the details change and shift. The rubbing brush techniques develop from the early Dong Yuan more rounded *pima cun* (the hemp textured) strokes to his own horizontal *zhetai cun* (the folded strip texture) strokes. The older Ni Zan was, the dry grays of his brushwork became richer --- layers upon layers, the strokes less restrained and more untrammeled. The total composition actually bears more components in *The Rongqi Studio* than those in *The Six Gentlemen*. Perhaps, after decades of experiment and practice with the same format, influenced by his associations with Buddhist and Daoists, Ni Zan attempted to achieve in his art the ultimate seemingly simplicity which contains profound contents.

The subtle variation of Ni Zan's minimalist landscape tells us little about the artist's thoughts and feelings. We can only analyze and guess the meaning and general preference of the artist from his painting. Fortunately his poetry and writings provide the missing messages. Opposite to his seemingly unchanged theme in painting, his poetry covers a wide range of subjects. We can find most of the testimonies from writings by Ni Zan and his contemporaries corresponding to happenings in his life and society of his time. He voiced his feelings, likes and dislikes, opinions on literature and art in his writings.

Among the different subjects Ni Zan’s poetry covers, the most frequent subject is about associates, including poems and prose for or to certain individuals on certain occasions, poems composed at or after some literati gatherings, inscriptions on his own
paintings or on works by others for certain acquaintances or friends. Out of curiosity, I counted the number of his poems and pose in *Qingbe ge quan ji*, and assigned them under five categories: “Thoughts,” “Associates,” “Colophons excluding associates,” “Nature” and “Miscellaneous.” The book contains about 1,154 pieces of Ni’s literature, of which 68% are under the category “Associates.” The statistics confirm the importance of these associates in Ni Zan's life and art.

Ni Zan had not written special works on art theories. His views and aesthetic tastes were expressed in his numerous poems and other writing. Let us look at some of Ni Zan’s writings to learn more about his criticism.

To express his admiration to Huang Gongwang, Ni Zan inscribed on Huang’s painting *Fuchun daling tu (Fuchun Mountains)*,\(^\text{142}\) praising Huang:

\[
\text{[You] Painted Fuchun Mountains to express your dignity cultivated from thousand-year-old tradition.}
\]

\[
\text{Traveled until bone-tired when shall I see the steep cliffs like these?}
\]

\[
\text{Master, in a hundred years who could be considered in tone with you?}
\]

\[
\text{The ink splash caught the true essence of the mountains.}\(^\text{143}\)
\]

In another poem, Ni Zan summed up the achievements of the best artists of his time in a few sentences:

\[
\text{In our time [these are the best ] landscape painters: Gao Kegong’s qiyun (spirit) is leisured and distant. Zhao Zhao Mengfu’s brushwork is bold and}
\]


\(^{143}\) "Ti Huang Zijiu Fuchun daling tu,” Zhuang Shen, *Poetry of the Four Landscape Masters of the Late Yuan Period*, 167.
forceful. Huang Zijiu for his untrammeled distinction. Wang Shuming (Wang Meng) for his graceful elegance...\textsuperscript{144}

When commenting on calligraphy, Ni Zan wrote:

The finest calligraphy of our time can be seen in the \textit{zhuan} (seal script), \textit{li} (clerical script), \textit{xing} (running script) and \textit{cao} (cursive script) by Zhao Ronglu (Zhao Mengfu) and Yu Kuizhang (Yu Ji). Their calligraphy is not unlike Zhang Zhenju (Zhang Yu)'s \textit{kai} (regular script) known for his clear, forceful and unconventional style. Xienyu Shu (1246-1302)'s \textit{cao} (cursive script) excels for his rounded and lively style. Zhou Zuocheng (Zhou Mi 1232-1298)'s \textit{zhuan} (seal script) is archaic and elegant. Their calligraphic works are competitive with works by calligraphers of previous periods...\textsuperscript{145}

Comments like these two abstracts show Ni's great knowledge on calligraphy and thorough studies on individual artists. Ni Zan's own distinctive calligraphy was thought to be "vigorous, delicate and full bodied; very exquisite" by his contemporary Zhou Nanlao. Xu Wei (1521-1593), an artist of the Ming commented: "Ni Zan's calligraphy started from \textit{li} (clerical script). Ni divined his style from Zhong Yao's \textit{Jian Ji Zhibiao (Recommending Ji Zhimiao)}. Ni managed to be archaic and charming, meticulous yet breathable."\textsuperscript{146} Li Rihua, a Ming writer said Ni's calligraphy followed Yang Yihe (Daoist active in the 5th century)'s \textit{Huang su huang ting} (Daoist manuscripts written on yellow paper).\textsuperscript{147} The pairs of

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{144} Bian Yongyu [Qing], \textit{shigu tang shuhua hui kao, juan} 18. Quoted in Zhu Zhongyue, \textit{Ni Zan zuopin biannian}, 38.
\item \textsuperscript{145} \textit{Qingbi ge quan ji, juan} 9, 12.
\item \textsuperscript{146} & \textsuperscript{147} Wang Jiquan, "Ni Yunlin's Life and Poetry," 41.
\end{itemize}

83
describing words in their comments seem to contradict to each other. Yet they are appropriate to describe the multiple layered aspects of Ni Zan's calligraphy.\footnote{Ni Zan's calligraphy is another important issue which will not be covered in this paper due to lack of space. For discussion on the subject see Wang Jiquan's "Ni Yunlin's Life and Poetry," Zhang Guangbin's \textit{Four Great Masters of the Yuan} and Shen Fu's \textit{Traces of the Brush}, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1977.}

Ni Zan was an accomplished poet though not so well known as Yang Weizhen. In Yang Weizhen's view, Ni Zan's poetic capability was delicate and his poetry was archaic. This archaism is also a characteristic of Ni Zan's calligraphy. Another critic said: "Ni Zan's poetry could keep away from the ostentatious favour of the Yuan and maintain the simple and delicate style of Tao Qian (ca. 365-427). His poems, while being read, are so moving that the woods looked as if also affected by the reading."\footnote{Gu Sili, \textit{Yuanshi xuan, chuji}. Quoted from Zhu Zhongyue, \textit{Ni Zan zuopin piannian}, 1991, 15-6.} His preface for Xie Zhongye's \textit{Selected Poetry} (1369) revealed his paradigm in poetry:

When \textit{Shijing} poetry declined then it became \textit{Li Sao} (of \textit{Chuci}). When it reached the Han it became \textit{wuyan} (five-word sentence) poetry. Is Tao Qian the only person who obtained the orthodox of \textit{xingqing} (nature in feelings) in poetry?...\footnote{\textit{Qingbi ge quan ji, juan} 10, 2-3.}

Ni Zan was such a great admirer of Tao Qian, a retired scholar-official of the Eastern Jin Period (317-420) who escaped from the chaotic world to become a hermit in a remote village that Ni not only accepted Tao's outlook of life but also followed the poetic style of the later. Ni Zan's \textit{wuyan shi} are also the best written of all his writing.\footnote{See Wang Jiqian, "Ni Yunlin's Life and Poetry," 36-41.} Ni expressed his...
longing for a quiet life in many of his poems. For instance, in his 1397 poem inscribed on his *Spring Trees & Mountains in the Distance*, Ni Zan wrote:

Tao [Qian] *chushi* (the recluse)\(^{152}\) of Yixi lived a relaxed life.  
I also wish to experience his life,  
remembering him and reading his poetry forever.  
Open ajar window in his thatched studio,  
Singing birds changed on the spring green twigs.  
My heart [feeling] matches the scenery.  
Wish today's beauty could last forever.\(^ {153}\)

Wang Meng was also present when Ni Zan composed this poem. Wang Meng, a close friend of Ni Zan understood very well Ni Zan's affiliation with Tao Qian. Wang Meng hinted such affiliation in one of his numerous poems on Ni Zan's paintings long before Ni's later period began:

Daoist priest of Kaiyuan *gong* (temple) came to visit me,  
Asked me to inscribe on Yunlin's *After Rain in Early Spring*.  
It has been two years since I last saw Yunlin  
Who has been living on the Lake Tai.  
Extensive water reflects the mountains.  
Spring willows leaves like eyes and flower petals dropped on gray beard.  
Escape from the noisy world to find a quiet life as farmer-fisherman;  
The peach blossoms from the upper river can be found everywhere.\(^ {154}\)

---

\(^{152}\) *Chushi*, a term used in ancient time to imply recluse scholar who refused to serve in the public office. *Cihai*, Shanghai ci shu chuban she, 1979, 835.

\(^{153}\) Zhuang Shen, *Poetry of the Four Landscape Masters of the Late Yuan Period*, 144.

\(^{154}\) Zhuang Shen, *Poetry of the Four Landscape Masters of the Late Yuan Period*, 231-2.
The last sentence refers to the famous Tao Qian and the secluded village where Tao had resided. In the preface to this poem, Wang Meng recalled Ni’s change of life style, living along the riverbanks of the lake district amid fishermen and uninhibited scholars.

Many of Ni Zan’s poems of associates state his relationship with his associates. There are a numerous ones connected to Wang Yunpu, a host to Ni Zan nearly three decades, obviously a close friend to Ni, too. The same can be said about Ni’s friendship with the Chen brothers --- Chen Ruzhi and Chen Ruyan. The poetry and prose written to them and other close friends such Wang Yunpu, Huang Gongwang and Wang Meng are more intimate and casual compared to the ones dedicating to persons outside his close circle, for instance, Yang Weizhen.

As we have learned that most of Ni Zan’s paintings were made for certain associates or at special occasions, the artist’s inscriptions mentioned the individual or occasion in the poetry or the preface. From some of the poems on the works discussed above we know that some of Ni’s inscribed poems expressed his feelings or opinions (Bamboo for [Zhang] Yizhong). Some described the scenery of the season (Fishing Village after Autumn Rain). Some talked about Ni’s association with the recipient of the work or the occasion (The Six Gentlemen). Others paid tributes to the recipient. The poem on The Rongqi Studio falls to the last type. Ni Zan’s poem depicted a literary picture of the studio and the portrait of [Lu?] Renzhong, the host whose studio was named Rongqi zai (The RongqiStudio):

The spring breeze brings more apricot blossoms at the corner of the house;
[The host] Spends his years at the little Rongqi Studio which was just big enough for his knees.
Fish play and leap in the pond like golden shuttle;
Like colourful birds nesting in the forest, bamboos slant along the waterfall.
The dignified host cares little about wealth and fame;
[His] White hair seen against the rim of his dark scholar’s cap.
He does not mind how much he is paid for his medical service. 
Hanging the pot in the market is not worth bargain about.\textsuperscript{155}

While examples of Ni Zan’s associations like this one can found very easily in Ni’s writing, some writings of his contemporaries on Ni Zan’s art give us the general impression the artist had projected. Some describe the painting itself. Some writer told legends about the artist. Others described the occasion or the writer’s association with Ni Zan.

\textsuperscript{155} Rongqi zai tu, Chinese text see Zhu Zhongyue, \textit{Ni Zan zuopin biannian}, 93.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

Apart from the inherent aspects of the artist, the associations he kept played an important role in the development of Ni Zan's art, especially during his youth and earlier life. We must not isolate Ni Zan and his art from the particular political, geographic, social and cultural contexts.

Ni Zan's life style was the key to his art whereas his life style was affected by changes of his time. He was able to live a relatively carefree life in his youth under the protection of his half brother Ni Shaokui of high Daoist rank. With his family wealth, the privileges as a Daoist officer and his scholar refinement, Ni Shaokui established close friendships with many important literati of the time including some of the best scholar artists. Naturally, Ni Zan took advantage of his brother's network and connections. In time Ni Zan also made friends with those learned scholars, Daoists and Buddhists, who shaped the foundations of Ni Zan's Classic training and aesthetic views in arts. Some of them, Zhang Yu (121283-1350) in particular, influenced Ni Zan greatly in the formation of his outlook on life.

Parallel to the increase of social disorders from later half of the 1340s to the early 1350s, Ni Zan went through a very difficult time in his personal life. Longing for freedom
from all worries and agonies he left his family and estate behind in 1352 to begin his wandering life on a house boat. He did so because he had no other choice, not because of his so-called elegance and dignity as a man of merits.

Ni Zan lived in the Jiangnan region, the centre of cultural activities. The new ideas in landscape painting, initiated by Zhao Mengfu (1254-1233) and Qian Xuan (ca. 1235-ca. 1301), were discussed in the literati gatherings. Yuan artists by-passed the Southern Song tradition, rediscovered the Dong-Ju tradition and the Northern Song tradition. Their works were expressions of their private world though their styles varied. Through associations with other literati, Ni Zan had the access to works of previous masters and experimental pieces by his contemporaries such as Huang Gongwang (1271-1354) and Wang Meng (1301-1385). Ni Zan absorbed new ideas, tested older traditions, and finally developed his personal style characterized minimal brushwork in various toned dried ink; three-sectioned composition --- a few trees with spare branches and leaves on riverside and an empty hut in the foreground, a stretch of empty space indicating water in the middle sometimes with a few patches of sand strips; and distant mountains on the far shore; a view of the bleak and remote world of his own was actually generated from the real scenery around him.

Combined with his personal preference in art, the deceptive simplicity of his painting was developed out of his studies and associations with Daoist and Buddhist personnel. Single mindedly, the artist explored the maximum possibilities within a narrow boundary.

He might have taken Tao Yuanming as his model in life and poetry though he was never a true recluse to cut off all his connections with the world. He could not have made it were he to live in other times and in other region without communications with other literati.
The impact of his associations on his art reduced as he grew older. During his early life Ni Zan relied on his associations for information, guidance and spiritual support. In his last years he needed friends and hosts to give him shelter and company in his wandering. He might have kept fewer close relationships than he had done in his earlier life, yet these friends provided accommodation and materials to him to refresh and expand his knowledge in connoisseurship. In exchange, he had to produce works to fulfill the requests of his hosts. Living on charity, he did not have the luxury to turn down those requests. The harshness in his later life gave him the depth to his personality, and transformed into his art to produce the masterpieces of his final years.

Ni Zan expressed his feelings in his poetry and writing. We find that Ni Zan was not totally indifferent to fame and wealth as he had claimed to be. Some of his poems revealed his reminiscence of his comfortable life in his early days. From the numerous correspondences between Ni Zan and his associates, we can find out information like who his closest friends were; how he felt about a certain individual; what others thought about him and his art. Through comprehensive study of all the sources we can reconstruct aspects about his life and his art as well so that we can appreciate Ni Zan’s art from a new perspective.
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元四大家


黃公望富春大嶺圖


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<td>Gao Kegong</td>
<td>高啓 (1336-1374)</td>
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<td>Gao Qi</td>
<td>龔開 (1222-1307)</td>
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<td>Gu An</td>
<td>顧安 (ca. 1295-ca. 1370)</td>
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<td>Gu Sili</td>
<td>顧嗣立</td>
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<td>Gu Ying</td>
<td>顧瑛 (1309-1369), Gu Dehui 顧德輝, Gu Zhongying 顧仲瑛</td>
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<td>Guan Tong</td>
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<td>郭畀 (1280-1335), Guo Tianxi 郭天锡</td>
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<td>郭熙 (ca. 1020-ca. 1100)</td>
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<td>Jiangnan</td>
<td>江南</td>
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<td>Jie Xisi</td>
<td>揭溪斯 (1274-1344)</td>
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<td>Jimo</td>
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<td>Jing Hao</td>
<td>荆浩 (ca. 87-80 – ca. 935-40)</td>
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<td>Jingshi da dian</td>
<td>經世大典</td>
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<td>Jingyiwei</td>
<td>錦衣衛</td>
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<td>Jingxi</td>
<td>荊溪</td>
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<td>巨然 (fl. Ca. 960-ca. 986)</td>
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<td>楷 (書)</td>
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<td>Ke Jiusi</td>
<td>柯九思 (1290-1343), Ke Jinzhong 柯敬仲</td>
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<td>Khubilai Khan</td>
<td>忽必烈 (1215-94, r. 1260-94), Shizhu 元世祖</td>
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<td>Kunshan</td>
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<td>Li Cheng</td>
<td>李成 (919-967)</td>
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<td>Li Rihua</td>
<td>李曰華 (1565-1635)</td>
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<td>Linhai</td>
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<td>Liu Gongquan</td>
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<td>Lu Shanpu</td>
<td>盧山甫</td>
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<td>Lu Yangzheng</td>
<td>陸養正 (陸繼善之子)</td>
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<td>Mi Fu</td>
<td>米芾 (1051-1107), Mi Yuanhui 米元晉, Mi Xiangyang 米襄陽, Mi Dian 米顥</td>
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<td>Mi Youren</td>
<td>米友仁 (1074-1154)</td>
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<td>南人</td>
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<td>Ni Shaokui</td>
<td>倪昭奎 (1278-1328), Ni Wenguang 倪文光, Ni Can 倪</td>
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<td>披麻馥</td>
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<td>Qian Xuan</td>
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<td>清閩閣, including: Qinghuai tang 清淮堂, Yunlin tang 雲林堂, Qingbi ge 清閩閣, Xiaoan guan 蕭閩館, Zhuyang guan 朱陽館, Jingming an 淨名庵, Xuehe tang 雪鶴洞, Shuzhu ju 水竹居, Xiaoan xian ting 消安仙亭, Haiyue wong shuhua xuan 海岳翁</td>
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Qingbi ge quan ji  | 清閱閣全集
Quanzheng jiao | 全真教
renwu | 壬午
renzi | 壬子
Renzong | 仁宗(r. 1312-20)
ru | 儒
Sanjiao tang | 三教堂
semu ren | 色目人
Shao Hengzhen | 邵亨貞
shenpin | 神品
Shengguo | 勝國
Shitian | 石田, Shen Zhou (1427-1509) 沈周
Shu hai | 遂愷
Shundi | 順帝(r. 1333-1368), Toghon Temür 奄忽帖睦爾
Songjiang | 淞江
Su Shi | 蘇軾 (1036-1101), Su Dongpo 蘇東坡
Sun Kehong | 孫克弘 (1533-1611)
Suzhou | 蘇卅
Taidingdi | 泰定帝(r. 1324-7)
Taihu | 太湖, Lake Tai
Taizhou | 泰卅
Taohua yuan | 桃花源
Tao Qian | 陶潛 (ca. 365-427), Tao Yuanming 陶淵明, Tao Ling 陶令
Tao Zongyi | 陶宗義
Tianshi | 天師
Tiju | 提舉
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<td>Xianyu shu</td>
<td>鮮于樞 (1246-1302)</td>
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<td>Wang Gengyun</td>
<td>王耕雲</td>
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<td>Wang Jiqian</td>
<td>王季遷 (C. C. Wang)</td>
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<td>Wang Keyu</td>
<td>汪開玉 (b. 1587)</td>
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<td>Wang Lingxian</td>
<td>王令顯, Wang Guangda 王光大 (王天覺之孫)</td>
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<td>Wang Mian</td>
<td>王冕 (1276-1359), Wang Yuanzhang 王元章</td>
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<td>Wang Meng</td>
<td>王孟 (1308-1385), Wang Shuming 王叔明</td>
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<td>wangnian zhi jiao</td>
<td>忘年之交</td>
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<td>Wang Rijin</td>
<td>王曰晉, Wang Ziming 王子明 (王天覺三子)</td>
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<td>Wang Rixing</td>
<td>王曰新, Wang Zhongde 王仲德 (王天覺次子)</td>
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<td>Wang Rixuan</td>
<td>王曰宣, Wang Ziming 王子敬 (王天覺長子)</td>
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<td>Wang Shouyan</td>
<td>王壽衍, Wang Zhengren 王真人</td>
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<td>Wang Tianjue</td>
<td>王天覺, Wang Juexuan 王覺軒</td>
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<td>Wang Wei</td>
<td>王維 (618-906)</td>
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<td>Wang Wenyou</td>
<td>王文友</td>
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<td>Wang Xizhi</td>
<td>王義之 (303-379)</td>
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<td>Wang Yunpu</td>
<td>王雲甫</td>
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<td>Wang Zhongde</td>
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<td>Wen Tong</td>
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<td>無錫</td>
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<td>吳興</td>
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<td>Wuzong</td>
<td>武宗 (r. 1308-1311)</td>
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xie shanshujue
旅山水訣

xing
行 (書)

xingming
性命

Xu Wei
徐渭 (1521-93)

Xuanzheng yuan
宣政院

Yang Weizhen
楊維禎 (1296-1370), Yang Lianfu 楊廉夫, Yang Tieya 楊鐵崖

Yang Zai
楊載 (1270-1323), Yang Zhonghong 楊仲弘

Ye Dan
野旦

yi
逸

yipin
逸品

Yingzong
英宗 (r. 1321-3)

Yu Ji
虞集 (1272-1348), Yu Bosheng 虞伯生

Yuan Jue
袁桷 (1264-1327), Yuan Bochang 袁伯長

Yue Jun
岳浚

Yushan caotang
玉山草堂

Yushan pu gao
玉山璞稿

Yushan mingsheng ji
玉山名勝集

Zhang Deji
張德機

Zhang Jian
張盥 (1291-1370), Zhang Tianmin 張天民

Zhang Jing
張經, Zhang Dechang 張德常

Zhang Shen
張紳 (active late 14th century)

Zhang Shicheng
張士誠 (1321-1367)

Zhang Shixing
張士信

Zhang Xuandu
張玄度

Zhang Yizhong
張以中

Zhang Yu
張雨 (1283-1350), Zhang Boyu 張伯雨, Zhang Zhenju 張貞居

Zhang Shi
張適 (1329-?), Zhang Ziyi 張子宜, Ganbai 甘白
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<td>趙孟頫 (1254-1322), Zhao Ziang 趙子昂, Songxue daoren 松雪道人</td>
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<td>Zhao Yong</td>
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<td>折帶鍬</td>
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<td>Zheng Sixiao</td>
<td>鄭思肖 (1241-1318)</td>
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<td>Zheng Yuanyou</td>
<td>鄭元祐 (1292-1364)</td>
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<td>Zhong Yu</td>
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<td>Zhou Mi</td>
<td>周密 (1232-1298), Zhou Gongjin 周公瑾, Zuocheng 左丞</td>
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<td>Zhou Nanlao</td>
<td>周南老 (1300-1383)</td>
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<td>Zhu Derun</td>
<td>朱德潤 (1294-1365)</td>
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<td>Zhu Yuanzhang</td>
<td>朱元璋 (1327-1398)</td>
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<td>zhuang</td>
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</table>
Reference to Footnote 58:

二月廿日题赵松雪《诗稿卷》

赵松雪①高情散朗，殆似晋宋间人。故其文章翰墨如珊瑚玉树，自足照映清时。虽寸缣尺楮散落人间，亦莫不以为宝也。今人工诗文字画，非不能粉泽妍媚，山鸡野鹜文采亦尔班斓，至其神韵则与孔翠珠，绝无他也，固在人品何如耳。此卷张德常得之翰林之子仲穆②处，卢山甫二月廿日见过田舍，携以示仆，因题。倪瓒。至正二年壬午岁也。

著录：《式古堂书画汇考·书》卷十六
①赵孟頫（1254—1322）字子昂，自号松雪道人，吴兴人。
②赵雍（1289—？）字仲穆，孟頫次子。

Reference to Footnote 69:

四月八日写《六君子图》并题

卢山甫每见，辄求作画。至正五年四月八日，泊舟弓河之上。而山甫篝灯出此纸苦征画。时已怠甚，只得勉以应命。大痴老师见之，必大笑也。倪瓒。

著录：《式古堂书画汇考·画》卷二十：二十四
图录：《唐宋元明名画大观》一七九
Reference to Footnote 77:

题云林《六君子图》（一）初元未完事卷二，书无题跋记卷六，画册卷名卷七。

陡质山河栖秋水。（二）近看古木拥坡陀。

(一) 有唐六君子图，图中皆明画此大观上册。

(二) 无题跋记作“道”。

(三) 见《六君子图》序。

六君子图轴：元至正五年乙酉作（一三四五），四十五岁。上有题元酒氏识。（旧跋卷）

(1)六君子图轴。元至正五年乙酉作（一三四五），四十五岁。上有题元酒氏识。（旧跋卷）

(2) 六君子图轴。元至正五年乙酉作（一三四五），四十五岁。上有题元酒氏识。（旧跋卷）

题云：一念回头即是明，到头未见未得。虽求，求已无得生，只得

自题云：一念回头即是明，到头未见未得。虽求，求已无得生，只得

自题云：一念回头即是明，到头未见未得。虽求，求已无得生，只得

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自题云：一念回头即是明，到头未见未得。虽求，求已无得生，只得
獻余幼失教養自大兄勵志務為學守義思居貞閉

户讀書史出門求友生放筆作詞賦覽時多論評白眼

視俗物清言屈時英貴富弔足道所思垂令名大兄忽

搆館母氏繼論傾傾笑肺肝裂練祥寒暑井釣耕奉生

母公私日侵凌競勉二十載人事浩縱輪租膏血盡

役官憂病娶抑鬱事汗俗紛擾心獨驚聲折拜茲史載

星候公庭昔日春草暖今如雪中萌寧不思引去締焉

起浮情實恐貽親憂夫何遠道行遺業忍卽棄哀聲還

力耕非為蝸蠅計興已浮滄溟雲霧龍蛇噬不復辨渭

涇邀巖澗阿靈芝熠燭紫莖有志而弗遂悲歌歲窪朒

冶長在縷縷仲尼猶亟稱周康誥宏放刑僮固其徵被

褐以懷玉天爵非外榮賤辱行豈玷表暴徒自矜蘭生

蕭艾中未嘗損芳馨

Reference to Footnote 80:
Reference to Footnote 88:

平生无他好，惟嗜善古法书名画，性以售者，求其直累百金无所售。雅意吟咏，每发于字画之间，苍劲儒雅，光洁清雅，奉币嘉宾，志之见之者无虚日。晚年思恬退，弃散无所取，屏虑释累，黄冠野服，浮游湖山间，以事游圣。气造愈高，不为谄曲以事上官，足迹不涉贵人之门。与世浮沉，耻于陋暴，清而不染，将依隐焉。

Reference to Footnote 90:

元处士云林倪先生旅葬墓志铭  长乐王 宾撰

云林姓倪，讳瓒，字元镇。所居云林，故号云林先生。其家常
州无锡富家。至正初，兵未动，修其家田产，不事多事，事作诗。
人窃笑其为避。兵动，诸富家皆割资产，人始视其有见。性好洁，
阅数日数月，冠服时数十次。作自诗。见俗士，避去如惊鸟。从王文友读书，文友死，葬葬不计所费，一如
其所愿。友张伯夷，后伯夷至其家，会皆田产，得钱千百缗，念伯
雨老不载（再）至，推与不留一缗。盛年诗名在馆阁，晚当至正末，
飘流中作诗，益意清。其诗行口，率与唐人合。年七十四，旅葬江
阴江。子一，孟羽，季民。孟羽早卒。女三，其诗散逸，人咸惜
之。铭曰：

捐所忧，心何求，呼嗟乎其为。
安所由，身何投，呼嗟乎其时。
竭所修，名何留，呼嗟乎其诗。

《清闲阁集》卷十一
願玉山三敟小像
見瑞琳曹篳輿碑題跋卷八、武當仙事を卷一○。

先世之業，昌其門閣。遙遙庭戶，名賢京師，忽自逸於塵氛之外，駕扁舟乎湖。

性印朗月，身同太虛，非欲會玄覽一統，而貫通乎儒者耶。

遙想少年豪俠處。

天下青山骨可雕。

五陵鞍馬洛陽街。

[[參]詩，武當仙事本作一統。]

[[參]案，武當仙事本作一理。]
参考脚注108：

参考脚注109：

参考脚注105：

参考脚注105：
Reference to Footnote 110:

写《渔庄秋霁图》
江城风雨歇，笔研晚生凉。鹳鹤未埋没，悲歌何慷慨。
秋山翠冉冉，湖水玉汪汪。珍重张高士①，闲披对石床。

此图余未及写今王云浦②渔庄，忽已十八年矣。不意子宜
友契藏而不忍弃捐。感怀畴昔，因成五言。壬子七月廿日，瓒。

著录：《六研斋笔记三笔》卷二：三一作小景
图录：《上海博物馆藏画》
①张高士即张适，字子宜，长洲人。
②王云浦即元晖《大姚村图》云：“大姚去姑苏城东南三十里。
……予别业数椽在笠泽姚城江之北，与大姚隔小龙江相望咫尺……。
又大姚浦在府东南三十八里，属长洲县。图中所称渔庄，殆即在此。

Reference to Footnote 115:

大笔描写，宛如天生，而故山丘墟，几成陈迹。大抵故山
大笔描写，宛如天生，而故山丘墟，几成陈迹。大抵故山
大笔描写，宛如天生，而故山丘墟，几成陈迹。大抵故山
大笔描写，宛如天生，而故山丘墟，几成陈迹。大抵故山
Reference to Footnote 136:

倪迂畫在勝國時可稱逸品，以逸品置神品之上，
歷代維張志和盧鴻可無愧色宋人中米襄陽在奚徑
以外餘皆從陶鑄而來元之能者雖多然承率宋法稍
加蕭散耳吳仲圭大有神氣黃子久特妙風格王叔明
奄有前規而三家未洗縱橫習氣獨雲林古淡天然米
癡後一人而已

Reference to Footnote 143:

題黃子久富春大嶺圖 見翻畫意語。

先生百世稱同調。

墨氣淋漓貌得真。
Reference to Footnote 144:

三月七日观黄子久画卷并题

本朝画山水林石，高和尚之气韵闲远，赵荣禄之笔墨峻拔，黄子久之逸迈不群，王叔明之秀雅清新，其品第固自有甲乙之分，然皆余所不知。余亦此，非余所知。此卷中非黄杰出，亦自有一种风气也。至正十二年三月七日，与明道尊师谒张先生，因以示余，遂得纵观。东海倪瓒题。

著录，《式古堂书画汇考·画》卷十八

Reference to Footnote 145:

題宣伯炯書

本朝書法之妙若趙榮祿虞奎章之篆隸行草無不如意范清江張貞居之楷法清勁絕俗鮮于奉常峻相國

前人哉宣君伯炯正書法度森嚴得法於薛子立氏而或過之伯炯已矣工字學者智未及此也。
参考注脚151:

謝仲野詩序
詩亡而為騷，至漢為五言，吟咏得性情之正者，其惟淵明乎。韋柳詩行，蕭散皆得陶之旨趣，下此則王摩詰矣。

杜韓蘇固已烜赫，焜煌出入今古，踰前而絶後，其情性有正始之遺風，則聞然矣。延陵謝君仲野居亂世而有怡愉之邑，隱居教授以樂其志，家無絶粮，歌詩不為愁苦無聊之言。況翰詠詠必以陶韋為準則，巴酉春發，飯瓦釜之詩，糜臘，茅箬之初日。怡然不知有甲兵之塵，形骸之累，亦余疑仲野為有道者，非歟？其得於義熙者多矣。
Reference to Footnotes 153 & 154:

春林遠岫
見沉軒(日記卷八,大觀錄卷十七)。

至正二十七年三月在書院讀書時,時于子中,王叔明同書。

義熙陶處士。 閒止日遠遙。

詩子亦邀約。 懷賢長詠詩。

茅齋開罷奮。 閒以永今潮。

余心適復爾。 五}

此句大觀錄作「閉止日遠遙」。此從沉軒本。

此句大觀錄作「懷賢長詠詩」。此從沉軒本。

此句大觀錄作「春懷開罷奮」。此從沉軒本。

此句大觀錄作「欣然者趣意」。
題倪雲林春遊圖
見湘湖名園紀述卷十一（二）

倪與雲林別，已及三年。雲林棄宅，携妻子，繫舟湘湖之湄，日與遊者，皆煙

開元道士來相訪。

便寫雲林春遊圖。

五株煙柳空破面。

便寫雲林春遊圖。

數年後見清雙眼。

桃花流出世間無。

此日武陵谿上路。

桃花流出世間無。

桃花流出世間無。

桃花流出世間無。
七月五日《容膝斋图》
壬子岁七月五日。云林生写。
屋角春风多杏花，小斋容膝度年华。
金梭跃水池鱼戏，彩凤栖林涧竹斜。
叠叠清流葬玉屑，萧萧白发老乌纱。
而今不二韩廉价，市上悬壶未足夸。

甲寅三月四日，葵轩翁复携此图来索谬诗，赠致仁仲医师。且锡山子之故乡也。容膝斋则仁仲燕居之所，他日将归故乡，登斯斋，持卮酒，展斯图，为仁仲寿，当遂吾志也。云林于识。
Figure 1. Ni Zan, *Enjoying the Wilderness in an Autumn Grove*. Dated 1339, ink on paper, 97.5 x 68.6 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (bequest of John M. Crawford, Jr., 1988), New York. Copied from James Cahill, *Hills beyond a River*, Tokyo: John Weatherhill, 1976, Plate 47.
Figure 2. Gu An, Zhang Shen, Yang Weizhen and Ni Zan, *Old Tree, Bamboo and Rock* 1373, ink on paper, 93.5 x 52.3 cm, National Palace Museum. Copied from Zhang Guangbin, *Four Great Masters of the Yuan*, Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1975, Plate 315.
Figure 3. *Portrait of Ni Zan* with inscription by Zhang Yu. 1349 (?), Taipei, National Palace Museum. Copied from Zhang Guangbin, *Four Great Masters of the Yuan*, Plate 327.
Figure 6. Ni Zan, *The Six Gentlemen*. Dated 1345, ink on paper, 61.9 x 33.3 cm, Shanghai Museum. Copied from *Shanghai Museum*, Beijing: Wenwu chuban she, 1985, Plate 165.
Figure 8. Wang Meng and Ni Zan, *Landscape*. Dated 1361, ink on paper, 119.9 x 56.1 cm, National Museum, Taipei. Copied from Zhang Guangbin, *Four Great Masters of the Yuan*, Plate 302.
Figure 9. Ni Zan, *Fishing Village after Autumn Rain*. Inscription of 1372 gives date as 1355, ink on paper, 96.1 x 46.9 cm, Shanghai Museum, Shanghai. Copied from James Cahill, *Hills beyond a River*, Plate 49.
Figure 10. Ni Zan, *Mountains Viewed from a River Bank*. Dated 1363, ink on paper, 111.3 x 33.2 cm, National Palace Museum, Taipei. Copied from James Cahill, *Hills beyond a River*, Plate 48.
Figure 11. Ni Zan, *The West Garden*, 1365, ink on paper, private collection in Hong Kong. Copied from Wang Jiqian, “Ni Yunlin’s Painting,” *Gugong ji kan, The National Palace Museum Quarterly*, 1:3 (1967), 15-46, Taipei, Figure 7B.
Figure 12. Ni Zan, *Trees on the Riverbank with Mountains in Distance*. Dated 1365, ink on paper, 69.2 x 31.3 cm, Shanghai Museum, Shanghai. Copied from *Zhongguo gudai shuhua tu lu II. Illustrated Catalogue of Selected Works of Ancient Chinese Painting and Calligraphy*, vol. 2, Beijing: Wenwu chuban she, 1986, Figure 1-0235.
Ni Zan, *Falling Maple Leaves on the Wu River*. Dated 1366, ink on paper, 94.3 x 48.8 cm, National Palace Museum, Taipei. Copied from Zhang Guangbin, *Four Great Masters of the Yuan*, Plate 305.
Figure 15. Detail of a painting attributed to Juran, *Landscape in Sunset*. Ink on silk, 23.31 x 247.65 cm. Copied from Chen Rentao, *The Three Patriarchs of the Southern School in Chinese Painting*, Hong Kong: The Union Syndicate, 1955, Plate 5-A.
Figure 16. Ni Zan, *The Rongqi Studio*. Dated 1372, ink on paper, 74.2 x 35.4 cm, National Palace Museum, Taipei. Copied from Zhang Guangbin, *Four Great Masters of the Yuan*, Plate 314.