





Introduction to “An Autumn Dawn on Lakes and Hills” by Wu Yushan

Huang Xiaofeng*



“An Autumn Dawn on Lakes and Hills” [*Hushan Qiuxiao Tu* 湖山秋晓图] (20 x 844 cm) by Wu Li 王历, styled Yushan 渔山, is currently part of the Hong Kong Museum of Art collection. At the head of this long scroll is the title “Autumn Hills” [*Yin Qiushan Jing* 吟秋山净]. At the end of the painting is a postscript written by the painter himself: “The great master painters of the late Yuan 元 dynasty did a lot of freehand paintings on the theme of quiet woods enshrouded in autumn mist. But it is hard for me to imitate their style because their meanings linger on, even though they have long since stopped painting. After finishing this scroll, however, I find it rather to my liking, especially the lakes and hills, which have deep meanings of their own. Painted and inscribed by Mo Jing 墨井, the Ink-well Taoist, on the Double Ninth Festival in 1704.” In another postscript on the same painting, Yushan writes: “In the autumn this year, I got two pieces of *xuan* 宣 paper. I love it because it is so long and hate it because it is too short. In a good mood,

*黄晓峰 Editor executivo da edição chinesa da RC. Doutor em Historiografia, Universidade Jinan, Cantão. Membro fundador da Associação de Investigação Cultural de Macau.

Executive Editor of the Chinese edition of RC. Ph.D. in Historiography from Jinan University, Canton. Founding member of the Macao Cultural Research Association.



I started painting this scroll by imitating Huang Gongwang 黄公望 and Wang Meng 王蒙, two early masters. Of course I put my own ideas into the painting too. It is quite successful and I think I can carry it proudly with me, like Mi Fu 米芾 carrying his stones. But painting, in the final analysis, is a childish pursuit, nothing more than a hobby. I am now 73 years old and my arms get weaker every day. My painting skills have deteriorated for lack of practice. I know that if I don't paint now, I might never be able to produce such good paintings in the future.”

From his postscripts we can conclude that this painting is a successful imitation of the Yuan masters. The “lakes and hills” featured in the works of the great masters imbue his painting with “deep meanings.” If Yushan had not personally visited such wonderful places, how could he portray them so beautifully in this scroll? As to his self-knowledge, that he might never produce such good work in the future, Yushan writes: “My knowledge of traditional Chinese culture is getting rusty as I have lived away from the secular world for so long. Sometimes when I am in the mood, I try to translate my past experiences into paintings; but often I miss the best part and thus cannot surpass the ancients” (see op. 34 in *Postscripts to Paintings by Mo Jing* [*Mo Jing Ti Ba* 墨井题跋]). From this description we can

imagine how dedicated he was when he painted this scroll. Song Xiangyin 宋湘尹 writes, in the preface to *São Paulo and Other Poems* [*San Ba Ji* 三巴集], “In Heaven dwell the Catholic saints. After seeing the nine fairy islands, Yushan wrote poems to eulogize them. He became more open-minded and embraced more things in his heart. His poems are a reflection of his true feelings.” The Macao experience, deep in Yushan's heart, had a great influence on his later paintings. This much is evident in paintings like “An Autumn Dawn on Lakes and Hills.”

Sometime around 1684, Yushan returned to Jiangnan 江南 from his sojourn at the St. Paul's College in Macao (a line in his “Catholic Poems” [*Shengxue Shi* 圣学诗] reads, “I have studied at the College for four years”), and started his career as a preacher. On the Double Ninth Festival in 1704, some twenty years later, he recalled with sadness the moment at the Fishing Terrace 钓台 where he parted with his two sons. Lu Xiyan 陆希言, who went to Macao with Philippe Couplet and Yushan, wrote, in his “Record of Macao” [*Aomen Ji* 澳门记]: “I followed Mr. Couplet to Macao in the winter of 1680. Upon reaching Qianshan 前山, we found that the land ahead looked like a lotus leaf floating on water, with the border gate as its stem... With its curving coastline, Macao looks just like a landscape painting.” Yushan records his first impression of Xiangshan 香山 and Macao like this: “Li Shangyin 李商隐 often regrets that he has never seen or visited a fairy island. He records this regret in one of his poems: ‘I hear that there are fairylands outside of China. But even in these lands one cannot predict one's fate, just as Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang dynasty, who vowed to live to a ripe old age with his favourite concubine Yang, couldn't predict his.’ As we approached the Jiuzhou Islands 九州, I found that they are situated very close to each other, like nine green snails on the

sea. Seen from a distant boat, amidst high surf and dense mist, these islets look very indistinct, like gulls drifting on the sea” (see op. 60 in *Postscripts to Paintings by Mo Jing*). From this description we can conclude that Yushan reached Macao by boat along the coast of Xiangshan, via Lingdingyang 零丁洋. Similar lines abound in his “Miscellaneous Poems Composed in Macao” [*Aozhong Za Yong* 澳中杂咏]; for example, “After passing the Border Gate in Guangdong, we saw before us the hill of Macao, in the shape of a lotus flower;” “Ilha Verde, surrounded by lush trees that seem to generate their own wind, lies between Macao and the mainland.” On top of the hill by the Border Gate, he writes: “On this hill I look for a quiet spot; my clogs are caked with mud. The road down by the Gate has hidden itself in clouds because it cannot bear to make me homesick!”

Looking at “An Autumn Dawn on Lakes and Hills,” brings to mind lying on a boat sailing slowly along the coast from the beginning of the scroll towards its end where the sea meets the sky. Along the way, there are undulating hills such as the Tangjia Bay 唐家湾, Incense Burner Bay 香炉湾, North Ridge 北岭板障山, Lotus Stalk Sandbar 莲茎沙堤, Lotus Peak 莲峰山, Guia Hill 松山 or 东望洋, and, on the opposite side, Taipa 大潭, the Jiu Ao Islets 九澳诸岛, and Hengqin Island 横琴岛 across the Mirror Sea 镜海. Now take a closer look at the human figures on the scroll. On the sandbar, a gentleman walks with a stick, followed by a page carrying his zither. The boats and barracks in the upper right hand corner must be the Autumn Wind Corner [*Qiu feng jiao* 秋风角], where troops were stationed in the past. The island in the upper left hand corner must be Ilha Verde. Guia Hill, known in those days as Macao Hill, is surrounded by the sea, on which you can see several fishing boats; the fisherman on one of these boats wears a cone-shaped

吴
渔
山



bamboo hat, while another sports a western-style felt hat. This detail indicates that Chinese and westerners are fishing together! Yushan writes, in his Impressions of Macao, “Have I painted nature in my pictures? A painting skilfully executed is nature. The world's mountains and rivers can be found here in Macao.” Who could imagine that this artist's deep love of Macao would be reflected in a long scroll painted twenty years after he left the city! In this work, although he deliberately mimics the styles of Huang Gongwang and Wang Meng, Yushan has also expressed his own ideas. The scroll, painted from memory, is as perfect as nature! Yushan recorded his experiences of Macao in his *Postscripts to Paintings by Mo Jing*. In Macao there are many old banyan trees whose branches reach down to the ground to take root, and whose dense foliage provides miles of shade... When I

feel hot, I sit or lie down in the shade of banyan trees and sketch them the way I sketch pines and cypresses.” In his “Arriving from Afar to St. Paul's to Study the Way” [*Yuan Cong Xue Dao Dao San Ba* 远从学道到三巴], he records his determination to devote himself to Catholicism: “I've decided to destroy my ink-slab, abandon my old learning, and give up painting and writing poetry.” However, we can still find lines like the following in his “Catholic Poems”: “As I paint quietly before the green hills, I can see emerald clouds drifting amidst the hilltops and a crescent moon hanging above the pines. I can also hear a fisherman singing on his boat at night.” Yushan is a scholar as he has always been. And the themes and images of southern China reflected in the poems he composed before he left Macao recur now and again in his later poems and paintings.

On his painting entitled “Water Gushing in Rocks Amidst Old Trees and Verdant Bamboo” [*Shuibuo Shirun Shulao Jun You* 水活石润树老筠], Yushan inscribed, “In the late Yuan dynasty, gentry immersed themselves in paintings in order to distance themselves from officialdom and fame. Many of them lived carefree, casual lives in deep forests, and ultimately died there.” Yushan was 73 in 1704. Despite the fact that his arms got weaker every day, he still created “An Autumn Dawn on Lakes and Hills” based on his memory of the beautiful scenery of Xiangshan and Macao. This effort was not what he described as “a childish pursuit,” rather, it was a great project. If he did not take the chance to paint then, he might have never again been able to capture such beauty. The dreamlike lakes and hills,

brimming with meaning for Yushan, are vividly depicted, just like those created by Ming 明 loyalists. Qian Qianyi 钱谦益 praised Yushan's poems for being “clear in thought, seasoned in style, and detailed in description.” Chen Hu 陈瑚, his teacher, used to say that “Yushan was born at the wrong time.” And according to his friend Tang Yuzhao 唐宇昭, “Yushan is entirely different from his contemporaries.” Yushan retained the integrity of a Ming loyalist throughout his life. I believe that on that Double Ninth Festival in 1704, when he painted this scroll, he must have been thinking of the heartbreak and misery of the fall of the Ming Dynasty some sixty years earlier. **RC**

Originally published in *Review of Culture* (Chinese edition) no. 51. Translated by Guo Yidun 郭颐顿.



墨井道人

