CLP: 192 (w/o handwritten insertions in "reading copy")

Santa Barbara discussant paper, Jan. 1993. "Mountains and Cultures of Landscape in China."

From the earliest planning stages of this conference I (and I assume others) have worried a bit about how it would relate to other conferences, symposia, and exhibitions on mountains in China held in recent years, whether it would overlap or in some part repeat them. I was a participant, along with Bill Powell and others present today, in what I think of as Sacred Mts. One: the conference of January 1989 organized by Sue Naquin and Chun-fang Yü on "Pilgrimages and Sacred Sites in China," of which some of the papers later were published as a book. Kiyo Munakata's exhibition of 1990, "Sacred Mts. in Ch. Art," provided the occasion for another symposium in November of that year (distinguished by, among other things, one of the last public appearances? of the late, great Edward Schafer.) And another at the Met in New York in the following year when the same exhibition was shown there. So, since the number of specialist scholars who can talk interestingly and authoritatively on this subject is finite, the whole enterprise was in danger of turning into a movable feast. My folder of correspondence for this present project is labeled, I must confess, Sacred Mountains IV. That it has turned out <u>not</u> to be that is a matter for rejoicing: while it's beyond question that all mountains in China were in the broadest sense sacred, and particular mts were espec. so in particular periods, as quite a few of our papers demonstrate once more, it was a bit disturbing to be told, in effect, that that was the **only** way we were supposed to think about mountains and interpret their representations in art. I responded to Sacred Mts. One by writing a long paper showing that paintings of Huangshan in Anhui Province, in the periods from which all but a few of the paintings date, was the site more of literati and literary

pilgrimages than of religious ones--or rather that the former, not the latter, underlie the paintings and best account for their character. At Sacred Mts. II I gave a lecture on the secular functions of Chinese landscape paintings. I couldn't attend Sacred Mts. III, and so was unable to do my bit toward subverting its purpose.

This introduction, only partly facetious, explains my pleasure in being a discussant for a session in what we will not call Sacred Mts. IV on "Private Values: Literati and the Landscape."

Since I have mentioned Edward Schafer I can begin talking about Madeline Spring's paper by saying that he would have liked it: it's very much in the lineage of his 1967 Vermilion Bird and 1969 Shore of Pearls, the former devoted to "T'ang images of the south," the latter to "Hainan Island in Early Times," and especially the exile there of Su Shih in the 11th century. The T'ang-period exiles that Spring writes about., Han Yü and Liu Ts'ung-yüan, were not banished like Schafer's into the really deep south--only Hunan and Kwangsi for Liu, Kwangtung and Kiangsi for Han--and the miasmic perils of the places they had to endure were no doubt less severe. But their responses were roughly the same: for Han Chinese to be budged off their comfortable Chung-yüan base at all was distressing however far it might be, and to be surrounded with strange flora and fauna and natives, with a "dank humidity hanging heavily in the air" as she puts it, made it worse. Like Shafer, Spring writes about "the hostility of the environment, which the exile tries to overcome in order to relieve his own sense of alienation" (p. 6).

A very interesting point she makes is that the poems written in exile, while they may incorporate the Ch'ü Yüan imagery of the misunderstood scholar, don't differ notably in the visions of nature they present from poems

composed at other times; the same conventions are used. The poets obviously bring their inner landscapes with them, and in some respects prefer these, superimposing them on the real landscape around them and feeling unhappy about the mismatches. Elements of the real landscape are used metaphorically for projecting the poet's feelings: Liu writes a "Rhapsody on the Imprisoning Mountains," Han projects his wish for freedom onto the soaring birds, envying them, and so forth. Also indicative of early Chinese feelings about nature is their desire to change it to make it fit better their aesthetic tastes: Wang Hung-chung and his companions "rearrange" the landscape, as Spring puts it, adding a hillock, a pond, a grotto; Liu Tsung-yüan "restructures his environment" to make it conform with his "personal vision of the natural realm," having his servants (members of the "retinue" who accompany him on all his outings) chop away all the clutter, and writing triumphantly when they are finished: "From chaos emerges order; a clean cut removing earth's excrescences." The desire to turn nature into a garden is the mirror image of the desire to re-create the world in miniature <u>in</u> a garden. Absent, it would appear, or at best weak, is the empirical urge to understand the natural world by observing it as it is, to accord it a self-sufficient existence; instead it is used to affirm established cultural values. We should keep this in mind, I think, in spite of the difference in period and the special circumstances of the exile situation, when we write about the sense of order achieved by the Northern Sung landscapists, and also when we read Kuo Hsi's famous claim for landscape painting, that it allows the gentleman to experience the streams and valleys without leaving the comfort of his study. We may suspect that for many of Kuo Hsi's audience, the wish to endure the hardships and aesthetic disorder of the <u>real</u> natural world was not so

strong, and that it was not only their official responsibilities that kept them in the city.

Another way in which the literary gentleman could, as Spring puts it, become the "master" of the landscape was to assign names to features of it, a practice that has often been noted as another that has the same effect of superimposing a human order on nature.

(S) Still another was to build viewing pavilions, rest shelters etc. In landscape paintings as in the physical landscape these are typically placed to command some imposing view; the modern western equivalent is to put a sign by the road reading "vista point" and provide a pull-off. Both mark a pause in one's movement through the landscape.

(S) On the subject of meaning in early landscape painting, and with all respect to the more complex, multi-level or serial readings proposed in Rick Vinograd's paper (against which I'm certainly not arguing, having attempted some of the kind myself, although simpler), I continue to believe that the basic reading is the one suggested, more or less dictated, by all the roads, paths, buildings, figures, and other markers supplied by the artists, and the systems of spaces they create in their pictures. We are meant, that is, to retrace a kind of narrative of moving through the landscape, encountering a succession of sights and incidents, pausing at places indicated to gaze at the view, perhaps if we are sensitive enough hearing dimly the cries of gibbons and songs of birds, as Kuo Hsi promises we will, or the sound of water, as Mi Fu says we can do in Fan K'uan's paintings.

(S) And for those great Northern Sung hanging-scroll paintings with which Peter Sturman's and Richard Vinograd's papers are chiefly concerned, as well as some ascribed to Five Dynasties masters (as this one is to Kuan

T'ung), the course of the imaginary journey is so regularly upward and inward, ending at a Taoist or Buddhist temple (I say "ending" because there is never anything accessible further up, nor does the road go further), that we are more or less forced to the conclusion that the central meaning of the painting is somehow implicated in this ascent. I am in full agreement with Vinograd's caution against simple iconic readings, but feel nevertheless that the ways in which the painters worked within the boundaries of an established type or genre, one that must have coincided generally with the expectations of their audiences, should be acknowledged before we go on to analyze how they manipulated it, altered it, amplified it, for special ends, and developed sub-themes within the same pictures.This underlying theme or narrative, if there is one, would seem to be what bears most on the large questions of this conference, of particular interest to our colleagues who want to link their concerns with ours. (I must admit here that I wrote out these remarks before reading Charles Hartman's paper, of which he kindly sent me a copy but which, since it wasn't among the ones I was assigned to discuss, I didn't read until too late. I was pleased to see how the last pages of it reinforce what I want to say, but haven't had time to rewrite to take account of his observations.)

(S) (A few examples, quickly, just to remind you. Works ascribed to Chü-jan--explain, 3 more slides) (As my colleagues know, in recent years I've become a devotee of reading paintings, paying attention to the clues the artists have inserted for <u>how</u> we should read them, making groupings which may constitute genres, and pondering matters of meaning and function on this basis.) An assortment of figures appear on the road in these pictures; sometimes we see the donkey rider to whom Peter Sturman has interestingly called our attention--I would incline to take him more as a

type along with other types such as Buddhist pilgrims, foot travelers, luggage carriers--but Sturman's identification of him as representing the "poor and unsuccessful scholar" is new and convincing, so that donkey-riding becomes more than a mode of travel. The distinction between those moving through the picture and the inhabitants of the place is another that we have to read sensitively. Whether, as the "Chü-jan" example would indicate, climbing to the temple is an allegory for the religious pursuit of enlightenment is a question of interpretation with no easy answer. Charles Hartman assumes that it is; I wouldn't feel on safe ground in saying more than that the idea probably resonates in these paintings, along with other ideas. That the theme of ascending to the temple has no prominence in Kuo Hsi's or other early texts is strange, considering its near-ubiquity in the paintings; perhaps it was simply "what everyone knew," unnecessary to write about. The theme of climbing to a temple is common, by contrast, in T'ang poems: Madeline Spring introduces two of them, by Liu Tsung-yüan and Han Yü (pp. 12, 13-14), one by Po Chü-i is well known in Waley's translation ("The Temple,") and so forth. And coexisting with these literary parallels are the religious aspects of the practice that Hartman explores. What I would like to know, and must leave for others to find out, is how frequently it appears, and how it is treated, in Northern Sung poems and essays and other texts: can these elucidate the paintings, and confirm our readings of them? Can we learn from them what mixtures of religious and literary and other motivations typically underlay the urge to climb a mountain and visit a temple?

(S) In the great Northern Sung examples, the temple as destination is enclosed in hollows of the mountain, partly hidden in trees and mists, and is relatively small, that is, distant. It can be located midway up the

mountain (as Taoist temples properly were, according to Charles Hartman) or could be further up. In the Yen Wen-kuei, one of the signed, reliable works that we must take as our monuments, it is partway up:

(S) the road leads from villas in the lower part to the temples; as Peter Sturman's paper puts it, "the higher he [the donkey rider] ascends, the more remote and spiritual the landscape."

(S) So it is in the Fan K'uan, where the ascent is truncated in keeping with the effect of allowing the composition to be dominated by the huge bluff, but the structure is basically the same;

(S) So it is in the Kuo Hsi, in which, as we all know, there are two temples: one in the valley at right, and the other,

(S) toward which the travelers are seen climbing,

(S) in the more difficult-of-access ravine near the top. I would see this guided progress through the paintings as a kind of attenuated continuation or echo of

(S) the penetration and exploration of successive spaces, "visually burrowing into the picture" as I called it in an article on the subject, that is the dominant feature of several surviving tenth century compositions, such as this anonymous work found in a Liao tomb, representing a Taoist paradise or retreat.

(S) The echo, while still audible, is much fainter in Southern Sung paintings such as this one attributed to Ma Yüan, in which the temple is not remote at all, and seems to offer more a refuge from the rain than a spiritual goal.

(S) In Hsia Kuei's great handscroll it is even more easily accessible, and although presumably a destination for the two pilgrims who approach it, it

is also a place where two gentlemen have come on an outing from the nearby city.

(S) This is not a trivial difference, but a fundamental one, that changes the character of the paintings; the underlying narrative is not the same any more. How far it reflects new philosophical and religious orientations I will leave for others to argue; for now I want only to note what is happening in the paintings. The temple becomes a stopping place, from which the road continues, as in this fan painting by Wu Shu-ming,

(S) or this album leaf by Chia Shih-ku (show).The consistency in this respect exhibited by paintings of the two periods argues against the assumption that the artist made ad-hoc, personal decisions for each work--as of course he could do for other aspects of the paintings.

(S) The temple comes to have a function in these pictures structurally the same as that of the hostels that appear in other So. Sung paintings of this kind (Yen Tz'u-yü), with the road leading to it and beyond. In post-Sung painting it is seldom there at all, although of course exceptions can as always be found. Landscape painting of the later periods was mostly about other things.

(S) When an early landscape exhibits nothing like this pattern, we may wonder why. There were, of course, landscapes of other types painted in the period: trees on the plain, or the "Gazing At a Stele" scene represented by the Li Ch'eng-attributed painting, for which Peter Sturman has now provided a convincing new interpretation. But the answer can also be that the picture is incomplete, a surviving panel from a screen, as is this painting in Cleveland attrib. to Chü-jan,

(S) or this one in Shanghai attrib. to Kuo Hsi.

(S) or this recently-discovered work with a Kuo Hsi signature, which is convincing for the period and not impossibly from his hand, but seems thematically incomplete as it stands.
(S) Or, for still another, this picture ascribed to Kuan T'ung, which similarly looks like part of a larger composition, presumably a screen. The attribution to Kuan T'ung may go no further back than 1649, when Wang To wrote an inscription for it; and if Wang To's batting average is no better than that of his contemporary Tung Ch'i-ch'ang, as the latter was exposed in a recent paper by Dick Barnhart, Wang To's attribution might well be a good reason for believing the picture is not by Kuan T'ung. By style, it would appear to belong around the time of Kuo Hsi, or a bit later.

(S) I say this to raise the danger of taking late and poorly-substantiated attributions too seriously, and to call into question the dating of this painting, which figures in the Sturman and Vinograd and Hartman papers--with some expressions of caution, to be sure, but perhaps not enough--as representing the style of Li Ch'eng and being close to his time. In this case, so far as I know, the attribution cannot be traced back further than Michelangelo Piacentini, the Italian collector in Japan from whom Sickman purchased it, and may be based on nothing more than the Chinese habit of ascribing landscapes with bare trees to Li Ch'eng. I have always held the painting in very high regard, along with the handscroll ascribed to Hsü Tao-ning in the same museum, also a wonderful painting with an uncertain attribution-(I think of a song titled "Everything's hard to date in Kansas City.) And the would-be Li Ch'eng does bear an official seal used in the late 11th or early 12th century. But I can't put it in the company or period of the Fan K'uan, or see it as representing Li Ch'eng's style in more than

the loosest way. Local and institutional pride can account for the treatment it receives in the Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting catalog, which states confidently that it "must antedate, not follow, Fan K'uan's masterpiece," and that the brushwork of the Fan K'uan "is somewhat looser." But the acceptance of such an early dating in more disinterested circles is bewildering. To my eye, it is the so-called Li Ch'eng that exhibits the looser brushwork, by far--

(S) I would challenge anyone to find in the Fan K'uan any passage with the free-swinging, calligraphic brush movements to be seen in some places in it, movements that become partially independent of representation. The comments on Li Ch'eng's paintings by Sung writers quoted in Peter Sturman's paper--Mi Fu saying that they make one feel "as if one is in the mist of a dream," or that they appear to be "a product of nature," Liu Tao-ch'un quoting "people today" as saying that "with Li Ch'eng's painting you can get right up close and it still seems to be one thousand miles distant"--or Kuo Jo-hsü writing that Li Ch'eng's "brush-point is as fine as a needle, his ink, infinitely slight," (Loehr, p. 104) all point in a very different direction, even one diametrically opposed to that represented by this painting, toward the concealment of the artist's hand in the pursuit of a deeper naturalism, of a kind we can see magnificently exemplified in several reliable 10th century paintings, and I would expect to see exemplified in a Li Ch'eng if only we had one.

(S) Just as importantly, the giving of roughly equal weight and full frontal exposure to the different segments of the picture--nothing is hidden, or especially mysterious or "spiritual"--seems out of keeping with the great works of Northern Sung, and suggests a date toward the end of the period, when the achievements of the masters were being synthesized and a bit

conventionalized. The architectural complexes are larger, and seem closer to the viewer; the short passage from one to another is not clearly indicated by a road, and involves no winding through fogs and forests. Long ago in my Skira Chinese Painting book I suggested that the picture belongs about a century after the time of Li Ch'eng--contemporary, perhaps, with the official seal on it--and that dating still seems to me best.

(S) The shortened ascent, the enlargement and elaboration of the architectural complexes (which are no longer so visually integrated with their landscape settings), the way the different areas of the painting are equally weighted, may recall this "Market Village by the River" scroll, which I take to be a late Northern Sung work.

(S) And the drawing of the trees as a screen of lively brushwork can be paralleled in, for instance,

(S) the foreground trees in the signed painting by Li Kung-nien, more securely datable to the late Northern Sung period. Since, against all these visual indicators of a later dating for the work ascribed to Li Ch'eng, we have only an attribution that might have been made in modern times, I think we have no choice but to regard the painting as essentially "floating free," and to date it as best we can by its style.

(S) Introducing the Li Kung-nien painting raises another issue, and takes us to Robert Harrist's paper, since he alludes to it in a footnote as an exception to the generalization we all make about how figures in Northern Sung landscape exhibit an un-selfconscious relationship to their environment, going about their occupations without stopping to contemplate the scenery. The fact that the Three Lis of his paper, as Li Kung-lin portrays them in his scroll enjoying their villas on Longmian Mountain, "tirelessly observe" the mountain scenery and encourage us to do the same Harrist sees as

indicative of a turning point in how figures in landscapes experience their surroundings--and, inevitably, in how we experience the paintings--leading to the well-known Southern Sung type represented by Ma Yüan and others. The point is a good one, and Li Kung-lin's scroll can indeed be regarded as a precursor of the fully-formed Southern Sung type.

(S) How far we associate this change with Li Kung-lin or any other particular master, and how far we see it as a large development in painting of late Northern Sung, is a matter of how we construct our art history. I lean in the latter direction, and would cite a few other works of the period or slightly later, such as this one ascribed to Hsü Tao-ning, in which the two gentlemen at the end of the scroll have come to a vantage point to gaze out over the valley (where Peter Sturman's donkey rider still plods on).

(S) One of them even points out something to the other. Nothing like this could have happened in earlier landscape paintings. If Richard Barnhart is right in his recent reading of this picture,

(S) they are not so much looking as listening: he believes it to be a representation of "An Evening Bell from a Distant Temple," one of the "Eight Views of the Hsiao and Hsiang," and perhaps it is. In any case, the two men are situated in the picture so as to command the space of it, and their implied aesthetic response to what they see (and perhaps hear), once we have noticed them, conditions our own response to the scene; their relation to the temple is only distant and aesthetic; they (and we) have no thought of going there, not at least out of any religious motives. In this, too, we see the beginnings of a mode of painting that will typify Southern Sung.

(S) The Li Kung-nien painting similarly has a new narrative embedded in it, with a different set of clues from those of earlier Northern Sung hanging scroll landscapes.. A gentleman has come by boat to a place that affords a view over a misty valley to tall peaks;
(S) the boatman waits patiently in his boat drawn up on the foreground shore, holding his oar, while across the river
(S) the man sits meditatively on a bank, accompanied by a boy servant.
(S) Beyond is a t'ing-tzu or rest-shelter; having passed over and observed the boatman and the gentleman, we can move still further inward and imagine stopping here to contemplate the mountains ourselves. Since, as the gentleman now seated behind us signals, they are there to be contemplated, not climbed, they can be portrayed without the complex shapes, ledges and valleys and hollows, that permitted ascent and the building of temples. We cannot imagine anyone within Kuo Hsi's painting contemplating his mountain, because we cannot imagine that person in the painting seeing as much as Kuo Hsi reveals to us **on** the mountain, in order to invite our vicarious ascent of it and exploration of it; and you cannot have two different ways of seeing the mountain in the same picture. Kuo Hsi's mountain, that is, cannot be seen as a whole from within the picture. These, by contrast, are mountains to be looked at, whether from inside the painting or outside it; they need no tactile surfaces, rocky or earthy texture, or naturalistic detail; they are like the dematerialized mountains of typical Southern Sung paintings. Great changes were occurring in painting just at this time that would open up new modes of expression while closing off others; it would not be much of an exaggeration to say that they deprived painting of its capacity to imbue representations of mountains

with the quality of the numinous by encouraging imaginary pilgrimages on them and extended contemplation of them as images of the sacred.
(S. Fang Ts'ung-i in KK/B) Later pictures of mountains with temples on them which might seem to call this observation into question in fact bear it out. Fang Ts'ung-i's Taoist vision of Mt. Wu-i, painted in 1359, turns it into a great, raveled, mushroom-like growth. The self-expressive brushwork of Yüan-period literati painting, in which Fang (good Taoist though he was) was implicated, works against the conveying of truly religious meanings, at least of the kind 11th century paintings could convey. Ascending Fang's mountain visually provides us with dizzying aesthetic sensations but not much of enlightenment.
(S) There is a temple on top of it, but one must fly to get there. For Fang's very different purpose, this does not matter. (**Slide off.**)

To return finally to the topic of this session, and the Sturman and Harrist papers: Sturman sets out to demonstrate "that Li Ch'eng's landscape paintings represent the distinct perspective of the scholar-official class, or literati, of 10th century China," and that the values they express anticipate those of Su Shih and other literati writers a hundred years later. But Sturman goes on immediately to note that while the values persist, the forms that embody them in literati painting represent "a radical departure" from what had gone before. The latter part of the formulation is true beyond question; the former remains problematic, in spite of Sturman's strong argument, in part because the argument depends more than is comfortable on the Kansas City painting. Descriptions of Li Ch'eng's paintings of the kind quoted earlier, all of which concentrate on the seeming reality of the scene rather than on any prominence of the hand of

the artist, would seem to put it off at another extreme from the brushworky creations of the Late Northern Sung literati painters. Some of those artists do seem to have found "scholarly" qualities in Li Ch'eng's paintings--Sturman quotes Wang Shen to that effect--as they were almost obliged to do, considering Li's status as a literatus. And the re-identification of the "Reading the Tablet" composition does establish this as a subject charged with special meaning for the literati, and Li Ch'eng's having represented it becomes more significant. But Sturman, after trembling on the verge of claiming Li Ch'eng's landscape as anticipating literati painting, wisely stops short of doing so; it would be like making that claim for Wang Wei (as Tung Ch'i-ch'ang had no hesitation in doing, but we should.) We are back to the question of innovative individuals vs. broad art-historical movements. In his conclusion Sturman suggests that Li Ch'eng may have been instrumental in perfecting the expression of distance in painting, and that is entirely plausible; his association of that achievement with the literati project of "illustrating the quality of one's personal virtue" in painting seems less so. The shift in the content of landscape painting from large religious, philosophical, and cultural issues, however we define them, to the more private ones of literati painting as it evolved in the late Northern Sung was a complex, basically new phenomenon, interlocked with special conditions of that time; earlier artists, however strong their literatus credentials, could not have arrived at it single-handed. We cannot really know how Wang Wei or Li Ch'eng painted, but we can know that they were, respectively, painters of the eighth and the tenth centuries, not of the late eleventh or early twelfth. Li Kung-lin, by contrast, was right in the middle of the movement, and must have taken part in what Harrist calls the "domestication of the

mountain." From his painting and descriptions of his villa, it would appear that he believed, like Madeline Spring's people, that nature could best be appreciated after it had been transformed, insofar as possible, into a garden. Endowing the places with, as Harrist says, "poetic, historical, religious, or biographical meaning" by naming them was a literati enterprise that did not so much enhance their religious aura as drain them of it. To realize that, we have only to imagine the fourth century climbers to the Stone Gate at Mt. Lu about whom Susan Bush wrote gazing out over the awesome vista and, instead of being inspired as they were to a deeply religious experience, spending their time assigning names to the terrain features before them.

Li Kung-lin's was one kind of domestication; at around the same time or a few decades later, other kinds of taming were going on: Chao Ling-jang's drastic simplification of the scene to a few thatched cottages among misty trees; the Hui-tsung Academy's practice of distilling it into carefully chosen images that would subtly correspond to a single verse of poetry; and, most importantly for landscape painting of the next century and a half, the more thematically focused pictures of Li T'ang. All these changed the character of landscape painting forever, and in effect made it very difficult for it to transcend the secular. Kiyo Munakata's "Sacred Mountains" exhibition and symposium stopped with the Northern Sung; this one is announced as encompassing the period to the end of Southern Sung, but none of the papers that deal with painting, except Ellen Laing's, goes that far. A follow-up conference on "mountains and the cultures of landscape in China" for the post-Sung periods is certainly possible--somebody may already be plotting it--but it certainly cannot be, at least for us painting

specialists, Sacred Mountains Five. I would propose as a working title Secular Mountains One, and invite all the Chinese religion specialists to come and subvert it.

Thank you.