

Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470-1559)

River Landscape by Wen Zhengming

文徵明山水

Wen Zhengming shanshui

Painting

Dated 1499

Handscroll; ink on paper, mounted on silk; 21.7 cm x 1054.1 cm (scroll sheet); 17.4 cm x 125.3 cm (image)

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ARTIST'S INSCRIPTION

(n/a)

ARTIST'S COLOPHON & SIGNATURE

(2 columns in regular script)

On the sixteenth day of the ninth lunar month of the *ji wei* year [October 20, 1499], Wen Bi of Hengshan paints.

己未九月既望。 / 衡山文壁畫

ARTIST'S SEALS

Zhengming 徵明, linked-square relief

Wen Bi Zhengming 文壁 / 徵明, square intaglio

COLOPHONS

Shen Zhou 沈周 (1427-1509)

(7 columns in semi-cursive script)

To glance around, I climb up and down

The top of a tree touches my pair of duck-shoes

The River stretches far to meet the sky

Cloud reluctantly moves desiring the support of wind

Sun setting over the creek and behind the mountain

Scenery floating just before my eyebrow and moustache

The terrain is high, as my pleasure is

Sing aloud, and let the song reach the celestial palace

Shen Zhou

眺遠屢登頓，林梢 / 拂雙鳧。江長要天 / 接，雲懶欲風扶。落 / 日在溪山，
秀色浮 / 眉須。臺高興亦超， / 空歌徹清都。¹沈周

Wu Kuan 吳寬 (1435-1504)

(5 columns in cursive script)

Zhengming, in his spare time while preparing his civil service examinations, is
fond of painting to express his lofty spirit. After an inspection of this handscroll, I
have admired and praised him for a long time.

Paoweng

徵明於舉業之暇，而 / 能好衍繪事。其託興 / 亦脩遠矣。因覽此 / 卷，嘆羨
久之。 / 匏翁

¹ Shen Zhou, "Ti hua" 題畫, in Shen 1968 (1615), "Wuyan lü er" 五言律二:21b.

Yang Xunji 楊循吉 (1456-1544)

(4 columns in regular script)

Along the River, peaks look green in mass

Open to the water is the door to someone's house

There could be someone leaning on the railing upstairs

And expecting the sail back from the horizon that never arrives

[Chen Lü 陳旅 (1287-1342). Transcribed by] Yang Xunji

江上群山翠作堆，人家門 / 檻對江開。小樓應有憑 / 闌者，天遠歸帆似不來。² 楊循吉

Zhu Yunming 祝允明 (1460-1526), dated April 2, 1510

(10 columns in regular script)

In the high place a high tower has been established

Over the top of trees we can see the river running

As light rain suddenly falls

Mist rises over the water, anticipating the autumn

Descending the mountain, I explore the bamboo grove to its end

Where unexpectedly a vast shoal lures me for an excursion

And divides the twisting river into two branches

Continuous crops cover the field

Chrysanthemums light the ruin in the cold

A woodcutter and a herdman laugh at the thorn-covered mound

Together with cloud and water, the mountain becomes dark

² Chen Lü, "Ti Ma daoshi hua" 題馬道士畫, Chen Lü 1781, 1:11b.

While the forest and bamboo grove appear more secluded and quiet

At my first sight I love this scenery

I wish I could linger here this whole day, and another day

On the twenty-fourth day of the second lunar month of the *geng wu* year in the Zhengde reign (April 2, 1510), I happen to inspect this tiny handscroll by Wen Zhengzhong. It is so elegant and tasteful that, if put together with those pieces by Li Cheng 李成 (919-967) and Jing Hao 荆浩 (c. 850- c. 923), it would not be distinguished from the earlier ones. Hence I transcribe the above poem by Wei Yingwu 韋應物 (735-790) to pay a respect to this painting.

Zhu Yunming of Taiyuan

登高創危構，林表見川流。微雨 / 颯已至，蕭條川氣穠。下尋密竹 / 盡，忽曠沙際遊。紆曲水分野。綿 / 延稼盈疇。寒花明廢墟，樵牧笑 / 榛丘。雲水成陰澹，竹樹更清幽。適 / 目戀佳賞，復茲永日留。³

正德庚午二月廿又四日，偶閱文徵仲小 / 卷，清逸有致。禱之李營丘、洪谷子之 / 中，不能季孟也。因書韋應物詩以 / 歸之。太原祝允明。

Wang Chong 王寵 (1494-1533)

(7 columns in regular script)

Appreciation of the scenery along the large river

Leads to endless roaming up and down

In the crisp autumn thousands of ridges rise clear

On the vast land the Tai Lake looks ample and pure

Along the old city wall, cloud covers the parapets

³ Wei Yingwu, "Deng xi'nan gang buju yu yu..." 登西南岡卜居遇雨... (779 CE), in Wei 2011, 7.433-434.

The suspension bridge reflects in the water, as a rainbow lies

A painted drum urges the turret boat to depart

The temple in the field sees red maple leaves falling

Beside the extravagant seats is wave shining

Through the gauze window is mist sneaking in

The immortal is not worried about a late return

But can go back by riding a fair wind

Wang Chong, Master Elegant and Proper

自得名川勝，沿洄殊未窮。秋 / 高千嶺出，地濶五湖空。古 / 堞雲橫雉，縣
梁影虹臥。樓 / 船催畫鼓，野寺落丹楓。綺 / 席波光蕩，紗窓霧氣通。 / 山
人何惜晚，歸路使樵風。⁴ / 雅宜子王寵

Zhu Yunming 祝允明, dated July 22, 1519

(5 columns in cursive script)

This tiny handscroll by Wen Zhengzhong is elegant above the world. I once inspected it several years ago and wrote a colophon to it. Since then I have recalled it quite often and thought of another inspection. Today I see it again in the residence of one of Master Wen's clients, and record the date. It is the twenty-sixth day of the sixth lunar month of the *ji mao* year (July 22, 1519).

Zhishan

文徵仲小卷，清逸絕塵。余于 / 數年曾一見之，因書其後。每憶 / 是卷，輒
復思之。今復見于 / 公客坐上，更識歲月。時己 / 卯長至後之三日也。枝山。

Wen Zhengming, dated February 2, 1531

⁴ Wang Chong, "Shihu zuo" 石湖作, in Wang 1537, 7:1a–b.

(7 columns in cursive script)

This tiny handscroll is a surprise created thirty years ago

The misty mountain and forest remain as green as before

At dawn I write another colophon sitting beside window

Shameful is my hearing and eyesight inferior to the earlier

On the sixteenth day of the first lunar month of the *xin mao* year in the Jiaping
reign (February 2, 1531), Zhengming writes this second colophon

尺楮俄驚三十年，／林嵐蒼翠故依／然。曉窓援筆重題／處，慚愧聰明不／及
前。⁵

嘉靖辛卯春王正／月既望，徵明重題。

Chen Chun 陳淳 (1483-1544)

(6 columns in running script)

I began in my teenage to study under the scribe [Wen's] direction. His talent and
virtue startled the world, and his calligraphy and paintings surpassed those present
and past. He practiced and created every day, without any time wasted or any
stroke careless. This ingenious and inimitable handscroll satisfied himself well
even in his whole life. Please cherish it, cherish it.

Chen Daofu, one of his former disciples

余幼入太史門牆。才德傾動／海外，書畫冠絕古今，日無虛／刻，筆無草率。
此卷精妙／入神，生平得意作也。／珎之，珎之。／門下士陳道復

Peng Nian 彭年 (1505-1566), dated Sept 16, 1528

(5 columns in regular script)

⁵ Not included in Wen Zhengming's collection; for more details, see the Note.

The scribe Wen created this handscroll with his powerful and rich brush. His spirit in composition appears lofty and ample, fully benefited from the vital essence of the art of Dong Yuan 董源 (d. ca. 962) and Wu Zhen 吳鎮 (1280-1354). It is a work created with close attention. On the third day of the ninth lunar month of the *wu zi* year in the Jiajing reign (Sept 16, 1528), I inspect this painting in Yuan Biao's (1488-1553) studio and hence write this colophon.

Peng Nian, his pupil

文太史此卷，筆法蒼潤，布景高曠，/ 深得董北苑、梅道人神髓，生平最經
/（筆）意筆也。嘉靖戊子秋九月三日，觀 / 于袁邦正齋頭，因題。/ 後學彭
年

Wang Guxiang 王穀祥 (1501-1568)

(4 columns in regular script)

The river rolls down, holding a long shoal

The scenic forest appears in dark green

Really like the Jiangnan area immediately after rain

With blue mist floating before evening smoke rising

[Wen Zhengming. Transcribed by] Guxiang

溪流泯泯帶遙汀，樹色沉沉綠未 / 明。大似江南新雨歇，碧煙浮動 / 晚煙
生。⁶ / 穀祥題

Wen Peng 文彭 (1498-1573)

(6 columns in running script)

⁶ Wen Zhengming, "Mi Yuanhui Yaoshan Qiu ji tu" 米元暉姚山秋霽圖, in Wen 1987, 13.1115, originally in a calligraphy hanging scroll, with textual variants; also in a colophon to a painting by Mi, see Liang Tingnan 梁廷枏, *Tenghua ting shuhua ba* 藤花亭書畫跋, ch.1, in Lu Fusheng 1992, XI:1006.

My late father loved calligraphy and painting, working every day without time for meals. He imitated old famous pieces and would not be satisfied until his mastery of the vital spirit in them. He created this current handscroll in his early years, but it is extremely powerful and spiritual with outstanding brush techniques and composition. Today I am lucky to inspect it in the Plum Blossom House on the Tiger Hill [in Suzhou]. It could not be more regretful that I could not serve him with filial piety any longer.

[Wen] Peng, his oldest son, sincerely records after obeisance

先君留神翰墨，日不暇膳。 / 追摹古名筆，必得其神方 / 遂意。此卷少年所作，精力有 / 餘，落筆不凡。今幸方觀於虎 / 丘梅花樓，不勝風木之感。 / 長男彭百拜謹識

Lu Shidao 陸師道 (1517-1580), dated March 30, 1545

(8 columns in cursive script)

The academician Wen's art of painting is close to the old tradition, integrating into his own style the merits of Dong Yuan, Ju Ran 巨然 (fl. the 10th century) and the late Yuan masters. All people cherish his paintings – There is no wonder.

During my visit to Yuan Biao in his Studio of Sleeping in the Snow, we unfold and inspect this current handscroll and knowledge it created in the academician's early years. The old gentleman Zhishan (i.e. Zhu Yunming) [in his colophon] praises it, writing, "If put together with those pieces by Li Cheng and Jing Hao, it would not be distinguished from the earlier ones." What an insight!

On the eighteenth day of the second lunar month of the *yi si* year in the Jiajing reign (March 30, 1545), Lu Shidao of Wuhu inscribes.

文內翰畫法近古，兼集董、巨 / 元季諸家之大成。人爭寶 / 之也，固宜。余
訪袁邦正於臥 / 雪齋中，展閱斯卷，知為早歲 / 之筆。枝山翁稱其置之李營
/ 丘、洪谷子之中，不能季孟也。真 / 知言哉。嘉靖乙巳[24/1545]仲春十又
八日 / 五湖陸師道題

Xu Chu 許初 (fl. the 16th century)

(4 columns in regular script)

In the shadowy forest, the stone-paved trail zigzags

In the deep mountain are hidden houses

From spring breezes to my ears come birds' songs

Water running in the torrent is partly covered with fallen flowers

[Zhu Chengyong 朱誠泳 (1458-1498). Transcribed by] Xu Chu

萬木陰陰石逕斜，亂山深處有 / 人家。春風滿耳多啼鳥，澗水 / 流來半落
花。⁷ / 許初

Zhang Fengyi 張鳳翼 (1527-1613)

(4 columns in semi-cursive script)

I inspected many calligraphy and paintings by the academician Wen and wrote
colophons to each of them. This current handscroll was created in his early years.

It is as valuable as a big precious jade.

Zhang Fengyi

余觀文內翰翰墨丹青，並 / 得其品。此卷早歲所作，真 / 與拱璧並寶也。/張
鳳翼

COLOPHON WRITERS' SEALS

⁷ Zhu Chengyong, "Shan xing" 山行, in Zhu 1779, 7:28a.

Shen Zhou 沈周

Qi'nan 啓 / 南, square relief

Shitian 石 / 田, square intaglio

Wu Kuan 吳寬

Yuanbo 原 / 博, square relief

Yang Xunji 楊循吉

Xunji 循 / 吉, square relief

Zhu Yunming 祝允明

Zhu Xizhe 祝 / 希喆, square intaglio

Zhishan 枝 / 山, square relief

Wang Chong 王寵

Wang Chong si yin 王寵 / 私印, square intaglio

Lüji zhi yin 履吉 / 之印, square intaglio

Wen Zhengming 文徵明

Zhengming 徵明, square intaglio

Zhengzhong 徵仲, square relief

Chen Chun 陳淳

Baiyang shanren 白易 / 山人, square intaglio

Fufu shi 復 / 父氏, square intaglio

Peng Nian 彭年

Kongjia 孔 / 嘉, square relief

Pei Peng Nian yin 沛彭 / 年印, square intaglio

Wang Guxiang 王穀祥

Luzhi 祿 / 之, square relief

Wen Peng 文彭

Wen Shoucheng shi 文壽 / 承氏, square intaglio

Sanqiao jushi 三橋 / 居士, square relief

Lu Shidao 陸師道

Zichuan 子 / 傳, square intaglio

Shidao 師 / 道, square relief

Xu Chu 許初

Gaoyang 高易, square intaglio

Zhang Feng yi 張鳳翼

binggeng liyi 秉耕 / 禮義, square intaglio

Zhang shi Boqi 張氏 / 伯起, square relief

COLLECTORS' SEALS

Yang Shiji 姚士壑 (fl. late 17th – early 18th centuries)

Luzhai Yao Shiji xinshang 魯齋姚 / 士壑心賞, tall rectangular intaglio

Hongli 弘曆 (1711-1799, i.e. the Qianlong emperor [r. 1735-1796])

Shiqu baoji 石渠 / 寶笈, rectangular relief

Sanxi tang jing jian xi 三希堂 / 精鑑璽, tall rectangular relief

yi zisun 宜 / 子孫, square intaglio

Baoji san bian 寶笈 / 三編, square relief

Yongyan 顥琰 (1760-1820, i.e. the Jiaqing 嘉慶 emperor [r. 1796-1820])

Jiaqing yulan zhi bao 嘉慶 / 御覽 / 之寶, square relief

Jiaqing jianshang 嘉慶 / 鑑賞, round relief

Yang Fan (Yonfan) 楊凡 (1947-)

Hengshan Yang shi 衡山 / 楊氏, square relief

Manshi 曼 / 石, square relief

Zhexian guan zhengcang shuhua zhibao 謫仙館 / 珍藏書 / 畫至寶, square relief

Unidentified

sishi jie hao 四時皆好, rectangular intaglio

CATALOGUED

Yinghe 英和 et al., eds. *Shiqu baoji sanbian* 石渠寶笈三編 (1816), “Jingsheng zhai cang” 敬勝齋藏.

Guoli Beiping Gugong bowuyuan 國立北平故宮博物院. *Gugong yiyi shuji shuhua mulu si zhong* 故宮已佚書籍書畫目錄四種 (Beiping: Guoli Beiping Gugong bowuyuan), 25a.

Gugong yiyi shuhua mu 故宮已佚書畫目, in Yang Renkai 楊仁愷, *Guobao chenfu lu* 國寶沉浮錄 (Revised and enlarged edition. Shenyang: Liaohai chubanshe, 1999), 360.

Tsang, *Brilliant Stokes*, 5-7.

NOTE

A PAINTING by Wen Zhengming (1470-1559) in 1499 that depicts a river between hills and in trees. It is Wen's only painting dated this year that has been found so far, a year

when he was in mourning over his father Wen Lin's (1445-1499) death in July.⁸ Basic ink and brush techniques that he had learned from Shen Zhou (1427-1509) since 1489 and that remained characteristic to his later works were vividly employed in this painting.⁹ It is an early milestone in Wen's long artistic career.

After Shen Zhou, Wen Zhengming was the leader of the Wu school of Chinese painting, a school established after the Yuan tradition in fifteenth-century Suzhou, a center of literati culture in Ming-Qing China.¹⁰ In this current horizontally stretched-out composition, the trail beginning at the open and the plank bridge prolong the viewer's visual experience into a more voluminous mountain and larger water with mist lingering over. These interrelated elements offer a sense of vastness and universality that Wen Zhengming and other Suzhou painters tended to convey in their works. Deliberation and the quality of reserve that would distinguish his stylistic features from Shen's are evident.¹¹ His thin and dry brush moves slowly in delineating the forms. Even tree foliage is rendered with the same deliberation, without any impulsive stroke. Dry brush in gray is applied much more than wet brush in black in this painting as in his later works.

From the colophons, this painting was conserved in 1528-1545 in Yuan Biao's (1488-1553) collection in Suzhou. Yuan Biao, together with his brothers and cousins, was an important client of Wen Zhengming and his disciples.¹² In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the Yao family of Tongcheng in Anhui possessed it. It

⁸ No painting or calligraphy dated 1499 has been recorded; see Zhou Daozhen 1985, 3; Jiang Zhaoshen 1977, 54-55; Zhou Daozhen and Zhang Yuezun 1998, 95-110.

⁹ Tsang 2008, 6.

¹⁰ Edwards 1962; Cahill 1978, chap. 2, 5-6.

¹¹ Cahill 1978, 212-213.

¹² Clunas 2004, 137-138.

reached from Yao Shiji (fl. the late 17th – early 18th centuries)¹³ or his offspring to the Qing court, where the Qianlong emperor and his son the Jiaqing emperor successively owned it. In 1922 the last Qing emperor Puyi 溥儀 (1906-1967; r. 1908-1912, 1934-1945) gave it to his brother Pujie 溥傑 (1907-1994), who perhaps brought to Changchun, the capital of the Manchukuo.¹⁴ With the collapse of Puyi's puppet reign, this painting was transported to Taiwan or Hong Kong, where the film director Yang Fan (Yonfan, 1947 --) obtained it. Yang could be the last private collector of this painting before its auction with Sotheby's in New York in 1984.

In their colophons, the artist's son Wen Peng (1498-1573) and his disciples Lu Shidao (1517-1580) and Zhang Fengyi (1527-1613) confirmed that Wen Zhengming created this painting in his early years. Zhang had very close relationship with Wen Zhengming in his late years and well knew his works. Wen Zhengming, according to Zhang, rarely inscribed and signed his early pieces on the grounds that "they were weak" and immature.¹⁵ Wen signed and dated this early work, however, and even wrote a colophon to it over thirty years later in 1531, admitting that he could not create another painting as fabulous as this one because of his physical deterioration. Similar lines appear in a few colophons by him to his other paintings, though of different meanings with minor textual variants. When one of his early paintings was not good in his current view, he would write, "Don't say that my [current] hearing and eyesight are not comparable

¹³ For Yao Shiji's life, see Zhang Kai 1721, 16:43a–b.

¹⁴ Guoli Beiping Gugong bowuyuan 1934, 25a.

¹⁵ Zhang Fengyi, "Ti Wen taishi wukuan huajuan" 題文太史無款畫卷, in Zhang 1610s, 8:25a–b.

with the earlier” (*mo dao congming bu ji qian* 莫道聰明不及前);¹⁶ otherwise, he would say, “How could it be created simply with my [current] hearing and eyesight inferior to those earlier?” (*hezhi congming bu ji qian* 何止聰明不及前),¹⁷ as he meant in his colophon transcribed above.

Wu Kuan’s undated colophon and Zhu Yunming’s second dated 1519, however, remain puzzling. Wen Zhengming studied compositional skills under Wu Kuan’s direction in 1478-1497. In 1497 he sent off his tutor to Beijing and since then they had never meet each other.¹⁸ As for Zhu Yunming, he served as a magistrate in Guangdong in 1519, and went to Beijing in the autumn for his triennial examination.¹⁹ Zhu inspected this painting for the second time in the residence of one of Wen Zhengming’s clients (*ke* 客). This client could be the first owner of this painting, but cannot be identified until we know more about its circulation by 1528. It also calls for further investigation that Wen Zhengming’s colophon to this early painting is not included in his comprehensive collection edited by Zhou Daozhen, who had collected more poems by Wen from the Qing imperial catalog in which many of Wen’s paintings and calligraphy, including this current piece, are described in details.

Beyond what this painting presents to our eyes is the Wu school that made possible its production and circulation with increasing colophons. All colophon writers were from Wen’s artistic circle, including his mentors, peers, disciples and family members. Either

¹⁶ Wen Zhengming 1987, II:1108, for “Ti hua” 題畫 (1535); II:1097, for “Chong ti Zhengde wu chen qiyue suo zuo hua” 重題正德戊辰[1508]七月所作畫 (1528).

¹⁷ Ibid., II:1129 for “Ti hua lan” 題畫蘭, a colophon written in 1558 to his 1507 painting of orchid.

¹⁸ Jiang Zhaoshen 1977, 51.

¹⁹ Chen Maiqing 1996, 139–140.

composing colophons in their own words or transcribing others' poems to convey the aesthetic implication of this painting, those writers endorsed its authenticity and tangible existence as a social currency. It materializes Wen Zhengming's social and intellectual networks by combining the painting, colophons, signatures and seals into a physical handscroll. Together with the paradigmatic stylistic features distinctive to the Wu school, its institutionalization in social relationships between master and apprentice, father and son, artist and cliental, and even in-laws ensured its survival, development and social recognition, coexisting with and promoting its intellectual identification and technical transmission, as we can find within schools of philosophy, practical arts and skills in traditional China.

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