

三十四

Trails wove through mountains
running narrow and steep
hiding treasures which paintings
and poetry keep
reminding us how
little time has affected
the clouds and the cliffs
which the pools reflected



Chapter 34 – Yellow Mountains and the poet, 王維 Wáng Wéi

Huáng Shān is a range of mountains located in the southern part of Anhui province. Photos and paintings illustrate the types of natural features that greet those who find their way here. Sunrises, sunsets, peaks, crags, promontories reaching into seas of clouds, pine trees and natural springs abound. Huang Shan is latticed with trails and steps. On these paths, one finds hikers and artists, painters and poets. The World Heritage Foundation says, “Mount Huangshan became a magnet for hermits, poets and landscape artists, fascinated by its dramatic mountainous landscape consisting of numerous granitic peaks, many over 1,000 m high, emerging through a perpetual sea of clouds.” After one visits Huang Shan, the landscapes on the scrolls that formerly appeared magical, finally make sense. They’re real.

More than a thousand years ago, there was a poet, musician, and painter by the name of Wang Wei (王維 Wáng Wéi). Although Wang Wei is acclaimed as one of the greatest landscape artists of the Tang Dynasty, none of his original paintings have survived. His words continue to live and inspire artists, musicians, and writers both in China and in the west. Austrian composer, Gustave Mahler’s “Song of the Earth” is said to be an interpretation of Wang Wei’s poem, “Farewell”, a poem written by Wang Wei to celebrate the retirement of his good friend, Meng Hao Ren. Ezra Pound’s “The Cantos”, written after his collection called “Cathay” were also said to have been inspired by and influenced by the translated works of Wang Wei.

In 1980, Fred Fang-Yu Wang (王方宇 Wáng Fāngyǔ), a professor of Chinese at both Yale and Seton Hall Universities, published a book of his own calligraphy called “Walking to Where the River Ends”, where he attached his calligraphy to the poetry of Wang Wei. Although nowhere in this volume is Huangshan mentioned, I can’t help but connect Wang Fangyu’s calligraphy and Wang Wei’s poetry to this amazing range of mountains. Wang Fang-Yu starts off the book with a poem by Su Shih (蘇軾 Sū Shì), an eleventh century poet who wrote of Wang Wei, “in every poem, there is a painting. In every painting, there is a poem.” (Wang, Fred Fang-Yu. *Walking to Where the River Ends*. Compiled by Suzanne Graham Storer and Mary De G. White, Hamden, Archon Books, 1980.)

In his book, not only does the author introduce us to the poetry of a beloved Chinese poet, but he opens doors to appreciating Chinese calligraphy through his own calligraphic interpretations. In the index, he then gives both figurative and literal interpretations in English which encourage the reader to conjure up their own images and wonder how they might create a poem in English which would begin to do justice to the images created by the Chinese characters. Here’s an example from the poem used as

the title for this book. The English words were the literal translations provided by Professor Wang. Mary de G. White then took Professor Wang's literal translation and created a poem which works well in English:

Walking to Where the River Ends (行到水窮處)

行到水窮處 · (xíng dào shuǐ qióng chǔ,)

walk, to, water, end, place

坐看雲起時 · (zuò kàn yún qǐ shí ·)

sit, watch, clouds, end, time

偶然值林叟 · (ǒu rán zhí lín sǒu ·)

accidentally, meet, forest, old man

談笑無還期 · (tán xiào wú huán qī.)

chat, laugh, have not, return, time

Walking to Where the River Ends by Wang Wei

“Walking to where the river ends

I sat and watched the clouds rise

By chance I met an old man in the forest

We talked and laughed

and forgot when it was time to go home.”



“In Every Poem There is a Painting; In every Painting There is a Poem” Su Shih said this about Wang Wei's work: from Walking to Where the River Ends by Wang Fang Yu