LANDSCAPE AND CULTURE

The Geographical Vise

Far below patterns unroll with monotonous fascination: ranges of yellow or red hills ridged and layered like the raised grain of well-worn wood; reticulated sheets of water like random mosaics of fragments of a broken mirror; plains of light green intersected by rectilinear aqueducts and canals; slender rows of trees concealing paths and roads joining tiny villages, like a finely knotted net drawn over the land. Nowhere is the impression of man's imprint on the Chinese landscape stronger than looking down from an airplane high above it. From the arid loess highlands of the northwest to the lush paddies of the southern valleys, patterns of land use vary enormously. Yet, however changing the scenes, the cumulative impact of settlement is most striking, the ubiquitous hand of man.

Centuries of continuous cultivation have left few areas untouched. Successive deforestation has denuded mountains and plateaus; rivers and streams have been disciplined by irrigation works; hillsides and valleys have been reshaped by terracing.

From its beginning China has been an overwhelmingly agrarian civilization. Now, as in the past, more than 80% of China's population lives and works on the land as peasants. Although the old Silk Road to the West is a reminder that trade flourished in some periods,

(in agriculture, industry, science and technology, and 2 defense)

it was always inhibited by China's geographical isolation, and commerce never occupied as significant a proportion of the population as it did in Europe and the Mediterranean world. Industrialization and the "Four Modernizations" may someday alter that proportion. But China's immense population has inevitably exacted a tremendous commitment of human energy and resources to the production of food in the countryside.

Already in very early times the population of China was ~~relatively~~ large and ~~it~~ continued to increase despite temporary setbacks from wars and natural disasters. Estimated at ~~perhaps~~ around sixty million in the first century A.D., it grew to over one hundred million in the tenth century, and to more than four hundred million by the nineteenth century. Since then it has more than doubled.

Yet ~~it is~~ the irony of Chinese geography is that most of China Proper--the scene of the classical development of Chinese civilization where most of its great population is concentrated--is so mountainous that it cannot be cultivated. A large portion of the rest, whether because of rugged terrain or infertility of the soil, is marginal land which can be worked only with considerable effort. There intensive application of labor drawn from China's great population reserves has modified the land by terracing hillsides and constructing irrigation channels and aqueducts. In only a few regions, notably the North China Plain, the Sichuan Basin, and the lower Yangtze ~~valley~~ River valley is cultivation relatively easy.

Of the total area of China (including the regions surrounding China Proper), only 11% is cultivated. South China, because of its favorable tropical climate, supports high yields of grain, ~~from two and even three crops per year.~~ Yet only 15% of the land south of the ~~Yxxx~~ Yangtze is arable. Thirty per cent of North China, with its ~~xx~~ open plains and plateaus, is under cultivation, but the dry climate and winter cold ~~xxxxxxx~~ severely limit agricultural yields.[1]

Caught between the jaws~~x~~ of this geographical vise--population on the one side, ~~xxxxxxxx~~ topography ~~xxxxxx xxxxxx~~ and climate on the other--the people of China long ago were forced to exploit the land to the fullest extent. The result is the ~~particular~~ pattern of ~~xxxxxxxxx~~ intensive agriculture, meticulous engineering works, and high population density which everywhere characterizes rural China. ~~It is this which~~ and imparts to much of the ~~Chinese~~ landscape its fastidiously managed garden-plot character.

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~~and water," is the aesthetic sense of landscape, for poets and painters.~~ ~~Behind~~ A large white marble ~~seated~~ statue of Chairman Mao sits within the entrance to his Memorial Hall at the center of Peking's Tiananmen Square. ~~In Peking,~~ Behind it is a vast tapestry depicting an expansive pastoral scene of mountains and rivers. Oddly, ~~There~~ no human figure is in evidence, no mark of the hand of man.

The natural landscape has been more than just a stage on which the Chinese could act out their history. It is inseparable from China's cultural history. The Chinese conception of landscape comprises two parts: water or rivers, and mountains. He shan, "rivers and mountains," stand not only for the land itself, but for the cumulative experience of the land--for China. Shan shui, "mountains and water," is the aesthetic sense of landscape for poets and painters.

Water

Flooded paddy fields, irrigation channels and water wheels, canals and lakes, floods and droughts--these are so much a part of the Chinese scene that they compose one of the most enduring images. More than anything else the control and use of water has transformed the landscape of China.

Fine yellow loess soil lies more than one hundred feet deep over most of the desicated northwest highlands, bare of trees and gullied by erosion. Loess is an exceptionally fertile soil, high in mineral content and porous, so that it retains moisture for plants. When water is available from seasonal rain or irrigation it will respond generously to cultivation.[2] Chinese civilization was born in the valleys of the loess region where snug caves were dug into the easily worked banks and a modest effort was rewarded with good crops. Cave houses are still the prevalent style of dwelling here. But the rainfall is erratic and only recently this was an area of chronic poverty and famine.

To insure a steady and secure livelihood, precious run-off must be collected and irrigation water brought to the fields. From the very beginning, therefore, cooperative public works projects employing massed labor forces became imperative to manage water.

Loess originated as wind-borne dust picked up by great prehistoric winds from Inner Asia and deposited like silt over north China for thousands of years.[3] Because loess is so fine, it readily remains suspended in water. The Yellow River, arching in a great bend north and then south through the yellow land from which it gets its name, picks up the eroded soil again and carries it in staggering quantities eastward. Silt makes up more than 10% of the river's flow, and at flood may reach almost 50%![4] When the river debouches from the highlands onto the plains to the east, it slows and its burden of silt begins to settle out. Thus the North China Plain was laid down as a second great alluvium of loess, this time borne by water instead of by wind.

Here loess, though still fertile, poses a new problem, and the Yellow River earns its other name--"China's Sorrow."

As its channel becomes choked by the fine silt, the sluggish river seeks a new course, inundating the surrounding plain. So unstable is its lower course that historically it has had no fixed opening to the sea, sometimes running to the south, and sometimes to the north of the mountains of Shandong blocking its way eastward. In the seventh century B.C. the

rulers of the North China Plain mobilized the peasants and built great dikes to control the river's destructive flooding. As the river bed continued to fill with silt the dikes were repeatedly raised until in some places the river flows above the level of the plain, with a potential for even greater disaster when the dikes break.

Large-scale engineering works mobilizing human labor forces, to deliver water where it was wanted and to keep it away from where it was not, assumed a place of primary importance in Chinese civilization. The large population made possible ever-larger projects. Recently the Chinese have succeeded in solving--at least for the time being--the problem of "China's Sorrow." They have built a great dam across the Sanmen Gorge where the river issues from the northwest highlands, ending the chronic flooding of centuries.

So, in the north the problem is either too little water or too much. In the south it is different. Moist tropical monsoons blowing up from Southeast Asia and the South China Sea carry abundant rainfall to the lush valleys. Confined by rugged hills, the rivers carry the run-off safely away. Occasional floods are limited to a few low-lying basins. Water creates the contrasts between north and south. As north China is a land of dry crops like wheat and millet, so south China is a land of wet rice agriculture. But the control of water remains a dominant concern for the south as for the north.

Rice cultivation, which spread northward from Southeast Asia in prehistoric times, demands faithful attention to the proper supply of irrigation water and unstinting labor throughout ~~x its~~ the cycle from sowing to harvest. Fields must first be carefully levelled and diked, and channels dug for irrigation water. Where the land slopes--as it does more often than not throughout most of the south--terraces following the contours are excavated and stabilized by retaining walls. Then the fields are flooded and plowed in preparation for planting. In the meantime rice seed has been sown densely in small plots. Planting begins when the seedlings are individually removed from the wet mud and transplanted by hand ~~in~~ to the prepared fields, spaced in tidy rows. As the plants grow the fields must be kept flooded to the critical depth and periodicaly cultivated by hand. Because rice will quickly exhaust the fertility of the soil, the fields must be regularly and intensively fertilized. When the rice reaches maturity ~~and~~ the fields ~~xxx~~ are drained and allowed to dry out as the ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ grain heads ripen. Finally the rice is harvested, again by hand, and usually threshed directly on the field. Where ~~xxxx~~ two or three crops a year are possible the fields are almost immediately plowed and flooded in preparation for the next planting. The rewards for such intensive effort are significantly higher yields than for dry broadcast-sown crops like wheat.

~~The practice~~ ~~experience~~ ~~of~~ large scale hydraulic engineering engendered by the unpredictable environment of north China, and the meticulous irrigation skills instilled in the Chinese peasant by centuries of wet-rice farming in the south, converged in almost every phase of the agricultural cycle everywhere in China. Not only the landscape but also society and culture have felt the lasting imprint of the organization and control of water.

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¶ Not surprisingly, the mythology of water control and irrigation is very old in China. More than four thousand years ago, according to legend, north China was devastated by chronic floods. The Nine Rivers wandered randomly over the land, bringing misery to the people.[6] This was the age of the great culture heroes, the Model Emperors Yao, Shun, and Yu, who gave to emerging Chinese civilization its characteristic shape. It was Yao who promulgated the first agricultural calendar, and established the rudiments of government. By passing over his own son to choose Shun, his most virtuous and capable subject, as his successor, Yao established a cardinal principle of sovereignty in China: that political legitimacy depends on virtue and moral qualities, not on blood-line.

During their successive reigns, both Yao and Shun ~~had~~ sought without success to control the undisciplined rivers. Yao charged one of his officials, Gun, with

the task of stopping the floods, but Gun's methods were equally unsuccessful: he attempted to check the flow of the rivers with dams, which only aggravated the problem by interrupting their natural flow. Gun was executed for his failure, but Shun, having inherited the problem, appointed Gun's son Yu to follow him in this thankless task.

Yu labored tirelessly for many years before he finally succeeded, using a different method from that employed by his father. He channelled the Nine Rivers, draining the land and leading the streams to the sea. Such was his virtue that Shun, following the example of Yao, passed over his own son to make Yu his successor.

Yu the Great consummated a new order founded on the control of water and the economic, cultural, and political unification which it engendered--systematic cultivation and a stable agricultural society.[7] The lands divided by the channels he dredged became the nine zhou--the primordial Nine Regions of ancient China. (The Chinese character graphically depicts lands divided by flowing water.) Such unification demanded a stable political succession. Thus it was no accident that Yu the Great's achievement inaugurated China's first dynasty, the Xia, when his son succeeded him following his death. But while seldom observed in later ages, the ideal of virtuous succession exemplified by Yao and Shun continued to inhere in the dynastic order.

Coiling dragons--symbols of the forces of water--pierced by swords signifying their submission decorate the roof-ridge of an impressive temple on a hillside near Shaoxing, east of Hangzhou. Here Yu the Great, ceaselessly on the move surveying his work, died while making an imperial tour of inspection to the east. He rests appropriately in the midst of the region of canals which are associated with his great task. Behind the temple stands a curious old stone, a smooth, tall, loaf-shaped piece of granite with a hole through its narrow top. Its function is now forgotten, but it is believed to be very old, a relic of Yu the Great. Perhaps it was his original tombstone, as some say, or a towing mast used to haul his boat along the canals? Men tracking the banks still pull boats with ropes attached to their masts along the canals which lace the region around Shaoxing.

"Dredge the channel deep; make the embankments low." On the wall of another rambling temple overlooking the Dujiang Dam at the edge of the Sichuan Basin ~~northwest of Chengdu bold characters~~ Bold characters proclaim this engineering lesson northwest of Chengdu. If Yu the Great remains shrouded in legend, his work formed the basis of a living tradition of hydraulic engineering realized more than two thousand years ~~later~~ ago here where the Min River leaves the mountains at Guanxian.[8] Around 250 B.C. Li Bing, ~~then~~ governor of the region for the state of Qin, with the help of his son constructed a water-diversion system still in use, ~~today,~~ irrigating over a million acres of the most fertile and productive agricultural ~~region~~ land,

supporting the largest concentration of population in China. A long low embankment lined with stone--called the Fish Mouth--cleaves the stream. The right channel follows the original river bed, while the left channel passes through a deep cut made by Li Bing in a steep hill and enters a network of branching irrigation canals on the other side. Below the Fish Mouth a depression across the embankment, called the Flying Sand Spillway, carries the excess flow and silt from the new channel back to the main stream.

Construction of the Dujiang Dam also expressed another side of Yu the Great's legacy. Like the great engineering projects of Yu, the dam was associated with a second great era of political and social unification under the Qin which consolidated the regions of China on a far larger scale than ever before. Now the regulation of water once again forms a part of modern China's task of unification since the Revolution. Though the temple dedicated to Li Bing and his son--the Temple of the Two Kings--is no longer the seat of an active cult of water control, the two heroes are still celebrated as folk-engineers, models for modern emulation in a time of heroic tasks. Their venerated statues were destroyed by the Red Guards in the Cultural Revolution, frantic to erase the memory of the old culture, but they have been replaced by modern likenesses in proletarian realistic-heroic style--firm-jawed, and sharp-eyed men striding forth to serve the people.

Mountains

If water posed ~~mainly~~ social and technical engineering problems--how to restrain its destructive force and harness its benefits--mountains held a spiritual and aesthetic significance for the Chinese. A dynamic element of the landscape, water required an active response from man and in the process bound him to the social order. This was not so for mountains. Static and isolated, they were passively enduring yet exerted a mysterious attraction. Mountains elevated the individual above society and liberated him from its restraints.

"Mountain Stones"

Deep in the night while I lay quietly after the
insects stilled,
The clear moon ~~xxix~~ rising behind the mountain
shone into my hut.
In the lightening sky I went out alone following
no path,
In and out, up and down, penetrating fog and mist,
Rosy mountains and jade streams in glistening
confusion.
Then I saw pines and oaks ten spans around,
And stepped on the stones in the current with my
bare feet,
With the sound of rushing water and the wind in
my clothes.
If life were like this I would be happy;
Why must I be restrained by other men's fetters?

Alas, my friends and colleagues,
Can it be that in old age I shall never return? 9

--Han Yu (768-823)

More than any other part of the Chinese landscape, ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ mountains have remained an unspoiled wilderness apart from civilization. ~~As such~~ they have offered a spiritual refuge holding the fascination of poets and painters, rulers and statesmen. Especially for the reclusive, passive side of Chinese culture expressed in Taoism--in contrast ~~the~~ to the social, active inclinations of Confucianism--mountains were places of escape from society, where personal values were cultivated.

As the imperial-bureaucratic state system enlarged its scope and tightened its grip on Chinese society and culture following the chaotic medieval era from the third to the sixth centuries, mountains became an increasingly prominent theme for poets and recluses. The more complete the organization of culture became, the more attractive was the image of mountains as a pure refuge from the artificial, sullied world of society and politics:

"Zhongnan Retreat"

In middle age I inclined to the right way,
And retired to the edge of the southern mountains.
Going alone is always a joy;
Pleasant things known only by oneself:
Walking to the water's end,
Sitting to watch the rising clouds.
Meeting by chance an old man in the woods,

We talk and laugh without thought of returning.[10]

--Wang Wei (699-759)

Spiritually ~~elevating~~ liberating, at the same time mountains were enigmatic places which evoked an intuitive understanding and imagination shared by poetry and landscape painting. Indeed, Chinese landscape painters found their principal inspiration in mountains.

The san qi, the "Three Wonders" of Huangshan, the "Yellow Mountains," are said to be the strange pines, the marvelous rocks, and the sea of clouds surrounding them. ~~(To these are sometimes added the springs, making the "Four Incomparables.")~~ ~~West of Hangzhou~~ in the lower Yangtze valley, China's cultural heartland from the tenth century on, ~~xxxx~~ Huangshan might have been the model for many landscape painters. Rocks and peaks, trees and streams, clouds and mists were the essential ingredients of landscape paintings. Here strangely twisted pines cling to rocks where shrouded peaks fall into misty chasms.

~~After~~ Landscape painting reached its full development during the Song dynasty, and reamined the premier form of visual art in China. The most celebrated painters, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ literati-amateurs, abjured mere technical proficiency and pictorial literalism, and embraced a personal aesthetic of spiritual liberation symbolized by mountains.

Though still unspoiled, even Huangshan's ~~these~~ mountains have not ~~xxxxxxx~~ remained untouched by man. ~~On Huangshan~~ flights of ~~xxxxxx~~ stone steps wind up narrow defiles from

peak to peak. Visitors on holiday outings swarm over every choice spot, endlessly snapping photographs of each other against the background of strange rocks and trees. Every view, every feature along the way has its name--"The Monkey viewing the sea of clouds," "a dog baying at the moon," "the rock which flew here," ~~a golden cock, several turtles, and a snake~~; even "the shoes of an immortal drying in the sun." Thus minutely ordered and labelled, nature even here has been restrained and formalized, brought in to the familiar human order.

* * *

Of the five sacred mountains recognized by the Chinese since ancient times, Taishan, the Sacred Mountain of the East, was the most revered. It stands at the edge of the mountainous region of central Shandong on the southern perimeter of the North China Plain.

In 110 B.C. the Han emperor Wudi, the "Martial Emperor," came to Taishan seeking some sign of Heaven's sanction for his reign. His plan was to perform the mysterious *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, august ceremonies designed to report the success of the dynasty to Heaven and Earth and to secure their blessing on its continued prosperity. It was believed that Yu the Great himself had performed such ceremonies here on Taishan and that, hardly more than a century before Wudi, the First Emperor of the Qin dynasty had also come here to repeat them, ~~but in fact Wudi was establishing them for the first time.~~ Long before the Han, Confucius, whose home

at Qufu is not far to the south, once climbed the mountain and from its summit felt the smallness of the world below.

In Han times Taishan was still a wild area and a forbidding ascent without the benefit of the well-developed path that was ~~built~~ to come later. Over the ~~subsequent~~ centuries the mountain gradually acquired an historical and religious aura associated with its many shrines and temples which made it an important goal for pilgrims as well as emperors. Confucian worldliness and Taoist mysticism mingled on Taishan. But the important temples associated with the mountain are all Taoist, and the mountain itself was venerated as a Taoist deity.

Pilgrims began their ascent from ~~xxxx~~ a great ~~xxxxx~~ temple, the Daimiao, on the southern flank of the mountain in the town of Taian. The temple is dominated by an immense central hall, said to be the third of the three great temple buildings in China after the Imperial Palace in Peking and the Confucian temple in ~~xxxxx~~ Qufu. The temple in its present form did not exist when Wudi came to Taishan; it has been rebuilt many times since. But there must have been something here then, because the emperor had six cypress~~xxx~~ trees planted on the site in honor of the mountain. They are still here, in a small garden courtyard to the right of the main gate, their huge twisted trunks and silver-grey bark ~~xxx~~ witness to their age.

The Chinese fondness for trees as one of their

finest aesthetic sensibilities. The main courtyard is filled with other old evergreens, and behind the main hall are several ginko trees, seven-hundred years old. Together, the old trees convey a feeling of aged charm to the place.

Almost two millenia later, in honor of the old cypresses, Wudi's distant successor, the Qianlong emperor ~~in the eighteenth century~~ of the Qing dynasty, erected ~~a on a raised platform planted with miniature pines~~ a set of three steles depicting the trees. Not only the trees Wudi planted but the institutional foundations he laid proved long lasting. Wudi did ~~xxxxxx~~ more that any other emperor to establish Confucian learning as the foundation of the enduring imperial state ~~which was~~ taking shape in the early Han. Yet his passion for the occult teachings of Taoism brought him here to climb Taishan and seek some word ~~x~~ from the god.

The summit of the mountain is reached ~~from the edge of Tai~~ by an arduous climb of about 7000 steps. For many pilgrims the progress to the top was a ~~xxx~~ kind of allegory of spiritual elevation, through stages beginning with the First Gate of Heaven and passing through the Middle Gate of Heaven at the midpoint. From there the climb becomes more precipitous as one confronts the almost straight flight of a thousand steps up ~~the~~ to the South Gate of Heaven standing awesomely at the top of a gorge running up ~~xxx~~ to a shoulder of the mountain, still some way from the true summit.

All along the way are inscriptions carved in the rocks.

Some merely announce the name of a place, point out an interesting scene, or exhort the climber in his effort. ~~These are anonymous, but~~ Others, left by appreciative visitors, are signed by their authors--poems in praise of the mountain and bold encomiums left by ambitious ~~xx~~ emperors. More than half way up, on a massive cliff across a canyon, is a colossal inscription, the "Ten Thousand Foot Stele," ordered cut by ~~x~~ the Qianlong emperor, ~~a ruler~~ whose towering ego matched the proportions of his dedication. Nearby the ascent is interrupted by a terrace with a small pavilion and several pine trees. The First Emperor of the Qin was overtaken by a storm here on his way down from the summit ~~x~~ in 219 B.C. and found shelter under a large pine. In gratitude he conferred on the tree the rank of an ~~x~~ official of the fifth degree, and the title ~~#Pinexfrxexofxfifthxdegreex~~ wu dafu song, "Pine Tree of the Fifth Degree," still adheres to the place.

It ~~x~~ is doubtful that Mao Zedong, unlike the illustrious procession of rulers who preceded him, ~~the First Emperor, Wudi, the Qianlong emperor, and others~~ ever visited Taishan. Yet here are his sayings and his poems all over the place. Some inscriptions replicate his own handwriting, larger than life. ~~Others,~~ Quotations of his political aphorisms, declare his revolutionary wisdom in graceless modern characters. Perhaps they were put here in an effort to ~~link~~ identify him with the historical continuity preserved by the sacred mountain,

But they are gratuitous, irrelevent to the appreciation of the landscape, ~~where they are found.~~

During its long history the path has been improved until it is now essentially a long stairway. The most recent work was completed in 1978 when the whole path was rebuilt with carefully cut stone steps and ~~xi~~ walls. A labor force of cadres and peasants from the neighborhood of Taian was mobilized to contribute 800,000 man-hours. The project was completed in~~x~~ only 88 days at a cost of over one million yuan. The path is now more regular than it was, ~~previously,~~ but at the cost of many of the old and interesting features along the way--the reconstruction seems to have provided a pretext to eliminate all the smaller shrines and temples which dotted the route ~~x~~ to the summit. When a planned aerial tramway is completed, modern tourists, no longer visiting the mountain as pilgrims to a shrine, will not ~~require the fortitude~~ have to undergo the rigors of the ~~ascent~~ climb onfoot.

The steady force of the wind blowing across the ~~mountain top~~ peak has bent and stunted the scrubby vegetation. The wind isolates ~~the~~ Taishan's summit from the land below like an island of abandoned solitude. ~~A~~ ~~On A~~ large Taoist temple, ~~rusty brown~~ its rustic roof tiles, made of cast iron to withstand the wind, ~~testify to the rigors of the weather.~~ ~~The temple~~ sits in a ~~relatively~~ sheltered depression just below the summit. Dedicated to the Princess of the Colored Clouds, ~~it~~ the temple was the principal destination of pilgrims, many of them women who climbed the ~~xxxxxxx~~ mountain in spite of their painful bound feet.

Occupying the very summit itself, is a more humble building. In its courtyard a small pine tree and a few large stones protruding from the pavement are surrounded by a little stone balustrade. Just outside stands a tall stone pillar, "The Stele With No Inscription," which the First Emperor was supposed to have erected to commemorate his visit, but its words have been effaced by the weather.

What did these imperial visitors have in common, which they sought on Taishan? A little below the summit is a cliff with many inscriptions, some brief, some long. Among them, much longer than the others, is the eloquent explanation left by the illustrious Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang after his visit in 726:

> For fourteen years I have occupied the high position of Emperor. I am, however, troubled by my lack of virtue; I am ignorant of perfect reason. The duties which I have to fulfill are hard to fulfill; the calm which I should preserve is hard to preserve. Now I know not whether I have committed an offense against the gods or the people and my heart is tossed on the floods as though I were crossing a great river. Thanks to the protection granted me by the Emperor above and thanks to the riches accumulated by the sovereigns who proceded me, my chief ministers and the crowd of my officials combine their efforts to achieve imperial perfection. . . . My officers of all ranks have deliberated together and as one man they have exhorted me to perform the feng and shan sacrifices, saying that to pay one's respect to one's father is the highest of all acts of filial piety, saying that to address a declaration to the Sky is the most august of all ceremonies. So . . . I deployed the power of my six imperial armies; I made the Nine Regions tremble with fear; the colors and standards were drawn up; horses and soldiers were in silence; and what majesty! What a beautiful sight! What pomp! Thus I arrived at Taishan; all was as it should be. 11

The moral order of man and the natural order of heaven and earth were believed to be intimately linked; a weakness or flaw in one was inevitably reflected by disturbances in the other. Moral failures in society would be signalled by natural portents, like comets, or worse by natural catastrophes such as earthquakes and floods. Between Heaven, Earth, and Man, like a pivot, the emperor. On him fell the heavy responsibility of harmonizing the natural and social orders. On his virtue and personal propriety depended the welfare of the world--or so his ministers would have him believe. Legitimacy and success rested not on power alone but flowed from moral qualities, as the legend of Yu the Great had taught.

These were no ordinary rulers who came to Taishan. They were empire builders, autocrats who reigned over times of great expansion and prosperity. Yet they sensed some insecurity in their power. Their successors would lose what they had achieved or preserved, and the signs of disintegration were already visible to those who cared to look. Xuanzong presided over a brilliant court celebrated for its refinement and patronage of the arts, but his reign ended in tragic rebellion and abdication. Wudi's successors succumbed to bitter factional struggles and economic crisis. The First Emperor's conquest barely outlasted him, though he proclaimed it for ten-thousand generations. What they all sought on Taishan was not merely a detached and clear vision of the world below, but spiritual

vision and strength, some assurance from the natural order of their virtue.

Artificial Nature

> The Master said, The wise man delights in water, the Good man delights in mountains. For the wise move; but the Good stay still. The wise are happy; but the Good, secure.
>
> --The Analects, VI, 21.[12]

Water and mountains are ~~were~~ complementary modes in the Chinese view of nature, one active, the other passive. Water, the dynamic element, potentially or actually always in motion, ~~evokes~~ ~~evoked active response and~~ imposes ~~imposed~~ itself on man. Mountains, static and aloof, evoke quiessence and peace. Like Yin and Yang, each, ~~to a degree~~ incorporates some of the other's associations. Water can be recessive and calming; mountains thrust upward in dynamic instability. But, in practice, organized ~~xxx~~ social ~~x~~ activity revolved about the life-giving benefits of water, as well as its life-threatening ~~destructive~~ potential. Mountains, on the other hand, were the antithesis of society, offering intuitive spiritual power over society.

The work of the Legalists, exponents of law and centralized ~~social~~ organization of the state, during the rise of the Qin was associated with great public works of social and political unification depending on the control of water. Taoists, rejecting social restraints on individual freedom, embraced mountains as places of personal refuge and symbols of natural simplicity. Between Legalist

social activism and Taoist mystical quietism lay a broad middle way which borrowed something from each. This was occupied by the Confucian ethos of harmony and order. In his public and private lives the Confucian was drawn by conflicting sympathies in either direction--toward social obligations of public action and toward spiritual self-cultivation in his private world. Scholars, poets, and philosophers, retiring from active careers as Confucian officials, sought to reconcile the two tendencies of their personalities, of action and renunciation, in the classical Chinese gardens of the literati.

Gardens flourished during the Song dynasty when the cultural elite gravitated to the cities of the rich lower Yangtze valley.[13] In this new environment a brilliant urban culture was patronized by wealthy merchants and rising scholar-officials. Hidden behind the walls of their urban villas, they created miniature imitations of the natural landscape where mountains, water, trees, and pavilions were transposed in harmonious association. Although the Song had reunited China after the collapse of the Tang in the tenth century, it remained under a cloud of foreign harassment and invasion, to which it ultimately succumbed. The Song emperors never reestablished the Tang empire in Central Asia or the Silk Road to the West which had helped to give Tang culture its cosmopolitan flavor. While their immense military establishment was

Contact with the west languished as [illegible]
slowly became more closed and ethnocentric.

committed to staving off the inevitable disaster, the Song's great achievements were in art and literature, philosophy and science. Here was an urban culture, compressed into the cities of the south as the Song fell back before the inexorable advance of the barbarians from the north. In 1279 the Song finally fell before the Mongol onslaught of Khublai Khan.

The urban gardens of the literati reflected these changing cultural patterns. The rough edges and diversity of Tang society were being smoothed out. Buddhism gradually ceased to pose an other-worldly spiritual challenge to the this-worldly Confucian ethos of social order. The old rural aristocratic classes of the north were waning while the new urban scholar-official class was assuming the leadership it would hold until the twentieth century. And, as the southern frontier filled up with new settlers and an expanding population, the Chinese landscape became less wild, more civilized.

For its creator, a garden was an imaginative recreation of nature, a counterpart of landscape painting, the premier artistic achievement of the Song. Like landscape painting and poetry, it assimilated and brought to the Confucian aesthetic of order and harmony the intuitive predilections of Taoism and Buddhism. Diverse media were synthesized in the garden: architecture of pavilions, galleries, and libraries; poetry of strangely shaped mountains and still water; living paintings in carefully arranged scenes of rocks and plants. Here was nature civilized, brought out of the wilderness in

a self-contained microcosm. Perhaps the gardens were also an analog in the Chinese mind for the self-contained macrocosm, which China itself had become, hidden behind its man-made great walls and its formidable natural barriers, ~~which Chinese China civilization itself had become.~~

Notes

1. Chiao-min Hsieh ~~Hsieh, Chiao-min,~~ Atlas of China (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1973), 81.

2. For a discussion of loess , see Joseph Needham ~~Needham, Joseph,~~ Science and Civilization in China (7 volumes projected; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959-), I, 68-70; IV.3, 211ff.

3. Edwin O. Reischauer ~~Reischauer, Edwin O.~~ & John K. Fairbank, East Asia: The Great Tradition (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1960), 22.

4. Needham, IV.3, 221; Reischauer & Fairbank, 20.

5. Needham, IV.3, 232.

6. Marcel ~~Marcel,~~ Granet, Chinese Civilization (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1958), 73.

7. Ibid., 16, 74-75.

8. For a discussinn of the technical and historical significance of the Dujiang Dam see Needham, IV.3, 249-250, 288-296.

9. Translation by the author.

10. Translationby the author.

11. Adapted from Nagel's Encyclopedia-Guide: China (Geneva: Nagel Publishers, 1968), 737-738.

12. Arthur Waley, trans., The Analects of Confucius (New York: Vintage Books, orig.pub. 1938), 120.

13. On Chinese gardens, see Maggie Keswick, The Chinese Garden: History, Art & Architecture (London: Academy Editions, 1978), ~~and William Willets, Chinese Art (~~