WANG WEI'S JOURNEYS IN IGNORANCE*

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A predominant characteristic of Wang Wei's (王維,701-761) mode of apprehending the world is that it often begins with a journey in ignorance. His *oeuvre* contains several poems which depict the ascent of a steep mountain or the passage on a stream to its source, along an unfamiliar and circuitous route which may present innumerable obstacles. Both of these actions are also traditional Buddhist metaphors for the movement towards enlightenment, grounded in the sense of an identification between natural and spiritual phenomena. The association between the conquest of heights and the religious progression, for example, finds its literary antecedent in what Richard Mather calls the "landscape Buddhism" of the Six Dynasties poet Hsieh Ling-yün (謝靈運,385-433). Mather observes that in a typical poem by Hsieh which describes a mountain ascent, "there is more than poetic imagery in the parallel drawn between 'climbing the heights and looking down' and surmounting the doctrinal problems for an over-all view of Reality. The 'pushing aside of boulders' and 'trimming of branches' are consciously compared to 'searching after subtleties' and 'probing mysteries.' "[1] Similarly, we read in the biography of the Ch'an master Hsüan chüeh of Yung-chia (永嘉玄覺,665-713) that a journey to the beginning of a stream may be compared to the attainment of enlightenment, the realization of the essence of reality: "To see that the mind is the Tao is to follow the stream and reach the source."[2]

While the significance of these movements is not unique to Wang Wei's poetry then, what I find particularly distinctive is his emphasis on the necessity of their occurring spontaneously and in ignorance. His literal

*This article is part of a longer study of the poetry of Wang Wei to be published by the Indiana University Press.

and figurative goals cannot be consciously and purposefully pursued but must be reached via unknown paths, and without preconceived notions or expectations. We can perceive these concerns in one of his earliest works, a long *yüeh-fu* in heptasyllabic ancient verse, written at the age of nineteen.

Song of Peach Blossom Spring (T'ao-yüan hsing, 桃源行, ch. 6, 6b)[3]

The fisherman's boat follows the water; he loves spring in the mountains.
On both banks peach flowers enclose the distant ford.
Sitting he looks at the red trees, not knowing the distance.
Traveling to the green creek's end he does not see men.
At the mountain valley a hidden path begins to twist and turn.
As the mountain opens, a broad view: suddenly flat land.
From afar he looks at a whole expanse of gathered clouds and trees;
He nears and enters—a thousand homes, scattered flowers and bamboos.
Woodcutters have just passed on the name of the Han dynasty.
The residents have not yet altered Ch'in dynasty clothes.
The residents lived together at Wu-ling Spring,
And yet from beyond this world started fields and gardens.
The moon shines beneath the pines; houses and windows at peace.
The sun rises within the clouds; cocks and dogs clamor.
Startled to hear of the worldly guest, they rush and come together,
Vying to bring him to their homes to ask about the cities.
At dawn on the village lanes, they sweep the flowers away.
Toward night fishermen and woodcutters enter along the water.
At first to escape the place of troubles they left the midst of men.
Then, it's heard, they became immortal and so did not return.
Amid these gorges who knows of the existence of human affairs?
Within the world from afar they gaze at empty cloudy mountains.
Not suspecting this ethereal realm is hard to hear of and see,
His dusty heart has not yet ceased to think of his native district.
He goes out of the grotto, not considering the barrier of mountains and waters,
Then leaves his family, finally planning a long leisurely journey.
He tells himself that what he passed through before cannot be lost.
How can he know that peaks and valleys when he comes today have changed?
Of that time all he remembers is entering mountains deep.
How many times does the green creek arrive at a cloudy forest?
When spring comes, everywhere are peach-flowered waters;
Not distinguishing the fairy spring, where can he seek?

This poem is based on the short narrative and poem of a similar title

by T'ao Ch'ien (陶潛,365-427).[4] The differences between the two accounts, however, are more significant than any superficial thematic similarities. In his prose piece the earlier poet reports the story in a matter-of-fact manner; he states that the journey occurred sometime during his own youth (the *T'ai-yüan*[太元] reign period of the Chin dynasty [376-397]), and it may, in fact, "have been inspired by the report of a contemporary discovery of such an enclave."[5] His accompanying 32-line poem provides more specific details of the daily activities of the recluse farmers and clarifies the suggestion in the prose narrative that the residents of the Peach Blossom Spring had purposefully withdrawn from society in protest against a corrupt government. T'ao's poem concludes in a didactic, sermonizing fashion; the poet claims that "the pure and the shallow" are two absolutely distinct realms, and he rather contemptuously inquires of his readers: "Let me ask you who are convention-bound, / Can you fathom those outside the dirt and noise?" In the final couplet he implies, not without self-righteousness, that he alone possesses this understanding: "I want to tread upon the thin thin air / And rise up high to find my own kind."[6]

In both his prose narrative and poem then, T'ao Ch'ien presents the Peach Blossom Spring as a political utopia whose inhabitants have correctly retreated on principle from the dusty world. To heighten the journalistic realism of his story, he locates the fisherman's discovery during an actual time and place, mentions a local official by name and provides much information about the routine events in and social organization of the farmers' lives. Moreover, he suggests that the fisherman's main weakness and explanation for his inability to find the spring again consisted in his failure to honor the residents' request to keep their existence a secret.

Except for mentioning the Han and Ch'in dynasties and Wu-ling (武陵,in present-day Hunan province) in lines 9-11, however, Wang Wei's poem provides no such "realistic," concretizing details. In contrast to T'ao Ch'ien's account, the Peach Blossom Spring appears here as a distinctly philosophical or religious, rather than political, utopia. The fisherman discovers not merely some morally pure alternative society, but rather an ethereal realm of the spirit whose inhabitants are explicitly described as being more than human: "At first to escape the place of troubles they left the midst of men. / Then, it's heard, they became immortal and so did not return" (lines 19-20).

Wang Wei does retain both the prototypical Taoist ideal figures of the fisherman and woodcutter and the terminology potentially descriptive of a this-worldly retreat ("worldly guest" [*su-k'o,*俗客], line 15 and "dusty heart" [*ch'en-hsin,*塵心], line 24, for example). And furthermore, the distinction he establishes in lines 21-22 between the realms of "human affairs" and "cloudy mountains" frequently appears in other poems about Buddhist monks praised for their removal from the worldly din. Yet it is clear that he is not merely concerned here with contrasting two ways of life.

"Song of Peach Blossom Spring" focuses on the nature of the actual search, rather than the characteristics of its destination. Only because he embarks on a journey whose distance, route and outcome he does not know does the fisherman arrive at the Peach Blossom Spring. He proceeds without conscious intention and in total harmony with nature, passively trusting the water until he reaches its end, then traveling on foot along a hidden,winding path. Each new element of the scene appears as a sudden surprise. And this ignorance is absolutely essential; because it consists in a freedom from mental calculation and a spontaneous appreciation of and reliance on nature, it leads him to a true moment of intuitive recognition, a vision of purity. But this positive ignorance of an unconscious journey becomes the negative ignorance of the failure to understand the meaning of his arrival. Having achieved enlightenment, he abandons it for rational modes of thought and the purposeful plan to repeat his travels in a more orderly fashion. He thereby only demonstrates the uselessness of intellectual cognition in such an endeavor.

The problem of cognition is, of course, associated with that of perception. Wang Wei twice suggests the importance of distance--both physical and, by implication, spiritual--in the recognition of the Peach Blossom Spring. The word "from afar" (*yao,*遙) appears twice, each time with a verb of sight ("looks" [*k'an,*看] in line 7 and "gazes" [*wang,*望] in line 22). In lines 7-8 it describes the fisherman's initial delusory perception of the scene as a vague expanse of "gathered clouds and trees"; only after he gradually approaches it does the village suddenly appear to his view. He is distinguished in this respect from most men of the dusty world, for as Wang Wei notes in line 22, when they gaze at this region from afar all they can perceive are "cloudy mountains." These are "empty" (*k'ung,*空) in several senses: they seem literally uninhabited from a distance, and are also figuratively non-existent for those who cannot realize what they truly

represent. Furthermore, they may also embody the absolute truth of the Buddhist notion of *śūnyatā* ("emptiness" or "the void"), for which *k'ung* is the Chinese translation; *k'ung* is, of course, one of the most frequently recurring words in Wang Wei's poetic vocabulary and generally suggests such Buddhist connotations. In fact, the ignorance is mutual, for the residents of the Spring are described in the preceding line as equally unaware of human activities, yet it is clear that this "deficiency" is a positive one, simply indicating that they have risen above such preoccupations; they are, after all, immortal.

After Wang Wei reveals the fisherman's inability to accept an enlightenment acquired without any rational calculation, he reflects this turn of events in the phrasing of the last ten lines of the "Song of Peach Blossom Spring." Negatives appear in five lines (23-25, 27, 32), a limiting adverb ("only" [*chih*,只]) in line 29 and rhetorical questions, which suggest the futility of the second journey, in lines 28, 30, and especially 32: "Not distinguishing the fairy spring, where can he seek?" There is, in fact, no place where the fisherman can "seek" the Peach Blossom Spring, for enlightenment cannot be actively or willfully pursued. Nor, in fact, can it be "distinguished" (*pien,* 辨), for the true intuition is unifying. Remaining limited by his attachment to rational cognition, he will never be able to repeat his original spontaneous experience.

The Peach Blossom Spring appears in several other of Wang Wei's works, where he often reiterates this notion that it can only be discovered unintentionally. In a poem written in response to one by another official during a visit to two Buddhist monasteries, for example, he describes the scenery in terms of a pure spirituality analogous to that of the Spring. His friend has arrived at such a realm but only suddenly, as if by accident; another purposeful visit, he concludes, would be unsuccessful: "To the Peach Spring you've suddenly returned. / Visit it again—I'm afraid you'd lose the way" ("Harmonizing with Vice-President of the Tribunal of Censors Sung's Poem, 'On a Summer Day Traveling to Fu-hsien and T'ien-ch'ang Monasteries' " [*Ho Sung Chung-ch'eng hsia-jih yu Fu-hsien-kuan T'ien-ch'ang-ssu chih tso,*和宋中丞夏日遊福賢觀天長寺之 作 , ch. 11, 9a]). Wang Wei also mentions the Spring at the end of the following pentasyllabic poem in ancient verse, which describes another ascent to a monastery.

Stone Gate Monastery on Mt. Lan-t'ien (*Lan-t'ien-shan Shih-men-ching-she,* 藍田山石門精舍 , ch. 3, 3a)

In the setting sun, mountains and waters were lovely.
The tossing boat trusted the returning wind.
Enjoying the strangeness, unaware of distance,
I followed all the way to the spring's source.
Afar I loved clouds' and trees' lushness.
At first I thought the route was not the same.
How could I know the clear flow turned?
Suddenly I passed through the mountain ahead.
I left the boat and readied my light staff,
Truly satisfied with what I encountered:
Old monks—four or five men,
At leisure in the shade of pines and cypress.
At morning chants the forest has not yet dawned;
During night meditation, mountains are even stiller.
Their minds of the *Tao* reach to shepherd boys;
For worldly affairs they ask the woodcutter.
At night they lodge beneath tall pines;
Burning incense, they sleep on clean white mats.
The valley stream's fragrance pervades men's clothes;
The mountain moon illumines the stone walls.
Seeking again I fear I'd lose the way.
Tomorrow I'll go out to continue my climb.
Smiling I'll leave the Peach Spring men:
When flowers are red I'll come to see them again.

"Stone Gate Monastery on Mt. Lan-t'ien" begins with a description almost identical to the opening of "Song of Peach Blossom Spring," except that here Wang Wei speaks of himself rather than another person, the fisherman. In both poems he emphasizes a passive reliance on and appreciation of nature: the light boat moves through unfamiliar surroundings, yet simply trusts to the wind and water. Again, too, the journey occurs in ignorance; the speaker is unaware of both the distance and course of the route, and each twist of the stream brings a new and sudden discovery. Even the arrival at the monastery is depicted as an almost accidental encounter (line 10).

At line 11 begins the description of his destination, marked by a change of rhyme in the original and of tense in my translation. Wang Wei focuses on the solitude and simplicity of the monks' existence, removed from all men except those familiar pastoral figures, the woodcutter and shepherds. Sleeping beneath the pines, the monks live in total harmony with nature, and Wang Wei can orient their religious activities according to

the features of the surrounding scenery (lines 13-14). Here human and natural realms interpenetrate; the fragrance of the stream "pervades" (*hsi,*襲,actually means "to assail secretly") the men's clothing, and the moon shines on the monastery wall.

In the concluding four lines Wang Wei returns to the Peach Blossom Spring motif which he had evoked by his opening description. Unlike the fisherman, the speaker here knows that such a realm of purity cannot be consciously pursued: "Seeking again I fear I'd lose the way" (line 20). And although he cannot remain with the monks now, because he possesses this awareness of the nature of a successful journey, he can be confident of a return the following spring, so that the future is contained in the present moment.

We can understand the significance of this assurance when we compare "Stone Gate Monastery at Lan-t'ien" with a similar pentasyllabic poem in ancient verse by Wang Wei's friend Meng Hao-jan (孟浩然,699-740).

Going to See Monk Chan of Fragrant Mountain
(Hsün Hsiang-shan Chan shang-jen, 尋香山湛上人)

At dawn I seek a famous mountain,
A mountain distant in empty blue.
Thin-air swirls a hundred hazy *li;*
Not until sunset do I come near.
At the mouth of a gorge I hear the sound of a bell;
By the forest's edge I smell a fragrant breath.
With staff in hand I seek my friend;
I loosen the saddle and rest my horse.
By stone gates . . . strange precipitious deep ravines—
Through bamboo I wind deep into the wood.
Delighted, I find my Buddhist friend;
We engage in pure talk until dawn.
Throughout my life I have admired the true recluse;
For all my days I have sought the spiritual and strange.
At dawn, old rustics climb into the mists;
Mountain priests return to their lodges at dusk.
Pine and spring—full clear sounds;
Mossy slopes—rife with ancient lure.
I would cast myself into this mountain—
Cut myself off from the world.[7]

Although Meng Hao-jan's poem includes much of the same imagery and implications as Wang Wei's—with an emphasis on a long, unfamiliar and winding route and the rustic simplicity of the monk's life—there are equally important differences in perspective between the two works. Unlike Wang Wei, who simply provides an objective description of the monks' activities after his arrival midway through the poem, Meng Hao-jan indulges in a personal explanation of the reasons for and meaning of his journey: "Throughout my life I have admired the true recluse, / For all my days I have sought the spiritual and strange" (lines 13-14). Moreover, by explicitly mentioning this admiration for another style of life, he implies that he himself has not yet been able to achieve it. This becomes clear in the final couplet, which is phrased as a desire (*yüan*,願, "I wish") rather than an actuality. In Wang Wei's poem, on the contrary, we find no such distinction being drawn, for the poet has, in fact, been able to share the experience of his Buddhist friends and remains confident that this possibility will remain open to him.

In any case, Wang Wei's destination, the Stone Gate Monastery, resembles T'ao Ch'ien's account of the Peach Blossom Spring more than his own, for it is depicted here as the embodiment of a definitely human ideal—withdrawal from worldly affairs. Yet the similarities of the opening accounts, the mention of following the stream to its source (line 4) and the concern with the uncalculating manner in which this enclave must be reached cannot but suggest, too, that the journey is spiritual as well as physical.

Two other accounts of journeys over mountains and water also interweave the concrete and abstract. In "Green Creek"(*Ch'ing ch'i*,青溪, ch. 3, 3b) Wang Wei concentrates on an integration with nature rather than the attainment of enlightenment.

To enter into Yellow Flower River,
Always follow Green Creek's waters.
Along the mountains for ten thousand turns,
Yet traveling no more than a hundred *li*.
Sounds noisy mixed among the rocks,
Colors peaceful deep within the pines.
Tossing lightly, floating water chestnuts;
Clear and still, gleaming reeds and rushes.
My heart has always been serene,
The clear river is tranquil like this.
Let me stay atop a flat rock

12 And dangle a fishhook forever.

Wang Wei emphasizes the circuitousness rather than the mystery of this route to Yellow Flower River (黃花川) in Shensi province; the road takes many turns along the mountains, creating a misleading impression of the actual distance covered. He then moves on to provide two couplets of contrasting images which reveal the range of differences encompassed by nature: sound and color, noise and silence, motion and stillness.

Written in pentasyllabic ancient verse, "Green Creek" is characterized by an unusually informal diction. The poem begins quite casually, with a meaningless particle (*yen*, 言), more likely to be found in prose than poetry, as its first word. Both the opening couplet and closing four lines are marked by the conversational tone of direct address. And in line 9 we find one of the few uses of the first-person pronoun ("my heart" [*wo hsin*,我心]) in Wang Wei's poetry. In this and the following line he suggests the significance of the experience in the poem, the attainment of a true serenity in harmony with his natural surroundings. Man and nature are so totally intertwined, in fact, that elements of the latter can be compared to the former (line 10), the reverse of usual practice. They are completely interchangeable, so that a stream can be described in terms of a person's tranquility. Although the explicit interest here is on the identification of the two realms rather than the achievement of enlightenment, we should remember that for the Ch'an Buddhist, at least, these states are closely linked.

The following poem in pentasyllabic ancient verse also depicts a journey to Yellow Flower River.

From Ta-san Pass Going Through Deep Forests and Dense Bamboo on a Winding Path for Forty to Fifty *Li* to Brown Ox Peak and Seeing Yellow Flower River (*Tzu Ta-san yi wang shen-lin mi-chu teng-tao p'an ch'ü ssu-wu-shih-li chih Huang-niu-ling chien Huang-hua-ch'uan*,自大散以往深林密竹蹬道盤曲四九十里至黃牛嶺見黃花川, ch. 4, 11a)

A precipitous path—how many thousands of turns?
Over a few *li*, resting three times;
Now and then seeing my companions
Disappear and appear behind a wooded hill.
Splash splash, rain beneath the pines;
Flowing on, the stream amid the rocks.
Peaceful words deep within the creek,

8 Long whistles high atop the mountain
Gazing I see south of Southern Mountain:
A white sun, cloudy in the distance,
A green marsh, beautiful and quiet,
12 Green trees, dense as if afloat.
Always I have hated covered closeness:
Boundlessness dissipates men's cares.

Like "Green Creek," "From Ta-san Pass . . . " begins with a description of a passage along a precipitous, winding path. Here Wang Wei emphasizes height more than distance; the ascent is difficult—rests must be taken frequently—and the speaker's companions move in and out of view because of numerous wooded ridges. The poet then presents various aspects of the scenery along the way, and finally his successful arrival at the summit.

"Whistle" in line 8 is an inadequate translation for the original *hsiao*, (嘯), probably a combination of Taoist breathing techniques and whistling which was said to express feelings and was characterized by qualities of liberation, naturalness and harmonizing with nature.[8] In the following four lines Wang Wei describes the vast expanse which comes into view as he reaches the mountaintop; the immensity of the scene, as well as the earlier mention of *hsiao*, both create a sense of release. And indeed, in the closing couplet the poet explicitly states that the completion of the ascent along the difficult, dense and twisting path has led to a freedom or care-dispelling boundlessness. And since Nirvana may be interpreted as a kind of uncovering process, the final stage in the removal of all obstructions,[9] I feel that "From Ta-san Pass . . . ," like "Song of Peach Blossom Spring," may be read as an indirect depiction of the progress toward enlightenment.

Again, we may notice the distinctive features of Wang Wei's journeys more clearly when we compare these poems to one by Hsieh Ling-yün, who also writes frequently about mountain ascents and the surmounting of obstacles.

On Climbing the Highest Peak of Stone Gate
(Teng Shih-men tzui-kao-ting, 登石門最高頂)

At dawn with staff in hand I climbed the crags,
At dusk, I made my camp among the mountains.
Only a few peaks rise as high as this house,
4 Facing the crags, it overlooks winding streams.
In front of its gates a vast forest stretches,
While boulders lie around its very steps.

Hemmed in by mountains, there seems no way out,
The track gets lost among the thick bamboos.
My visitors can never find their way,
And when they leave, forget the path they took.
The raging torrents rush on through the dusk,
The monkeys clamor shrilly through the night.
Deep in meditation, how can I part from Truth?
I cherish the Way and never will swerve from it.
My heart is one with the trees of late autumn,
My eyes delight in the buds of early spring,
I dwell with my constant companions and wait for my end,
Content to find peace through accepting the flux of things.
I only regret that there is no kindred soul,
To climb with me this ladder to the clouds in the blue.[10]

Although Hsieh Ling-yün writes that he has achieved a oneness with nature ("My heart is one with the trees of late autumn," line 15) and an awareness of the "Truth" and the "Way," his poems do not generally reveal a successful realization of the selfless intuition of enlightenment. Wang Wei, as we have seen, rarely comments directly on the significance of his journey, nor does he expound on the related Buddhist doctrines. "On Climbing the Highest Peak of Stone Gate," in contrast, is typical of Hsieh Ling-yün's work in its preoccupation with the poet's emotions, its lament over loneliness and the sense that nature can never be properly enjoyed alone, and its use of explicitly Taoist-Buddhist terminology ("Truth," "Way," "constant companions" [poverty], and "flux"). Although his poetry celebrates a breath-taking natural beauty, he is generally also overwhelmed with sadness and longing for an absent friend.[11] In Wang Wei's poems, on the contrary, the journey is both predicated on and results in an effortless, unconscious union with nature.

Perhaps the most enigmatic example of such an experience is the following famous pentasyllabic regulated verse.

Visiting the Temple of Gathered Fragrance
(*Kuo Hsiang-chi-ssu*, 過香積寺, ch. 7, 11b)

I do not know the Temple of Gathered Fragrance,
For several *li*, entering cloudy peaks.
Ancient trees, paths without people;
Deep mountains: in what place a bell?
The spring's sound swallows lofty rocks.
Sun's color chills green pines.

Toward evening by the curve of an empty pond
Peaceful meditation controls poison dragons.

Wang Wei opens the poem with a statement of ignorance, which declares that he does not "know" the temple and suggests several possibilities: that he does not know where it is, if it even exists, or that he does not possess a rational knowledge of its significance but rather an intuitive, nondifferentiating awareness. This special kind of ignorance sets the tone for the description of the journey up the mountain; the process is phenomenological, for the speaker moves up the forested mountain with no a priori notions of what he will encounter.

Each line contains images of extreme ambiguity and vagueness. In line 2, for example, "entering" can refer to both the action of the speaker and the location of the monastery, thus implicitly refusing to recognize a distinction between the traveler and his destination, or subject and object. "Cloudy peaks," as we have already seen in "Song of Peach Blossom Spring," are frequently associated with monasteries and ethereal realms in general. Their vagueness suggests the inability of the Temple of Gathered Fragrance to be localized and stresses the inadequacy of merely sensual perception on such a journey of the spirit.

In the second couplet Wang Wei provides a spare description of the scenery along the way. The phrase "paths without people" (*wu jen ching*, 無人徑 : literally "without man path") can also be read as "no paths for people,"[12] thus further suggesting the speaker's venture into totally unknown territory which no other humans have traveled; this experience must be his alone. This sense of mystery is evoked again in the question of the following line. As in the first couplet, Wang Wei reveals a distrust of visual perception and purely intellectual cognition. He has presumably heard the sound of a bell from somewhere deep in the mountains, thus confirming, at least, the existence of the monastery (although he does not actually say he has *heard* a bell at all, so that for us some doubt remains), but he is unable to specify its location. So he must continue his ascent up the densely wooded mountain without the comforting knowledge of where he is or where he is going.

Although the images in the third couplet are perhaps more specific than those in the first half of the poem, they are both highly ambiguous. As if to continue the denial of the visual implied by the question in line 4, both lines 5 and 6 focus on other sensual modes of apprehension. "Swallows"

(*yen*,咽 or, alternatively, "chokes" [*yeh*]) can be read actively and passively, in either case evoking the sound of water over rocks. Similarly, English cannot render the multiple readings of line 6, where the synesthetic effects of the setting sun could also be translated as "Sun's color is chilled by (or among) green pines" or "Sun's color leaves green pines to turn cold." In both lines the simultaneous activity and passivity of the verbs suggest that the processes occurring cannot be subjected to rational analysis; they can only be apprehended intuitively, as one total experience in which subject and object, the various elements of nature, are indistinguishable. Furthermore, the diction also diminishes the potentially sensual precision of the couplet. Rather than presenting the concrete nouns, spring and sun, as the agents (or receptors) of each line, Wang Wei speaks of the "spring's sound" (*sheng*,聲) and the "sun's color" (*se*,色), so that in each case it is an *abstraction* and not a particular *object* that is being described.

The final couplet of "Visiting the Temple of Gathered Fragrance" in no way diminishes the mysterious quality of the journey. Presumably Wang Wei has arrived at the monastery, but he is typically indirect and presents neither buildings nor monks for our observation. Instead he seems to have reached a pond, whose bends and curves continue to recall the winding paths of other spiritual journeys. The pond is "empty"—perhaps dried-up, or deserted, or illusory, or transcendent. The last line simply presents a process but does not specify the subject or the precise nature of the object. The "poison dragons" are traditionally interpreted as illusions or passions which may stand in the way of enlightenment, although the source of the allusion has not been definitively determined.[13] And the person engaged in "peaceful meditation" may be either a monk from the temple or the poet himself, but since no actual person is named, perhaps Wang Wei is referring to an intangible atmosphere of the place. In any case, it seems to me that by concluding with the image of such a struggle, he is suggesting that the journey has not yet been successfully completed. Although the speaker has proceeded in an ideal, spontaneous, ignorant manner, he does not experience the boundlessness and liberation we have seen at the end of other similar poems. There are still, it appears, obstructions to be overcome.

Nevertheless, "Visiting the Temple of Gathered Fragrance" embodies the mode of perception most characteristic of Wang Wei's poetic world. Throughout the journey the poet emphasizes the intuitive nature of his experience—a state of "ignorance," perhaps, when seen from the point of

view of a strictly rational, differentiating cognition. Yet it is precisely that distrust of visual perception, that refusal to distinguish between subject and object, which creates the sense of integration with the universe emerging from Wang Wei's work as a whole.

Notes

1. Richard Mather, "The Landscape Buddhism of the Fifth-Century Poet Hsieh *Ling-yün*," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1 (Nov. 1958), p. 78.
2. From *The Transmission of the Lamp* (*Ching-te chuan-teng lu*, 景德傳燈錄), ch. 5, trans. Chang Chung-yüan, in *Original Teachings of Ch'an Buddhism* (New York: Vintage, 1971), p. 31.
3. References are to the standard edition of Wang Wei's works, annotated by Chao Tien-cheng 趙殿成, *Wang Yu-ch'eng chi-chu*, 王右丞集注 (*Rpt. Taipei: Chung-hua shu-chu*, 1966). Chüan, 卷 (ch.) and page numbers will be given in the text.
4. James Robert Hightower, trans., *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 254-256.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 256.
6. *Ibid.*, 257.
7. Trans. James Whipple Miller, "English Romanticism and Chinese Nature Poetry," *Comparative Literature*, Vol. XXIV, No. 3 (Summer 1972), pp. 220-221.
8. The word has also been translated as "humming," "singing," and "crooning." The tradition of the *hsiao* began during the Chin dynasty and has always been linked with Taoism. Its most famous practitioner was a friend of the poet Juan Chi 阮籍 (210-263), a certain Sun Teng, 孫登, whose *hsiao* was said to sound like a phoenix. The earliest information on the *hsiao* is found in a short "exposition" or "rhyme-prose," the *Hsiao fu*, 嘯賦, by the Chin dynasty poet Ch'eng-kung Sui, 成公綏. By the T'ang dynasty there were apparently twelve different types of *hsiao*. For further details see Chuang Shen, 莊申, *Wang Wei yen-chiu*, 王維研究 (Hong Kong: Wan-yu t'u-shu kung-ssu, 1971), pp. 97-101 and p. 107, n. 15.
9. Edward Conze writes that "Many Buddhist authors have derived the word *Nirvāna* from the root *vri*, 'to cover,' interpreting it as that which is quite 'unobstructed,' or 'free.' Nirvāna is therefore here envisaged as the final stage of the removal of all obstructions, of the uncovering process." See his *Buddhist Wisdom Books* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 97.
10. Trans. J. D. Frodsham, *The Murmuring Stream: The Life and Works of the Chinese Nature Poet Hsieh* Ling-yün *(385-433), Duke of K'ang-lo* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967, 2 vols.), Vol. I, p. 144.
11. See, for example, "On Making a Trip to the Southern Pavilion," where a descrip-

tion of the transitional scene between spring and summer only provokes unhappiness: "Sadly I sigh, for Nature moves my heart." Hsieh concludes with a desire to unburden himself to someone else: "To whom can I express my will quite clearly? / Only my good friends understand my heart" (trans. Frodsham, *The Murmuring Stream,* p. 122). In another poem, "On Climbing Stone Drum Mountain, near Shang-shu," after dwelling on the sorrows of traveling and loneliness, as well as the passage of time, Hsieh writes that he hopes to "find a scene to suit my melancholy." Looking about him, however, he sees only a burgeoning landscape of spring, whose promises and delights pain him both because he has no friend to share them with and because they contrast with his mood: "Not a trace of a friend to come and meet me here, / The distance only mocks my loneliness" (*ibid.,* p. 126).

Hsieh Ling-yün's "poems also contain numerous allusions to Buddhist doctrine. One typical example is "Written on the Lake on my Way Back to the Retreat at Stone Cliff," which, after a description of the scenery along the way, concludes with this didactic message:

> Once the mind stops striving the world loses all importance,
> Once the heart is content it does not swerve from truth.
> I send these words to those who would nurture their lives.
> Try using this Method if you want the Truth (*ibid.,* p. 138).

12. Burton Watson notes this distinction and also prefers to translate the phrase as "peopleless paths," i.e., "no-people paths," rather than "no paths for people [to walk on]" or "no people-paths." See *Chinese Lyricism: Shih Poetry from the Second to the Twelfth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 175. I feel that this decision is justified because "no-people paths" more closely parallels the phrase "what-place bell" in the following line.

13. Chao Tien-ch'eng cites a passage from the *Nirvāna Sūtra* which speaks of the fearsome and harmful dragons in one's dwelling place. Burton Watson, however, suggests that the line may "recall the tale of a poison dragon that lived in a lake and killed passing merchants until it was subdued by a certain Prince P'an-t'o through the use of spells. The dragon changed into a man and apologized for its evil ways" (*Chinese Lyricism,* p. 175).

Still another possible reference may be the story of the Buddha's conversion of a poisonous dragon in a hermit's cave which occurs in the Sanskrit text, the *Ekottarāgama.* According to Richard Mather, "The dragon, symbolizing hatred, attempted to overwhelm the Buddha with fire from its mouth, but the Buddha, absorbed in a compassionate trance, shone more brilliantly than the dragon and ultimately subdued it" (pp. 78-79, n. 65).