WANG WEI'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS MOUNTAINS: HIS PERCEPTION OF SPACE

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The Chinese attachment to mountains is found not only in their philosophical outlook, which regards mountains as the abodes of the ancient emperors and as places of hermitage and quietude, but also in the conception that the earliest socienties were situated in the mountains.[1] The rapprochement between the Chinese people and mountains in ancient times is significant in that the forefathers of the Chinese first made their habitat in the hilly regions before they migrated to the plains. In his scholarly article, "An Enquiry into the Mountain Living in Ancient China," Mr. Ch'ien Mu cites passages from various sources such as *I Ching, The Book of Songs* and *Tso Chuan* to prove this evolution of ancient Chinese life-styles; he points out that mountain living was prevalent in the Hsia dynasty (c.2100-1600) and earlier, and that the migration to the plains started in the Yin dynasty (c.1600-1122).[2] Besides, the traditional Chinese belief that mountains are asylums from worldly troubles might have derived from the pragmatic fact that the ancient Chinese found mountains to be bastions against predatory animals and natural disasters such as floods. This existential ease with mountains, however, seems to be absent in the west, where people often looked upon the postlapserian mountains as nothing but "relicts of ruin and deforming woe," "monstrosities," "Nature's shame and ills," "warts, wens, blisters, impostnumus."[3]

Notwithstanding this intimacy between mountains and the Chinese life-style in ancient times, the aesthetic attitude of the Chinese towards mountains did not actually flourish until the period of *Ch'u T'zu* (楚辭) (B.C. 329-299). In *Ch'u T'zu,* Chü Yüan (屈原) (c. 340-277 B.C.) began to romanticise the image of Mt. Kunlun (崑崙山), the Chinese counterpart of Olympus. as an idyllic paradise, where the poet himself would "climb up to drink ambrosia, and coexist with the universe, and rival the sun and moon in brightness." (登崑崙兮而食玉英，與天地兮同壽，與日月兮同光.) Sung Yü (宋玉, c. the middle of third century B.C.) further humanized the mountain motif in his "Fu of Mt. Kao-t'ang" (高唐賦) by depicting a

romance between the Goddess of Mt. Mu and the emperor of Ch'u. However, in this *fu*, the insurmountable and mysterious height of Mt. Kao-t'ang is emphasized in such a way that it exudes a sense of awe; thus, the aesthetic gratifications derived from the physical description of mountainscape in this *fu* are still negligible.

Take one look at the summit of the mountain,
One can see clusters of greenery
Shining like red-green cicadas.
Take one look down at the ravines,
One can see an unfathomable depth
And emptiness.
From afar, the rustling of pines is vaguely audible.
The roaring stream flows rapidly by,
Standing on its sides, one feels the presence
Of a loitering bear and its reluctant departure
Long enough to make one's feet perspire
And one's mind overwhelmed and lost.[5]
[The English translation in this article is mine.]

仰視山顛，肅何千千，炫耀虹蜺，俯視峭嶸，
窒寥窈冥，不見其底，虛聞松聲，傾岸洋洋，
立而熊經，久而不去，足盡汗出，悠悠忽忽，
怊悵自失，悞人心劫，無故自恐。
（見文選卷十九賦，三百九十六頁）

In general, one could assume that the Chinese began to foster a more relaxed and aesthetic attitude towards mountains in the period of the Warring States (c. B.C. 372-289).

Naturally, the emergence of Taoism had a lot to do with this change of attitude. Ideas demonstrating this change can be found in the following lines of *Chuang Tzu* (莊子): "Mountains and forests yield us joyful delight;" (山林與，皐壤與，使我欣然而樂焉。[知北遊]) or "forests and mountains are friends to men." (　大林丘山之善於人也。[外物]) What is perhaps more important is the fact that Taoism, after Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, gradually developed into various cults, one of which is the cultivation of *hsien*-hood (仙) or immortality. Down to the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.), thanks to the vogue of elixir-searching and the belief that herbs and elixir conducing the attainment of immortality could be found in remote mountains, mountains then began to symbolize immortality; and emperors

came to worship mountains and make sacrifices known as *feng sh'an* (封禪) to them, in the hope of acquiring immortality.[4]

By the Six Dynasties(225-538), Taoism had already taken root in the minds of the Chinese people, especially of the intelligentsia. Spurred by their "search" for *Tao*, a term then almost identical with infinity or immortality, and their desire to escape from a restricted and suffocating society, men of letters found themselves interested in mountain-excursions. Nevertheless, despite the fact that mountains were never really held in terror by the Chinese, their presence in literature was not aesthetically prominent, except in the works of such poets as Sun Ch'o (孫綽, 320-380) and Hsieh Ling-yun (謝靈運, 384-433). The reason for this neglect of mountains in literature is more geographical than aesthetic. One discovers in the period from the time of *The Book of Songs* (詩經) to the Six Dynasties that mountain scenery is sparse and sketchy. In this period the cultural ambience of China still centred around the Yellow Plains in the north, with the exception of Ch'u, the birthplace of *Ch'u T'zu*. Mountainscape is not altogether absent in *The Book of Songs*, but its description is simple and subordinated entirely to the expression of the poet's sentiment. I shall cite two mountain poems from *The Book of Songs* to illustrate this point:

The South Hill

Cold and bleak is the south hill.
Very fierce is the blowing wind.
People are all happy.
Why am I alone so miserable?

Very steep is the south hill.
Blustering is the blowing wind.
People are all happy.
I alone cannot perform my filial duties.

南山

南山烈烈，飄風發發，民莫不穀，我獨何害？
南山律律，飄風弗弗，民莫不穀，我獨不卒？

Ascending to the Hill

Ascending to the grassless hill to look
In the direction of my father's house,
I recall his words: Oh, son, you are now

In government service; take care
While you are on duty, night and day,
Lest you might be killed or deserted
In the wilderness.

Ascending to the grassy hill to look
In the direction of my mother's house,
I recall her words: Oh, son, you are now
In government service; take care
While you are on duty, night and day,
Lest you might be killed or deserted
In the wilderness.

Ascending to the flat hill to look
In the direction of my brother's house,
I recall his words: Oh, brother, you are now
In government service; cooperate
With your comrades, day and night, take care
And don't get killed far away from home.

陟岵

陟彼岵兮，瞻望父兮，父曰：嗟予子行役。
夙夜無已，上愼旃哉，猶來無止。
陟彼屺兮，瞻望母兮，母曰：嗟予季行役，
夙夜無寐，上愼旃哉，猶來無棄。
陟彼岡兮，瞻望兄兮，兄曰：嗟予弟行役。
夙夜必偕，上愼旃哉，猶來無死。

The emphasis on emotional description began to change in the Six Dynasties. What with the philosophical milieu of the time (i.e., the flourishing Taoism and its delight in mountains and rivers), and what with a gradual switch from sentiment to scenery, mountain scenes appeared more frequently in poetry and were given more prominence in the hands of poets like Hsieh Ling-yun.

Thus began what might have been called by Ruskin the "Mountain Glory" period in Chinese literature. Unlike the eighteenth century's Western taste for mountains, which essentially evolved from a physical fear of them to an aesthetic enjoyment of their picturesque qualities, the Chinese taste for mountains progressed from an initial existential pragmatism enriched by a philosophy congenial to the love of mountains to, finally, a profound

aesthetic contemplation.

It is significant to mention that Taoists regarded mountains as *Tao* itself. This was strongly felt by Sun Ch'o:

Fu of Mt. Tien T'ai

Tai-hsu (The Supreme Void) is vast and shapeles.
It moves through all beings in nature.
It dissolves into rivers
And coalesces into mountains.
The magnificence of Mt. Tien T'ai is
Indeed supported by the divine presence of *Tao*.

登天台山賦

太虛遼濶而無閡，運自然之妙有，融而爲川瀆，
結而爲山阜，嗟台嶽之所奇挺，實神命之所扶持。

This attitude was shared by Wang Wei, the Taoist poet. While Wordsworth may feel the adumbration of the power and benignity of God in mountains, Wang Wei and most Chinese nature poets see the presence of the all-pervasive *Tao* in mountains.

This perception of *Tao* by way of space, coupled with the fact that Wang Wei was himself a painter, may help to explain the aesthetico-philosophical roots of the tendency towards spatialization in some of his nature (or mountain) poetry.

Thanks to the proliferation of spatial imagery, the sense of space comes out very strongly in the nature poetry of Wang Wei. This fondness for spatial imagery reveals the poet's cosmic outlook as well as his painter's frame of mind. Space, in Wang Wei's poetry just as in his painting, is a vehicle for him, as both Taoist and Buddhist, to come closer to the comprehension of the infinite *Tao* and *Nirvana*.

The subtle arrangement of the near and the far, so frequently found in his poems, constitutes an almost palpable impact of space. Wang Wei's impulse towards spatializing his poetry comes not only from his fondness for vast landscape but also from the compositional interaction between the far and the near imagery. These, assisted at times by the paratactic structure of Chinese poetic language, accentuate the palpable impact of space in one's perusal of his poetry. The following lines, with their geometric taxonomy of

the far-and-near spatial images, best exemplify this spatialization effect:

A. Green mountains outside the city look as vivid as if inside the house.
B. The river passes from one house to the other.

A. White clouds circle around the peaks, and coalesce, viewed from afar.
B. Bluish mists become invisible, viewed inside mountains.[5]

城外青山如屋裏，東家流水入西鄰（春日與裴廸過新春里訪呂逸人不遇）

白雲迴望合，青靄入看無（終南山）

In the lines above, one observes that the A lines depict a more distant landscape, whereas the B lines depict a closer one. The rapid spatial alternations and the juxtaposition of two landscapes of varied sizes conjure up in the reader's mind an effect, comparable to the cinematic alternation of long shots with close-ups.

This rapid spatial alternation repeats itself in the short poem, "Deer Park" (鹿柴), in which two scenes of different scales are depicted respectively in each half of the poem:

A. Empty mountains, no human is seen.
Only human voices reverberate.
B. Reflected sunbeams enter the deep forest
And shine upon the green moss.

空山不見人，但聞人語響，返景入深林，復照青苔上。

Couplet A covers the whole mountainscape, while couplet B only the nearby forest, the green moss therein, and the angularity of the sunlight. From the lines we have so far discussed, it could be inferred that the verbal text reflects compositionally a painter's awareness of the relational geometricity in his poetry: the far and the near; the vast and the diminutive.

Wang Wei's preoccupation with the spatial alternation of the far with the near or vice versa can be illustrated further by a farewell poem, "Farewell to the Nephew of Mr. Ho" (送賀遂員外外甥):

The southern nation has a homeward-bound boat,
Sailing up against the current at Ching Men.
Dusk beyond the reeds enshrouds
Clouds, waters and the Tomb of King Chao.
Upon the boat's mast perches a crow.
The river joins the evening rain in melancholy.
The howling of gibbons—don't listen.
Don't anticipate autumn in the hills of Ch'u.
南國有歸舟，荊門泝上流，蒼茫葭葵外．
雲水接昭丘，檣帶城烏去，江連暮雨愁．
猿聲不可聽，莫待楚山秋．

The spacing in this poem is thematically significant, as the feeling of the poet for his friend's departure is expressed by the spatial development from the near to the distant. One may feel the same impact in a telephotograph of a boat, at first in the foreground, and then gradually dwindling into the background in a canvas of vast mist and water. In the fourth line, one gets the picture of simultaneity of clouds, water, and the Tomb of King Chao beyond the dusky reeds. The structure of this poem can be anatomized into a few cinematic shots: 1) a medium one of the homeward-bound boat, sailing up the river against the current; 2) a long shot of the distant reeds and water at dusk, with the image of the Tomb of King Chao superimposed on it; 3) a close-up of the boat's mast and the crow; 4) another long shot of the river flowing into the distance in the rain. The overall impact one feels from the vastness of the scene intensifies spatially the feeling of loneliness at parting. The last two lines are the poet's wish for his friend's speedy homeward journey, as the howling of gibbons and the autumnal atmosphere in the hills of Ch'u would probably sadden a traveller. This couplet expresses an essentially uncinematic subject, the poet's inner feeling—the loneliness he feels for himself and his friend, which is integrated into the compositional structure of the poem.

In another poem, "The View of a Fresh, Clear Evening" (新晴晚望), one finds the treatment of space diametrically opposite to that discussed in the previous poem. Instead of panning from the near to the distant, the spatial development in this poem is from the distant back to the near. This spatial direction is thematically integrated with the poet's double vision or rather the development of his vision.

It is fresh and clear in a vast plain,
With not a speck of dust in sight.
The city gate overlooks the ferry.
Village trees dot the mouth of the stream.
White tinted waters glimmer beyond the paddyfields.
Bluish-green peaks appear behind the hills.
There is no idler during agrarian months.
Everyone is engaged in tilling the south field.
新晴原野曠，極目無氛垢，郭門臨渡頭．
村樹連溪口，白水明田外，碧峯出山後
農月無閒人，傾家事南畝．

Here, the poet's vision is first riveted to the distant hills and plain, as indicated by the first three couplets. The last couplet brings the poet's vision back to his immediate milieu. This change in perspective signifies the poet's change of outlook from a cosmic awareness to that of mundane, human endeavours. One can point out that two kinds of activities in nature are at work in this poem: the features of the landscape and whatever is happening therein and the human endeavour—the tilling of the field. Both activities form parts of the scheme of nature and coexist to pursue their own courses, without mutual interference.

This non-interference among all living beings in the universe, and in all their activities, regardless of their scales of magnitude, is best exemplified in the six-character poem, "Pastoral Joy, V" (田園樂之五).

Foothills, a lone column of smoke, and a distant village.
The edge of sky, a lone tree, and a high plain.
One-gourd Yen Huei in a rundown alley.
Five-willow Gentleman, facing the door.
山下孤煙遠村，天邊獨樹高原．
一瓢顏回陋巷，五柳先生對門．

Here, I have deliberately translated this poem in a telegraphic style, so as to bring home the correspondence between form and content. The first two lines, concerned with a distant landscape, achieve a very substantial, spatial impact by virtue of the concreteness of the component units. The juxtaposition of these component units, in a paratactic fashion (as demonstrated in the above approximation), with no grammatical links, establishes a specific acausal orderedness in the poem. The component units could be re-shuffled in

different orders without changing the meaning of the poem. The last two lines, withdrawing the poet's vision from the distance, allude to two ancients, Yen Huei, one of Confucius's disciples (who is famous for his austere life style in living in a rundown alley on one gourd of rice a day), and T'ao Ch'ien, the famous Chinese nature poet (known as Five-willow Gentleman after the five willows he planted in front of his hut). These two historical figures are the archetype of saintly self-contentment, a virtue the poet himself wants to identify with. The last two lines let the reader perceive the significance of self-contentment in an instantaneous flow of association, thanks to its staccato passage devoid of a ratiocinative, adjectival description. In the flash of a moment, the saintly asceticism and self-sufficiency are conveyed by the juxtaposition of syntactically unrelated component units–"Five-willows Gentleman," "Facing the door," "One Gourd Yen Huei," and "rundown alley."

In the latter two poems discussed, "The View of a Fresh, Clear Evening" and "Pastoral Joy, V," one notices that the spatial alternation follows a long shot-to-close-up pattern, which to a great extent could be construed as a typical illustration of the Chinese ontological view of an individual. Space, here, manifests the psychological state of an individual and his ontological view of himself in the universe. The self-contentment of an individual and the immediate or most contiguous world that he lives and moves around is usually demonstrated by the change of an individual's vision: a switch from the distant to the near. The Chinese can view the distant landscape with perfect calmness and are seldom infatuated by the distant vastness or magnificence to the point of losing their own composure. Perhaps, the best expression to describe this state is T'ao Ch'ien's "*yu jan chien nan shan*" (悠然見南山, peacefully seeing the *far-off* South Hill). The binom, *yu jan* (悠然), has both the connotation of peacefulness and that of far-off-ness. The Chinese can also see the whole universe in nearby scenery or tiny objects, without recourse to distant vastness and magnificence. Thus, they can always retract their vision from the far-off to the most contiguous without any agitation. This change of vision is in conformity with the traditional concept of "Returning to the self and be sincere" (返身而成, *fan shen erh ch'eng*) and "all things are in me" (萬物皆備於我, *wan wu chieh pei yü wo*).[6] This reversion to one's self and its most contiguous environment from the infinite and the distant somehow prevents the Chinese from indulging in any Prometheian or Adonaisian trance or vagaries, namely, to draw out of oneself,

beyond nature and all earthly things as Shelley does in:

My Spirit's Bark is Driven

Far from the shore . . .
I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar;
Whilst, burning through the inmost veil of heaven,
The soul of Adonais, like a star,
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal Are![7]

In the Chinese opinion, this Adonaisian trance will eventually result in the effort to overreach oneself in one's aspirations and consequently upset the self-regulating scheme of nature. The outcome will be human tampering with nature and mutual infringement upon each other among living things. In Wang Wei's world, nature is a world of self-so-ness or *tzu-jan* (自然), where all things pursue their own courses without infringing upon one another. This idea of self-so-ness is implied by the ease and disencumbrance with which they see the universe: the far and the near; the above and the below. The following lines are the sublimation of Wang Wei's view of self-so-ness:

1) Patterning, the autumn rain,
Skimming through the slippery rocks;
Jumping ripples splashing themselves;
A white egret, startled, descends again.
颯颯秋雨中，淺淺石溜瀉，跳波自相濺，白鷺驚復下

2) Tree-tips' hibiscus,
In the hills, give birth to red blossoms.
The hut, by the stream, is without human presence.
Blossoms bloom and fall themselves.
木末芙蓉花，山中發紅萼，澗戶寂無人，紛紛開且落

3) Falling petals, quietly, chirps the hill bird.
Willows, green, green, a water-wading man.
落花寂寂啼山鳥，楊柳青青渡水人

4) Misty paddyfields; white egrets fly.
Shady summer woods; chirp yellow orioles
漠漠水田飛白鷺，陰陰夏木囀黃鸝

5) Flowers fall; the pageboy has not swept them.
Orioles sing; the hillman still sleeps.[8]
花落家僮未掃，鶯啼山客猶眠.

In the above examples, the ripples jump and splash themselves as autonomously as the blossoms bloom and fall themselves. I have on purpose translated these two images in reflexive case with "themselves," hoping to underscore the

autonomy of their activities and the self-sustainedness of their life-cycle. This theme of non-infringement is made ever clearer by the hemistiche-structure of the last three of the five examples cited. The petals fall quietly while the hill bird chirps. The green willows and the water-wading man are separate living entities in the same landscape, each pursuing its or his own business. The white egrets and the yellow orioles are at peace with their respective habitats (stretching paddyfields and shady summer woods). The fallen flowers are not disturbed or swept by the pageboy, just as the pageboy is not bothered by the falling flowers. The sleeping hillman is not the least disquieted by the singing orioles or vice versa.

Before going into any discussion of the relationship between Wang Wei's painting and poetry, it seems only proper to mention some of the images of distance and space. These images are integrally related to his vision of the landscape and are the manifestations of the aesthetico-philosophical outlook in his poetry as well as in his painting. The following are some of the examples:

1) A vast desert, a lone straight column of smoke.
   A long river, a round setting sun.
   大漠孤煙直，長河落日圓
2) At sunset, rivers and lakes are white;
   When the tide comes, heaven and earth turn green.
   日落江湖白，潮來天地青
3) A vast solitude: heaven and earth at dusk.
   The mind and the broad river are at peace.
   寂寥天地暮，心與廣川閒
4) Rivers flow beyond heaven and earth;
   Mountain hues (undulate) between visible and invisible tints.
   江流天地外，山色有無中
5) A fine, sunny, vast plain;
   At the edge of visibility, there is not a speck of dust.
   新晴原野曠，極目無氛垢
6) Looking back to the eagle-hunting place—a
   Thousand miles of dusk, clouds and level land.
   回看射鵰處，千里暮雲平
7) In a refreshing winter, a view of the distant hills—
   Piles of snow coalesce the greenery.
   清冬見遠山，積雪凝蒼翠
8) Foothills, a lone column of smoke, a distant village.
   At the edge of sky, a lone tree, a high plain.
   山下孤煙遠村，天邊獨樹高原

9) The river and the plain stretch to infinitude;
At sunset, flying birds return.[9]
川原杳無極，日暮飛鳥還

To Wang Wei, these aspects of nature manifest the microcosm of *Tao*, the totality of all existing things in the universe. Moreover, these images of distance and space significantly reveal Wang Wei's angle of viewing the world, which, to use a cinematic term, is horizontal-panning, as compared to the vertical-tilting angle of Shelley or Byron. The difference between the horizontal-panning vision of Wang Wei and the vertical-tilting vision of either Shelley or Byron lies in the inclusiveness of the former and the exclusiveness of the latter; to put it in another way, the flexibility of the former and the extremity of the latter. Even when Wang Wei finds himself on the top of the mountain, his vision is characterized by either panning towards the distance or looking down to take in all objects, far or near, large or small. This vision, like the frequent sedentary postures in his poetry (examples to be given later), suggests peace, satisfaction and harmony, whereas the vision of Shelley and Byron is characterized by looking upward in fervent aspirations. The verticality of this vision, like the standing postures in their poetry, suggests the importance of individuality and a defiant human spirit, which eventually leads to spiritual let-down and emotional spleen. It is therefore understandable that Manfred is not satisfied with the panoramic bird's eye view on the peak of Jungfrau and still looks up towards the sky in agony and vehement proclamation:

Farewell, ye opening Heavens!
Look not upon me thus reproachfully—
You were not meant for me.
Earth! take these atoms![10]

Wang Wei's attitude towards mountains is definitely related to his keen perception of a sacrosanct space. For instance, in the poem "Mt. Hua" (華嶽) Wang Wei describes the majesty of the mountainscape in conjunction with its relationship to former emperors who made sacrifices there. The mountain, thus, is a terrestrial embodiment of the permanence of *Tao*. This poem best demonstrates Wang Wei's preoccupation with the Taoist idea of immortality or *hsien*-hood, and the traditional sacrosanctification of mountains:

Floating clouds emerge from the top of the West mountain.
Accumulated greenery envelops the pure air.
The sky stretches out; dark hues of distant hills coalesce.
Hundreds of miles in dark-green hues,
The sun appears chilly.
Gloomy is the city of Hua-yin.
Of yore, heaven and earth opened
And the river God, Chu-ling, was born.
His right leg on top of the mountain,
His left hand carving out mountains,
He opened the mountain in two.
Through the division, the great river flows to the east sea.
Thus, the West mountain was formed,
And overlooking majestically the Capital of Ch'in,
Enshrouding the emperor in its protection
And the people in its virtues,
A harbinger of the Divine.
Golden sky awaits the arrival of emperors
To make sacrifices, a favor and courtesy not only limited to
Mr. Yun and Mt. T'ing.

西嶽出浮雲，積翠在太清，連天疑黛色，
百里遙青冥，白日爲之寒，森沉華陰城，
昔聞乾坤開，造化生巨靈，右足踏方止，
左手推削成，天地忽開拆，大河注東溟，
遂爲西峙嶽，雄雄鎮秦京，大君忽覆載，
至德披羣生，上帝佇昭告，金天思奉迎，
人祇望幸久，何獨稗雲亭。

Unlike the mountain poetry of the English Romantics, which tends to draw heavily on the exhilaration of mountain-climbing and the triumph over nature, such as the famed Alpine tour, Wang Wei's mountain poetry describes what the poet sees in the mountains, not necessarily on his climbing or on reaching the peaks. Wang Wei seldom expresses what he feels atop an elevated height personally. If ever he does feel anything close to the personal level, it is not exultation, let alone the Shelleyan "extatic wonder not unallied to madness," but an ineffable sense of abandon and contentment, and of harmony between himself and his surroundings:

A vast solitude: the sky and earth at dusk.
The mind and the broad river are at peace.

It should be noted that, although Wang Wei does not shy away from depicting nature in her more majestic forms, such as the height of mountains, cataracts and precipices, he does not go about it with a kind of romantic adventurism, so typical of the English Romantics. He never tries to convey to his reader in the mountain description what Wordsworth would describe as "terrible majesty." Instead, he describes his mountains with such an aesthetic distance that he gives them a perspective of calmness and tranquility. Wang Wei's approach to nature is analogous to what Ruskin wrote of the first class poet, who composes in a state of aesthetic repose, "impassive (as shallow people think Dante stern), receiving indeed all feelings to the full, but having a great centre of reflection and knowledge in which he stands serene, and watches the feelings, as it were, from afar off."[22]

In the following poem, "Mt. Chung-nan" (終南山), Wang Wei gives both distant and close-up descriptions of T'ai-yi (Mt. Chung-nan):

Mt. T'ai-yi is near the Capital,
Stretching its ranges to the edge of the sea.
White clouds, viewed from a distance, encircle and coalesce.
Bluish mists become invisible, viewed inside mountains.
Each peak is under different stardom,
Reflecting a variegation of light and darkness in its valley.
For lodging accomodation,
Ask the woodcutter across the river.
太乙近天都，連山到海隅，白雲迴望合，青靄入看無，
分野中峯變，陰晴衆壑殊，欲投人處宿，隔水問樵夫。

In this poem, the reader is in no way unnecessarily disturbed or exulted, while reading between the lines, since the poet never draws on mountains for their impetus as Wordsworth would immerse us in the natural sublime:

How divine,
The liberty, for frail, for mortal, man
To roam at large among unpeopled glens
And mountainous retirement . . .

. . . regions consecrate
To oldest time! and, reckless of the storm
That keeps the raven quiet in her nest,
Among the many there; and while the mists
Flying, and rainy vapours, call out shapes
And phantoms from the crags and solid earth
As fast as a musician scatters sounds
Out of an instrument; and while the steams
(As at a first creation and in haste
To exercise their untried faculties)
Descending from the region of the clouds,
And starting from the hollows of the earth
More multitudinous every moment, rend
Their way before them—what a joy to roam
An equal among mightiest energies;
And haply sometimes with articulate voice,
Amid the deafening tumult, scarcely heard
By him that utters it, exclaim aloud,
"Rage on ye elements! let moon and stars
Their aspects lend, and mingle in their turn
From day to night, from night to day, prolonged!"[12]

In addition to the description of more majestic forms in nature, Wang Wei's approach to nature includes more rural and arcadian landscape. He would derive a sense of harmony and peace by depicting some rural aspects of life in the mountains. For example, in the poems "Mountain Living in Autumn" (山居秋暝) and "Living in the Mountain" (山居卽事), Wang Wei deals with the rural aspects of nature again and brings about that ineffable sense of tranquility and harmony mentioned previously:

Mountain Living in Autumn

Empty mountains, after the rain,
The evening air smells the advent of autumn.
The bright moon shines on the pines.
The clear brook glides over rocks.
Bamboos stirred, return the washing women.
Lotus moved, a fishing boat glides past.
Of its own accord, the fragrance of spring abates.
The gentleman can decide to stay.

山居秋暝

空山新雨後，天氣晚來秋，明月松間照，清泉石上流
竹喧歸浣女，蓮動下漁舟，隨意春芳歇，王孫自可留

Living in the Mountain

Solitude enshrouds the thatched door.
Misty air fronts the setting sun.
Cranes nest on the boughs of pines.
Seldom would visitor call at the thatched door.
Tender bamboos covered in fresh powders,
Red lotus shedding old skins.
By the ferry lights spring up.
Water-chestnut gatherers return home from all directions.

山居即事

寂寞掩柴扉，蒼茫對落暉，鶴巢松樹偏
人訪華門稀，嫩竹含新粉，紅蓮落故衣
渡頭燈火起，處處採菱歸。

Wang Wei's mountain excursion, in fact, is an existential practice of his Taoist concept of nature, *tzu-jan* or self-so-ness, as well as his Buddhist belief of *ju-lai* (如來) or suchness. Both the Taoist state of *tzu-jan* and the Buddhist state of *ju-lai* share the same characteristics; i.e., spontaneity and purity of things. Unlike Wordsworth who sees beyond the landscape "into the life of things," or Byron who projects his disturbed mind onto the extreme forms of nature such as cataracts, precipices, and mountain-peaks, or Shelley who envisions his flight in the skylark, Wang Wei approaches all forms in nature in their native purity, that is to say, things as they are. He never tries to see in them any exteriorization of his internal thoughts or feelings. This tendency to things as they are may perhaps explain the lack of pathetic fallacy in Wang Wei's nature poetry, which is in striking contrast to the nature poetry of the English Romantics. The "Dear Park" quoted previously and the following poem on mountains are two of the best examples of seeing things in their native purity:

In the Mountain

In the Ching stream, white rocks jut out.
The sky is cold, and red leaves are sparse.
No rain is on the mountain path.
Blue mists in the air wet one's clothes.

山中

荊溪白石出，天寒紅葉稀，山路原無雨，空翠濕人衣。

In Wang Wei's mountain poems, mountain-climbing is mentioned. But the importance of the ascent, except in cases of some of his Buddhist-inspired

Of all issues, embattled humanity, plagued by a sense of injured merit or abetted by a spirit of defiance, concerns Wang Wei the least. This is evinced by his postural description of himself in his poetry. Occasionally, when he describes himself in his poetry as a standing figure, he would hasten to qualify the erect posture with a neutralizing device. For instance, he would tend to describe himself standing, with his body supported by a staff or a cane (倚仗, *i-ch'ang*), or leaning against a tree (倚木, *i-mu*), so as to downplay the challenge and defiance that a standing posture might suggest. It is no coincidence that one finds in his poetry a proliferation of sedentary images: *hsien-tso* (閒坐, sitting at leisure); *fu-tso* (趺坐, sit in a Buddhist posture); *tuan-tso* (端坐, sit erect); *yeh-tso* (夜坐, sit at night); and *tso-k'an* (坐看, sit and watch).[13] All these sitting postures "give us the notion of solidity, firm conviction, and immovability, a symbol of peace, tranquility and self-assurance."[14]

However, in English Romantic nature poetry, one finds almost always the struggle or confrontation between the poet and nature. Unlike the Chinese way of attaining infinity or *Tao* by submerging the individual in the infinite flux of things, English Romantic poets tend to strive for excellence of one sort or another. In the Chinese view, "men are not considered as for ever struggling against nature but forming part of it."[15] There is never such a conflict between Wang Wei and nature as that found in Byron's *Manfred*, where the hero fails completely to find any sympathy in the mountains:

> My mother Earth!
> And thou flesh breaking day, and you, ye mountains,
> Why are you beautiful? I cannot love ye.
> And you, ye crags, upon whose extreme edge
> I stand and on the torrents' brink beneath.
> Behold the tall pines dwindled as to shrubs,
> In dizziness of distance; when a leap,
> A stir, a motion, even a breath, would bring
> To rest for ever—wherefore do I pause? . . . .
> How beautiful is all this visible world!
> How glorious in its action and itself!
> But we, who name ourselves its *sovereign*, we
> *Half dust*, half deity, alike unfit to sink or soar
> With our *mix'd essence* make
> A conflict of its elements, and breathe
> The breath of degradation and of pride,

Contending with low wants and lofty will,
Till our mortality predominates,
And men are—what they name not to themselves
And trust not each other.[16]
(emphasis mine)

Neither could we find in Wang Wei the self-pitying death-wish of Shelley in the presence of a magnificent, smiling scene:

Alas! I have nor hope nor health nor peace within nor
calm around
Nor that content surpassing wealth the sage in
meditation found,
And walked with inward glory crowned—
Nor name, nor power, nor love, nor leisure.
Others I see whom these surround—
Smiling they live, and call life pleasure;
To me that cup has been dealt in another measure.[17]

All these "romantic agonies" in the presence of sublime scenery are completely absent from Wang Wei's poetry. What seems to be the cause of this type of "romantic agony" is the idea of being "sovereign" over nature and men's inherent "mix'd elements," which oftentimes tempt the mind to rise above itself and nature. Hence, the Faust-like defiance and the heroics of a Manfred.

Faust-like figures are foreign to the Chinese mentality in general and Wang Wei's in particular. Whereas Byron admits that he cannot lose his "own wretched identity in the majesty, and the power, and the glory, around, above, and beneath me" (*Letters of Journals,* iii, 364), Wang Wei can lose his identity and merge it with nature. The speaker in Wang Wei's nature poetry can lose his identity in a coalescence with the rest of nature. I shall cite two poems dealing with mountain-climbing by Wang Wei to illustrate this harmony between man and nature:

Ascending the Walls, North of the River

A small village upon the Fu Cliff,
A traveller-pavilion in the mists and clouds,
High walls overlook the setting sun,

The distant water-edge reflects dark-green hills.
Lights along the bank, a solitary boat at anchor,
Fishermen and birds returning at dusk.
Vast solitude: sky and earth, at dusk.
The mind and the broad river are at peace.

登河北城樓作

井邑傅巖上，客亭雲霧間，高城眺落日，
極浦映蒼山，岸火孤舟宿，漁家夕鳥還，
寂寥天地暮，心與廣川閒。

Ascending the Temple of Discerning Perception

Bamboo-shaded paths lead to the Pristine land.
Lotus-decorated summits rise above the Buddha-built City.
Inside the window, a silent view of the Three Rivers of Ch'u.
Above the woods, the Nine Rivers run smooth.
Grasses, so soft to sit on,
Long pines echoing Sanskrit chant.
Home of emptiness, beyond the clouds,
A look therefrom at the world with "lifelessness."

登辨覺寺

竹徑從初地，蓮峯出化城，窗中三楚盡，
林上九江平，輭草承趺坐，長松響梵聲，
空居法雲外，觀世得無生。

In the first poem, the sense of cosmic harmony is demonstrated by the couplet at the end: "Vast solitude: sky and earth, at dusk/The mind and the broad river are at peace." The image of "The distant water-edge reflects dark-green hills" also suggests a harmonious merger and coexistence of natural elements, namely, water and hills, and by extension, man. In the second poem, the oblivion of the self is made more noticeable by the use of Buddhist terminology. The temple is referred to as "Home of emptiness," (空居, *k'ung-chü*) and "Buddha-built City" (化城, *hua-ch'eng*); the venue that these paths lead to is described as "the Pristine land;" and the term, *wu-sheng* (無生, lifelessness) implies the annihilation of the ego. The "Pristine land" is the land of origin where Boddisattvas live. The "Buddha-built City" is a place of repose for pilgrims in their journey toward Buddhahood. The Buddhist manner of sitting is a sign of composure and peace. The act of ascent here implies an improvement of the self, that is to say,

from the Buddhist viewpoint, from *wo* (我, ego) to *wu-wo* (無我, egolessness), and from *sheng* (生, life) to *wu-sheng* (lifelessness), and the resultant deliverance from suffering and anguish in this world. The temple, "Home of emptiness," is where the individual can find self-oblivion or *annata.* Symbolically, the ascent then is a religious ascent of a pilgrim or believer. It is a quest for something. But this quest, unlike that of the English Romantics, does not entail any exertion or agony on the part of the climber, and would only come to him in serenity. Moreover, in this Buddhist poem, Wang Wei's treatment of the ascent differs from that of the English poets in terms of the posture he assigns to the climber. The English poets usually have their climbers stand on the summit of mountain or near some "extreme edge" of precipice, or on "the torrents' brink," like Manfred, to show off their defiant spirit, while Wang Wei has his climber, like background figures in Chinese paintings, sit quietly on "soft grasses," with an aura of peacefulness and non-confrontation about him. If "Mt. Hua," cited earlier, reflects the influence of Taoism on Wang Wei, "Ascending the Temple of Discerning Perception" definitely reflects the impact of Buddhism on him. In short, these two poems together summarize Wang Wei's overall attitude towards mountains.

Notes

1. Ch'ien Mu cites *Shih Chi* in his annotation of the character, *chiu* (丘, mountain), and *Tso Chuan Shu* in his annotation of the character, *hsü* (虛, mountain) to prove that emperors of ancient China used to live in the mountains.

   Shih Chi: "The Yellow Emperor lived in the mountains of Hsuan-yuan, where he wedded the daughter of the west hill, and fathered two sons, Hsuan-hsiao or Ching-yang, who descended to live in Chiang river. and Ch'ang-i, who descended to live in the Ssu river." Thus, it can be inferred that the Yellow Emperor at first lived in the mountainous region, where he married the daughter of the mountain people, and that his sons later moved their habitats close to the rivers.

   史記："黃帝居軒轅之丘，娶于西陵之女，生二子，其一曰玄囂，是謂青陽，降居江水，其二曰昌意，降居蜀水"是謂黃帝居丘，其所娶亦陵居之女，其二子始降居近水。

   Tso Chuan Shu:

   "*Hsü* is the abode of the ancients." This proves the assertion by ancient documents that emperors in ancient times were mountain-dwellers, and were their subjects.

左傳疏：「虛，舊居之處也．」是證古史傳說諸帝皆山居也．
See Ch'ien Mu's article, "An Enquiry into the Mountain Living in Ancient China," *Hsin-ya shu-yuan hsueh-shu nien-koan* or *New Asia College Academic Annual*, V(1963), 432-433.

2. Ibid., p. 431.
3. Majorie H. Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: the Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1959, p. 3.
4. *Po Wu Chih*, vol. III (博文志卷三):
漢武帝好仙道，祭祀名山大川．
5. This contrast between the far and the near, or the magnificent and the diminutive, and the parallellism between homogeneous genres of objects in couplets are not unique to Wang Wei's poetry only. Other Chinese poets resort to these devices of contrast and parallellism, especially in lü-shih (The Regulated Poetry) or chüeh-chü (The Quatrain), as required by prosodic exigencies.
6. *Mencius* (孟子盡心篇).
7. Shelley, "Adonais," 11.488-490.
8. 1) "Rapids by the Luan's" (欒家瀨).
   2) "Hsin-yi Village" (辛夷塢).
   3) "Written on the River, During the Cold-Eat Festival" (寒食汜上作).
   4) "Written on the Wang River on a Rain-drenched Day" (積雨輞川作).
   5) "Pastoral Joy, VI" (田園樂之六).
9. 1) "Delegation to the Frontier" (使至塞上).
   2) "Seeing Mr. Hsin Kuei-chou off" (送邢桂州).
   3) "Ascending the Walls, North of the City" (登河北城樓作).
   4) "Sailing on the Han River" (漢江臨汎).
   5) "The View of a Fine, Sunny Evening" (新晴晚望).
   6) "Hunting" (觀獵).
   7) "Written for Treasurer Ch'iu" (贈從弟司庫員外逖).
   8) "The Pastoral Joy, V" (田園樂之五).
   9) "Ascending the Elevated Terrace to See Prefect Li off" (臨高臺送黎拾遺).
10. Byron, *Manfred*, Act I, sc.ii.11.107-109.
11. John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. III, p. 180.
12. Wordworth, "The Excursion, Book IV," 11.514-535.
13. 倚仗柴門外（輞川閒居贈裴迪秀才）
側弁倚春木（晦日遊大理韋卿城南別業四首之四）
閑坐但焚香（春日上方即事）；輭草承跌坐（登辨覺寺）
端坐學無生（遊感化寺）；夜坐空林寂（過感化寺晝雲上人山院）
坐看雲起時（終南別業）
14. D. T. Suzuki, *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*, New York, 1957, pp. 150-151.
15. James Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., London, 1962, p. 49.
16. Byron, *Manfred*, Act I, sc.ii., 11.7-47.
17. Shelley, "Stanza: Written in Dejection, Near Naples," 11.19-27.