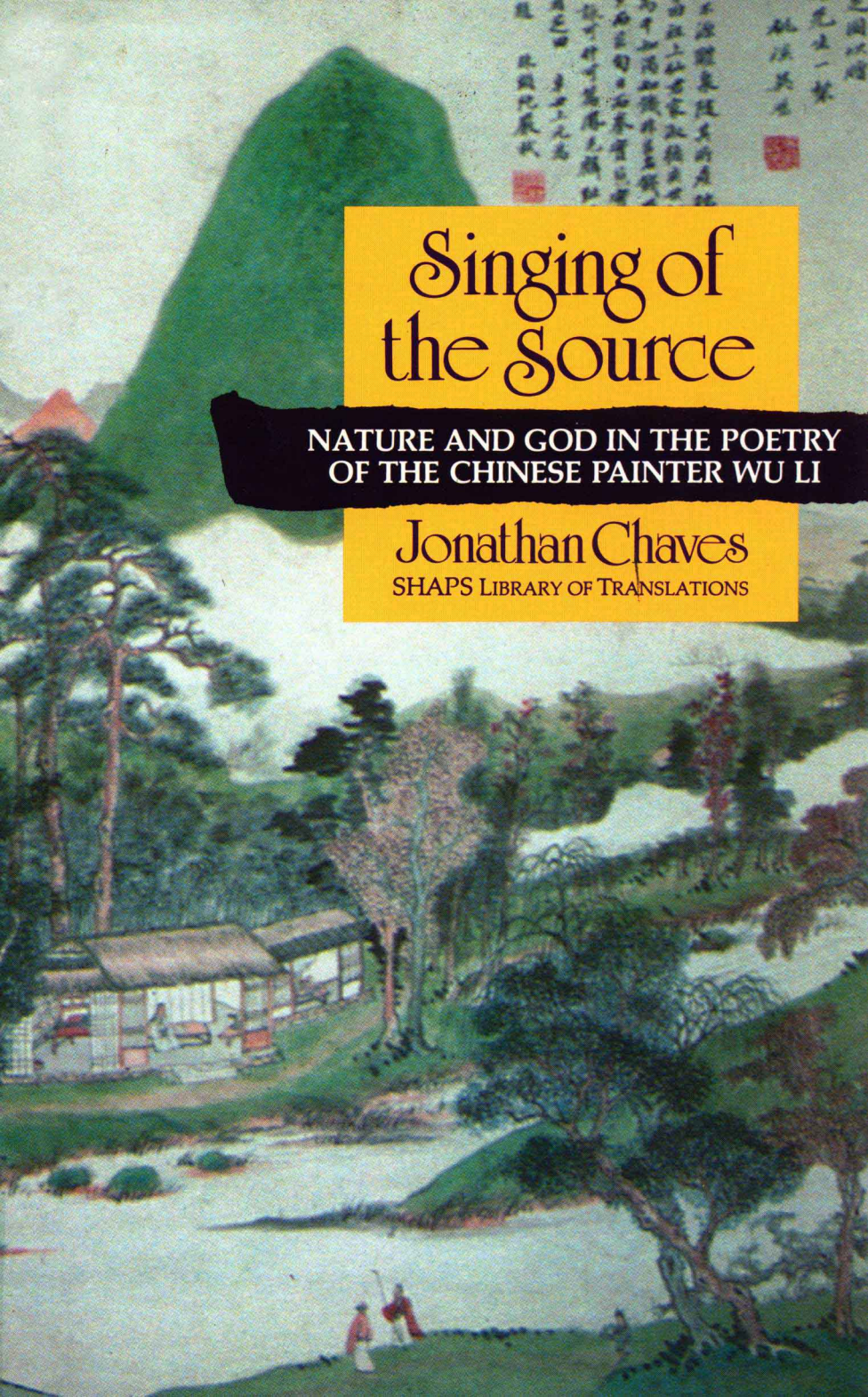

Singing of the Source

NATURE AND GOD IN THE POETRY OF THE CHINESE PAINTER WU LI

Jonathan Chaves

SHAPS Library of Translations

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Designed by Kenneth Miyamoto

For if I should (said he)
Bestow this jewel also on my creature,
He would adore my gifts instead of me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature:
So both should losers be.

—George Herbert, "The Pulley"

The shelves are full, all other themes are sped;
Hackney'd and worn to the last flimsy thread. . . .
And 'tis the sad complaint, and almost true,
Whate'er we write, we bring forth nothing new.
'Twere new indeed to see a bard all fire,
Touch'd with a coal from Heaven, assume the lyre. . . .

—William Cowper, "Table Talk"

Preface

This book has two purposes. It is the first comprehensive study and presentation in any language of the poetry of Wu Li, a man famous as one of the orthodox masters of early Ch'ing-dynasty painting, but whose very reputation as a painter even in his own lifetime obscured his achievement as a poet. And the book is an attempt to come to grips with the role played by Christianity in seventeenth-century China as embodied in the personal conversion experience of one individual: Wu Li.

Increasing attention to poetry of the later era—the Yüan, Ming, and Ch'ing dynasties—is one of the salient developments in recent Chinese poetry studies. I myself have striven to contribute to this exciting new field in a series of articles on individual poets of the Ming–Ch'ing transition, which has emerged through recent scholarship as a particularly fascinating period of ferment in both poetry and painting, as well as in my *Columbia Book of Later Chinese Poetry* (1986). For each of the early Ch'ing poets I have studied—Wu Chia-chi (1618–1684), Ch'ien Ch'ien-i (1582–1664), and now, Ch'ien's pupil in poetry, Wu Li (1632–1718)—I have aimed at showing that while the individual poet may have been drawing from aspects of the past, he was unmistakably original in the variations he rang upon some traditional theme.

Wu Li is here presented as a participant in the rediscovery of Sung-dynasty poetry and poetics in the early Ch'ing, centering on the publication in 1671 of *Sung-shih ch'ao* by Wu Chih-chen (1640–1717) and his colleagues. I shall demonstrate that Wu Li was associated, however briefly, with the circle of important poets and scholars who enjoyed first access to this major compilation of Sung

poetry, and that he was influenced by Sung poetry to produce a highly accomplished body of conventional poetry in what might be called a neo-Sung manner. But his real originality, I argue, lies in the unprecedented boldness of his experimental creation: a Chinese Christian poetry, a poetry utterly traditional in its use of *shih* and *ch'ü* forms and such devices as parallelism and allusion, but equally *un*conventional in being based on orthodox Christian theology.

The conversion experience which led Wu Li to become a member of the Jesuit society, and eventually to be ordained as one of the first Chinese Catholic priests, is explored here in the context of widespread intellectual and spiritual ferment in the early Ch'ing, as well as considerable conversion activity among the various religions of China, especially conversions from Confucianism to Buddhism, in the wake of the collapse of the Ming dynasty. Nevertheless, the conversion of Wu Li is ultimately taken to be an authentic non-coerced spiritual experience irreducible to social, economic, or even psychological determinants either singly or in combination. The enormous leap by which a Chinese scholar deeply immersed, as will be seen, in Neo-Confucianism and Buddhism would seek to become a Christian, and would then be inspired to compose Christian poetry in classical Chinese poetic forms, is the central mystery which this book hopes, not to explain completely, but to elucidate to some degree.

Abbreviations

CKH: Chou K'ang-hsieh 周康燮, ed. *Wu Yü-shan yen-chiu lun-chi* 吳漁山研究論集. Hong Kong: Ch'ung-wen Bookstore, 1971.

MCC: Li Ti, S.J. 李杕, ed. *Mo-ching chi* 墨井集. Shanghai: Hsü-chia-hui 徐家滙 ("Zikawei") Press, 1909. The copy of this rare book I consulted is in the East Asian Library at Washington University in St. Louis.

MCSC: *Mo-ching shih-ch'ao* 墨井詩鈔. In Ku Hsiang 顧湘, ed., *Hsiao-shih shan-fang ts'ung-shu* 小石山房叢書, 1874; and MCC, chap. 2.

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The Poet

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Wu Li's Literary World

Wu Li is a familiar figure to students of Chinese painting. Together with Yün Shou-p'ing 惲壽平 (1633–1690), Wang Shih-min 王時敏 (1592–1680), Wang Chien 王鑑 (1598–1677), Wang Hui 王翬 (1632–1717), and Wang Yüan-ch'i 王原祁 (1642–1715), he is classified as one of the Six Orthodox Masters of early Ch'ing-dynasty painting. Some attention has also been given to his conversion at an uncertain date to Catholicism, entry into the Society of Jesus in 1682, and ordination as a priest in 1688. But his poetry has gone largely unstudied, with the exceptions of references in an article on Wu (1936) and a *nien-p'u* 年譜 on him (1937) by Ch'en Yüan 陳垣,[1] and annotations to certain individual poems of Wu's by Fang Hao 方豪 (1950 and after) and Wang Tsung-yen 汪宗衍 (1971).[2] Nevertheless, the modern anthologist Teng Chih-ch'eng 鄧之誠, in editing his *Ch'ing-shih chi-shih ch'u-pien* 清詩紀事初編 (1965), thought highly enough of Wu Li's poetry to include three of his poems and a brief essay on Wu as poet.[3] After noting that Wu Li studied poetry under Ch'ien Ch'ien-i 錢謙益 (1582–1664) and painting under Wang Shih-min (facts recorded, as Teng notes, in a biography of Wu by a certain Chang Yün-chang 張雲章 of Chia-ting 嘉定 dating from 1714),[4] Teng concludes his essay by stating:

> Li's poetry has been obscured by his fame in painting, and his personal character has been obscured by his poetry and painting. Those who praise Li today also stress his transmission of religion, but how can they understand that in those days, when he entered the Way, it was because of having undergone bitterness and suffering which cannot be explained to people?

In using the expression *shih wei hua-ming so yen* 詩為畫名所掩 (*"his poetry has been obscured by his fame in painting"*), *Teng* may be hearkening back to a comment on the great painter-poet Shen Chou 沈周 (1427–1509) rendered by the scholar Ho Liang-chün 何良俊 (1506–1573) and echoed through the centuries in later evaluations of the reputations of painter-poets: "Some of Shih-t'ien's 石田 [Shen Chou's] poems are outstandingly fine, but they have been obscured by his painting and so the world does not praise them" (石田詩有絕佳者,但為畫所掩,世不之稱).[5] More immediately, Teng may have had in mind the echo of Ho's phrase in the last of the four prefaces to the 1719 edition of Wu Li's poetry known as *Mo-ching shih-ch'ao* 墨井詩鈔, the one written by Yü Huai 余懷 (1616–1696),[6] in which Yü laments: "People only know that he is good at painting, but they do not know of his skill at poetry; people only know that his poetry has been obscured by his painting (其詩以畫掩), but they do not realize that his painting has been transmitted because of his poetry." (The final part of this statement is clearly hyperbolic, but in the first part Yü at one stroke suggests that even in Wu's day he was better known as a painter than as a poet, and that there was a consensus, presumably among his admirers, that his poetry was unjustly neglected.)

The highest praise yet accorded to Wu Li's poetry has come from Albert Chan, S.J., who writes: "His poems are graceful and limpid, especially those of his later years, which couch Catholic thought in exquisite style; he was perhaps the first in China to find a poetic vehicle for Christian doctrine. His poems manifest his devout life and his admiration for the scientific achievements of the early Jesuits."[7]

Wu Li's Reputation as a Poet

In Wu Li's own day, those like Yü Huai who did praise his poetry seem inevitably to have done so in a context which emphasizes that he was, after all, primarily a painter. Wu's painting teacher, Wang Shih-min, in a colophon "Inscribed at the End of Wu Yü-shan's [Wu Li's] Poem and Painting, 'Suffering from the Rain,'"[8] writes:

> [Wu Li] is skillful at poetry and at the same time excellent at the matter of painting. With Censor Hsü Ch'ing-yü of P'i-ling he has established a relationship of literature—brush and ink—and there is no disagreement in their views. They often travel to see famous sights; ornamented carriage and rowed boat they never fail to share. They exchange poems and essays and in the course of time these have formed a volume. Recently [Wu Li] also has written a sixteen-line poem, "Sighing Over the Rain," which he has connected to a painting, and this can be considered a particularly suitable match [between the two arts].[9] . . . "Painting in poetry, poetry in painting": in this scroll they are fully complete. When it comes to the Way of poetry, I am at a loss; how would I dare rashly to "insert my beak" even the least bit? But when I gaze from two hundred *li* away, I see the tones of the Great Elegance *Ta ya* 大雅 produced by great men and noble scholars, "very grand," "extensive and lovely,"[10] mutually illuminating the precious picture, a fine episode for the Garden of Art. . . .

The "Hsü Ch'ing-yü" referred to by Wang Shih-min is Wu Li's closest friend in the 1670s, Hsü Chih-chien 許之漸 (*chin-shih*, 1655), a figure known in the history of Catholicism in China because of the anti-Catholic polemic launched against him by Yang Kuang-hsien 楊光先 (1597–1669).[11] As Ch'en Yüan has noted,[12] there are indeed a number of poems in MCSC addressed to him, and he figures importantly in the colophons of a number of Wu Li's paintings, including the handscroll of 1679 entitled "Whiling Away the Summer at the Inkwell Thatched Hut" (*Mo-ching ts'ao-t'ang hsiao-hsia t'u* 墨井草堂消夏圖), now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, which is dedicated to him, although Ch'en rejects the claim in one of the later colophons to this scroll that Hsü like Wu converted to Catholicism. (A detail from this painting is reproduced here as Plate 2.)

Wang Shih-min's chief concern seems to be to present Wu Li as a traditional *wen-jen* 文人 literatus, exchanging poems with a "friend in poetry," as did Po Chü-i 白居易 (772–846) and Yüan Chen 元稹 (779–831), or Lu Kuei-meng 陸龜蒙 (d. ca. 881) and P'i Jih-hsiu 皮日休 (ca. 833–883), or Mei Yao-ch'en 梅堯臣 (1002–

1060) and Ou-yang Hsiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072). Still, the close connection of his poetry with his painting remains fundamental in the colophon.

One might expect Wu's painting master to emphasize his painting, but even his poetry master, Ch'ien Ch'ien-i, in a colophon (or preface) to an early collection of Wu's poetry—*T'ao-ch'i shih-kao* 桃溪詩稿,[13] now apparently lost as an independent book, although some or all of the poems in it were probably edited into MCSC—if anything places more stress on Wu's painting than Wang Shih-min does. Only after a lengthy discussion of the influence on Wu of certain great painters, in which he praises Wu's ability in the depiction of architectural elements and human figures, as well as his painstaking application of "texture-strokes" (*ts'un* 皴) and washes, does Ch'ien so much as mention Wu's poetry—even though the text in question is supposedly about his poetry collection in the first place. When Ch'ien does finally get around to the poetry, he writes:

> Yü-shan is not only good at painting; he is exceptionally skillful at poetry. The thought [in his poems] is pure and the style ancient. In his command of the brush he achieves the subtle. For this too [the writing of poetry] he does on the basis of his painting: he does not wish to vie in prettiness with the world of fashion [in poetry and painting] by smearing rouge and daubing powder.

Ch'ien then returns to the discussion of painting as such, which he maintains to the end, although he states at one point that, "of course, there has never been a scholar of whom it could be said that he was a good painter even though he did not draw upon the well-water of antiquity or work at literature." Ch'ien also speaks of Wu Li as a "Huang [Kung-wang] or Shen [Chou] of our time." Huang Kung-wang 黃公望 (1269–1354) was one of the Four Masters of Yüan-dynasty painting. Shen Chou, as we have seen, had a reputation both as painter and poet.

In a different context—a eulogy on Wu Li's mother written by Ch'ien at Wu's request—Ch'ien does end the brief preface with the statement, "Her youngest son, Li, can write poetry and has a reputation (能詩有聞). He has asked me to write a eulogy for

her."[14] It is unclear from the wording whether Wu Li's "reputation" was specifically for his ability at writing poetry. No mention is made of his painting, but as a eulogy on one's mother would be a highly formal text, reference to what was officially regarded as a somewhat frivolous pastime might have been considered inappropriate.

When MCSC was edited in 1719 (the year after Wu Li's death), four prefaces were printed along with it. All four of them treat Wu Li as primarily a painter, even though with some regrets at the neglect of his poetry. The first, dated 1668, is by a certain T'ang Yü-chao 唐宇昭 (the second character of his name also appears as Yü 于 or even Yü 禹).[15] T'ang, known for his *ch'uan-ch'i* 傳奇 plays and for his forty poems "In Imitation of Palace Lyrics" (*ni kung-tz'u* 擬宮詞),[16] tells how he "had long heard of Yü-shan's name, but had not yet seen his painting." Only later did he discover Wu Li's character; and last of all his poetry:

> Yü-shan is not a man typical of the present time. And so I asked to see his paintings. His paintings are not of a single style. Some are landscapes, some human figures or flowers and birds. . . . Next I sought out the poems in his book-basket. They were all in the form of little fascicles [*chih* 帙], and the fascicles made up more than a single anthology [*chi* 集]. He happened to show me the Peach Stream Anthology [*T'ao-ch'i chi*], the one Mu-weng [Ch'ien Ch'ien-i] had enjoyed greatly and discussed with words of praise.

T'ang also says that he spoke about Wu Li to Hsü Chih-chien, and it was Hsü who had the idea that T'ang write this preface, originally intended for the *T'ao-ch'i* anthology, four years after the death of Ch'ien Ch'ien-i.[17]

The second preface to MCSC, the most intellectually interesting of the four, is by Ch'en Yü-chi 陳玉璂 (chin-shih, 1667), the son-in-law of Wu's friend Hsü Chih-chien and a scholar with a reputation both for prose and for poetry, who was anthologized in *Ch'ing-shih chi-shih* (although the editor, Teng Chih-ch'eng, says his prose is superior to his poetry, which is not his forte) and in *Ch'ing-shih pieh-ts'ai chi* 清詩別裁集, edited by Shen Te-ch'ien 沈德潛 (1673–1769) and others.[18] Ch'en develops a distinction between those

"men of today who make it their rule to imitate the poems of men of the past, carving their hearts and puncturing their reins to seek skillfulness, and yet in the end they are not skillful," and those who "happen to see some scenes or phenomena between heaven and earth, enjoyable or detestable, and upon contact with them form poems, and their skillfulness ends up superior to that of the ancients." This may be seen as a reference to the orthodox masters of the Ming and their emphasis on imitation of the great writers of the past, as opposed to the individualists of the Kung-an school and the concept of direct experience leading to naturalness of expression. Wu Li is enlisted by Ch'en on the side of those who "master it without intention" (*wu hsin erh te chih* 無心而得之), but only after a somewhat turgid attempt to argue that painters, by contrast with poets, need not experience the phenomena of the world directly because they already contain them "within the breast," so that they can "close their eyes and engage in meditative viewing [*ming-shih* 冥視], and then that which they contact within the breast will be plentiful." Perhaps this argument is intended as a kind of compliment to Wu Li, for Ch'en continues:

> Master Wu Yü-shan is famous as a painter. He is also skilled at poetry. His poetry entirely does away with the practice of "carving and weaving"; he follows the self-so. Chung Jung 鍾嶸 [ca. 465–518] says that T'ao Yüan-ming's [T'ao Ch'ien 陶潛 (365–427)] poetry "emerged from that of Ying Chü 應璩."[19] I say Yü-shan's poetry in fact emerged from Yüan-ming, and yet Yü-shan simply lets flow directly the scenes and phenomena in his breast. When has he ever depended upon a man of former times?

Ch'en Yü-chi, in associating Wu Li with a natural, direct mode of expression derived in a sense from T'ao Ch'ien, is in fact linking him with the whole movement away from T'ang-oriented archaism to a new appreciation for Sung poetry and its characteristic understated manner; we shall shortly see that Wu Li was indeed influenced by this movement. Ch'en Yü-chi was an insightful critic who also wrote prefaces to the poetry of such major figures of the day as Wu Wei-yeh 吳偉業 (1609–1672), Wang Shih-chen 王士禛 (1634–1711), and Shih Jun-chang 施閏章 (1619–1683),[20] with all

of whom Wu Li too had some contact. (It remains unclear whether he actually met Wu Wei-yeh.)[21]

The third preface to MCSC is by none other than Ch'en Hu 陳瑚 (1613–1675),[22] who, as Chang Yün-chang points out in his biography, was Wu Li's teacher in Confucian philosophy and indeed, as we shall see, a leading Confucian thinker of his time. He describes Wu Li as a master of the *ch'in* 琴 zither and a calligrapher, but then goes on like the other preface writers to remind us that he "was exceptionally good at painting landscapes." After quoting at some length from Ch'ien Ch'ien-i's colophon-preface to Wu's *T'ao-ch'i shih-kao,* he notes that "Tsung-po [Ch'ien Ch'ien-i], in prefacing Wu's poetry, simultaneously brought in his painting to this degree," making the point we have been establishing—namely, that those who praise Wu Li's poetry always stress the primacy of his painting or at least mention the fact of his being a painter. Ch'en Hu then names Wang Wei 王維 (701–761), Shen Chou, and Wen Cheng-ming 文徵明 (1470–1559) as rare examples from earlier periods of men who combined poetry and painting like Wu Li.

Finally, as we have seen, Yü Huai, a writer with a reputation for his *tz'u* 詞 poetry and for his memoirs of Nanking, *Pan-ch'iao tsa-chi* 板橋雜記—which contain, as Strassberg notes, "intimate accounts of the personalities and manners of the pleasure quarters,"[23] including the biographies of various famed singing girls—in the fourth and last preface to MCSC expresses regret that Wu Li's fame as a painter prevented recognition of his poetry.[24] Yü Huai refers to another apparently lost anthology of Wu's poetry, the *Hsieh-yu chi* 寫憂集.

If the very men who set out to praise Wu Li's poetry found the intimidating effect of his reputation as a painter impossible to ignore, what justification is there today for attempting to focus attention on the poetry? If Wu Li had written only the sort of poetry found in the MCSC, the answer would probably be: very little. But as Albert Chan's statement cited above makes clear, Wu Li was to write an entirely different sort of poetry in his later years. He was to attempt, in fact, the creation of something com-