

CHINESE PAINTINGS IN THE PALACE MUSEUM (4TH-14TH CENTURY)

DICKSON HALL
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List of Plates

001 Nymph of the Luo River 洛神赋图卷	10	018 Taking a Short Rest after Hunting 卓歇图卷	94
002 Exemplary Women 列女图卷	16	019 Xiao Xiang Landscape 潇湘图卷	100
003 Spring Excursion 游春图卷	20	020 Sparrows in Winter 寒雀图卷	104
004 Emperor Tang Taizong Receiving a Tibetan Envoy 步辇图卷	24	021 Butterflies 写生蛱蝶图卷	108
005 A Literary Gathering 文苑图卷	28	022 Nest of Rocks on a Plain 窠石平远图轴	112
006 Five Oxen 五牛图卷	32	023 Dawn over Streams and Mountains in Spring 溪山春晚图卷	116
007 Palace Garden 宫苑图卷	36	024 Spinning 纺车图卷	120
008 Palace Garden 宫苑图轴	40	025 Imperial Horses at Pasture, after Wei Yan 临韦偃牧放图卷	124
009 Gentlemen Riders on an Outing 游骑图卷	44	026 Vimalakirti Preaching Buddhist Doctrine 维摩演教图卷	130
010 One Hundred Horses 百马图卷	48	027 Fishing Village in Light Snow 渔村小雪图卷	136
011 Ladies with Fans 挥扇仕女图卷	54	028 Islet and Reeds in Snow 芦汀密雪图卷	140
012 Six Aryas 六尊者像图册	58	029 Life along the Bian River at the Pure Brightness Festival 清明上河图卷	142
013 Birds, Insects and Turtles 写生珍禽图卷	72	030 Pheasant on Cotton Rose Hibiscus 芙蓉锦鸡图轴	150
014 Female Immortals in Elysium 阆苑女仙图卷	76	031 Boat Returning on Snowy River 雪江归棹图卷	152
015 Night Revels of Han Xizai 韩熙载夜宴图卷	80		
016 Playing Chess before a Double Screen 重屏会棋图卷	86		
017 Eminent Recluse 高士图卷	90		

032 Listening to the Qin (Zither) 听琴图轴	156
033 A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains 千里江山图卷	158
034 Rare Views of Xiao Xiang 潇湘奇观图卷	164
035 Fifteen Children Playing by a Garden Rock and a Plantain Tree 蕉石戏婴图页	168
036 Gathering Edible Wild Herbs 采薇图卷	170
037 Plum Blossoms in Snow 雪梅图卷	174
038 Four Views of Flowering Plum 四梅图卷	176
039 Autumn Colours on Rivers and Mountains 江山秋色图卷	180
040 Golden Halls in Pine Forest 万松金阙图卷	184
041 Ten Thousand Li of River and Mountains 江山万里图卷	188
042 Bird Attracted to Ripe Fruit 果熟来禽图页	194
043 Illustration to Second Ode to the Red Cliff 赤壁后游图卷	196
044 Illustrations to the Book of Odes: Odes Beginning with Deer Call 小雅鹿鸣之什图卷	200
045 Eagle on Autumn Maple Eyeing Pheasant	

枫鹰雄鸡图轴	206
046 Four Seasons 四景山水图卷	208
047 Willow Tree and Two Crows in Autumn 秋柳双鸦图页	214
048 Sparse Willow and Wintry Crows 疏柳寒鸦图页	216
049 Itinerant Peddler 货郎图卷	218
050 Dancing and Singing 踏歌图轴	222
051 Plum Blossoms above Rocks and Wild Ducks 梅石溪凫图页	224
052 Streamside Cottage under Bamboo and Phoenix Tree 梧竹溪堂图页	226
053 Layers of Icy Thin Silk 层叠冰绡图轴	228
054 Four Goats 四羊图页	230
055 Travellers Passing Through Snow-covered Mountain 盘车图轴	232
056 Orchids 墨兰图卷	234
057 Spinning 丝纶图轴	238
058 Dwelling in Seclusion 幽居图卷	240
059 Waterside Village 水村图卷	244

060 Watering Horses in Autumn Suburbs	
秋郊饮马图卷	248
061 Bathing Horses 浴马图卷	252
062 Two Horses 二马图卷	256
063 Bo Ya Playing Qin 伯牙鼓琴图卷	260
064 Fisherman 渔父图轴	264
065 Ink Plum Flowers 墨梅图卷	268
066 Fishermen on a Snowy River 雪江鱼艇图卷	270
067 Ink Bamboo and Rock 墨竹坡石图轴	272
068 Ink Bamboo Painted in the Pavilion of Fresh Quietude	
清閟阁墨竹图轴	274
069 Sparse Pines and Secluded Mountains	
疏松幽岫图轴	276
070 Waiting for a Ferry at Riverbank in Autumn	
秋江待渡图轴	278
071 Bathed in Rain 沐雨竹图轴	282
072 Cliffs of Tianchi 天池石壁图轴	284
073 Pheasants, Flowers and Bamboo 花竹锦鸡图轴	286
074 Horse-rider Holding a Peddle Bow While Hunting	
挟弹游骑图轴	288

075 A Fishing Boat in a Stream with Pine Trees on the Bank	
松溪钓艇图卷	290
076 Bamboo and Rocks in Delineation	
勾勒竹石图卷	292
077 Swallows in Willow 柳燕图轴	294
078 The Migration of Ge Zhichuan	
葛稚川移居图轴	296
079 Du Qiu 杜秋图卷	298
080 Pavilion and Trees in Autumn 秋庭嘉树图轴	302
081 Rocks and Bamboo 竹石图轴	304
082 A Boat Going Down the Stream in the Wu Yi Mountains	
武夷放棹图轴	306
083 Lodge of Beautiful Wilderness 秀野轩图卷	308
084 Boating in the Stream with Pine on the Bank	
松溪放艇图卷	312
085 Eagle, Rock and Juniper 鹰桧图轴	314
086 Portrait of Yang Zhuxi 杨竹西小像卷	316

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Dickson Hall

Author

Dickson Hall is a Canadian with a lifelong interest in China, Chinese art history and traditional Chinese culture. He studied in Beijing as a government exchange scholar from 1977 to 1980. Mr. Hall has degrees in Art History from University of British Columbia (BA, MA) and diplomas from Beijing Language Institute (Chinese language), Beijing University (archaeology), and Central Academy of Fine Arts (Chinese painting history). He has lived in Beijing, Guangzhou and Hong Kong for extended periods of time as a diplomat and businessman and has travelled extensively throughout China. Mr. Hall now lives in Vancouver, Canada and visits China on a regular basis.

Preface to the Palace Museum Edition

This new edition of *Chinese Paintings in the Palace Museum (4th – 14th Century)* is the result of my serendipitous, but wholly auspicious, meeting with Ms. Zhao Guoying, Editor-in-Chief, The Forbidden City Publishing House, at an opening reception held in honour of a Palace Museum exhibition in Vancouver, Canada in October 2014. Discovering that we were both alumnis of the Central Academy of Fine Arts and had studied under the same professors, we fell into a long conversation. I eventually described the original concept for this book when it was written in the mid-1980s, its intended use as a handbook, and my hope at the time to publish it through the Palace Museum. She asked me to bring a copy of the earlier edition to Beijing on my next visit, and I did. As we sat in her office and flipped through the long out-of-print book she said that she would love to re-publish it with higher quality reproductions of the paintings with the target audience being the English-speaking visitors to the Palace Museum. I agreed without hesitation. Little did I imagine that she and her team would take my modest handbook and reposition it as a magnificent, full-colour art book with every painting carefully reproduced in full, including many with beautiful detailed close-ups. The Palace Museum and the Forbidden City Publishing House are intensely proud of their collections and, indeed, of China's long art traditions. This new edition is a reflection

of their hope that international visitors to the Palace Museum will learn more of China's cultural traditions and understand more of the beauty and complexity of the Chinese painting tradition.

Thirty years have passed since I completed the first edition of this book, and twenty-five years have passed since its first publication. China, and Beijing, are now a world apart from that time. From today's vantage point it is difficult to imagine my student days riding a bicycle through the sparse traffic of Beijing's streets and *hutongs* to spend hours peering at paintings in the then ill-lit, cold, sparsely visited Palace Museum halls or researching in the library at the Central Academy of Fine Arts at the old campus in *Jinyu Hutong (Goldfish Alley)*.

During the ensuing years, China and Beijing have changed enormously. The dramatic speed and breadth of social, economic and cultural change is well documented. Even the Palace Museum has changed. While it remains the historic cultural centre of Beijing that it always was, it now has enormous newly re-furbished areas open to an ever growing number of Chinese and international visitors, it has beautiful new state-of-the-art museum spaces that host well-curated exhibitions enhanced by the latest in audio-visual guides and digital information. However, one thing has not changed—the Palace Museum's timeless collection of the earliest treasures of

Chinese painting. These paintings are preserved with the greatest care and veneration so they will be available for generations to come. They are presented to the public now in well-lit, comfortable conditions, but in a slow rotation that means the oldest paintings may only be seen for short periods every few years. Hence the need for more publications like this one so these paintings may be known by a greater number of people.

The entries for the paintings in this new edition have been edited where necessary to reflect recent scholarship and to correct any mistakes or typos from the past. A few of the titles have been changed to reflect the English language titles that are now in common use with the Palace Museum.

I would like to sincerely thank Zhao Guoying and her staff at the Forbidden City Publishing House, including editors Zhu Lan and Wang Conghui, for their beautiful design and production of this book. Their professionalism and enthusiasm for this project has re-sharpened my own interest. I would also like to acknowledge belatedly professors Jin Weinuo and Bo Songnian of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing for their assistance and support many years ago. Finally, I dedicate this edition to the memory of the late James Caswell, Professor of Chinese Art History, University of British Columbia, who first opened my eyes and mind to the wonders of Chinese painting so many, many years ago.

April 2016, Vancouver

Preface to the First Edition (1989)

The Palace Museum (*Gugong Bowuyuan*), located within the walls of the Forbidden City in the centre of Beijing, houses one of the most important collections of classical Chinese painting in the world. The core of this magnificent collection consists of paintings acquired by imperial art lovers, notably the Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty and the great connoisseur and avid collector, Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty. Subsequent acquisitions, particularly those added after the Palace was officially designated a museum, have enhanced the imperial collection and today the vast holdings number thousands of hanging scrolls, handscrolls and album leaves. These are accompanied by an equally large and impressive collection of calligraphy.

The Palace Museum is one of the few museums in the world able to mount comprehensive exhibitions focused on an individual artist, an influential school or movement, or a theme in Chinese painting relevant to a particular period or dynasty. Research into classical Chinese art and culture resumed after the end of the "Cultural Revolution" and the Palace Museum has since organized a number of shows of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The Museum's collection of masterpieces

from these later Dynasties is unsurpassed in quality and number.

However, the Museum also possesses a fine collection of rarer vintage, so delicate and treasured that it is only glimpsed by the outside world for a brief period each year. During the short Beijing autumn of clear blue skies, low humidity and moderate temperature, the Palace Museum authorities expose to light and air their precious pre-Ming Dynasty paintings. This collection of paintings, dating from the fourth to fourteenth centuries, is exhibited in the Museum's *Shuhua Guan* (*The Calligraphy and Painting Gallery*) as a survey history of Chinese painting. Masterpieces representative of the most important artists, schools, subjects and techniques developed during the formative and classic periods of Asia's greatest painting tradition are displayed.

There is no one book or catalogue in Chinese or any other language that provides the interested viewer with details of all these early paintings. Although some of the major works have been published repeatedly in large format art books, many others have only appeared in Chinese newspapers, academic journals, museum pamphlets or other texts with limited and specialist

circulation. A few very fine paintings, only recently come to light, have never been published or discussed in detail.

While resident in Beijing during six autumns (1977–1982), I had the great fortune and pleasure to make numerous visits to the Palace Museum to spend hours enjoying, studying and examining these paintings in great detail. Aided by a background in Chinese art history and knowledge of the Chinese language, I gradually became familiar with the paintings. Through discussions with authorities at the Palace Museum, with professors at the Central Academy of Fine Arts and with visiting scholars, and by collecting and reading all available information, I began to recognize more fully the beauty, emotions and creative genius to be seen in these paintings. In the same way I came to understand some of the controversies of age, artist, authenticity and style which surround certain paintings.

This book is an attempt to synthesize the available information into a simple reference guide for the use of those visiting the annual autumn exhibition.

The book contains entries on more than eighty paintings. These are arranged according to the chronology and layout adopted by the Palace Museum for its exhibition. Each painting has been reproduced in full whenever possible, to assist the viewer to locate and identify paintings. Opposite each reproduction there is an entry for quick reference (title, artist, dates of activity, format and materials, dimensions) and a text outlining the painting's subject matter, technique and stylistic tradition, together with some biographical details of the artist. It should therefore be possible for the non-reader of Chinese to use the book as a pictorial and textual guide

and reference while walking through the Palace Museum.

This book can also serve a secondary purpose as an English language compendium to the Palace Museum's lavishly illustrated series of Chinese language art books: *Zhongguo Lidai Huihua: Gugong Bowuyuan Canghua Ji* (*Chinese Paintings of Successive Dynasties: Paintings in the Collection of the Palace Museum*). This series of books, of which four volumes have been published, is a chronological survey of the most important paintings in the Museum. Each book provides complete, high quality, colour reproductions of the paintings as well as colophons and seals. Commentary from early connoisseurs and art historical texts are also provided in Chinese. This book includes entries on all of the paintings reproduced in the first three volumes. In addition, I have tried to anticipate those pre-Ming paintings which may appear in subsequent volumes and have included entries in this book.

I would like to thank the many people who contributed their thoughts, their scholarship, their energy and their love of Chinese painting to the writing of this book. I hope that those using it will find it helpful and informative as they view and study the Palace Museum's priceless collection.

Guangzhou, Spring 1984

List of Plates

001 Nymph of the Luo River 洛神赋图卷	10	018 Taking a Short Rest after Hunting 卓歇图卷	94
002 Exemplary Women 列女图卷	16	019 Xiao Xiang Landscape 潇湘图卷	100
003 Spring Excursion 游春图卷	20	020 Sparrows in Winter 寒雀图卷	104
004 Emperor Tang Taizong Receiving a Tibetan Envoy 步辇图卷	24	021 Butterflies 写生蛱蝶图卷	108
005 A Literary Gathering 文苑图卷	28	022 Nest of Rocks on a Plain 窠石平远图轴	112
006 Five Oxen 五牛图卷	32	023 Dawn over Streams and Mountains in Spring 溪山春晚图卷	116
007 Palace Garden 宫苑图卷	36	024 Spinning 纺车图卷	120
008 Palace Garden 宫苑图轴	40	025 Imperial Horses at Pasture, after Wei Yan 临韦偃牧放图卷	124
009 Gentlemen Riders on an Outing 游骑图卷	44	026 Vimalakirti Preaching Buddhist Doctrine 维摩演教图卷	130
010 One Hundred Horses 百马图卷	48	027 Fishing Village in Light Snow 渔村小雪图卷	136
011 Ladies with Fans 挥扇仕女图卷	54	028 Islet and Reeds in Snow 芦汀密雪图卷	140
012 Six Aryas 六尊者像图册	58	029 Life along the Bian River at the Pure Brightness Festival 清明上河图卷	142
013 Birds, Insects and Turtles 写生珍禽图卷	72	030 Pheasant on Cotton Rose Hibiscus 芙蓉锦鸡图轴	150
014 Female Immortals in Elysium 阆苑女仙图卷	76	031 Boat Returning on Snowy River 雪江归棹图卷	152
015 Night Revels of Han Xizai 韩熙载夜宴图卷	80		
016 Playing Chess before a Double Screen 重屏会棋图卷	86		
017 Eminent Recluse 高士图卷	90		

032 Listening to the Qin (Zither) 听琴图轴	156
033 A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains 千里江山图卷	158
034 Rare Views of Xiao Xiang 潇湘奇观图卷	164
035 Fifteen Children Playing by a Garden Rock and a Plantain Tree 蕉石戏婴图页	168
036 Gathering Edible Wild Herbs 采薇图卷	170
037 Plum Blossoms in Snow 雪梅图卷	174
038 Four Views of Flowering Plum 四梅图卷	176
039 Autumn Colours on Rivers and Mountains 江山秋色图卷	180
040 Golden Halls in Pine Forest 万松金阙图卷	184
041 Ten Thousand Li of River and Mountains 江山万里图卷	188
042 Bird Attracted to Ripe Fruit 果熟来禽图页	194
043 Illustration to Second Ode to the Red Cliff 赤壁后游图卷	196
044 Illustrations to the Book of Odes: Odes Beginning with Deer Call 小雅鹿鸣之什图卷	200
045 Eagle on Autumn Maple Eyeing Pheasant	

枫鹰雄鸡图轴	206
046 Four Seasons 四景山水图卷	208
047 Willow Tree and Two Crows in Autumn 秋柳双鸦图页	214
048 Sparse Willow and Wintry Crows 疏柳寒鸦图页	216
049 Itinerant Peddler 货郎图卷	218
050 Dancing and Singing 踏歌图轴	222
051 Plum Blossoms above Rocks and Wild Ducks 梅石溪凫图页	224
052 Streamside Cottage under Bamboo and Phoenix Tree 梧竹溪堂图页	226
053 Layers of Icy Thin Silk 层叠冰绡图轴	228
054 Four Goats 四羊图页	230
055 Travellers Passing Through Snow-covered Mountain 盘车图轴	232
056 Orchids 墨兰图卷	234
057 Spinning 丝纶图轴	238
058 Dwelling in Seclusion 幽居图卷	240
059 Waterside Village 水村图卷	244

060 Watering Horses in Autumn Suburbs	
秋郊饮马图卷	248
061 Bathing Horses 浴马图卷	252
062 Two Horses 二马图卷	256
063 Bo Ya Playing Qin 伯牙鼓琴图卷	260
064 Fisherman 渔父图轴	264
065 Ink Plum Flowers 墨梅图卷	268
066 Fishermen on a Snowy River 雪江鱼艇图卷	270
067 Ink Bamboo and Rock 墨竹坡石图轴	272
068 Ink Bamboo Painted in the Pavilion of Fresh Quietude	
清閟阁墨竹图轴	274
069 Sparse Pines and Secluded Mountains	
疏松幽岫图轴	276
070 Waiting for a Ferry at Riverbank in Autumn	
秋江待渡图轴	278
071 Bathed in Rain 沐雨竹图轴	282
072 Cliffs of Tianchi 天池石壁图轴	284
073 Pheasants, Flowers and Bamboo 花竹锦鸡图轴	286
074 Horse-rider Holding a Peddle Bow While Hunting	
挟弹游骑图轴	288

075 A Fishing Boat in a Stream with Pine Trees on the Bank	
松溪钓艇图卷	290
076 Bamboo and Rocks in Delineation	
勾勒竹石图卷	292
077 Swallows in Willow 柳燕图轴	294
078 The Migration of Ge Zhichuan	
葛稚川移居图轴	296
079 Du Qiu 杜秋图卷	298
080 Pavilion and Trees in Autumn 秋庭嘉树图轴	302
081 Rocks and Bamboo 竹石图轴	304
082 A Boat Going Down the Stream in the Wu Yi Mountains	
武夷放棹图轴	306
083 Lodge of Beautiful Wilderness 秀野轩图卷	308
084 Boating in the Stream with Pine on the Bank	
松溪放艇图卷	312
085 Eagle, Rock and Juniper 鹰桧图轴	314
086 Portrait of Yang Zhuxi 杨竹西小像卷	316

Nymph of the Luo River

洛神赋图卷

Gu Kaizhi 顾恺之

(Ku Kai-chih) c. 344-406

Handscroll, ink and colours on silk

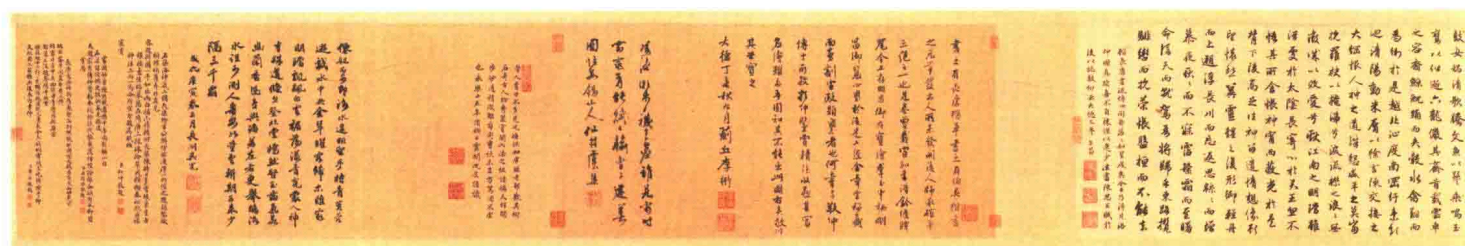
27.1 × 572.8 cm

This long handscroll featuring human figures and mythological beasts set in a primitive, schematic landscape is an illustration to a prose poem or *fū* written by Cao Zhi (192-232 AD), third son of the famous Cao Cao (155-220 AD), the great military tactician and leader during the Three Kingdoms period.

The poem describes the meeting of a man of noble birth with a bewitching river spirit who enchants him with her beauty, eliciting firstly a declaration of love followed by hesitation as he ponders her motives. Finally, she is disappointed, and together with her attendant beasts disappears, saying:

Alas that between men and gods no converse can endure.

Alas that they are vanished, those lusty days of mortal youth!



The painting closely follows the narrative of the poem and is complete but for one short section.

The elongated figures are drawn with a fine, even width brush line and are washed with light colour, showing some shading to indicate volume. Human emotions are expressed either through variation of stance, or the interrelationship of figures. There is little variation in facial expression. Movement is created in the billowing scarves and flowing pendants. The carefully painted trees and landscape details serve as stage setting; trees and figures show no differentiation of size or expression of space and depth. These stylistic conventions are consistent with those seen on excavated materials from the time of the Northern and Southern Dynasties.

Gu Kaizhi came from Wuxi in Jiangsu province, and served firstly as aide-de-camp to General Huan Wen

and later as a secretary to the governor Yin Zhongkan in Hubei. When he died at the age of sixty-one he held the honorary position of Cavalier-Attendant-in-Ordinary, a title given to distinguished men of venerable age. Gu Kaizhi painted Buddhist subjects, Daoist mythology, literary themes, figures, portraits and possibly landscapes.

Since the Song Dynasty, the name of Gu Kaizhi has been associated with paintings of *Nymph of the Luo River*. Although there is no contemporary textual evidence to verify that he actually painted this subject, certainly this painting, now judged to be a Song Dynasty copy, retains the period style of Gu Kaizhi's lifetime, and therefore is an important landmark in the history of early Chinese figure painting.

