

At the time of his death in 1707, Shitao was one of China's most famous painters, and since that moment there has never been a time when his work was not admired. In today's China, his may be the single most famous name among Ming-Qing dynasty artists. It is a privilege, therefore, to have the opportunity to present to the Chinese public my attempt to make sense of Shitao's vast oeuvre in the context of his life and times—though as a non-Chinese scholar I do so with some trepidation. Although long in the making, this book makes no claim to be anything more than an interim report on an inexhaustible artist. You will read here what was possible for a scholar writing in the 1990s combining the resources of traditional Chinese approaches, Western formal and iconographic analysis, and the type of social interpretation made possible by the “New Art History” in Britain and North America since the 1970s. Another scholar, though, would have combined the same resources differently. I gave the project two key emphases.

First, I decided to approach the artist not simply as an artist in a narrow sense but as a complete social being and actor. It seemed to me that studies of pre-twentieth-century artists, whether in China or elsewhere in the world, had generally neglected to treat the artist systematically in all his dimensions. I wanted to see whether one could actually do such a thing. Thus, in this book you will encounter an (in the narrow sense) social Shitao (Chapters 1, 2, and 10), a political Shitao (Ch. 3), a psychological Shitao (Chs. 4, 5), an economic Shitao (Chapters 6, 7, and 8), and a religious Shitao (Ch. 9). Obviously, all of these different facets were mixed together in the artist and his art, and my discussions too are not as neatly separated as this synopsis would suggest. The breadth of treatment comes at a price, however.

Since the focus shifts every chapter or two, there is no point at which all the pieces come together into a single stable image. By the end of the book the reader will at best have glimpsed the complete Shitao, and it may only be in *rereading* the book that the image of him becomes more fixed. Some reviewers found my approach exciting and illuminating, others, understandably, found it frustrating. It will certainly place heavy demands on readers who work their way through the entire text, but those who persevere will have an experience that is available nowhere else in art historical writing today. The second distinctive emphasis is the framing of Shitao's life and art in terms of (early) modernity. This does not mean that my argument shortchanges either the dynastic frame of reference or the self-conscious relation to, and involvement with, the Chinese past. Both of these important aspects of early Qing cultural life receive extended attention. But if Shitao is of compelling interest to us today, it is not for these reasons. Rather it is because his restless inventiveness and insistence on the right of the present to be different from the past are part of the prehistory of China's present cultural modernity. This book explores his role in that prehistory. It takes a very different view of the Chinese past from the conventional one that imagines modernity to have begun in the late Qing, for reasons that are explained at length in Chapters 1, 8, and 9.

Living as we do in a period of soaring demand for Ming-Qing Chinese paintings, it is necessary to say a few words about questions of authenticity. Today copies and wholly invented forgeries of Shitao's work command high prices at auction alongside genuine traces of his brush. Although this is to some degree true of all pre-twentieth-century Chinese painting, the problem is particularly acute with regard to Shitao. In the first place, his work has been forged continuously since his own day. Secondly, whereas other artists

worked in one or at most just a few styles in the course of a lifetime, Shitao practised dozens of styles, with the result that it is easy for owners, dealers, and auction house specialists to persuade themselves and others that almost any interesting-looking painting bearing Shitao's signature may plausibly be attributed to him. Many hundreds of forgeries (if not more) have been reproduced in books, articles, museum catalogues, and auction catalogues, leaving the field of Shitao connoisseurship thoroughly muddied. Now, it is true that Shitao was a prolific artist; moreover, his work was highly valued from a very early date, so a great deal of it has survived. Since 2001 alone, quite a number of genuine images from his hand have come to light—all previously unknown to me and in several cases shedding new light on his life. But these new additions to the corpus are far outnumbered by newly discovered spurious paintings that, inevitably, are now somebody's—or some institution's—prized masterwork.

In the West, connoisseurship has usually been understood in terms of style, which makes sense in a cultural framework where artists themselves aspire to a distinctive personal style. In Ming-Qing China, however, although many artists had a similar aspiration, other artists treated styles as rhetorical options; they did not consider eclecticism to be a weakness, nor did their public. Shitao is the preeminent exemplar of the latter approach, and it follows that stylistic connoisseurship is of limited use in his case. Much more important is the evolving craft—both technical and conceptual—that was specific to him and which he brought into play, no matter what style he was using. When Shitao wrote, in various ways at various times, that there was one *fa*—the *fa* of the One-Stroke—from which the innumerable possible *fa* were generated and of which the latter were the embodiment, he was saying several things. But part of what he meant,

translated into twenty-first-century terms, is that there was one *craft* from which his multiple *styles* derived (the term *fa* can refer both to craft and to style). My sense of Shitao's evolving craft underlies the choice of works discussed in this book—a choice that always respected the counterbalancing documentary factors of seals, signatures, inscriptional information, and colophons, even if the nature of this book did not permit a discussion of the authenticity of each work. I discuss the development of Shitao's craft most systematically in Chapter 8 but the reader will learn much about it in the course of the rest of the book as well. One reviewer of the English edition had difficulty locating my reconstruction of the pattern of Shitao's evolving use of seals and signatures, so let me make clear here that the reconstruction is incorporated into Appendix 1: "Chronology of Shitao's Life."

The forger, too, has his own specific craft, both technical and conceptual. Forgeries—often aesthetically rewarding—are most convincing when the forger has used his craft to inhabit one of Shitao's many styles. Yet, because the forger's own craft—determined by period, personality, and training—prevents him from inhabiting Shitao's craft, in the end he will always be found out. Even if Zhang Daqian's forgeries continue to wreak havoc among unsuspecting viewers, they can be recognized quite easily by anyone who cares to familiarize himself with the careful scholarship of Professor Fu Shen, today the preeminent connoisseur of both Zhang Daqian's and Shitao's painting. Zhang, though the most prolific forger, is not the only one whose craft is distinctive enough to permit the attribution of an entire corpus of forgeries. Several earlier forgers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries whose names are today unknown produced impressive bodies of "Shitao" paintings. The reconstruction of these oeuvres is currently the most pressing issue in Shitao connoisseurship. Since the publication of

the English edition of this book, only one painting has been singled out for skepticism in print (no doubt many more have been doubted privately)—*Dadizi Sleeping on an Ox*, in the Shanghai Museum. I wish to affirm here my confidence in this handscroll image as an autograph work. Its apparent strangeness derives in large part from the fact that the artist was, rather unusually for him, reinterpreting a well-known Song dynasty theme (see the Song handscroll *The Rustic Official Returning Home Drunk* (Palace Museum, Beijing)).

I am very grateful to Rock Publishing in Taipei for commissioning this translation, and to Sanlian Publishing House for publishing the paperback edition in the People's Republic of China. My deepest gratitude goes to the translators and those who verified the translation. The text—extremely dense—is very demanding of the reader's attention in English and must have been exceedingly difficult to translate into a language as different as Chinese.

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