In some places and for some people, painting is considered as an independent occupation. So long as one can take up a brush and paint, he can ignore everything else. But it was different in ancient China. With the exception of a few painters and artisans who took painting as a profession, most of the painters were also men of letters. In their opinion, learning was more important than painting. A picture is not merely a picture but is a poem without words. When a poet is not in the mood to express his feeling in words, he paints a few strokes to show his inner self. Only those who are scholars like him can appreciate the poetic feeling and be inspired to write poetry from it. The simplest Chinese painting, even one that is composed of only a few solitary strokes, can represent the painter's entire stock of learning. If a painter is uneducated, then no matter how skillful his art may be it can never be rid of Vulgarity or even rise above an artisan's aspiration. An unpoetic painting without a heart, without a soul, is tasteless. Chinese painters have a great respect for being "scholarly". To be "scholarly" is to have gone through mature literary cultivation. To reach this stage, the least requirement is to have read hundreds and thousands of books, to be able to write clever and wonderful poetry, to master proper and beautiful calligraphy, to understand how to live a life of a scholar and how to be a man of refinement. Only then can a scholarly spirit be manifested in painting. Failing this, no matter how hard you work on craftsmanship it is still likely that you can never reach the highest stage of perfection. Dong Qichang, a painter of the Ming Dynasty.
代），wrote in his book “Hua Zhi”《画旨》(A General Idea of Painting):

A scholar who paints should use the method of grasshand writing. Trees should be as strong as steel, mountains as soft as sand. All the vulgar and seet touches should be avoided — this is being scholarly. Failing this, even though the painting looks majestic and seems to standard, it has already been degraded by the tricks of the artist and is beyond salvation. If he can break free from these bonds then he will be like a fish which has escaped from a net.

(士人作画，当以草隶奇字之法为之。树如屈铁，山如画沙，绝无甜俗蹊径，乃为士气。不尔，纵俨然及格，已落画师魔界，不复可救药矣。若能解脱绳束，便是透网鳞也。)①

In ancient times there were a lot of paintings which were complementary to literary works. As Guo Ruoxu (郭若虚) of the Sung Dynasty said in his Tuhua Jianwenzhi (图画见闻志) (What Has Been Seen and Heard About Paintings) Volume 1:

All the valuable pictures and paintings of old were named for their meaning. There are the Book of Spring and Autumn《春秋》，The book of Mao Shi《毛诗》，The Book of Analects《论语》，The Canon of Filial Piety《孝经》和 Er Ya《尔雅》．Next comes Cai Yong’s (蔡邕) Painting of A Lecture in East Han (东汉) Dynasty. Zhang Sengzhou (张僧繇) of Liang (梁) has his Painting of Confucius Asking About Rites (孔子问礼图)；Zheng Fashi (郑法士) of Sui (隋) , has his Painting of the Morning Audience in a Ming Court (明堂朝会图)；Yan Lide (阎立德) The of Tang (唐) has his Painting of Dedication of a Hill Sacred to Worship (封禅图) and Yi Jizhao (尹继昭) has his Painting of the Snow Palace (雪宫图)．

(古之秘画珍图，名随意立。典范，则有春秋毛诗论孔子问礼等图。其次后汉蔡邕有讲学图。梁张僧繇有孔子问礼图。隋郑法士有明堂朝会图。唐阎立德有封禅图。尹继昭有雪宫图。)②
In his *Lidai Minghuaji* (Famous Paintings of All Generations) Volume 1 Zhang Yanyuan (张彦远) has also said:

To look on good is warning enough to refrain from evil, to see evil is enough to desire for good. The purpose of preserving a man’s appearance, is to show to others his virtues. A man’s past deeds should be recorded according to his success or failure. A written record can only narrate the events but cannot portray his appearance. A poem can praise the beauty of his deeds but cannot depict them. The advantage of painting is to be able to serve both two purposes.

(见善足以戒恶,见恶足以思贤。留乎形容,式昭盛德之事。具其成败,以传既往之轨。记传所以叙其事,不能载其容。赋颂有以咏其美,不能备其象。图画之制,所以兼之也。)

This makes plain the position of painting in ancient times. In prologue of the *Xuanhe Huapu* (宣和画譥) it is said:

The Chou guan taught students the six principles of composing characters. The third principle was hieroglyphics. That is why it is quite believable that writing and painting are of one origin.

(周官教国子以六书,而其三曰象形。则书画之所谓同体者,尚或有存焉。)

This statement shows the relationship between characters and painting in ancient times.

On the other hand, the Chinese have always been lovers of freedom. No matter who they are, men of letters or painters, they all believe in nature. They like to wander aimlessly without restraint among their fellowmen and roam recklessly beyond physical boundaries. But they are restricted by human limitations and are unable to achieve their ideal goal, so naturally the longing to be free to roam like a “Supernatural being” (神仙) is purely
Chinese. A “Supernatural Being” lives forever, enjoying the freedom to stride across the sky on cloud and mist. Rather than say that this conception is a religious one, we had better say it is one of poetic art. In literature the romance of “supernatural beings” forms an individual type of poetry. Take, for instance, a verse written by He shao(何劭), the one chosen by Xiao Tong(萧统), Prince 昭明 of Liang, in his Wenxuan 文选 (Selection of Literary Works), Volume 21:

Green are the pines on the hillock and lofty is the cypress on the hill. Luxuriant all the year through, no fallen leaves cover their root. A ware of the inconsistency of things, the scholar with a stout heart entrusts his ideals to the world beyond. His aspirations soar to the darkening clouds, his eyes wander over the precipitous rocks. The admirable Wang Ziqiao (王子乔) of old found his way to immortality and ascended from I and Lo, He soared ahead with cranes beneath the distant hill and lofty mountain. Leaving footmarks over millions of miles, What cares he for the joy of mankind? Charmed, with all my heart, I long incessantly for the life of a supernatural being.

(青青陵上松, 亭亭高百节。光色冬夏茂, 根底无凋落。吉士怀贞心, 悟物思远托。扬志玄云际, 流目瞩岩石, 美昔王子乔, 友道发伊洛, 迢递峻岭岳, 连羁御飞鹤。抚迹遗万里, 岂恋生民乐。长怀慕仙类, 遐然心靡息。)

This and the seven poems by Guo Pu(郭璞) which are in the same book and same volume, describe the same psychology. They are said to be representative of this type of poetry.

Since the life of a supernatural being is idealistic, it is so comfortable and carefree that many scholars have a great inclination towards it. They, in their real life are incapable of reaching this ideal sphere. Yielding to inevitability, they turn to a love of roaming amid scenes of nature. This preference, in the eyes of later scholars almost became or faded. As in what has been said of Xie Lingyun(谢灵运) in Volume 19 of Nan Shi《南史》(Hist
He was appointed prefect of Yong Jia. The place was famed for its scenery and he had always been fond of it. Disappointed in his career he devoted all his attention to travel. He travelled for months and covered all the districts. He gave no concern to his judicial duty of giving judgement to disputes, and wherever he went he left poems to express his will.

(Hou Bo of the South).

His love for natural scenery was no longer passive, but active. His literary works also strongly stimulate his readers' interest in sight-seeing. From this time onwards, there were innumerable works of poetry and prose praising scenes from nature and keeping records of travels.

Due to the influence of this kind of poetry and prose, landscape painting enjoyed a dominant position in Chinese art from the T'ang Dynasty onwards. The T' poet Wang Wei wrote picturesque poetry which could be memorized by most Chinese children. The famous lines from some of his poems are:

"The setting sun lingers over the ferry,渡头余落日/ A solitary finger
of smoke hovers over the desolate lane" 虚里上孤烟/ "Outside, the bam-
boos quiver in the wind. 隔牖风惊竹/ Behold the hill is covered with
snow"开门雪满山/ "The bright moon shines through the pine tress, 明月
松间照/ The stream glitters and runs over the rocks" 清泉石上流/ "Once
the end of stream is reached, 行到水穷处/ Is time to sit and watch the
clouds go by" 坐看云起时/ "Beside the ancient ferry lies a desolated city,
荒城临古渡/ The sinking sun sits over an autumn hill" 落日满秋山/
"The middlemount marks off a different land, 分野中峰变/The sun shades
valleys in different hues." 阴晴众壑殊/ "A night of rain from the moun-
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tain flooded／The trees with hundred streams．”

“Beyond heaven and earth there runs the river，江流天地外／Between blankness and light is the hue of the mountain”

Painters of later generations often took them for the subjects of their works．The prevailing fashion was to express their poetic aspiration through painting．This was what they called “idea comes before painting．”(意在笔先) It was to conceive a poetic idea first before the painting began．This was further developed to the point where a picture was painted first，and then a poem in accordance with the poetic conception of the painting was inscribed on it．One of the most famous of these is Su Shi’s(苏轼) inscription on Wang shen’s(王诜)Yianjiang Diezhang Tu (烟江叠嶂图)(a picture of folding Mountains Over a Misty River) in Wang Dingguo (王定国) collection:

Peak after peak sadly overlook the river．A mist gathers into a jade-green cloud against the sky．Is it a cloud or a hill？Who can tell at a distance？But when mist and cloud are gone the mountain also remains．Behold the green cliffs sloping down to a deep valley，through which toss a hundred leaping streams．The broken foliage and rocks are concealed and then visible again，as the rushing streams hasten towards the opening．With water calm again at the foot of the hills，a break in the trees reveals a small bridge and a rustic inn．A little distance beyond the bridge the passerby can behold a fleet of fishing boats disappearing over the waters of the river and into the horizon．How do you acquire this ability to add details with such thoroughness and simplicity？Where is this place in the world of man？I would like to buy two hundred acres at once．

(江上愁心千叠山，倚空积翠如云烟。山耶云耶远莫知，烟空云散山依然。但见两岸苍苍接绝谷，中有百道飞来泉。萦绕楞石隐复见，下赴谷口为奔川。川平山开林鬣断，小桥野店依山前。行人稀度乔木外，渔舟一叶江吞天。使君何从得此本，点缀毫末分清妍。不知人间何处有此境，径欲往置之二顷田。)⑤
So the meaning of the painting was fully revealed. Between the times of Yuan and Ching, many paintings were endowed with poems. Some were written by the artists themselves, some by those who appreciated them. Thus poetry was subordinated to painting, and became a mere decoration. As for those essays on sight-seeing trips and landscapes, like Sun Chao’s (孙绰)You Tiantaishan Fu (游天台山赋) (A Trip to Tien Tai Shan), the language used was very beautiful and already very picturesque. The Eight Records of Yongzhou written (永州八记) by Liu Zongyuan (柳宗元) of the Tang Dynasty were simple but charming, interesting and attractive. Xu Xiake (徐霞客) Xi Xiake Youji (Xi Xiake’s Sight-Seeing Journey) written by Xu Hongzu (徐宏祖) in the Ming Dynasty, was a well-organised book on landscapes rich in details and broad in scope. In fact, many many years before there had been a book titled Shuijingzhu (水经注) written by Li Daoyuan (郦道元) in which impressions on landscapes and local customs were magnificently reproduced and perfectly arranged. It had a great influence on Chinese scholars. However, it was only a geography book and its aim was different from literature relating to travel. Nevertheless, it indirectly contributed not a little to painting. Although Xu Hongzu was a traveller and not a painter, he may have directly influenced painters. In the Ch’ing Dynasty, there was Huang Xiangjian (黄向坚), who was a painter and had travelled thousands of miles away to the southwest of China to search for his father. When he came back, he produced numerous paintings which told of what he had personally seen in the border regions. These paintings had a unique style and flavour of their own.

Another aspect of the philosophy of Chinese scholars is the emphasis on retirement. There are three reasons for this. The first one is a love (for nature, peace and quiet.). The second is dissatisfaction with reality, and a hope to escape from it in order to preserve their dignity and purity. Thirdly, in times of occupation by foreign forces there is a desire to escape from
serving alien masters. In the history of China there were many stories about learned men who chose to retire from public life and became his mits. The earlist record of them was the story of how the Emperor Yao (尧) offered his throne to Xu You (许由), But Hsu Yu refused to accept it and subsequently ran away to avoid the responsibility.

In the essay Bu Ju (卜居) of Chu Ci (楚辞) it was written that Qu Yuan (屈原), a poet of the kingdom of Chu (楚), at a time of internal disintergration and external oppression with a group of mean people in power and a lind and foolish prince on the throne, did not know what to do. So he went to ask a diviner for advices.

Under such conditions even an intelligent scholar had to think awfully and often found himself in dilemma. So escapism was only natural. In Liu Hou Shijia (留侯世家) of the 55th Volume of Shi Ji (史记) it was written:

The Supprior one (i.e. the founder of Han Dynasty, Liu Pang 刘邦) was unable to obtain the service of four men. The four were very old men and all held that the emperor showed them disrespect. So they ran away and retired to the mountains and refused to be Han officials. Yet the superior One had a high opinion of them.

They were the famous Four Grayheads of the Han Dynasty.

Most of the recluses were of this nature. In the volume 113 in The History of the Later Han Dynasty; there was a statement on Yan Guang (严光) in the Biography of Yan Guang.

He was well-known ever since he was a youth and was a friend of (Emperor) Guang Wu. He changed his name and disappeared, after Guang Wu came to throne.

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Again it said:

Later when he was appointed as a Chien Yi Ta Fu he refused to submit to pressure. He resigned and became a farmer in Fu Chun Hill (富春山).
In later ages, people named the spot where he went fishing Yan ling Lai (严陵濑).

(除为谏议大夫不屈，乃耕于富春山。后世名其钓处为严陵濑焉。)

The Chinese people admired this kind of retreatment and their artists frequently made use of this kind of story for their paintings. Not only were there paintings of Yan Ling Lai’s fishing haunt, but the farm which the Chin poet, Tao Qian (陶潜), chose for his retirement was also a common choice of subject. In the history of China Tao was said to be a representative of the poets who retired to farms. Wang Wei and he of the T’ang Dynasty who retired to Wang Chuan (辋川) and Meng Hao Ran who vowed he would never become an official were praised by all future generations. (李白) Li Bai wrote a poem dedicated to Meng:

I love the scholar Meng (孟子) whose life the whole world knows. In youth he renounced a life of luxury. He laid his snowy head beneath the lofty pines. He often toasted to the moon and, giving his devotion to flowers, he would not serve a king. I cannot aspire to his heights, I can only express my admiration.

(吾爱孟夫子，风流天下闻。红颜弃轩冕，白首卧松云。醉月频中圣，迷花不事君。高山安可仰，徒此揖清芬。)

It is thus that the Chinese people admire and praise recluses. As Wang Wei was a poet, a painter as well as a recluse, his paintings started a fashion and his influence was greatly felt by all later generations.
There remains the question of the colophon. It is both for explanation and decoration. Many artists excelled in calligraphy. The colophon gives a painting a finishing touch. Besides, the position of the colophon must be in accordance with the arrangement and spacing of the drawings. The colophon is complementary to the technique of a painting. Even the position of the impression made by a seal has a vital connection with the animation and vitality of the painting. Poems used for colophons were usually composed of regular stanzas or stanzas of four lines. They were limited in the number of words. Sometimes there were full-length songs set in ancient verse, but there were exceptions. If the colophon was in prose then there was no limit to the length. Sometimes the artist wrote the colophons themselves. These would mostly be discussions on the contents and the intended meaning of the paintings. Those written by others usually contained an introduction to the character and life of the artist, an explanation of the intended meaning, analysis of the technique or a record or verification of the sources and origins of the painting. It was the work of the collectors. Some books were specially compiled for the copying of colophons. They served to give an idea of the originals if the paintings had been lost. The best ones were very inspiring. They contributed enormously to the development of literature.

Notes:

(1) 戴董其昌《画旨》“Hua Zhi”《画旨》(A General Idea of Painting), 明代“华亭派”代表人物。
(2) 戴郭若虚(生卒不详)《图画见闻志》Tuhua Jianwenzhi(What Has Been Seen and Heard About Paintings)卷一, 此书是宋代绘画理论重要著作, 由史论、画家论、画事三部分汇编而成, 也可以说是一部画史性质的著作。
(3) 戴张彦远《历代名画记》Lidai Minghuaji (Famous Paintings of All Generations)卷一。
(4) 戴《宣和画谱》Xuanhe Huapu 宋摹本。
(5) 戴萧统《文选》Wenxuan (Selection of Literary Works)卷二十一。
(6) 戴《南史》Nan Shi (History of the South)卷十九。
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