Chapter Two

Towards Huangshan—the early paintings of Huang Binhong

The cultural history of Shexian featured prominently in Huang Binhong’s consciousness. During the course of his life Huang wrote extensive family histories and essays on Tandu village, as well as biographies of artists from Shexian, and those who lived and worked in the area and comprise the so-called Xin’an or Anhui school of painters. In articles for newspapers and magazines Huang often referred to Huangshan or the history and culture of Shexian. He also contributed to large, multi-volume publications such as the Collectanea of Anhui (Anhui congshu 安徽叢書, 1935) and the Shexian Gazetteer (Shexian zhi 歙縣志, 1937). His interest stemmed from his own family connection to the area and its history as an important cultural centre that had produced great artists and craftspeople. An important factor

1 James Cahill describes the terms that have been used to describe this school. See Cahill, ed., Shadows of Mount Huang, pp.7-10. Some historians prefer to use the term Huangshan School (Huangshan pai) because later artists did not only come from Xin’an or Shexian and Huangshan was the primary subject of their work. Wang Bomin, “Huangshan huapai jiqi chuantong fengmao,” in Lun Huangshan zhu huapai wenji (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1987), pp.320-329.

2 Early articles include “An Introduction to Making Ink” (Xu zao mo) (Guocui xuebao, 1908), “Biographies of Four Craftsmen” (Si qiao gong zhuan) (Guocui xuebao, 1909) as well as many short articles that were published in the Shanghai newspapers Shenzhou ribao (1913-1914), Shibao (1919-1921) and Xin Bei Jing bao in 1939. See Huang Binhong wenji, za zhu bian, pp.35-213, Huang Binhong wenji, shuhua, xia, pp.222-275. A long essay published in Art View (Yiguan) magazine in 1926, under the name of his wife Song Ruoying, surveyed artists of the Huangshan school “Huangshan hua yuan lunlue”. The essay traced the history of the school back to Xue Zhi and Zhang Zhidong of the Tang dynasty but focused primarily on artists of the Yuan, Ming and early Qing dynasties. The essay included both famous and lesser-known artists who lived and worked in the Xin’an area, a good number of whom were from Shexian and Xiuning. Artists from Shexian included Hongren, Zheng Zhong, Cheng Jiasui, Li Liefang, Cheng Sui, Xie Shaolie, Fang Zhaozeng, Huang Sheng and Huang Lü (both ancestors), Zheng Min, Wang Hongdu, Cheng Zhengkui, Wu Shantao and artists of the Huang family from western Shexian. The inclusion of family members in this history further emphasises Huang Binhong’s conscious linking of himself with this lineage of artists. See Huang Binhong wenji, shuhua, shang, pp.309-341. Huang published a short article on the Xin’an school in the magazine Chinese Painting Monthly (Guohua yuekan) 1, no.3 (1935), which concluded with a list of artists. See Huang Binhong wenji, shuhua bian, xia, pp.20-22.

3 Huang Binhong was a member of the editorial committee of the Anhui congshu. See Huang Binhong nianpu, p.257. He was a contributor to Shexian zhi, edited by Xu Chengyao and published by the Shanghai branch of the Shexian county association in 1937. See Huang Binhong, letter to Xu Chengyao, in Huang Binhong wenji, shuxin bian, p.170.
that contributed to the prominence of Shexian was its strategic location in regard to trade, and its proximity to the beautiful and rugged mountains of Huangshan.

**Huangshan and Xin’an artists**

Huang Binhong’s fascination with Shexian and Huangshan was complex and multi-faceted, at once literary, visual and experiential. His identification with Huangshan is highlighted by the way in which he described his place of origin when he signed his name or referred to paintings in his collection. For example “from the collection of Huang Binhong’s studio at Tiandu” (*Tiandu Huang Binhong 天都黃氏賓虹草堂藏*), or “Hongruo from below Tiandu Peak of Huangshan” (*Huangshan Tiandu xia Hongruo 黃山天都下虹若*). In these examples Tiandu refers to the Heavenly Citadel Peak (*Tiandufeng 天都峰*) of Huangshan and alludes to the Tiandu School which was synonymous with the Huangshan or Xin’an school of artists.

Huangshan (黃山) was originally called Ebony Mountain (*Yishan 黴山*). It is said that the Yellow Emperor travelled there to collect herbs for an elixir. In 747 Emperor Minghuang of the Tang dynasty, who was a practicing Daoist, changed the name of the mountain to Huangshan, thus linking it with the Yellow Emperor and Daoism. It is the name by which the mountain is known today.

Allusions to Huangshan, as well as to Daoism and Buddhism, are frequent in many of Huang Binhong’s artist names. Examples include Hermit of Huangshan (*Huangshan shanzhong ren 黃山山中人*) and Huang Binhong of Huangshan (*Huangshan Binhong 黃山賓虹*). A seal often used by Huang Binhong in his middle years, *Huang Binhong 黃賓虹*, has been cleverly composed so that the character for mountain reads as the two lower strokes of the Huang 黃 character, which allows for the readings of Huang Binhong and Binhong of Huangshan (*Huangshan Binhong*).

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4 Paintings from Huang Binhong’s collection were reproduced in the art supplement *Jinshi shuhua* in 1936 and 1937. For example *Jinshi shuhua*, 65 (1936), p.2, and a painting dated 1936 now in the collection of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in Washington D.C. (S1987,252). It is also interesting to note that Hongren also expressed his identification with Shexian and Huangshan by sometimes signing his paintings with a reference to the names of temples or mountain peaks of Huangshan and environs. See Cahill, ed., *Shadows of Mount Huang*, p.80.

5 “Huangshan shanzhongren” appears on a seal carved by Huang Binhong.

The names of the two mountains, Huangshan and Baiyue 黃山白嶽, were combined in an early seal carved by Huang Binhong. Mount Bai is the ancient name for present day Qiyun Mountain 齊雲山, which is located near Yanqian village 巖前鎮 in Xiuning County, Anhui. The Qiyun mountain range stretches fifteen kilometres from the Peak of Mount Bai in the east to Longevity Mountain (Wanshou shan 萬壽山) in the west. Unlike Huangshan, which is granite, Mount Bai is composed of rose-coloured sedimentary sandstone and has many eroded caves and grottoes. The Jiajing Emperor of the Ming dynasty built the Palace of Ultimate Simplicity (Taisu gong 太素宮) there, which during its heyday supported some 108 Daoist temples. The phrase Huangshan Baiyue 黃山白嶽, which Huang Binhong carved on one of his early seals, is a popular phrase linking these adjacent but geologically very different Daoist mountains.

Over the course of his life Huang Binhong made nine trips to Huangshan. The earliest was in 1883, at the age of twenty, and the last in 1935 when he was seventy-two. Visible from his ancestral home, Huangshan was a place of great natural beauty. Aware of its Daoist and Buddhist associations, Huang would comment on the power of the mountain to sustain the soul and extend human life. The relative inaccessibility of the mountain, as well as the benefits that humans could derive from entering its reaches, had attracted scholars, artists, poets and recluse for centuries.

In an essay on the Xin’an artist Cheng Sui (程邃, active ca. 1605-1691), Huang observed that the landscape of Huangshan had created the artists of the Xin’an School, and that the artists, in turn, steeped the landscape in cultural significance. Huang Binhong describes Cheng Sui’s ancestral home of Yan village 巖鎮 to the west of Shexian, and locates his own ancestral home in relation to the Fengle River emanating from Huangshan. The mountains and waters of Huangshan, he suggests, nurtured the families that in turn produced famous artists, including his own.

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7 Zoujin Huizhou, pp.6-7.
8 Huang Binhong wenji tiba bian, p.82.
Fengle stream in the township of Yan originates from the Yunmen Peak of Mount Huang and cascades down and converges with the Cao, Ruan, and Rong streams before entering the Fengle River. After a distance of some tens of li and having passed though the southern part of the stream you come to the former homes of Wu Yongqing Ting [吴用卿廷Wu Qingting], Cheng Mengyang Jiasui [程孟阳嘉燧Cheng Jiasui] and Li Tanyuan Liufang [李檀园流芳Li Liufang]. From an area of scattered villages and winding waterways, covering less than 100 li, many scores of famous artists have come down to us through history. The river passes in front of the Huang family ancestral village Tandu cun, and in the southeast flows into the Lian River at Shepu and is known as the Jian River [Jian jiang江].

Huang Binhong’s view is informed by Neo-Confucianism, and Daoism. It has affinities with the construction of sacred space during the Southern Sung dynasty as discussed by Linda Walton:

The presence of successive human figures over time endowed the landscape with spiritual power that was both symbolised by and generated by the mountain itself . . . . Heaven bestowed its favour through the collection of ch’i [qi], which produced eminent men and was physically manifested in the beauty of the mountain landscape. The spiritual power of Huangshan, and the qi which emanated from it, attracted artists over the millenia. Huang Binhong’s fascination with Huangshan related to the beauty and power of a landscape which had been adopted as a place of refuge by scholars, artists and poets. The landscape of Huangshan had nurtured great artists who displayed an independence of mind in pursuit of their own artistic styles.

In 1900, Huang Binhong travelled from Tandu village to Huangshan. The seven-day journey remained clear in his memory, as shown in an essay written many years later. Huang’s essay documents the proximity of Tandu village to Huangshan and features such as bridges and pavilions that, for the thoughtful and enquiring traveller, inscribe the landscape with historic significance. This landscape was a space inhabited and traversed by Huang’s forebears, and artists and poets of the past. It would figure as a major stimulus for his creative work over the next half century.

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9 Huang Binhong wenji, shuhua xia, p.326.
Ebony Mountain is the old name for Huangshan. It is about 100 li from the centre of Shexian. My ancestors have for generations lived to the west of Shexian at Tandu village. To the north are the peaks of Huangshan, including Heavenly Citadel [Tiandu feng 天都峰] and Cloud Gate Peaks [Yunmen feng 雲門 峰] which are visible morning and night. Those who grow up in the surroundings of these mountains will not grow old. I left the village long ago but within my heart I am always yearning to return. 11

So the essay begins.

We set off from Tandu village in a bamboo sedan chair and travelled ten or so li to Choushu 稠 塾, passing through Chikan 赤 坎, Tangyue 樘 越, Huaitang 槐 唐 and Fengkou 豐 口 at Huangjing ridge 黃 荊 嶺 to Xu village 許 村 … .

On the second day we got up early and set off from Jing Village 經 村. The sky was clear and we watched the sun slowly rise. We crossed a wooden bridge and passed through Maoshe 茅 舍, Chatan 茶 坦 and other villages. A mountain stream cut through the mountain like a jade lance and the gorge was overflowing with cloud. The path suddenly became very narrow and steep. From the very top of the ridge we could see Huangshan in the distance, its tall mountain peaks rising from a forest of trees … 12

Huang Binhong was also interested in representations of Huangshan, in both woodblock printed and painted forms. According to his research the earliest known depiction of Huangshan is the Illustrated Classic of Huangshan (Huangshan tujing 黃 山 圖 經) which dates from the Northern Song dynasty. 13 Representations of Huangshan increased in the late Ming-early Qing period as a result of increasing numbers of visitors after the Buddhist monk Pumen 普 門 established Ciguang Temple (Ciguang si 慈 光 寺) in 1606. The mountains became less remote as people sought a retreat from town life. With its proximity to Shexian and Xiuning, wealthy local merchants built villas and temples there. Travel to the area resulted in the production of

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12 Ibid.
13 Huang Binhong, “Huangshan xilan,” in Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian, p.522. Published in 1935. A version of The Illustrated Classic of Huangshan, which contained panoramic views of Huangshan, was included in the early Qing dynasty sixty-volume Huanghai zhi. The Huangshan Gazetteet (Huangshan zhi) compiled by Chen Hongzhi also included scenes of Huangshan by local artists notably Hongren, Jiang Zhu, Mei Qing, Zheng Zhong. It was followed by an updated gazetteer Huang shan xu zhi, compiled by Wang Shihong (ca. 1662-1721), which included a series of pictures of Huangshan by the monk Xuezhuang. Huang Binhong also mentioned a number of historic travel books that focussed specifically on Huangshan. See also Zhang Guobiao, Hui pai banhua yishu (Hefei: Anhui sheng meishu chubanshe, 1996), plate 2.
guides and gazetteers that incorporated illustrations. Well known literati artists were commissioned to create topographical pictures, which were then translated by highly skilled engravers into woodblock printed images and books. Wealthy Huizhou merchants, who conducted their business all over China, created a strong demand for such books and fuelled a burgeoning print industry.\(^{14}\) Many of the best images were created by highly regarded scholar artists who worked in a largely topographic style that was accessible to the merchant class. The contemporary interest in the investigating of the physical world was further prompted by contact with the West.

In contrast to printed representations of Huangshan, the earliest surviving paintings of the mountain date from the mid to late Ming dynasty (1368-1644) when the area around Huangshan became a refuge for Ming loyalists.\(^ {15}\) Two of the best-known artists associated with the mountain and the surrounding area are Hongren, referred to by Huang Binhong as Jianjiang, and Shitao (石濤, 1642-1707). Hongren was born in Shexian and lived most of his life there.\(^ {16}\) Shitao, a scion of the Ming imperial family, spent much of the period from 1666-1670 in the Shexian area and from 1671-1678 lived at Guangjiao Temple in Jingtingshan, a short distance from Xuancheng.\(^ {17}\) These artists—both monks—drew inspiration from the austere beauty of the landscape and created many fantastical paintings of the rugged mountain and its surroundings (Figure 2.1). The landscape of Huangshan came to be associated with a desire to be free from the world of politics and urban affairs. The album of sixty leaves by Hongren, now in the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing, and Shitao’s Eight Views of Huangshan, and Landscape of Mount Huang dated 1699, both in the Sumitomo collection in Japan, are among the best-known paintings of Huangshan by those artists.\(^ {18}\) (Figure 2.2).

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\(^{16}\) Kuo, *Austere Landscape*, p.3. Hongren is buried on Piyun feng, Xigan Mountain on the outskirts of Shexian.


\(^{18}\) See *Huang Binhong wenji, za zhu bian*, pp.522-524; Cahill, ed., *Shadows of Mount Huang*, pp.43-44; Hay, *Shitao*, pp.31-33.
Artists from the Xin’an school also took their inspiration from Huangshan. They include Ding Yunpeng, Sun Yi (孫 逸, active 1630s to 1650s), Xiao Yuncong, Dai Benxiao (戴 本 孝, 1621-1693), Mei Qing (梅 清, 1623-1697), Zha Shibiao, Cheng Sui, Mei Chong (梅 沖, active late seventeenth century) and the monk Xuezhuang (僧 雪 莊, d. 1718).

Throughout his life Huang Binhong went out of his way to view works by Xin’an artists, particularly paintings of Huangshan, as part of a process of understanding the way in which artists of the past had responded to the landscape. In 1878, for example, he travelled to Qiucun (虬 村, not far from Shexian, to view a painting of Huangshan by Shi Tao in the collection of Wang Rong (汪 洞). In 1903 he journeyed to Nanking and on to Qingliang Mountain (清 涼 山) to view ten large paintings of Huangshan by the Qing artist Gongxian (龔 賢, 1618-1689).19

Huang Binhong developed his own considerable collection of “fine paintings by famous Huangshan artists” including a number of paintings by Hongren. One was a painting given to him by Huang Cisun.20 Huang had visited his relative in Dingzhou (汀州, Fujian, in 1882, the year before his death, and was given a number of paintings.21 Most likely a small painting belonging to Huang Binhong in the Zhejiang Provincial Museum is the painting referred to in a poem by Huang Cisun “Jianjiang’s Painting of a Withered Old Tree, Bamboo and Rock” (Jian shi kushu zhu shi xiaojing (漸 師 枯 樹 竹 石 小 景) and was originally part of Huang Cisun’s collection.22 (Figure 2.3) When Huang Binhong was living in Beiping (北 平) he hung the painting in his studio. He was particularly attached to this fine, small work that symbolised the spirit of Hongren and his own family’s connection with Shexian and Huangshan.23

Huang Binhong wrote a series of articles on Xin’an artists exploring the links between their lives, the times they were living in, and their artistic style. Huang’s collection acted as a

20 Huang Binhong, “Jiushi zashu zhi yi,” section one, in Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian, p.570. Among Huang Binhong’s paintings by Hongren was a large landscape hanging scroll that was later published in the magazine Jinshi shuhua (Epigraphy, Calligraphy and Painting), a supplement to the Dongnan ribao (Southeastern Daily Newspaper). See Jinshi shuhua 56, no.30 (April 1936), p.1. The magazine was edited by Huang Binhong’s friend Yu Shaozong.
stimulus for his research. One of his first essays soon after his arrival in Shanghai and possibly written while he was still living in Shexian, was a biographical study of Hongren titled “Meihua guna zhuan” (梅花古衲傳). Hongren was from Hanjiang Village 寒江村 in Shexian. When the Manchu-Qing army invaded Shexian in 1645, Hongren remained loyal to the Ming, travelling to Mount Wuyi 武夷山 in Fujian where he was ordained as a Buddhist monk, largely to avoid serving the new and alien dynasty. He took the Buddhist name Hongren. Then around 1652 he returned to his native Shexian and took refuge at Huangshan.

Huang Binhong often referred to Hongren as Jianjiang 漸江, one of the artist’s style names, which was also the name of a river that flows through the southwestern part of Shexian, highlighting the association of Hongren with their native locale.

Hongren’s painting style may be traced back to the Yuan 元 artists Ni Yunlin and Huang Gongwang. Huang Binhong acknowledged him as a founder of the Xin’an School:

In the past Wang Ruanting [王阮亭, Wang Shizhen 王士禎, 1634-1711] coined the term Xin’an artists. Their antecedents may be found in Ni and Huang [Ni Zan 倪贊, 1301-1374 and Huang Gongwang黃公望, 1269-1354] but it was Jianjiang [Hongren] who forged a new path. Jianjiang, the monk from Shexian, learnt from Yunlin [Ni Yunlin] and artists south of the Yangtze and reached a state of purity and worldliness without effort. Xiuning’s Zha Erzhan 查二瞻 [Zha Shibiao], Sun Wuyi 孫無逸 [Sun Yi 孫逸], Wang Wurui 汪無瑞 [Wang Zhirui 汪之] and Jianjiang are known as the Four Masters of Xin’an and it is they who mark the beginning of the school.

Throughout his life Huang Binhong copied paintings by artists he admired, most often in freely drawn line renditions that bear little resemblance to the original. Huang Binhong’s undated copy of an album of paintings by Hongren, however, carefully records the compositional features of Hongren’s paintings and inscriptions.

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24 “Meihua guna”, meaning “Old monk of plum blossoms”, was a posthumous name given to the artist Jiang Tao better known by his Buddhist names Hongren or Jianjiang. The essay was published in Guocui xuebao 57(1909). See Huang Binhong wenji shuhua, shang, pp.16-18.
25 Kuo, Auster Landscape, pp.3-5; Cahill, ed., Shadows of Mount Huang, p.76.
26 Hongren also used the names of temples and the peaks of Huangshan as style names. See Cahill, ed., Shadows of Mount Huang, p.80.
28 Both the album by Hongren and Huang Binhong’s copy are in the collection of the Rietberg Museum in Zurich. On the reverse side of one of the Hongren album leaves there is a sticker “J. P. Dubosc Collection
The first leaf of the Hongren album is an idyllic landscape with willow trees framing a bridge that links two landmasses and a bubbling stream issuing forth into the foreground of the painting. (Figure 2.4) The inscription reads:

Willows like trailing mist, a wooden bridge arching like a rainbow [hong]—here we feel that the brushwork is simple but the spirit profound. 29

The gentle low-lying landscape is reminiscent of the ancestral home of Hongren and Huang Binhong. The pavilion-like dwellings to the left of the bridge “arching like a rainbow” (hong) may well have caused Huang to think of the Binhong pavilion on the bank of the Fengle Stream, close to the Sanyuan Bridge in Tandu village on the outskirts of Shexian.

In the version by Huang Binhong the composition is very similar, but the brushwork is less restrained and has a higher water content. (Figure 2.4a) Huang’s other leaves are more freely drawn renditions. He reproduced the general compositional elements of the paintings, but with a different overall effect. Interestingly, in one of the leaves Huang does not include the raised zig-zag pathway, which is a signature element of Hongren’s painting, and he treats the foreground in a completely different manner. Hongren filled the pictorial area whereas Huang left a large area of void at the top of the painting.

One leaf depicts the Xin’an River and is inscribed:

Emacliated trees and richly shaped rocks—this kind of scenery appears frequently along the Xin’an River. 30

In this painting Hongren emphasized the two-dimensionality of the paper through his articulation of the river and land formations (Figure 2.5). By contrast Huang Binhong created a greater feeling of depth in the way he depicted the same basic type forms. It is a looser and more spontaneous painting and he added the name “Jianjiang” at the end of the inscription, acknowledging Hongren as the original author (Figure 2.5a)

248”. Jean-Pierre Dubosc was a well-known French dealer-collector and a long-term resident in Beiping. The album probably went from the collection of Dubosc to Charles A. Drenowatz, whose collection is now in the Rietberg Museum. The Huang Binhong album was acquired by the Rietberg Museum at auction in 1994. Its title page is inscribed by Xie Zhiliu (1910-1997), dated 1986, which suggests the album was once in Xie’s collection, or was appraised by him. There is also a colophon by Song Wenzhi dated 1984.


30 Ibid., p.181.
In the inscriptions Hongren referred to artists of the past whom he admired and who constituted his lineage: Guo Xi (郭熙, ca. 1001-ca. 1090), Jing Hao (荊浩, ca. 855-915), Guan Tong (關仝, early 10th century), Dong Yuan (董源, d. 962), Juran (巨然, active ca. 960-985), Huang Gongwang and Ni Zan. Writing about the Hongren album, Li Chu-tsing has observed:

In brushwork, it is probably the most spontaneous of all Hongren’s known works. Following the practice of seventeenth century artists, he indicated his indebtedness to such masters as Guo Xi, Huang Gongwang, and Ni Zan, and this is one of the unique aspects of the album, for it is the only one in which he shows an interest in modeling paintings after a number of old masters.31

By way of contrast, the conscious reference to old masters is a marked characteristic of Huang Binhong’s art. The uniqueness of this album within the context of Hongren’s œuvre would have provided additional stimulus to Huang Binhong’s appreciation of Hongren’s art.32 It is clear that Huang Binhong had no intention of making exact copies by following the detail of Hongren’s compositions and his brush and ink method. Huang Binhong’s renditions are working sketches intended to capture a general likeness. In tracing the pathway of Hongren’s brush it is as if Huang Binhong wished to grasp the spirit of Hongren’s art and take his spontaneity even further.

At the end of the Huang Binhong album there is a leaf inscribed by the artist but not dated. It bears the seal Huang Zhi si yin 黃質私印, which was carved by Huang Binhong in 1895, but no signature, suggesting that the album was painted for himself rather than anyone else. (Figure 2.6) In the inscription Huang Binhong gives a brief outline of Hongren’s life, links his artistic style to Ni Zan and explains the origin of his posthumous sobriquet Old Monk of Plum Blossoms (Meihua guna 梅花古衲).33 He comments that in the past he had visited Hongren’s grave, but there were no plum blossom trees left and concluded “my plans to remedy this situation by painting some plum blossoms has come to nothing. On seeing the album, I felt regretful and so made this copy.” Copying the album was an act of remembering, of salving his conscience. Huang Binhong offers us no clue about who the owner of the Hongren album was or

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31 Ibid., p.182.
32 For a detailed discussion of the Hongren album, see Chu-tsing Li, A Thousand Peaks and Myriad Ravines, vol.1, pp.180-184; vol.2, plate 44.
33 In the inscription Huang Binhong notes that after Hongren’s death many hundreds of plum blossom trees were planted at the side of Hongren’s grave, giving the impression that his grave was clothed in plum blossoms, hence the posthumous sobriquet Meihua guna.
when his version was painted. Judging by the care with which the copies were made, however, Huang Binhong thought highly of the album and had ready access to it. Stylistically the paintings appear to date from the period soon after Huang Binhong moved to Shanghai. They were a way of reconnecting with his ancestral home and extending his own historical research into art.

Another poem by Huang Cisun also responded to a landscape painting by Hongren (Jianjiang shanshui juan 潭師山水卷) and referred to the artistic styles of Shitao, Shixi and Hongren. Writing in 1940, Huang Binhong follows his relative’s lead and, comparing the three monk-artists, observes:

In my estimation if we are talking about painting since the Ming who does one follow if it is not Jianjiang [Hongren]? Huang Binhong admired Hongren as a fellow county man who identified strongly with Huangshan, as a Ming loyalist and as an artist who succeeded in creating an independent style. One of Huang Binhong’s early seals, carved by Li Yinsang (李尹桑, 1880-1945) features the two characters Bin hong 贯弘. Hong means great or magnanimous and is the first character of Hongren’s name. By using it, instead of the character for rainbow (hong 虹), Li Yinsang acknowledges that for Huang Binhong, Hongren was the single most important artist of the Xin’an school.

**Early paintings**

There are few published paintings from the years prior to Huang Binhong’s move to Shanghai in 1909. Among them is an album leaf dated autumn 1892, painted while Huang was teaching in Nanjing. It is inscribed “painted in the style of Huang Qinmin [黃勤敏] at my

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35 Huang Binhong wenji, shuhua, xia, p.220.
36 Huang Binhong, “Jianjiang dashi shiji yiwen,” in Huang Binhong wenji, shuhua bian, xia, p.221.
37 The Anhui Provincial Museum, Hefei, has early paintings by Huang Binhong. Unfortunately these paintings have not been published and are not easily accessible. In his later years Huang Binhong is said to have bought and destroyed many of his earlier paintings, which has contributed to the relatively small number of extant early works.
lodging at Yicui in Zhongshan”. 38 An early handscroll, dated 1903, appears to have been painted in the style of Xiao Yuncong. 39 (Figure 2.7)

Huang Binhong received instruction from a number of artists including Ni Yifu 倪易甫, Chen Chunfan, Zheng Shan, possibly Chen Chongguang, and certainly his father, but he was largely self-taught. His artistic vision was influenced by artworks that he had viewed in family and private collections and his early works reveal an interest in different artistic styles. An album of undated landscape paintings, one leaf of which was discussed in Chapter One, includes leaves that emulate the styles of Shen Zhou, Gong Xian, Cheng Jiasui, Wang Yuanqi (1642-1715), Zhao Mengfu (趙孟頫, 1254-1322) and Shitao, though the resemblance to their purported models is not strong. The diversity of the list, encompassing artists of the Xin’an, Wumen 吳門畫派, Loudong 娄東畫派 and other schools, highlights Huang’s wide-ranging experimentation with historic models during his early years.

One of Huang Binhong’s early dated landscape paintings was made on a “spring day in 1901”, when Huang Binhong was thirty-eight years old. It is a narrow hanging scroll that features rocks and tall mountains painted in pale silver-grey ink. (Figure 2.8) A sense of height and depth has been achieved by using the perspective of a bird’s eye view and the long thin format of the hanging scroll. The painting is brought to life by a dwelling perched on stilts overlooking the river. Cut by the right hand margin of the painting as if to suggest the continuation of the landscape, the house forms a focal point and the primary subject of the painting. The painting has been damaged and some of the characters that form the inscribed poem are missing. The lack of people and the poetic references to emerald mists, clear streams, setting sun and the dwellings of a recluse echo the sense of well-being and calm that emanates from the rounded mountains.

38 See T.C. Lai, Huang Binhong, pp.80-81. Kuo, Transforming Traditions, p.74 says these paintings, in terms of the abbreviated brushwork and simple composition, are close to the style of Yun Xiang. There are also said to be two works dated 1895, one of which comprises four scrolls and is in the collection of the Huangshan City Museum, and another is in a private collection in China. They have not been reproduced.
39 The painting, in a private collection, is reproduced in the catalogue for the Huang Binhong exhibition held in Hong Kong in 1980. Kuo also cites a painting ca. 1906, influenced by Dong Qichang, in the collection of Williams College, United States, and a 1907 work (actually a 1909 work) reproduced in Wang Bomin’s Huang Binhong (1979), plate 1, in which the loose brushwork is reminiscent of Zha Shibiao’s style.
The active hand of the artist can be apprehended in twisting ink lines and energetic dots. The contours of the mountains, painted by a thick brush loaded with pale wet ink, travelling at speed for a considerable distance have lost some of their definition and become slightly broken. The effect, known as flying white (feibai 飛 白), imbues the lines with tensile strength. Sparse internal textural strokes and darker horizontal and diagonal dots, in many cases bearing the form of the ink-soaked tip of the brush, render the mountains solid. Further definition is provided by a pale ink wash that gives the painting warmth and intimacy. The dots may be interpreted as moss, undergrowth, or distant foliage. When repeated and overlaid they also suggest wind, movement and the energy or life breath inherent in nature.

In this early painting we see evidence of Huang Binhong’s great facility with brush and ink. Through a careful modulation of ink tones and wet and dry ink he has been able to convey subtle atmospheric effects. It is a quietly expressive painting with a strong emotional resonance that creates a deep sense of rustic reclusion in the viewer.

Huang Binhong’s depiction of an unpeopled landscape, his use of a pale palette and the emphasis on bold contour lines of mountain forms rather than internal textural strokes link him with an artistic lineage that evolved in Jiangnan. The lineage extended from the Five Dynasties (五 代, 907-960) and early Song artists Dong Yuan and Juran to the late-Yuan dynasty artists Huang Gongwang and Ni Zan, through to the late-Ming and early-Qing Xin’an school of artists in Anhui. Of the artists associated with the Xin’an school this painting bears particular affinities with works by Yun Xiang (惲 向, 1586-1655) and Zha Shibiao.40

Huang Gongwang, Ni Zan, Yun Xiang and Zha Shibiao lived during times of political turbulence resulting from foreign occupation by the Mongol-Yuan and the Manchu-Qing dynasties respectively. Much of their art reflected their conscious decision to detach themselves from the world of human affairs and to embrace the landscape. Huang Binhong, who also lived during the troubled period of late Manchu-Qing rule, identified with the attitude of these artists, and the art that they produced, which expressed reclusion and drew inspiration from the physical beauty of the local environment.

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40 See Cahill, ed., Shadows of Mount Huang, pp.12, 95.
Yun Xiang was from Wujin, southeast of Nanjing. His art was inspired by masters of the Five Dynasties and Song and Yuan periods, notably Dong Yuan, Juran, Ni Zan and Huang Gongwang. (Figure 2.9) He employed brush and ink that was modulated and encompassed dry and wet brushwork and dark and pale ink, together with a strong pictorial structure, which critics described as hua zi hun hou (華滋渾厚) or majestic and lush, yet with substance. A similar term hun hou hua zi (渾厚華滋) was later used to describe the complex quality of Huang Binhong’s own brush and ink. Yun Xiang’s landscape paintings were characterised by simple outlines and a relative lack of textural strokes. Many of his paintings have an openness, translucence and serenity that is very similar to the quality present in Huang Binhong’s 1901 landscape.

Huang adopted the sobriquet Yu Xiang 予向, which may be translated as “I emulate Xiang”. Xiang referred to Yun Xiang and also to Xiang Qin (Xiang Ziping): both were Ming loyalists. Huang Binhong explained his use of the artist name in this way:

I used Yu Xiang as one of my artist names because on viewing paintings by the Ming dynasty artist Yun Xiang, whose zi was Xiangshan [香山]Fragrant mountain], I found them to be majestic and lush and yet with substance [hua zi hun hou], the embodiment of the spirit of Dong Yuan and Juran. Yun Xiang combined their qualities in a way that [artists of the] Huating [華亭], Loudong and Yushan [虞山] [schools] could never attain. Because of my devotion to him I studied his paintings more than any other. I also

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41 T.C. Lai has explained this term in Huang Binhong (1864-1955), pp.41-44.
42 The term was also used to describe the brush and ink of Huang Gongwang and a number of other historical artists.
43 See Wen Fong, Between Two Cultures: Late-Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century Chinese Paintings from the Robert H. Ellsworth Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), p.164. Huang shan Yu Xiang appears on a seal carved for Huang Binhong by Yu Xining. This seal could be translated as “I emulate Xiang of Huangshan”. Yu Xiang was also used on a seal carved by Wen Jingbai and was used by Huang Binhong as an artist name on paintings, and for essays written from 1909 and again from 1939. Huang Binhong explains in a number of short autobiographies that he admired the character and temperament of Yun Xiang and Xiang Ziping. See “Zi shu,” in Huang Binhong wenji, za zhu bian, p.552. See also “Jiu shi za shu, zhi er,” in Huang Binhong wenji, za zhu bian, section 10, p.575. Xiang Ziping referred to Xiang Qin or Xiang Zhang of the Eastern Han who chose the life of a recluse over that of an official serving in government. He is said to have waited until all of his sons and daughters were married before he took off on travels to the five sacred mountains of pre-dynastic China—Mount Tai in Shandong, Mount Heng in Shaanxi, Mount Hua in Shanxi, Mount Heng in Hunan and Mount Song in Henan. For the reference in Hou Hanshu, Xiang Zhang zhuoan, see Cihai, p.190; Walton, “Southern Sung Academies and the Construction of Sacred Space,” p.26; Cahill, ed., Shadows of Mount Huang, pp.93-94. Yun Xiang’s nephew was Yun Shouping (1633–1690).
44 For a definition of hua which is translated as surface beauty, see Martin Powers, “When is a landscape like a body,” in Landscape, Culture and Power in Chinese Society, Yeh Wen-hsin, ed., p.14. Huang Binhong stressed the importance of both surface and substance.
love to walk in the mountains and to study the ancients in order to achieve creative
transformation. I also admired the temperament of Xiang Qin [Xiang Ziping] and so
adopted this as a literary name.\textsuperscript{45}

It is interesting to note that Huang Binhong used the artist name Yu Xiang in the period around
1909 and then again from around 1939. These periods coincided with the dying days of the
Qing dynasty, and the era of Japanese occupation when Huang Binhong was living in Beiping.
It would appear that by using this artistic name, Huang Binhong was consciously invoking the
memory of earlier loyalists such as Yun Xiang, Hongren and his ancestor Huang Sheng.

Huang Binhong also appreciated the paintings of Zha Shibiao, examples of which he
saw in family collections.\textsuperscript{46} Zha was from Haiyang 海陽, near Xiuning in Anhui. Stylistically
his paintings were influenced by the works of Ni Zan and Hongren, who was a few years his
senior. (Figure 2.10) Dry brushwork, squared mountain forms and flat-topped rock ledges,
characteristics of Hongren’s landscape paintings, were frequently incorporated into Zha’s own
works. But Zha Shibiao’s brushwork, particularly in his later works, was much more lively and
spontaneous than that of Hongren or Ni Zan, and his mountains were more rounded. His brush
carried a higher water content which made the works appear less austere. In the 1901 painting
by Huang Binhong, Zha Shibiao’s influence is manifest in the lively lines made with a wet
brush, use of pale ink wash and an interest in exploring three-dimensional space.

As was noted in Chapter One, in 1901, the year the painting was made, Huang Binhong
was working in Qingfeng, to the east of Shexian, to restore dykes on clan land. Like Tandu
Village, Qingfeng was surrounded by mountains, and the primary mode of transportation was
boat. The preceding year Huang had travelled to Huangshan and to Jiuhuashan 九華山 in
Anhui. Whilst this painting is not identified with a specific location, the dwellings on stilts and
the towering mountain peaks are features of the landscape of this region. Xin’an artists were
renowned for their paintings of local views and it is highly likely that this painting, following
the Xin’an artistic tradition of deriving inspiration from the immediate environment, is a poetic
evocation of mountains in the vicinity of Huang Binhong’s ancestral home.

\textsuperscript{45} Huang Binhong wenji, za zhu bian, pp.561-562.
\textsuperscript{46} Huang Binhong, “Zi xu,” in Huang Binhong shuhua zhan tekan mulu, 1943. See also Huang Binhong
wenji, za zhu bian, pp.560-561.
Two other paintings, one dated winter 1902 and the other undated but stylistically similar, are also images of withdrawal into a natural environment of great beauty and tranquility. The 1902 painting is inscribed with a poem by Wen Zhengming (文征明, 1470-1559) describing the landscape as a place for immortals where the mountain appears to change form with the shifting mists, like a dragon, and icy jade-like streams emerge from beneath the clouds. (Figure 2.11) The poem reinforces the painting to create an artwork imbued with great suggestive power. Huang Binhong depicts a cluster of huts cantilevered out across a lake or stream. Again there are no people to be seen. Close by are pine trees characteristic of Huangshan and Shexian where their angular forms were often compared to the writhing body of a dragon. Behind and to the left of the hut is a waterfall with its source suggested by the tall mountain peaks beyond. The landscape has been rendered in deft, spare, calligraphic strokes as if glimpsed through shifting fog and mist. The painting is signed Pucen Huang Zhi 樸岑黃質 one of Huang’s many names. Pu means simple, honest or sincere. It can also mean the substance of things. Cen means a relatively high jagged hill, but it can also mean still or quiet.

In 1902, the year this painting was made, Huang Binhong travelled to Mount Cen, about ten li south of Shexian.47 The style name Pucen used at this time may also relate to that journey.

A stylistically similar but undated painting inscribed with a poem about the pleasures of country life also appears to have been painted in Shexian at around this time. The painting presents a scene of tranquility, similar to those described in the two preceding paintings although in this case the landscape is animated by a fisherman in a covered boat. (Figure 2.12) Huang Binhong has applied an intense mineral green pigment to the leaves of trees on either side of the waterway suggestive of spring. The colour has the effect of encouraging the eye to trace a circular path corresponding to the area of human activity at the heart of the painting. The trees and the footbridge link the fore and middle grounds and our eye is encouraged to follow the zig-zag path deep into the mountains. As with the previous painting the landscape is presented from the vantage point of a viewer standing on the shore at the lower edge of the painting about to embark upon a journey. In each case the mountains tower behind the dwellings

47 Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, p.38.
with a realistic scale that hints at Huang’s own experience of travelling through such a landscape. The painting is inscribed:

The faces of people who live in the mountains are always ruddy, like hibiscus flowers,
They sing mountain songs and go boating along the rivers, so carefree,
Where did all the people on the other side of the bank go?
The sound of roosters crowing and dogs barking makes the red sunset even more beautiful.

The painting is signed “Huang Zhi, Man of Leisure in Praise of Thatched Huts, written [painted] at the Pavilion of the Fungus-shaped Stone” (Song an san ren. Huang Zhi xie yu Shi zhi ge 頌廠 散人 黃質 写于 石芝閣). Pavillon of the Fungus-shaped Stone or Shi zhi ge was the name of Huang Binhong’s studio at the time, and was also used by the artist as a pen name. The name was inspired by a large ornamental stone that originally belonged to Huang Tonggu 黃 桐 谷 who had a large collection of paintings. Huang Binhong purchased the stone in order to retain it as a family heirloom. The stone was originally eight feet tall. It was in the shape of lingzhi, a fungus prized by Daoists as a source of longevity, and stood in the courtyard of Huang Binhong’s home in Tandu village. 

Fragments of the stone may be seen today in the courtyard of the Huang Binhong House Museum in Tandu village. (Figure 2.13) The artist’s inscription and his studio name reinforce the ideal of gentlemanly reclusion at a time of political and cultural turmoil. In these early years the artist was creating idealised environments based on the landscape in and around his ancestral home where the viewers could lose themselves in the beauty of nature.

Another early landscape painting by Huang Binhong signed “Zhi who lives above the big pool of water” (Tan shang Zhi 潭 上 質) was painted in the autumn of 1908. At the time Huang Binhong was living in Tandu, named for its many large pools of water known as tan. This confident work refers to the paintings of Ni Zan, but in terms of brushwork and mood it has more in common with artists such as Huang Gongwang, Yun Xiang and Zha Shibiao. (Figure 2.14) Huang Binhong’s brushwork is bold and sure. If the eye follows the calligraphic

48 Collection of the Shexian Museum, Anhui Province.
49 Huang used the sobriquet “Shi zhi ge” in an essay in 1912.
lines that give form to the mountains, the movement of the artist’s wrist during the course of painting can be appreciated. The points at which Huang Binhong has changed from using the central tip of the brush (zhong feng 中 鋒), which creates a full and rounded line, to the side of the brush (ce feng 側 鋒) are clearly visible. The directional change in the wrist movement creates a sharper, more incisive and dryer line. Through these actions a sense of three-dimensional form is created. In the lower section of the painting, full wet strokes taper off into thin dry strokes as the brush describes the forms of rocks leading down to the water and away from our vantage point. The trees are distinguished by their different leaves, following the type-forms established by painting manuals and earlier artists, alluding to the diversity found in nature and providing visual interest. A solitary fisherman in a skiff faces the promontory and suggests the great height of the lookout. His tiny figure is the focal point of the painting. The inscription and the fisherman are placed so as to counterpoint each other providing pictorial balance.

If we compare this painting with one by Ni Zan, Huang’s use of brush and ink is seen to be more spirited, and more robust. (Figure 2.15) Huang Binhong uses a greater tonal and textural range of pale and dark as well as wet and dry ink to create a lively dynamic within the painting.

Huang Binhong’s early years in Jinhua and Shexian were crucial to his development as an artist. During these years he studied the paintings of the artists of the past who would constitute his artistic lineage. Intellectually and artistically, Huang Binhong would see himself as having emerged from the Xin’an school, with its foundations in the scholarly paintings of the Five Dynasties and Song artists Dong Yuan and Juran and the Yuan artists Ni Zan and Huang Gongwang. (Figure 2.16) It was a lineage that he consciously constructed and claimed.

During this early period he developed a great love and appreciation of the landscape, in particular the landscape of Shexian and Huangshan, his ancestral home. Both the landscape and its rich, multi-layered cultural history would provide a strong foundation for his artistic development. Rather than restrict his development, Huang’s interest in and knowledge of local
history and art had a grounding effect, even when, like a typical Shexian ren 歙 縣 人, he spent the greater part of his life living in places other than Shexian.\textsuperscript{51}

By incorporating references to his native region, its history and its people into his painting, writing and artistic names, Huang Binhong created an iconography of place through which he understood his relationship as synonymous with his own identity. Landscape became imbued with multiple layers of meaning that he was to spend almost his entire life recovering and deciphering. The past for Huang Binhong was constituted “not merely by historical evidence but also by emotional and experiential recollections”.\textsuperscript{52} It was fused with the present and could be inhabited in spirit.

\textsuperscript{51} Cahill, ed., \textit{Shadows of Mount Huang}, p.44.
\textsuperscript{52} Chakrabarty, “Romantic Archives: Literature and the Politics of Identity in Bengal,” p.671.