

Zhou Xian's Fabulous Construct

The Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake

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In the middle of the nineteenth century, Zhou Xian (1820-1875), a patron of the arts from the Shanghai area, created an imaginary estate for himself, the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake (*Fanhu Caotang*). This was a retreat he dreamed of building in place of his actual home. Remarkably, Zhou Xian endowed the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake with a sense of solidity by encasing his mental image of the fictitious locale within an elaborate network of visual and textual representations. He wrote the primary text describing the estate, the 'Record of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake' (*Fanhu Caotangji*, see Appendix), and produced a painting of the estate, now lost. Furthermore, he acted as the catalyst for the creation of at least two additional paintings of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake, as well as two major inscriptions concerning the estate. The two surviving paintings are handscrolls entitled the *Picture of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake* (*Fanhu Caotang Tu*). Ren Xiong (1823-1857), an important nineteenth-century artist, painted one of the handscrolls, a *tour de force* in a minutely detailed blue-and-green (*qingli*) style (figure 1). The other work, rendered in ink on paper, is the product of more than thirty artists, including Tao Qi (1814-1865), Huang Ju (1796?-1860), and Chen Xun (died 1860) (figure 2). One of the two inscriptions referred to above is appended to this collaborative painting. Yang Xian (1819-1896) records a series of poems he authored commemorating the estate and describes the context of the poems. Xu Jin (about 1834-1862) wrote the other inscription, which he appended to Zhou Xian's painting; although the painting was lost, the inscription survives. Correspondences between the visual and textual images of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake indicate the extent to which Zhou Xian controlled his program to establish his fictitious domain as a legitimate entity, albeit a cerebral and idyllic one. A repeated reference to Zhuangzi serves as a leitmotif in his program; by tying the



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Figure 1. Ren Xiong, *Picture of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake*, dated 1855. Handscroll, ink and color on silk, 35.8 x 705.4 cm. Shanghai Museum .

Thatched Cottage of Pan Lake to a revered ancient philosopher , the painter projects the authority of the past onto the imagined estate.

The two surviving handscrolls and their place within the structure of Zhou Xian 's fabulous construct form the core of this paper. We shall consider the inscriptions to the extent that they provide an understanding of the patron's desires regarding production of the *Picture of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake* . Zhou Xian apparently strongly influenced Ren Xiong's work. Ren Xiong 's painting agrees with Zhou Xian's description of the estate and picks up on the refer-

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ence to Zhuangzi. Ren Xiong also furthered Zhou Xian 's goal of legitimizing the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake through his choice of painting style, the ancient blue-and-green style which ties the estate to the past emphatically, as does the reference to Zhuangzi. The blue-and-green style also idealizes the estate by linking it to the world of the immortals, whose dwellings often were rendered in this manner. Ren Xiong contributes additionally to the idealization of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake through his use of motifs conveying gentility and immortality.

Zhou Xian had composed his 'Record of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake ' by 1858. We know this because during that year he inscribed it, along with a few additional notes, and appended it to Ren Xiong 's



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painting of the Thatched Cottage (see Appendix). At that time, Zhou Xian was in his late thirties, at the peak of his social position. Born in 1820, he was a native of Xiushui, which is halfway between Hangzhou and Shanghai in the present-day prefecture of Jiaying.¹ Like his ancestors, Zhou Xian spent periods of time away from his home, residing temporarily at the sites of his various military and government posts, including that of district magistrate . His major military effort was to lead troops against the Taiping rebels, for which he was awarded the rank of the Blue Feather. Subsequently, his fortunes declined. Towards the beginning of the Tongzhi period (1862-1874), Zhou Xian was dismissed from a post in Xinyang, a district now forming part of Suzhou



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prefecture, supposedly following an argument with a higher official. According to Zhang Mingke, author of *Hansong Ge Tanyi Suolu*, he then went to Suzhou, where he sold paintings to support himself. He died in 1875.

Since the name, the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake, in part explains Zhou Xian's invention of his imaginary retreat, we shall take it as the starting point of our investigation. At the beginning of the essay, 'Record of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake,' he wrote:

This retired scholar is a native of Zuili. His home is adjacent to Fan Li Lake. From the lake, he has drawn the name of his abode,

calling it the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake; and from the Thatched Cottage, he has derived his own name, the Retired Scholar of Fan Lake (*Fanhu Jushi*).

From Zhou Xian's equating of Fan Lake with Fan Li Lake, we know that the historical personage of Fan Li was the chief inspiration. He alluded to Fan Li because he saw parallels between his own life and Fan Li's. Fan Li was a statesman of the Spring and Autumn period and he helped the King of Yue conquer the state of Wu. When it appeared that continued government service would be expected of him, he chose to flee into the countryside. Zhou Xian likened himself to Fan Li because he too served the government, and also aided the army. The most telling parallel between Fan Li and Zhou Xian is that, having exerted themselves extensively on behalf of their countries, they then desired to escape the bounds of duty. The latter longed to escape responsibility as the former had done; he retreated to the imaginary estate, the Thatched Cottage of Pan Lake.

The fact that Zhou Xian constructed an imaginary retreat is complicated by the estate's ties to the real world. First, Fan Li Lake, the proposed site of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake, is located inside of the South Gate of the town of Jiaxing. Second, Zhou Xian's actual home was titled the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake. In his *Fanhu Caotang Yigao* (Writings Left Behind from the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake), he specifies that Ren Xiong spent three years studying his painting collection at the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake.⁶ Still, we can be certain that the elaborate estate featured in the 'Record of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake' was fictitious. In the latter essay, Zhou Xian describes the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake as an estate he had planned to build. He says, speaking of himself in the third person, 'he has always planned to buy two or three *qing* (one *qing* is equivalent to 6.67 hectares) of land at the shore of the lake, and to live there, giving the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake as its name.'⁷ It seems that he wished to move his residence to a very desirable site within the town of Jiaxing, while retaining the name he was already using for his present home. During the late 1850s, when he catalyzed the production of the textual and visual images of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake, Zhou Xian might have believed that he would actually build a new residence in Jiaxing. Then his career had not yet

begun to diminish. However, by the mid-1860s his fortunes had changed and the proposed estate did not develop beyond its original status as an elaborate escapist fantasy.

Why was Zhou Xian's desire for escape from responsibility so strong that he invested extensive effort in the creation of an idyllic, imaginary estate? The power of his escapist sentiment lay in the fact that China was in great turmoil. The country's educated elite, including Zhou Xian himself and some of his associates, felt responsible for holding the country together. Furthermore, few residents of Jiangnan were untouched by the violence and destruction of the Taiping Rebellion. Zhou Xian's sense of stress was heightened by the fact that, while he dreamed of a quiet life, he led troops in battle against the Taiping army.

The existence of Zhou Xian's 'Record of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake,' and his painting of the estate are evidence of the hold the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake had on Zhou Xian's imagination. The extent to which he was able to project this hold onto his cohorts is demonstrated by Yang Xian's and Xu Jin's inscriptions, as well as by Ren Xiong's handscroll and the collaborative painting of the estate. Members of Zhou Xian's circle would have been susceptible to the power of his dream because they, like him, felt the difficulties of the times. Ren Xiong in particular responded to his patron's vision and invested such effort in his *Picture of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake* that it became one of his major works, in part because he was similarly distressed by the state of contemporary life. His particular anguish arose from the fact that he had great difficulty supporting his family through his painting.¹⁰ In addition, he may have had a heightened awareness of military problems because of his possible involvement with the army in a civilian capacity!

By the late 1840s, Zhou Xian was at the center of a coterie of artists and men of letters, including contributors to the collaborative *Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake* handscroll such as Huang Ju and Chen Xun. Zhou Xian chronicled his activities and interactions with colleagues in his *Fanhu Caotang Yigao*, frequently mentioning Huang Ju and Chen Xun as travelling companions. A seal carver who followed the style current in his native Hangzhou, Chen Xun chose to reside in Suzhou.¹⁰ Huang Ju, foster father to Ren Xiong's wife,¹¹ also lived in Suzhou, although

he was a native of Songjiang. He painted a variety of subjects, including landscapes in the style of Wang Hui (16321-717), flowering plants in the style of Yun Shouping (1633-1690), figures, and beautiful women."

One chapter of Zhou Xian's *Fanhu Caotang Yigao* was devoted to a biography of Ren Xiong, 'Ren Chushi Zhuan (Biography of Ren the Recluse)'.¹⁰ In it, Zhou Xian states that he met the artist in 1848, in Hangzhou. He immediately invited him to be a guest at his home, permitted him to study his painting collection, and included him in the artistic gatherings he hosted. At that time, Ren Xiong was twenty-five years old and only recently had left his impoverished home in Xiaoshan to look for a more fulfilling life. When the two met, Zhou Xian was but twenty-eight, just three years Ren Xiong's senior; their lives quickly became intertwined. Indeed, the most detailed information we have concerning the younger man's activities starting in the late 1840s comes from Zhou Xian's biography of him. Much of Ren Xiong's life from 1848 on was spent with his friend, Zhou Xian, and members of the latter's circle, travelling to famous beautiful places in Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces. Zhou Xian was close enough to the artist to write familiarly about his struggle to support his family through his painting. The warm regard which Zhou Xian held for Ren Xiong is demonstrated by the sensitivity with which he wrote of the latter's death from tuberculosis in 1857, at age thirty-four.¹¹

As mentioned earlier, at least three paintings entitled the *Picture of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake* date from Zhou Xian's lifetime. Zhang Mingke, in his *Han-song Ge Tanyi Suolu* of 1908, stated that Zhou Xian himself painted a handscroll of that title;¹² the painting's location is unknown. The second work, Ren Xiong's handscroll, belongs to the Shanghai Museum. The third, collaborative, handscroll also is in the collection of the Shanghai Museum.

One or more inscriptions are associated with each of the three paintings. In 1858, Zhou Xian appended his long description of the estate, the 'Record of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake', to Ren Xiong's handscroll. Xu Jin, a fellow Xiushui native and holder of the *juren* degree, wrote a preface to Zhou Xian's painting of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake; Zhang Mingke includes this preface in his *Han-song Ge Tanyi Suolu*.¹³ Yang Xian, a wealthy patron of the arts, added a colophon to the collaborative handscroll following a meeting with

Zhou Xian in 1858. Yang Xian, who lived in Suzhou, was a calligrapher and scholar of epigraphy, specializing in Han stele scripts. As a poet, his writings reflect his concern over the state of China.

The *Picture of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake* (figure 1), painted in ink and color on silk, is one of Ren Xiong's major works, done in 1855 when he was at the height of his creative career, at age thirty-two. Zhou Xian's influence on the handscroll's style and content was substantial, no doubt because he was a central figure in Ren Xiong's life, as both patron and friend. Because this handscroll so closely reflects Zhou Xian's specifications for his estate, it holds an important place in the latter's creation of his complex symbolic fiction, the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake.

Notes in Zhou Xian's *Fanhu Caotang Yigao* afford us the opportunity to observe how the relationship between Zhou Xian and Ren Xiong changed from that of benefactor and protege to one more closely approximating that of equal friends. In 1850, when the two men had known each other for two years, Ren Xiong made a painting of the Qiantang River at Zhou Xian's request. According to Zhou Xian's record of this painting in his *Fanhu Caotang Yigao*, they crossed the Qiantang River together, whereupon Zhou Xian immediately instructed (*zhu*) the Recluse (Ren Xiong) to make a drawing of it so that he could keep [the drawing] at the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake as a record of having seen it.¹¹ The suggestion that Ren Xiong records the scene may have been phrased politely, but the artist no doubt was obliged to follow the suggestion, being at that stage an unrecognized artist dependent upon Zhou's goodwill.¹² By 1855 the year Ren Xiong painted the *Picture of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake*, their relationship had changed due to his enhanced stature as an artist. Zhou Xian's notation in his *Fanhu Caotang Yigao* concerning the creation of the *Thatched Cottage* handscroll contains no hint that he expected Ren Xiong to make such a painting for him. He simply states within the narrative of the 'Biography of Ren the Recluse' that, 'For Zhou Xian, he painted the long painting, the *Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake*. Two *zhang* in length (one *zhang* is equivalent to 3.33 meters), it was to be declared remarkable.'¹³ In terms of sheer size (35.8 x 705.4 cm), the *Picture of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake* is equalled in his oeuvre by only the 120-leaf *Album of Paintings after Poetry by Yao Xie*,¹⁴ and the labor he lavished on detail is



Figure 2. Tao Qi and others, *Picture of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake*, late 1850s-early 1860s. Handscroll, ink on paper. Shanghai Museum.

unmatched. This devotion is a reflection of the strong ties of affection that had grown up between the two men during their years of association. The long inscription appended to the handscroll by Zhou Xian indicates the value he attached to the painting.

The collaborative *Picture of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake* (figure 2) was painted over the course of several years, with most of the contributions made to it during 1859 and 1861, judging from the participating

artists' dated inscriptions mounted following the painting. The view of the imaginary estate presented in this handscroll does not correspond closely to Ren Xiong's. The degree to which Zhou Xian directed the artistic programs of the two works may be ascertained by comparing their imagery with that of his 'Record of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake.' Such a comparison will reveal a very close correlation between Zhou Xian's essay and Ren Xiong's painting, and a much lesser one between the essay and the collaborative work.

We can only speculate as to the role played by Zhou Xian's own painting, now lost. Presumably its content would agree with that of the 'Record of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake,' and the other two *Picture of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake* paintings would therefore agree with its imagery to the same extent that they agree with that of the essay. Although both Ren Xiong and the artists who created the collaborative work may have seen Zhou Xian's handscroll prior to painting their own images of the estate, it seems unlikely that Zhou Xian would have held up his own rendering as a model for Ren Xiong, whom he would have considered the superior artist.

At first glance, Zhou Xian's description of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake, as appended to Ren Xiong's handscroll, appears to have little relation to the latter's image of the estate. They seem to be similar only to the extent that they both present a conglomeration of buildings and vistas typifying an idyllic estate set on a lake, including pavilions, bridges, and bamboo groves. Upon further examination, however, the visual and textual images show a very close correlation. Ju-hsi Chou has previously noted the fidelity of Ren Xiong's image to Zhou Xian's description. I shall return to his comments on the *Picture of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake* below.

Whereas space considerations do not permit a vista by vista comparison of Zhou Xian's text with Ren Xiong's painting in the present essay, quotes from Zhou Xian's descriptions of two of the vistas will serve to exemplify the details contained in the essay, and a comparison of these two descriptions with the relevant images in Ren Xiong's painting will exemplify the extent to which the handscroll correlates with the description. Zhou Xian describes two multistoried buildings, the Ceremonial Cap Building and the Northern Hills. Of the former he says:

Down towards the east and to the north of the ridge, amongst trees and luxuriant, fragrant vegetation, a tall building rises up.

It bears resemblance to an ancient conical ceremonial cap; therefore, it is called the Ceremonial Cap Building. Vermilion columns reach toward the sky; green pillars cast their gaze downward [to the scenery below]. Taking in the lake girded by mountains, the view is always changing.

The western part of this building is linked to a dwelling that is called the Little House of Spring Trees.....²¹

In the painting, tall columns adorn the multistoried Ceremonial Cap Building, which is set amidst trees, on a rise with a view of both lake and mountains, exactly as Zhou Xian relates. Ren Xiong's Ceremonial Cap Building is attached to the Little House of Spring Trees, which is hidden by dense foliage.

Earlier in his essay, Zhou Xian states:

From the Thatched Cottage and heading towards the north, low ridges rise and fall, declivities descend and ascend. There are luxuriant trees and elegant rocks, and the foliage is so lush and verdant that it obscures the sun. In the midst [of this setting] are two-storied dwellings and studios, whose windows are secluded and elegant; this is known as the Northern Hills.

To the east of the hills are tall pines, standing apart like the Five Statesmen....

Ren Xiong's painting places the Northern Hills adjacent to a cluster of pines. The trees with which Ren Xiong surrounds the collected buildings of the Northern Hills are dense, and cause the windows to be secluded, just as Zhou Xian stipulates. Indeed, throughout this painting the vistas correlate well with the description, in a manner similar to that of the above two examples.

We can obtain a macro-view of the correspondence between Zhou Xian's text and Ren Xiong's image by considering a diagram of the handscroll (figure 3), labelled with the appellations used in the essay, in concert with a tentative map of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake (figure 4) based on Zhou Xian's description. Whereas other versions of the map would be possible, this one fits both Zhou Xian's and Ren Xiong's descriptions of the estate. Each of the buildings and vistas mentioned by Zhou Xian appears in Ren Xiong's painting, and the spatial relationships between them are consistent from essay to painting. In fact, the two versions of the estate are very closely related.

ZHOU XIAN'S FABULOUS CONSTRUCT

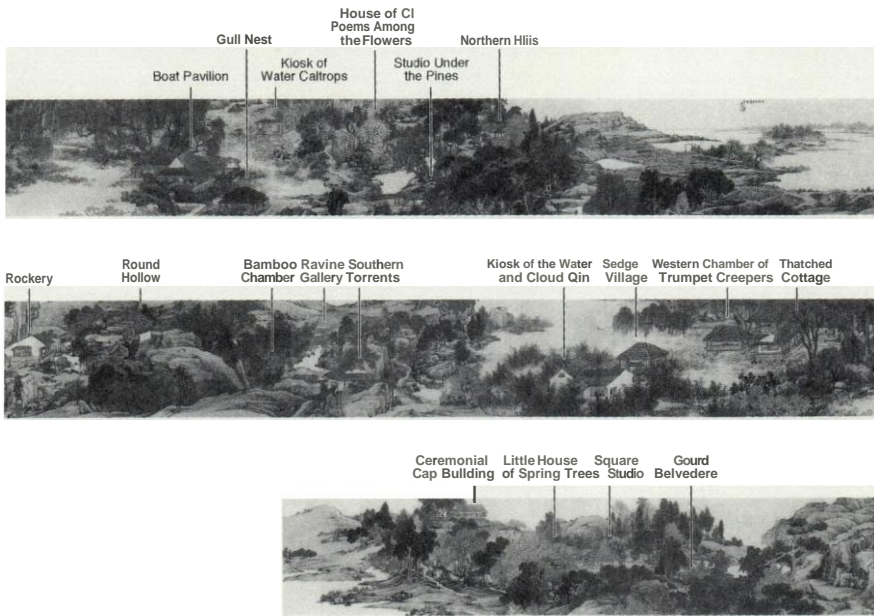


Figure 3. Diagram of Ren Xiong's *Picture of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake*, with buildings labelled according to Zhou Xian's 'Record of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake.'

Zhou Xian's description of the estate does not list the components of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake in the exact order in which they would appear to someone perusing the land in a single visual sweep. He backtracks, hampering attempts at an orderly visualization. Making a comparison even more difficult, Ren Xiong's image of the estate does not present it from a single viewpoint; rather, the viewer moves gradually through the landscape, circling the lake, and changing the direction of his vision, thus seeing each element from a shifting point of view. Ren Xiong leads the viewer clockwise around the lake, directing the viewer's gaze sometimes to the right, towards the lake, and sometimes to the left, away from the lake, usually toward rocky hills. This explains the way in which the lake disappears and then reappears. While it is not entirely logical to see one structure, such as the Kiosk of the Water and Cloud *Qin*, from one side, and immediately thereafter another building, the Southern

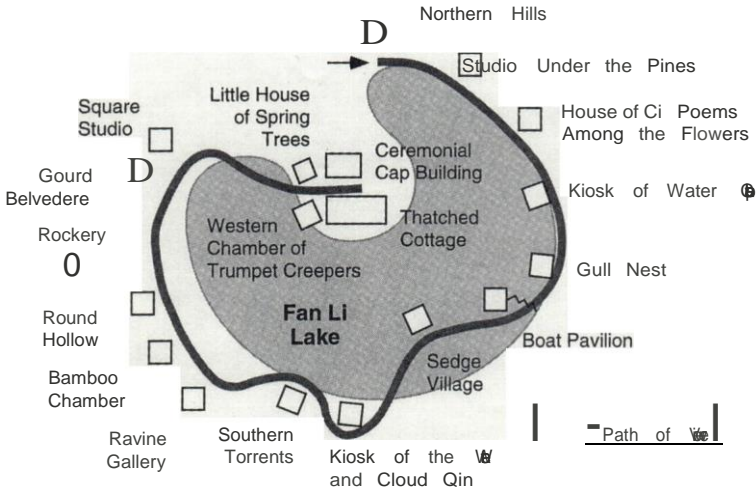


Figure 4. Tentative Map of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake.

Torrents, from the other side, this sudden shift in viewpoint is a serviceable device for the artist. The change in the direction of the viewer's gaze occurs twice, the other time being between the House of Ci Poems Among the Flowers and the Kiosk of Water Caltrops. These two changes of direction allow Ren Xiong to begin the handscroll with the image of a gradually increasing mass of land, and finish with a diminishing land mass, in this way bracketing his view of the lake with fairly standard opening and closing segments.

Because the collaborative handscroll depicts fewer buildings and landscape elements than does Ren Xiong's handscroll, it necessarily has fewer opportunities to illustrate Zhou Xian's description of the estate. In fact, not many segments appear to be related to his description at all. We can associate structures illustrated in the handscroll with specific buildings named in the 'Record of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake' only tentatively. For example, behind the large building in the middle of the painting, which presumably is the Thatched Cottage, is a building housing a *qin*. This could be the Kiosk of the

Water and Cloud *Qin*, although it certainly is not located on the opposite side of the lake from the Thatched Cottage, as Zhou Xian states it should be, but instead may even be attached to the Thatched Cottage. Behind that building is a two-storied structure that could be either the Ceremonial Cap Building or the Northern Hills, both of which are described as multistoried. Despite the detailed description of these two buildings in the essay, the multistoried building in the collaborative handscroll cannot be identified with either of them with any assurance. As with Zhou Xian's description of the Ceremonial Cap Building, the lake is within view, but we do not know if mountains are also. It is adjacent to the Thatched Cottage, as is the essay's Northern Hills, but it is not surrounded by ridges or rugged rock formations, and there are no nearby pines.

Why are the two handscrolls related to Zhou Xian's description in such differing ways? We do not know when he actually authored the description of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake, although he inscribed it and mounted it at the end of Ren Xiong's *Picture of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake* in 1858, the year after the artist's death. The close correspondence between Ren Xiong's visual image and Zhou Xian's textual image strongly suggests that one was modelled on the other. Ju-hsi Chou believes that the correlation between Ren Xiong's image and Zhou Xian's description indicates that Zhou Xian's essay, 'though recorded later than the painting itself, must have been in an early draft and made available to the artist.'²² This seems the most likely explanation, particularly considering a subtle literary allusion made by Zhou Xian, and reflected in Ren Xiong's painting. This literary allusion is discussed below.

The men who painted the collaborative *Picture of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake* could well have been familiar with both Ren Xiong's visual and Zhou Xian's textual versions of the estate, both of which predate the collaborative handscroll. The fact that the work was done by a large number of men over a span of years, with no single mind organizing an overall program, would account for the fact that the painting neither depicts the estate in detail, nor do its images correlate to those of Ren Xiong and Zhou Xian, assuming that the artists would have desired such a correlation. A few images are common to both handscrolls, but not present in Zhou Xian's description:

these include the introductory passage with willows on shallow spits of land, the flower-covered lattice, the low outdoor table topped with an array of potted plants, the Taihu rock, and cranes. It is possible that the two handscrolls share these elements because Ren Xiong's painting influenced the subsequent rendering; it is also possible that both handscrolls drew these images from Zhou Xian's lost painting.

Zhou Xian's effort to legitimize his imaginary estate produced a series of contemporary textual and visual representations. References within those texts and images to early Chinese visual conventions and literature carry an additional legitimizing force. Written documentation includes inscriptions on each of the three paintings, one of them being the long colophon composed by Zhou Xian and mounted at the end of Ren Xiong's handscroll.

According to Zhang Mingke, many men added inscriptions to Zhou Xian's painting, the *Picture of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake*, which now is lost. Of these inscriptions, Zhang Mingke found the most noteworthy to be a preface authored by Xu Jin.²³ For the most part, unlike Zhou Xian's very detailed and specific inscription on Ren Xiong's handscroll, Xu Jin's preface describes Zhou Xian's painting in vague terms suitable for any idealized image of a lakeside retreat. Included with these imprecise descriptions, however, are two comments deserving attention. The first is Xu Jin's suggestion in reference to Zhou Xian's handscroll that, "another Wangchuan Villa has been painted." The second is his statement that "the several tens of *gong* (a unit of land equivalent to 179 centimeters) [of the estate] are divided into nineteen views." Both comments further the legitimization of Zhou Xian's imaginary estate, the first through reference to the revered original estate painting by Wang Wei (701-761), the second through an allusion to Zhuangzi that is specifically explained by Yang Xian in his 1889 inscription on the collaborative *Picture of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake*.

Yang Xian's inscription begins with fifteen brief poems describing vistas of the Thatched Cottage, and finishes with the following comment:

I recall that in 1858, Cunbo (Zhou Xian) and I were staying in the capital at the same time. He took out a picture and directed me to write [a series of] quatrains of six-word lines, one quatrain per scene. Now, the Thatched Cottage was but a fable of Cunbo, who

had taken the *yuyan shijiu* as the basis for the nineteen scenes of the Thatched Cottage. Long ago, my draft had been lost during the turbulent time. I rediscovered it from piles of old papers, except four verses were missing.²⁶

Ju-hsi Chou has noted the significance of the allusion to Zhuangzi in Yang Xian's inscription; therefore I quote his summary of the situation:

This place [that is, the Thatched Cottage], so stated Yang Xian, was but a fable, or *yuyan*, alluding to *Zhuangzi's* chapter nineteen, particularly the first line: '*yuyan shijiu*' or 'imputed words make up nine tenths of it.'²¹ Here the numeral *shijiu* is taken literally to mean nineteen, thus resulting in the number of scenes in the painted scroll of Fanhu Caotang."

The reference to Zhuangzi through division of the Thatched Cottage into nineteen vistas is extremely persistent. It appears in Zhou Xian's listing of precisely nineteen structures in his 'Record of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake' and is reiterated through Ren Xiong's representation of the same nineteen structures described by Zhou Xian.²⁹ It recurs in Xu Jin's statement that the landscape in Zhou Xian's painting is divided into nineteen views, and is stated explicitly by Yang Xian in his inscription written at Zhou Xian's request. Clearly, this reference was engineered by Zhou Xian to help establish the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake as a significant entity. The Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake is related to Zhuangzi's chapter nineteen in a more subtle fashion. As Ju-hsi Chou has noted, Burton Watson states that '*yuyan* or "imputed words" refers to words put into the mouths of historical or fictional persons to make them more compelling.'³⁰ Paralleling this process, Zhou Xian's aim was to make his imagined estate more compelling, and less of a fable, through linkage with Zhuangzi, a revered historical figure. The network of contemporary text contrived by Zhou Xian was to anchor the estate in people's minds further.

While Ren Xiong is best known for his innovative technical and stylistic adaptations that were the basis for the Shanghai School manner of painting, he refers to the ancient blue-and-green style for his interpretation of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake. His choice of this style contributes to Zhou Xian's program of legitimizing the

Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake, while simultaneously emphasizing the estate's idyllism. The antiquity of the blue-and-green style suggests that the residence is long-established, and the fact that this style often was used in paintings of celestial dwellings serves to idylize the retreat. Ren Xiong further adds to the idyllic aura of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake through his inclusion of motifs redolent of gentility or symbolizing immortality.

Ren Xiong employed the blue-and-green style infrequently, and then almost exclusively in paintings of legendary or other-worldly beings or locations. As an accomplished practitioner, he revived the style and passed it on to his artistic successors. The antiquity of the blue-and-green style had led to a convention equating it with certain times and places and Ren Xiong did not stray outside this convention. Examples of his works in this style include the following: *Female Immortal Riding a Deer*,³¹ *Mending the Official Robe*, "Album of Buddhist Figures," and *Pavilion in Enchanted Mountains*. The first three are figure paintings with landscape settings. The female figure riding a deer is a fairy or immortal, and the Buddhist figures represent an other-worldly state of being which Ren Xiong stressed by using the blue-and-green style. In *Mending the Official Robe*, the heavy color application and stylized leaves and clouds, characteristic of the blue-and-green style, lend an aura of antiquity and reverence to the image. *Pavilion in Enchanted Mountains* depicts an uninhabited dwelling located high in the mountains, and has been given its title because of the style in which it was rendered; whereas no title is inscribed on the painting, the stylized rocks and clouds and heavy application of green pigment imply that the location is enchanted or other-worldly.

Like *Pavilion in Enchanted Mountains*, the *Picture of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake* is uninhabited. In the latter work, the landscape is attractive and fecund, and the many structures are furnished with items, such as a *qin*, an arrangement of potted plants, and shelves of books, suggesting a cultivated life. Although both the natural and the man-made components of the setting are designed to afford residents of the Thatched Cottage a most pleasurable life, the only inhabitants Ren Xiong has portrayed are the cranes, symbols of immortality. The absence of human inhabitants, combined with the use of the blue-and-green style, serves to elevate the image of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake above the mundane world. This is in sharp contrast to the

collaborative handscroll, the *Picture of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake*, which is populated by a variety of figures, and which is tied to nineteenth-century life through its rendition in the painting style popular among men with scholarly aspirations, namely ink-deployed on paper after the manner of such seventeenth-century orthodox landscape artists as Wang Hui.

The most startling aspect of the two handscrolls entitled *Picture of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake* is the fact that they represent an estate imagined by a contemporaneous figure in very concrete terms and for his own satisfaction. Whereas many earlier Chinese paintings depict locations grounded in fact or in established fiction (for example, well-known legends, poems or novels), few, if any, spring entirely from the artist's or patron's imagination. The Thatched Cottage is an imaginary place that lacks the weight of legend, which otherwise could lend texture and credence to a fictitious location. Zhou Xian sought to establish his imaginary estate through the program of paintings and inscriptions done by and for him to describe and memorialize the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake. Furthermore, references to early literary and painting traditions within the inscriptions and paintings serve to legitimize the estate through association. In particular, the allusions to Zhuangzi and Ren Xiong's employment of the blue-and-green style link the estate to the past. Ren Xiong's *Picture of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake* was the most effective vehicle for establishing the estate, in part because of the handscroll's concordance with Zhou Xian's 'Record of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake,' and in part because of Ren Xiong's ability to draw on historical painting traditions to create a detailed, and therefore convincingly concrete, rendering of the estate.

APPENDIX

Record of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake by Zhou Xian

This retired scholar is a native of Zuli. His home is adjacent to Fan Lake. From the lake, he has drawn the name of his abode, calling it the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake; and from the Thatched Cottage, he has derived his own name, the Retired Scholar of Fan Lake. When this retired scholar was young, he accompanied his father who served in various parts of Zhejiang. In his prime, he traveled extensively in the South. Last year, the [Taiping] rebels invaded Jiangnan. This retired scholar changed to military dress and directed troops in the recapture of the three towns of Jiading, Zhenjiang and Guazhou. Having accumulated merits in the military, he was then going to brave the wind and dust as an official [in a distant location]. Thus, in regard to [the Thatched Cottage of] Fan Lake, he hasn't spent a single day in residence there. However, he has always planned to buy two or three *qing* (one *qing* is equivalent to 6.67 hectares) of land at the shore of the lake, and to live there, giving the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake as its name.

The Cottage will be six or seven columns in width, and the rooms will be bright, open, and spacious. The willow's luxuriance will complement the profound beauty of the trees and flowers. This will be a place for reading and writing and also for entertaining guests. If you look eastward, then you can see winding shores and crooked sandbars, as well as pavilions and kiosks connected with one another. When summer turns to autumn, the lotuses produce flowers as beautiful as fine embellished silk.

The Thatched Cottage faces the lake, and the view from there is without limit. In the middle [of the lake], there is a small mound large enough to dwell on, with tall rushes and great reeds growing densely upon it. They could be cleared away [to create] an area for a small dwelling with short railings and low eaves, and there one could lie down and rest, or fish. Because [this dwelling] is surrounded by reeds, it will be named Sedge Village. Ducks, gulls, and other kinds of water fowl are tame enough to be approached. [One could] establish a narrow kiosk over the water and connect it with a board [to walk over], naming it the Gull Nest. [We would] call it thus because it floats like a gull, and it is just right as a nesting place for water fowls.

To the south of Sedge Village gorges intermesh with torrents, and to the west they join up with a lofty peak. In ancient times, my native place was known to be a land of marshes. The flat wilderness extended for hundreds of *li* without a single mound big enough even to fill a basket [of earth]. This retired scholar must gather earth and pile up rocks in order to create layers of mountain peaks and ridges. [The earth formations will consist of] tall ones, including the sharp point of a tall hill, and various kinds of high pointed mountains; both singular peaks and successions of rising peaks, including those standing alone like a great hall and those densely grouped; and lofty peaks including those with many large rocks and others with rocks unevenly scattered. The layered mountain barriers and piled-up peaks display hundreds of forms and thousands of shapes.

To the right of the Thatched Cottage, one will be filled with an agreeable spirit coming from the west. Even if one holds up the tablet (an accouterment of court attendance) through the entire session of court, it will never be enough to make one bored [with being at the Thatched Cottage].

From the Thatched Cottage and heading towards the north, low ridges rise and fall, declivities descend and ascend. There are luxuriant trees and elegant rocks, and the foliage is so lush and verdant that it obscures the sun. In the midst [of this setting] are two-storied dwellings and studios, whose windows are secluded and elegant; this is known as Northern Hills.

To the east of the hills are tall pines, standing apart like the Five Statesmen. The coiling branches [and foliage] form a cover; when the wind comes they make a sound like the ocean waves. A library lies underneath, exuding a sense of purity and emptiness divorced from the world; and this is the Studio Under the Pines.

This retired scholar enjoys composing *ci* poems: his writings include *Fanhu Ciji* (Collection of *Ci* Poems by Fanhu). Once he gathered all the works of *ci* poets from the Southern Tang, Northern Song and later, and stored them away in the House of *Ci* Poems Among the Flowers. The balustrades and railings on all sides have a variety of flowering plants spreading together over them, including floating purple and lofty red blossoms. During all the four seasons [the flowers] do not dwindle. The bamboo laces are woven together so as to screen the flowers from a path that connects with the Studio Under the Pines.

Moving to the east, there is the Kiosk of Water Caltrops. The winding shores and whirling water all are filled with water caltrops and lotuses. Wind [blows through] the galleries [of the Kiosk of Water Caltrops], water [reflects onto] the railings, and numbers of bamboo mats [grace the floors, creating an atmosphere] clean and cool.

Following the water's edge and turning to the south, [the view] suddenly opens onto a limpid lake. A pavilion stands in the water. This is the Boat Pavilion, as in [the expression] 'one boat sailing through five lakes.' Via a bridge one can then reach the pavilion, which is exquisite in architectural details. The appearance of the waters and the clouds, with its continuously flowing fullness, is never fixed. This retired gentleman once acquired a *qin*; it is of dark lacquer [adorned with] beautiful inlay, and its rhythm and tone are antique. Its belly bears the inscription, *shuiyun* (water and cloud), and it is a work remaining from the Southern Song period. Because of this *qin*, this retired scholar has named this dwelling the Kiosk of the Water and Cloud *Qin* [as a means of] noting its existence. From this kiosk to the Boat Pavilion and to the Kiosk of Water Caltrops, they all are separated from the Thatched Cottage by the lake. Following the shining girdle [of the lake's edge] with one's eyes around towards the east from the Thatched Cottage, [these buildings] are there amongst the winding banks and spits of land.

A rocky peak rises ruggedly from the western hills. As it heads south, it gradually dwindles down and winds around to form gullies. All the streams in the hills come gurgling northward to pour into the lake. Where compressed torrents wear a path between cliffs, there are white sand patches and green bamboo, isolated in the extreme. Here will be placed a [building] several columns wide, called the Southern Torrents, joined on the east to the Kiosk of the Water and Cloud *Qin*. Also, there is a narrow path which goes northwards to where you can cross the lake and can then reach Sedge Village. Following the mountain torrents upstream towards the west, [there will be] cliffs and ravines extreme and deep, with clear streams encircling the ravine. The studio built across the ravine is the Ravine Studio.

Across the Ravine Studio, after ten or twenty paces, a valley spreads out before the diminishing ridges. Covering the valley and the lower portions of the hills is a dense, concealing growth of bamboo (including dwarf bamboo). There is built a secluded dwelling of five

or six *jian* (a *jian* is an intercolumnar unit), its winding corridors silent and secretive. The sunlight cannot pierce through to the ground, so the earth and the moss are always moist, tinting the screens and doors green; and this is the House of Bamboo .

When this bamboo-filled valley comes to an end, the hills return to embrace it once more. The peaks enfold the winding stone path [in a manner that seems] carefully planned. There is a hall of ten *hu* in height (a *hu* is an ivory tablet about one meter long), so secret and peaceful that it is just right for relaxing; this is the Round Hollow.

There is another path that turns from the Hollow towards the north, in concert with the rising peaks. Here the interior 'bones' are all exposed, a disordered mass of stones standing together. The complex array of rockforms includes some with sheer faces, some grouped together, some planted upright, some lying on their sides, some joined together, and some widely spaced, some singular in appearance, and some nicely matched. The exquisite cottage revealed here will be a place for seclusion and the topic available for poetry is the Rockery.

The Gourd Belvedere hugs the side of the mountain and [is set] in the midst of the forest, with its eight windows open to the world. It is to the north of the Rockery and, because it [seems to] hang like a gourd, it is named the Gourd Belvedere.

Thereafter the colors of the hills yield to the kingfisher hue, and the clouds and mists join against the blue sky. When the worldly dust no longer blows and all is silent, the music of Nature suddenly resounds. To the left, an osmanthus thicket on the cliff produces fragrance, and the flowers on the ground offer up their beauty. Adwelling a square *zhang* (3.33 meters) in size is just right for autumn pleasure, and is called the Square Studio.

Down towards the East and to the north of the ridge, amongst trees and luxuriant, fragrant vegetation, a tall building rises up. It bears resemblance to an ancient conical ceremonial cap; therefore, it is called the Ceremonial Cap Building. Vermilion columns reach toward the sky; green pillars cast their gaze downward [to the scenery below]. Taking in the lake girded by mountains, the view is always changing.

The western part of this building is linked to a dwelling that is called the Little House of Spring Trees. Interwoven branches and dense foliage fill the four directions with their fragrant shadows,

always verdant whether it is sunny or dimmed. From the front [of this House] the Thatched Cottage can be reached.

To the right of the Thatched Cottage will be built a water kiosk. There is the fragrance of duckweed, and the shadows of water grasses ripple over the curtains and mats: this is the Western Chamber of Trumpet Creepers.

The Thatched Cottage is meant for this retired scholar who, following retirement after a successful career, plans to use it [as a place] to tend to his mother and to compose his own writings. What place does not have beautiful scenery? The reason he must remain at Fan Li Lake is that this is the place where his ancestors roamed and fished, so he does not dare to abandon it. From the past up through the present, among gentlemen of wealth, there has not been one without a famous garden which also, at its zenith, was absolutely worth visiting. However, [those gardens whose owners] are without the virtue and righteousness [necessary] to uphold their foundation, and are without the literary adjuncts that would enhance their reputation, are unable to compete against the Thatched Cottage.

In the seventh month of the year *yimao* (1855), the fifth year of Xianfeng, a friend of this retired scholar, Ren Xiong of Xiaoshan, made this depiction of the Thatched Cottage. Three years later, in the sixth month of the year *wuwu* (1858), I, this retired scholar, have committed this record of the Thatched Cottage to writing.

Notes

- r. While a simpler designation for the paintings would be the 'Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake,' I am calling each the 'Picture of the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake' to avoid confusion with the name of Zhou Xian's estate, the Thatched Cottage of Fan Lake, and the name of one of the buildings on that estate, the Thatched Cottage.
2. Most of the artists who contributed to the collaborative handscroll were so minor that they do not appear in the standard encyclopedias or artists' dictionaries.
3. For Zhou Xian 's biography, see Jin Youchen's account included in Zhou Xian's *Fanhu Caotang Yigao* (not dated). Also see Zhang Mingke, *Hansong Ge Tanyi Suolu* (A Record of Discussions on Art in the Hansong Pavilion) (Preface dated 1908; Shanghai, 1988 reprint), 64; Yang Yi, *Haishang Molin* (Shanghai Ink Forest) (Shanghai , 1919), 63; and Yujianhua editor, *Zhongguo Meishujia Renming Cidian* (A Dictionary of Chinese Artists)(Shanghai, 1981), 493.
4. Zhang , *Hansong Ge*, 64.
5. Zhang, *Hansong Ge*, 64.
6. Zhou, *Fanhu Caotang Yigao*, *juan*1, 15b and 16a.
7. For the full text in translation, see the Appendix.
8. Zhou, *Fanhu Caotang Yigao*, *juan*1, 17a.
9. See Ding Wenwei, preface to *Ren Xion g' s Liexian Jiupai* (Drinking Cards with Illustrations of the Immortals) (1854).
10. Yu, *Zhongguo Meishujia Renming Cidian*, rn28.
- n . Zhou , *Fanhu Caotang Yigao*, *juan*1, 16b.
12. See Jiang Baoling, *Molin Jinhua* (preface dated 1852), *juan* 16, rnb-n a. Also see Yu, *Zhongguo Meishujia Renming Cidian*, n68.
13. Zhou, *Fanhu Caotang Yigao*, *juan*1, 15b-18b.
14. Zhou , *Fanhu Caotang Yigao*, *juan*1, 17a-b.
15. Zhang, *Hansong Ge*, 64.
16. Zhang , *Hansong Ge*, 64-65.
17. Zhou, *Fanhu Caotang Yigao*, *juan*1, 7a-8a.
18. This image of a patron instructing an artist to record an event as it occurred is reminiscent of Emperor Tang Taizong commanding Yan Liben (died 673) to paint some exotic birds he had been watching. See Zhang Yan yuan, *Lidai Minghua Ji* (A Record of Famous Painters of All the Dynasties) (*Huashi Congshu* edition), *juan* 9, rn4.

19. Zhou, *Fanhu Caotang Yigao*, juan 1, 17a.
20. Ren Xiong painted this album for his second major patron, Yao Xie (1805-1864), in 1851. It is in the Palace Museum, Beijing.
21. I thank Ju-hsi Chou for generously sharing his translation of Zhou Xian's 'Record of the Thatched Cottage' with me, and for correcting mine.
22. Ju-hsi Chou, 'The Rise of Shanghai,' in Claudia Brown and Ju-hsi Chou, *Transcending Turmoil: Painting at the Close of China's Empire, 1796-1911* (Phoenix, 1992), 163.
23. Zhang, *Hansong Ge*, 64-65.
24. Zhang, *Hansong Ge*, 64-65.
25. Zhang, *Hansong Ge*, 65.
26. Dedicated to Kezhai, that is, Wu Dacheng (1835-1902), Yang Xian wrote the inscription in the tenth month, the year of *jichou* (1889) of the Guangxu reign. I thank Yin Chuang, Senior Lecturer, Department of Asian Languages, Stanford University, for his help in deciphering Yang Xian's handwriting.
27. Ju-hsi Chou, whom I quote, notes that he has used the Burton Watson translation, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York and London, 1968), 303.
28. Brown and Chou, *Transcending Turmoil*, 163.
29. The nineteen structures are the following: The Thatched Cottage, the Sedge Village, the Gull Nest, the Northern Hills, the Studio Under the Pines, the House of Ci Poems Among the Flowers, the Kiosk of Water Caltrops, the Boat Pavilion, the Kiosk of the Water and Cloud *Qin*, the Southern Torrents, the Ravine Studio, the House of Bamboo, the Round Hollow, the Rockery, the Gourd Belvedere, the Square Studio, the Ceremonial Cap Building, the Little House of Spring Trees, and the Western Chamber of Trumpet Creepers.
30. Brown and Chou, *Transcending Turmoil*, 341, note 252.
31. This round fan from the Suzhou Municipal Antique Store Collection is reproduced in *Zhongguo Gudai Shuhua Tumu* (Illustrated Catalog of Ancient Chinese Calligraphy and Painting), VI (Beijing, 1987), Su3-137.
32. There are two extant versions of this hanging scroll, one in the Xu Beihong Memorial Hall, Beijing, and the other in the Stanford University Museum of Art, Stanford, California. The latter, which is more likely to be genuine, is reproduced in Britta Erickson, 'Ren Xiong's Final Dated Work, *Mending the Official Robe*,' *Stanford University Museum of Art Journal*, XXII-XXIII 1, 6. The former is reproduced in *Zhongguo Gudai Shuhua Tumu*, I (Beijing, 1986), Jing 13-13.

33. This album of sixteen leaves from a private collection in the People's Republic of China is reproduced in *Zhongguo Minjian Micang Huihua Zhenpin* (Treasured Paintings in Private Collections in China) (Nanjing, 1989), 59-74.
34. This album leaf is reproduced in James Soong and Jung Ying Tsao, *Chinese Paintings by the FourJens: Four Late Nineteenth Century Masters* (San Francisco, 1977), 27.