“Cold Mountain: There’s No Through Trail”

Contemporary Interpretations of Chinese Classical Poetry

Killion and Snyder, *The High Sierra of California*  pp. 112-13

Tara Seekins

2015 Fulbright-Hays Delegation, NCUSCR

October 28, 2015
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage One: Desired Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Established Goals Based on California Common Core State Standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCCSS RL Grades 6-12, 6: Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCCSS RL Grades 9-10, 7: Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCCSS RL Grades 9-10, 9: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g. how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understandings:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classical Chinese poetry presents unique challenges and opportunities for translators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary American critics question the binary distinction between nature and culture that has traditionally separated Fields and Gardens poetry and Mountains and Rivers poetry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary writers, including the Beat Poets, idealize and engage with Classical Chinese poetry, particularly the poetry of Han Shan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essential Questions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do formal elements of Classical Chinese poetry and characters influence translation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the characteristics of Fields and Gardens poetry and Mountains and Rivers poetry, and how are they related?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do contemporary American writers and artists engage with Classical Chinese poetry?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage Two: Assessment Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance Tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Jigsaw presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Socratic seminar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Exit-ticket quick write</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gallery walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checks for understanding are embedded in each activity, along with themes teachers should observe as evidence of learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage Three: Learning Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesson One introduces students to two remarkable characteristics of classical Chinese poetry: its graphic form and its minimal grammatical elements. Designed for students who have never been exposed to classical Chinese language, the lesson provides multiple entry points to understanding this content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Two engages students in a conversation about whether modern readers should reconsider the traditional distinction between Fields and Gardens poetry, exemplified by T’ao Ch’ien, and Rivers and Mountains poetry, exemplified by Hsieh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ling-yun. After close reading a poem from each tradition and then considering a contemporary argument against such a distinction, students discuss whether the traditional distinction between the two genres holds up—or not. The lesson concludes with students reflecting on simultaneous representations of nature and culture in Wang Ximeng’s *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains.*

Lesson Three expands on the students’ prior knowledge of Cold Mountain (Han Shan) as introduced in the excerpt from *The Dharma Bums* in Lesson One. Here, students examine biographical information about the poet from three different sources and consider the idea that Cold Mountain is a legendary character more than a historical figure—and that “his” poems are likely the work of multiple authors. Students read several of Han Shan’s poems in two different translations, and they consider how contemporary poets and artists engage the themes he/they explore[s].
Lesson One

*Like Sharp Blows on the Mind*

This lesson introduces students to two remarkable characteristics of classical Chinese poetry: its graphic form and its minimal grammatical elements. Designed for students who have never been exposed to classical Chinese language, the lesson provides multiple entry points to understanding this content.

**Introduction and Group Engagement: Jigsaw**

Teacher will introduce the activity and provide students with copies of Handout 1. In small, heterogeneous groupings, students will read this short excerpt from Jack Kerouac’s *The Dharma Bums*. In this passage, Kerouac’s character, Ray, shows up at the “little domicile” of Gary Snyder’s character, Japhy, to find him translating “big wild crowtracks of Chinese signs,” in other words, the poetry of Han Shan. After reading the excerpt, each group will prepare an answer to one of the following assigned questions:

1. Why does Ray tell Japhy, “Say that sounds like you,” when Japhy describes Han Shan?

2. What characteristics of Han Shan’s poetry and/or biography are especially attractive to Ray and Japhy? Why?

3. How does Japhy receive Ray’s suggestion that translating each character individually would be “even better” than adding in “Western prepositions and articles and such” as he completes his translation?

4. Japhy takes significant liberties when he translates the word “sensualist” using the contemporary slang word “junk ey.” How does he explain this choice? What do you think about this choice?

5. Ray wonders why Han Shan is Japhy’s hero. What is Japhy’s response? Do you buy it?

6. Ray describes classical Chinese characters as “big wild crowtracks.” What do you think about this description?

Groups will share out their questions and answers. Teacher will listen for the following themes as a check for understanding:

- Beat Poets admired Han Shan as an iconoclast and artist (Kerouac dedicated *The Dharma Bums* to Han Shan);

- Han Shan’s rejection of the material world in favor of the natural world resonates with the themes explored in *The Dharma Bums*;
• Kerouac is attracted to the idea, as he conceived it, that classical Chinese poetry is pure, transcendent, and exotic—this belief is well worth interrogating and problematizing in the context of the group conversation.

Instruction

Teacher will distribute and project Handout 2 and begin direct instruction on the pictographic nature of classical Chinese, emphasizing its “extreme concision” and “direct visual connection to the empirical world” (Hinton, xx). Teacher will explain the etymological roots of the word “homology” (Greek: homo, “same” and logos, “word”) and encourage students to trace the character for “sun” as it appears multiple times in the phrase, “The sun rises in the east” (Pound, 33).

Individual and Group Practice

Individually, students will review the line that reads in translation, “stairs below clump grass see dew radience” and add the grammatical elements traditionally expected by Western readers.

Back in the same groups as before, students will share out their adaptations, noting similarities or differences—and the different meanings or shades of meaning they produce—among their editorial choices.

In the large group, small group representatives will summarize their conversations and their experiences of modifying the text. Teacher will listen for the following themes as a check for understanding:

• Translators are responsible for making choices—even as they add simple grammatical elements like articles and prepositions—that can dramatically alter the meaning of the primary text.

• The act of translating requires elements of intuition and instinct, a “feel” for the author's intent.

To close the translation activity, teacher will offer and ask for student feedback on the following critical perspective on translation:

The translator’s first and foremost concern must be the continuous involvement in experiencing and defining the boundaries of meaning and associations surrounding each word. . . . One could say that the translator draws a visual image of each word that evolves into a painting whose outer edges can never be clearly defined. Biguenet and Schulte, xiii.

Closing and Check for Understanding

Individually, students will respond to this prompt in short-answer exit tickets:
“Riprap” is really a class of poems I wrote under the influence of the Sierra Nevada and the daily trail crew work of picking up and placing granite stones in tight cobble pattern on hard slab . . . . I tried writing poems of tough, simple, short words, with the complexity far beneath the surface texture. In part the line was influenced by the five- and seven-character line Chinese poems I’d been reading, which work like sharp blows on the mind. Snyder, qtd. in Allen, 420-21.

Here, contemporary poet Gary Snyder (“Japhy” in The Dharma Bums) reflects on how his own writing process was influenced by the Chinese poems he was reading and the physical labor he was doing at the time he was writing. What does Snyder mean when he says that Chinese poems “work like sharp blows on the mind?” Explain how your new understanding of Chinese characters and poetic form helps you to understand what he’s talking about.
Lesson Two

*Fields and Gardens [and/or] Rivers and Mountains*

This lesson engages students in a conversation about whether modern readers should reconsider the traditional distinction between Fields and Gardens poetry, exemplified by T’ao Ch’ien, and Rivers and Mountains poetry, exemplified by Hsieh Ling-yun. After close reading a poem from each tradition and then considering a contemporary argument against such a distinction, students discuss whether the traditional distinction between the two genres holds up—or not. The lesson concludes with students reflecting on simultaneous representations of nature and culture in Wang Hsi-mung’s *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains*.

**Introduction and Group Engagement: Think Match**

Teacher will provide Handouts 3a and 3b and ask students to read the passage individually and answer the comprehension questions on the graphic organizer as a Do Now, explaining that the passage and poems they will read will form the basis for a seminar discussion later in the lesson (this step is designed to help students comprehend the academic language and style used in the passage). Teacher will break students into heterogeneous groupings to compare answers and complete any unanswered questions. Groups will share out their answers to ensure whole-group comprehension as a basis for the lesson.

Teacher will provide Handouts 4 and 5 to each student. Still in heterogeneous groupings, students will partner read both poems, checking the predictions they made on Handout 3b against the content actually present in each poem. Groups will share out their findings. Teacher will listen for the following themes as a check for understanding:

- T’ao Ch’ien presents images of domestic animals; cultivated plants like crops, gardens, and orchards; his own home; and property boundaries, like gates.

- Hsieh Ling-yun presents images of forests, wild landscapes, and expansive views—up to and including the sky.

- There are elements that complicate the reading of these two poems as direct representations of idealized nature and culture, respectively, including T’ao Chi’en’s description of the “tethered bird” and “pond fish” longing for more freedom and Hsieh Ling-yun’s inclusion of man-made elements such as “roads” and “switchbacks” on his natural landscape.

**Instruction and Seminar**

Teacher will project the italicized portion of Handout 3a. This will form the basis for a seminar-style conversation about Hinton’s suggestion that modern readers should reconsider the binary distinction between nature and culture in these two poems.
Teacher will read the text aloud, pausing for questions, to explain unfamiliar words or phrases, and to connect this analysis to the poems students read. Prior to this activity, students should be familiar with the following seminar expectations:

- Listen actively and respectfully;
- Offer analysis that moves the conversation forward;
- Offer clarification and ask questions;
- Refer directly to the text (in this case, the poems and the critical analysis that follows).

Teacher will listen for respectful engagement, depth of analysis, and references to the texts as checks for understanding.

**Closing and Check for Understanding**

Teacher will project *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains* by Wang His-mung (Song Dynasty) and provide the following facts about the painting:

- It is part of the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing.
- Wang completed this painting at age 18.
- The painting is huge: about 40 feet long and 20 inches wide.

Individually, students will respond to this prompt on short-answer exit tickets:

Hinton suggests that Chinese landscape painting may have begun as illustrations for rivers-and-mountains poetry (104). *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains* depicts scenes of domestic life within a larger wild landscape on a huge scale. Is the painting equally effective at depicting both the domestic scenes and the wild landscape? How does the huge scale of the painting contribute to your thinking about its effectiveness?
Lesson Three

Meeting Cold Mountain

This lesson expands on the students’ prior knowledge of Cold Mountain (Han Shan) as introduced in the excerpt from *The Dharma Bums* in Lesson One. Here, students examine biographical information about the poet from three different sources and consider the idea that Cold Mountain is a legendary character more than a historical figure—and that “his” poems are likely the work of multiple authors. Students read several of Han Shan’s poems in two different translations, and they consider how contemporary poets and artists engage the themes he/they explore[s].

Preparation

In addition to preparing Handouts 7a, 7b, and 7c, teacher will prepare the gallery walk (paste each of the poems on Handout 8 onto a separate piece of chart paper and post around the room).

Introduction and Group Engagement

Teacher will break students into three heterogeneous groups and provide each group with copies of Handouts 7a, 7b, and 7c as well as chart paper and markers. Each group will be tasked with reading and summarizing one of the biographical representations of Han Shan and creating a concept map of their summary. Groups will report their concept maps to the larger group, and teacher will help to keep track of the different summaries by writing each group’s key points on chart paper. After groups have presented, teacher will facilitate a critical discussion guided by the following questions:

1. When you visualize Han Shan, as he is depicted in each of these biographical representations, what do you see? How are these images similar or different?

2. What might these differences tell you about each biographer (or translator, in the case of the biographical representation written by Lu Ch’iu-yin and translated by Gary Snyder)?

3. Can you think of other writers or artists about whom there is similar controversy regarding authorship or historical accuracy? Does it really matter if we can accurately identify a single historical figure as the author of literature that has endured for centuries?

Instruction and Graffiti Gallery Walk

Teacher will ask students to predict images, themes, or metaphors they might observe in the poetry of Han Shan. Teacher will list these on the board for students to refer to during the graffiti gallery walk.
Teacher will instruct students on the procedures for the graffiti gallery walk activity:

1. Students will work silently in groups of 3 (assuming 24 students in the class);

2. Each group member will read their first poem and respond, in writing, on the chart paper in any way that is respectful and meaningful;

3. After three minutes, the teacher will give a signal and groups will rotate, reading new poems and responding to the poems and/or the previous commenter’s ideas;

4. Rotations repeat. When each group is back at the poem it started with, the students will read and summarize the poem and describe its themes, imagery, and metaphors, as well as the comments it received from other groups.

Teacher will listen for the following themes as a check for understanding:

- Identification of Cold Mountain the poet with Cold Mountain the place;
- Metaphors, similes, paradoxes, figures of speech;
- Opposition to dominant culture;
- Echoes of values articulated in The Dharma Bums.

**Closing and Check for Understanding**

Teacher will project Gary Snyder’s poem, *Marin-an* (Handout 9). Students will read along as teacher reads aloud. Students will respond to the following prompt:

As we know, Snyder and his contemporaries were big fans of Cold Mountain (remember that Kerouac dedicated The Dharma Bums to him!). Explain why you agree or disagree with this statement: *Marin-an can be read as a direct reflection of Cold Mountain’s style and values.*

**Capstone**

Because this unit engages the theme of literature embedded in the natural world, teachers are encouraged to consider opportunities for expanding these lessons to include experiences outside the classroom. This will take different forms in different communities. This unit was developed at a school located just north of San Francisco, where Snyder, Kerouac, and Killion lived and made explicit connections between Han Shan’s experience on Cold Mountain and their own experiences on Mt. Tamalpais in Marin County. We decided to conclude the unit with a field trip to Mt. Tam, where students will reflect on the interface between urban and natural environments and create their own poetry in the style of Han Shan. To set intention for this field trip and to introduce our next unit, we read Edward Abbey’s *Benedicto* (Handout 10). Set the capstone in a city park, a
community garden, an empty lot, a river bank—any wild or semi-wild place that inspires contemplation and creativity.
“Did you ever read the Book of Tea?” said he.

Crosslegged along the little wooden board wall and he offered me a cup of hot tea. Shoes off and laid them dutifully by the door and I sat crosslegged along the little wooden board wall and he offered me a cup of hot tea. "Did you ever read the Book of Tea?” said he.

“Did you ever read the Book of Tea?” said he.

About a mile from there, way down Milvia and then upslope toward the campus of the University of California, behind another big old house on a quiet street (Hillegass), Japhy lived in his own shack which was infinitely smaller than ours, about twelve by twelve, with nothing in it but typical Japhy appurtenances that showed his belief in the simple monastic life—no chairs at all, not even one sentimental rocking chair, but just straw mats. In the corner was his famous rucksack with cleaned-up pots and pans all fitting into one another in a compact unit and all tied and put away inside a knotted-up blue bandana. Then his Japanese wooden pata shoes, which he never used, and a pair of black inside-pata socks to pad around softly in over his pretty straw mats, just room for your four toes on one side and your big toe on the other. He had a slew of orange crates all filled with beautiful scholarly books, some of them in Oriental languages, all the great sutras, comments on sutras, the complete works of D.T. Suzuki and a fine quadruple-volume of Japanese haikus. He also had an immense collection of valuable general poetry. In fact if a thief should have broken in there the only things of real value were the books. Japhy’s clothes were all old hand-me-downs bought secondhand with a bemused and happy expression in Goodwill and Salvation Army stores: wool socks darned, colored undershirts, jeans, workshirts, moccasin shoes, and a few turtleneck sweaters that he wore one on top of the other in the cold mountain nights of the High Sierras in California and the High Cascades of Washington and Oregon on the long incredible jaunts that sometimes lasted weeks and weeks with just a few pounds of dried food in his pack. A few orange crates made his tables, on which, one late sunny afternoon as I arrived, was steaming a peaceful cup of tea at his side as he bent his serious head to the Chinese signs of the poet Han Shan. Coughlin had given me the address and I came there, seeing first Japhy’s bicycle on the lawn in front of the big house out front (where his landlady lived) then the few odd boulders and rocks and fully little trees he’d brought back from mountain jaunts to set out in his own “Japanese tea garden” or “tea-house garden,” as there was a convenient pine tree soughing over his little domicile.

A peacefuller scene I never saw than when, in that rather nippy late red afternoon, I simply opened his little door and looked in and saw him at the end of the little shack, sitting crosslegged on a Paisley pillow on a straw mat, with his spectacles on, making him look old and scholarly and wise, with book on lap and the little tin teapot and porcelain cup steaming at his side. He looked up very peacefully, saw who it was, said, “Ray, come in,” and bent his eyes again to the script.

“What you doing?”

“Translating Han Shan’s great poem called ‘Cold Mountain’ written a thousand years ago some of it scribbled on the sides of cliffs hundreds of miles away from any other living beings.”

“Wow.”

“When you come into this house though you’ve got to take your shoes off, see those straw mats, you can ruin ‘em with shoes.” So I took my softsoled blue cloth shoes off and laid them dutifully by the door and he threw me a pillow and I sat crosslegged along the little wooden board wall and he offered me a cup of hot tea. “Did you ever read the Book of Tea?” said he.

“No, what’s that?”
“It’s a scholarly treatise on how to make tea utilizing all the knowledge of two thousand years about tea-brewing. Some of the descriptions of the effect of the first sip of tea, and the second, and the third, are really wild and ecstatic... Sip your tea and you’ll see; this is good green tea.” It was good and I immediately felt calm and warm. “Want me to read you parts of this Han Shan poem? Want me to tell you about Han Shan?”

“Yeah.”

“Han Shan you see was a Chinese scholar who got sick of the big city and the world and took off to hide in the mountains.

“Say, that sounds like you.”

“In those days you could really do that. He stayed in caves not far from a Buddhist monastery in the T’ang Hsing of T’ien Tai and his only human friend was the funny Zen lunatic Shih-te who had a job sweeping out the monastery with a straw broom. Shih-te was a poet too but he never wrote much down. Every now and then Han Shan would come down from Cold Mountain in his bark clothing and come into the warm kitchen and wait for food, but none of the monks would ever feed him because he didn’t want to join the order and answer the meditation bell three times a day. You see why in some of his utterances, like—listen and I’ll look here and read from the Chinese,” and I bent over his shoulder and watched him read from big wild crowtracks of Chinese signs: “Climbing up Cold Mountain path, Cold Mountain path goes on and on, long gorge choked with scree and boulders, wide creek and mist-blurred grass, moss is slippery though there’s been no rain, pine sings but there’s no wind, who can leap the world’s ties and sit with me among white clouds?”

“Wow.”

“Course that’s my own translation into English, you see there are five signs for each line and I have to put in Western prepositions and articles and such.”

“Why don’t you just translate it as it is, five signs, five words? What’s those first five signs?”

“Sign for climbing, sign for up, sign for cold, sign for mountain, sign for path.”

“Well then, translated it ‘Climbing up Cold Mountain path.’”

“Yeah, but what do you do with the sign for long, sign for gorge, sign for choke, sign for avalanche, sign for boulders?”

“Where’s that?”

“That’s the third line, would have to read ‘Long gorge choke avalanche boulders.’”

“Well that’s even better!”

“Well yeah, I thought of that, but I have to have this pass the approval of Chinese scholars here at the university and have it clear in English.”

“Boy what a great thing this is,” I said looking around at the little shack, “and you sitting here so very quietly at this very quiet hour studying all alone with your glasses...”

“Ray what you got to do is go climb a mountain with me soon. How would you like to climb Matterhorn?”

“Great! Where’s that?”

“Up in the High Sierras. We can go there with Henry Morley in his car and bring our packs and take off from the lake. I could carry all the food and stuff we
need in my rucksack and you could borrow Alvah’s small knapsack and carry extra socks and shoes and stuff."

“What’s these signs mean?”

“These signs mean that Han Shan came down from the mountain after many years roaming around up there, to see his folks in town, says, ‘Till recently I stayed at Cold Mountain, et cetera, yesterday I called on friends and family, more than half had gone to the Yellow Springs,’ that means death, the Yellow Springs, ‘now morning I face my lone shadow, I can’t study with both eyes full of tears.’”

“My eyes aren’t full of tears!”

“Aren’t they going to be after a long time?”

“They certainly will, Ray . . . and look here, ’In the mountains it’s cold, it’s always been cold not just this year,’ see, he’s real high, maybe twelve thousand or thirteen thousand feet or more, way up there, and says, ’Jagged scarps always snowed in, woods in the dark ravines spitting mist, grass is still sprouting at the end of June, leaves begin to fall in early August, and here am I high as a junkey— ‘"

“As a junkey!”

“That’s my own translation, he actually says here am I as high as the sensualist in the city below, but I made it modern and high translation.”

“Great.” I wondered why Han Shan was Japhy’s hero.

“Because,” said he, “he was a poet, a mountain man, a Buddhist dedicated to the principle of meditation on the essence of all things, a vegetarian too by the way though I haven’t got on that kick from figuring maybe in this modern world to be a vegetarian is to split hairs a little since all sentient beings eat what they can. And he was a man of solitude who could take off by himself and live purely and true to himself.”

“That sounds like you too.”

“And like you too, Ray, I haven’t forgotten what you told me about how you made it in the woods meditating in North Carolina and all.” Japhy was very sad, subdued, I’d never seen him so quiet, melancholy, thoughtful his voice was as tender as a mother’s, he seemed to be talking from far away to a poor yearning creature (me) who needed to hear his message he wasn’t putting anything on he was in a bit of a trance. Kerouac, pp. 18-23.
Handout 2

The sun, the shining, on one side, on the other the sign of the east, which is the sun entangled in the branches of a tree. And in the middle sign, the verb “rise,” we have further homology; the sun is above the horizon, but beyond that the single upright line is like the growing trunk-line of the tree sign. This is but a beginning, but it points a way to the method, and to the method of intelligent reading.

The most immediately striking characteristic of classical Chinese is its graphic form: it has retained aspects of its original pictographic nature, and so retains a direct visual connection to the empirical world. This was especially true for poetry, which in its extreme concision focuses attention on the characters themselves, and for the original readers of these poems, who were so erudite that they could see the original pictographs even in substantially modified graphs of characters. The other remarkable characteristic of the language is that its grammatical elements are minimal in the extreme, allowing a remarkable openness and ambiguity that leaves a great deal unstated: prepositions and conjunctions are rarely used, leaving relationships between lines, phrases, ideas, and images unclear; the distinction between singular and plural is only rarely and indirectly made; there are no verb tenses, so temporal location and sequence are vague; very often the subjects, verbs, and objects of verbal action are absent. . . . In reading a Chinese poem, you mentally fill in all that emptiness, and yet it remains always emptiness. The poetic language is, in and of itself, pure poetry:

Hinton, xx-xxi.
Slowly, as the centuries passed, poets of the lettered class moved away from poetry modeled after the two styles that had dominated the oral tradition. . . . China’s poets began to embrace a poetic world of their own immediate concerns. A number of important poets contributed to this gradual transformation, which culminated in the 4th and 5th centuries C.E. with the appearance of T’ao Ch’ien and Hsieh Ling-yun.

Northern China had recently been lost to the foreign invaders, forcing China’s artist-intellectuals to immigrate with the government into the southeast. This was the first time their cultural homeland in the north had been overrun, and seeing Chinese culture under siege by the foreigners, the intellectual class felt a historical imperative to cultivate their native tradition and renew it. The resulting artistic accomplishments were revolutionary.

Most of these epoch-making achievements can be seen as part of a new engagement with wilderness that arose among Chinese artist-intellectuals for several reasons: They were enthralled by the new landscape of serenely beautiful mountains; an especially perilous and corrupt political culture drove many of them to retire into the mountains rather than risk the traditional career of public service; a recent revival of Taoist thought had become widely influential, and its transformation of recently imported Indian Buddhism into China’s own Ch’an Buddhism was beginning.

The innovations resulting from these influences were wide-ranging. The origins of Chinese landscape (rivers-and-mountains) painting can be traced to this time, probably beginning as illustrations for rivers-and-mountains poetry. Calligraphy was transformed by the organic spontaneity of Wang Hsi-chih, often called the greatest of Chinese calligraphers, and his equally remarkable son, Wang Hsien-chih. And developments in the field of poetry were perhaps even more dramatic, for it is in the work of T’ao Ch’ien and Hsieh Ling-yun that the mainstream tradition really begins. Hinton, 103-4.

The landscape tradition in Chinese poetry is sometimes divided into two branches: fields-and-gardens, which emphasizes the more domestic aspects of landscape, and rivers-and-mountains, which emphasizes the wilder aspects. T’ao Ch’ien is traditionally spoken of as the founder of fields-and-gardens poetry, in contrast to his contemporary Hsieh Ling-yun, founder of rivers-and-mountains poetry. But there is no fundamental distinction between the two: both embody Taoist cosmology that essentially is the Chinese wilderness, and as rivers-and-mountains is the broader context within which fields-and-gardens operates, it seems more accurate to speak of both modes together as a single rivers-and-mountains poetry. And this rivers-and-mountains framework is at the heart of virtually all poetic thinking in the centuries to follow. The more domestic feel of T’ao Ch’ien’s poetry is simply a reflection of his profound contentment. Unlike Hsieh Ling-yun, whose poems are animated by the need to establish an enlightened relationship with a grand alpine wilderness, T’ao effortlessly lived everyday life on a mountain farm as an utterly sufficient experience of dwelling. Hinton, 112.
Handout 3b

Think Match: T’ao Chien and Hsieh Ling-Yun

1a. What forced Chinese artist-intellectuals to leave northern China?

1b. Why did this forced migration motivate them to renew their artistic traditions?

2. Give two reasons why Chinese poets in this era became newly engaged with the natural world.
   a.
   b.

3. Hinton makes a guess about the original purpose of Chinese painting. What is it?

4. Predict the types of images characteristic in *Fields-and-Gardens* poetry (exemplified by T’ao Ch’ien).
   - What kinds of landscapes?
   - What kinds of plants?
   - What kinds of animals?

5. Predict the types of images characteristic in *Rivers-and-Mountains* poetry (exemplified by Hsieh Ling-yun).
   - What kinds of landscapes?
   - What kinds of plants?
   - What kinds of animals?
Handout 4

T'ao Ch'ien (365-427)
Fields and Gardens

Home Again Among Fields and Gardens

Nothing like all the others, even as a child,
Rooted in such love for hills and mountains.

I stumbled into their net of dust, that one
Departure a blunder lasting thirteen years.

But a tethered bird longs for its old forest,
And a pond fish its deep waters—so now,

My southern outlands cleared, I nurture
Simplicity among these fields and gardens,

Home again. I’ve got nearly two acres here,
And four or five rooms in our thatch hut,

Elms and willows shading the eaves in back,
And in front, peach and plum spread wide.

Villages lost across mist-and-haze distances,
Kitchen smoke drifting wide-open country,

Dogs bark deep among back roads out here,
And roosters crow from mulberry treetops.

No confusion within these gates, no dust,
My empty home harbors idleness to spare.

After so long caged in that trap, I’ve come
Back again to occurrence appearing of itself.
Handout 5

Hsieh Ling-yun (385-433)
Rivers and Mountains

_Dwelling in the Mountains_

Tracing the way back home here,
I might round North Mountain

On roads hung along cliff-walls,
Timbers rising in switchbacks,

Or I could take the watercourse
Way winding and circling back,

Level lakes broad and brimming,
Crystalline depths clear and deep

Beyond shorelines all lone grace
And long islands of lush brocade.

Gazing on and on in reverence
Across realms so boundless away,

I come to the twin rivers that flow through together.
Two springs sharing one source,

They follow gorges and canyons
To merge at mountain headlands

And cascade on, scouring sand out and mounding dunes
Below peaks that loom over islands swelling into hills,

Whitewater carrying cliffs away in a tumble of rocks,
A marshy tangle of fallen trees glistening in the waves.

Following along the south bank that crosses out front,
The snaking north cliff that looms behind, I’m soon

Lost in thick forests, the nature of dusk and dawn in full view,
And for bearings, I trust myself to the star-filled night skies.
Handout 6

A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains by Wang Ximeng (960-1127)
Handout 7a

Cold Mountain (Han Shan)

Like government officials, monks in ancient China were part of the intelligentsia, so virtually all of them wrote poetry. For the most part, however, theirs was doctrinal Buddhist verse with little lasting literary value. The greatest of these poet-monks is, in fact, an anti-monk who lived on Cold Mountain in southeast China and took that mountain’s name as his own.

Almost nothing is known about Cold Mountain the poet; he exists more as legend than as historical fact. It is said that he often visited a nearby Ch’an (Zen) monastery, where a like-minded friend in the kitchen shared leftovers with him, and the resident monks thought him quite insane. There are stories of his antics there, bantering with his friend and ridiculing the monks for their devout pursuit of an enlightenment they already possessed as part of their inherent nature. But mostly he roamed the mountains alone, a wild Ch’an sage writing poems on rock and trees. These poems were gathered by the local prefect who, recognizing Cold Mountain’s genius, assembled them into a collection that has been preserved. This collection now has about 310 untitled poems, a number that makes one suspect it was shaped with an eye to giving in the status of a classic by associating it with The Book of Songs, which has 305 poems (probably a few poems were added to the Cold Mountain collection in later years). Indeed, it appears likely that the collection is, in fact, the work of two primary poets, and perhaps others. In any case, the Cold Mountain poems came to be widely admired in the literary and Ch’an communities of China. This admiration spread to Korea and Japan, and recently to the West, where Gary Snyder’s influential translations re-created Cold Mountain as a contemporary American poet.

Cold Mountain is remembered as a Ch’an poet, and as such he identifies the empty mind of Ch’an enlightenment with the mountain itself. And he is no less a Taoist poet, sage-master of belonging utterly to the cosmology, the dynamic spiritual ecology that mountain realm manifests so dramatically. Indeed, Cold Mountain emptied out the distinction between Cold Mountain the poet and Cold Mountain the mountain. This is the essence of the Cold Mountain poems. And according to the legend, Cold Mountain the poet was last seen when, slipping into a crevice that closed behind him, he vanished into the mountain. Only poems remained, scrawled on rocks and trees: the record of a mountain working further and further into its own voice, its own singular language. Hinton, 213-214
Kanzan, or Han-shan, “Cold Mountain” takes his name from where he lived. He is a mountain madman in an old Chinese line of ragged hermits. When he talks about Cold Mountain he means himself, his home, his state of mind. He lived in the T’ang dynasty—traditionally A.D. 627-650, although Hu Shih dates him 700-780. This makes him roughly contemporary with Tu Fu, Li Po, Wang Wei, and Po Chu-i. His poems, of which three hundred survive, are written in T’ang colloquial: rough and fresh. The ideas are Taoist, Buddhist, Zen. He and his sidekick Shih-te (Jittoke in Japanese) became great favorites with Zen painters of later days—the scroll, the broom, the wild hair and laughter. They became immortals and you sometimes run into them today in the skidrows, orchards, hobo jungles, and logging camps of America. Snyder, 35.
Preface to the Poems of Han-Shan by Lu Ch’iu-yin, Governor of T’ai Prefecture

No one knows just what sort of man Han-shan was. There are old people who knew him: they say he was a poor man, a crazy character. He lived alone seventy li west of the T’ang-hsing district of T’ien-t’ai at a place called Cold Mountain. He often went down to the Kuo-ch’ing Temple. At the temple lived Shih-te, who ran the dining hall. He sometimes saved leftovers for Han-shan, hiding them in a bamboo tube. Han-shan would come and carry it away; walking the long veranda, calling and shouting happily, talking and laughing to himself. Once the monks followed him, caught him, and made fun of him. He stopped, clapped his hands, and laughed greatly—Ha Ha!—for a spell, then left.

He looked like a tramp. His body and face were old and beat. Yet in every word he breathed was a meaning in line with the subtle principles of things, if only you thought of it deeply. Everything he said had a feeling of the Tao in it, profound and arcane secrets. His hat was made of birch bark, his clothes were ragged and worn out, and his shoes were wood. Thus men who have made it hide their tracks: unifying categories and interpenetrating things. On that long veranda calling and singing, in his words of reply Ha Ha!—the three worlds revolve. Sometimes at the villages and farms he laughed and sang with cowherds. Sometimes intractable, sometimes agreeable, his nature was happy of itself. But how could a person without wisdom recognize him? Snyder, Trans. 35-36.
Handout 8

1
In the mountains it’s cold.
Always been cold, not just this year.
Jagged scarps forever snowed in
Woods in the dark ravines spitting mist.
Grass is still sprouting at the end of June,
Leaves begin to fall in early August.
And here am I, high on mountains,
Peering and peering, but I can’t even see the sky.

2
Men ask the way to Cold Mountain
Cold Mountain: there’s no through trail.
In summer, ice doesn’t melt
The rising sun blurs in swirling fog.
How did I make it?
My heart’s not the same as yours.
If your heart was like mine
You’d get it and be right here.
3
I settled at Cold Mountain long ago,
Already it seems like years and years.
Freely drifting, I prowl the woods and streams
And linger watching things themselves.
Men don’t get this far into the mountains,
White clouds gather and billow.
Thin grass does for a mattress,
The blue sky makes a good quilt.
Happy with a stone underhead
Let heaven and earth go about their changes.

4
Clambering up the Cold Mountain path,
The Cold Mountain trail goes on and on:
The long gorge choked with scree and boulders,
The wide creek, the mist-blurred grass.
The moss is slippery, though there’s been no rain
The pine sings, but there’s no wind.
Who can leap the world’s ties
And sit with me among the white clouds?
5
I have lived at Cold Mountain
These thirty long years.
Yesterday I called on friends and family:
More than half had gone to the Yellow Springs.
Slowly consumed, like fire down a candle;
Forever flowing, like a passing river.
Now, morning, I face my lone shadow:
Suddenly my eyes are bleared with tears.
6
Cold Mountain is a house
Without beams or walls.
The six doors left and right are open
The hall is blue sky.
The rooms all vacant and vague
The east wall beats on the west wall
At the center nothing.

Borrowers don’t bother me
In the cold I build a little fire
When I’m hungry I boil up some greens.
I’ve got no use for the kulak
With his big barn and pasture—
He just sets up a prison for himself.
Once in he can’t get out.
Think it over—
You know it might happen to you.

7
Once at Cold Mountain, troubles cease—
No more tangled, hung-up mind.
I idly scribble poems on the rock cliff,
Taking whatever comes, like a drifting boat.
8
When men see Han-shan
They all say he’s crazy
And not much to look at
Dressed in rags and hides.
They don’t get what I say
& I don’t talk their language.
All I can say to those I meet:
“Try and make it to Cold Mountain.”

Snyder, Trans. pp. 39-62
sun breaks over the eucalyptus
grove below the wet pasture,
water’s about hot,
I sit in the open window
& roll a smoke.

distant dogs bark, a pair of
cawing crows; the twang
of a pygmy nuthatch high in a pine—
from behind the cypress windrow
the mare moves up, grazing.

a soft continuous roar
comes out of the far valley
of the six-lane highway—thousands
and thousands of cars
driving men to work.

Killion and Snyder, Tamalpais Walking, p. 16
Handout 10

Benedicto: May your trails be crooked, winding, lonesome, dangerous, leading to the most amazing view. May your rivers flow without end, meandering through pastoral valleys tinkling with bells, past temples and castles and poets’ towers into a dark primeval forest where tigers belch and monkeys howl, through miasmal and mysterious swamps and down into a desert of red rock, blue mesas, domes and pinnacles and grottos of endless stone, and down again into a deep vast ancient unknown chasm where bars of sunlight blaze on profiled cliffs, where storms come and go as lightning clangs upon the high crags, where something strange and more beautiful and more full of wonder than your deepest dreams waits for you—beyond that next turning of the canyon walls.

Abbey, preface to *Desert Solitaire.*
Resources


