Chapter V

PO YÜEH

白嶽

Introduction

Po Yueh and nearby Huang Shan are part of a mountain range on the border between Chekiang and Anhwei. Po Yueh is not nearly so well known as Huang Shan, but most people who go to Huang Shan by way of Hsiu-ning also visit Po Yueh.

One of its claims to historical fame seems to be as the home of some of China's greatest makers of ink sticks. Those made by Li T'ing-kuei 李廷珪 in the tenth century came to be valued as the rarest treasures by calligraphers and painters and their cost was greater than their weight in gold. During the reign of K'ang-hsi (r. 1662-1722), a man named Wang Lung 汪隆 combined his superior skill in ink-making with his great love for Po Yueh, the most beautiful mountain in his native district, to produce a set of ink sticks made of the choicest materials. Each stick carried the picture of one of Po Yueh's scenic spots on one side and a poem about it by a celebrated poet or scholar on the other. The fate of the ink sticks is unknown, but readers can still obtain Wang's book in which he described his work and provided illustrations of his ink sticks.¹

Po Yueh had been a popular mountain by Hsü's time. The emperor Shih-tsung 世宗 (1522-1566) believed it answered his prayers for an heir and in gratitude had the chief monastery there rebuilt.² He also conferred upon it the name Equalling Clouds 齊雲.³ Hence, the monasteries and forests of the mountain must have presented a prosperous and well-kept look when Hsü visited it.
The drinking bout Hsü had with the Taoist monk Wang Po-hua suggests that it was customary for Taoist monks on Po Yueh to hold convivial gatherings with their scholarly visitors. Another tourist of the Ming dynasty, Li Jih-hua 李日華 (1565-1635), remarked in his journal how very pleased he was to find the Taoist monks of Huang-t'ing Yuan 黃庭院 such good drinking companions. "All the Taoist monks of Huang-t'ing Yuan drink. It is a pleasure to see how freely they toss off drinks and how frankly and high-spiritedly they converse. So different are they from the constrained manner and servility so characteristic of their kind in the city. How much I regret that I could not procure the superior skill of such portrait painters as Chan 阮 and Lu陸 to make a portrait of "Tipsy Taoists" and present it to them!"

Perhaps it was the wine of the Taoist monks of Po Yueh that led to the excessive practice of inscribing stones. A visitor of the reign of Chia-ching 嘉靖 (r. 1522-1566), one Shen Ming-ch'en 沈明臣 described in detail how he and his friends engraved their names on a stele. Shen first remarked on the inferiority of most of the inscriptions he saw. Then he said: "One of the attendant boys .... carried a hamper containing .... tea, fruit, brushes, ink stones as well as knives and swivels .... There is a stele in the pool at the foot of Purple Heaven Crag 紫霄岩. The inscription was by T'ang Yin 唐寅. The four of us put our names and dates on the left of the tablet."

This practice of scholarly graffiti reached such proportions by late Ming that Yuan Hung-tao 袁宏道 (1568-1610), a contemporary of Hsü and a master of prose style, penned this bitter indictment:

Remarkably beautiful as Heaven's Gate 天門 of Equalling Cloud Crag is, it is disgusting to see inscribed stone tablets cluttering its foothills. The predilection of Anhwei people for inscription is an incorrigible vice. Even officials in this province get accustomed to this practice and make it a tradition,
so that all the rocks are carved with inscriptions in red and white, making it a most distressing sight. The law provides regular punishments for those who rob mountains and open mines. Why is it that it does not prohibit the defiling and defacing of the spirit of the mountain by vulgar scholars? Buddha says that evil karma of all kinds shall reap evil results. This karma belongs to the same category as murder and killing, but Buddha's retribution does not reach out to these offenders.

Two aspects of Hsu's visit to Po Yueh deserve comment. He had a companion whom he called Uncle Hsun-yang. We do not know who he was. Ting Wen-chiang conjectured from the fact that the term shu-weng (honorable old uncle) suggests both a respectful way of addressing an elderly man and a family relationship that he probably was a relative on his wife's side. At any rate, the significant point which will become apparent to the reader of Hsu's diaries is that so long as his travels did not extend beyond the Yangtze valley, he never lacked travelling companions from among his friends and relatives.

The other aspect was the time Hsu chose for this trip. Usually, March is not deemed a suitable time for visiting mountains because the weather is still very cold even down on the plains. Hsu may have deliberately chosen that time in order to see Po Yueh in the winter. If that had been his aim, he was not disappointed. He was snowbound three out of the five days that he was on the mountain. He did not regret it. Although he was debarred from climbing, he enjoyed the rare sight of a snowy landscape on top of a mountain.

Diary

My uncle Hsun-yang and I reached Hsiu-ning in Anhwei on March 13, 1616. We left its west gate and followed the stream
coming from Ch'i-men county 邱門. Crossed it, headed south, and we reached Mei-k'ou 梅口 where the stream joins the one from the city on its course into Chekiang. Followed the stream for twenty li 十里 to South Ferry 南渡 and crossed the bridge. Then we walked along the base of the mountain until dusk when we reached the Crag of Equalling Clouds.

We climbed five li 五里, borrowed a lantern from a temple, and continued the ascent in a snowstorm, treading on ice. Passed Heaven's Gate after two li 二里, also Pearl Curtain 珠簾 but could not spare time to look for them in the darkness. All that we were aware of was the clinking of icicles among the trees. Finally I reached Lang-mei Temple 楊梅庵 and turned in for the night.

A heavy snowstorm came afresh after I had arrived at the monastery, but Hsun-yang and the servants had fallen behind and had still not come. I slept alone in the mountain abode and listened to the water dripping from the eaves all night without being able to sleep.

March 14: Rose and saw one color permeating the whole scene. The white snowy mountainsides were covered with ice flowers and jade trees [a conventional way of describing snow-covered trees]. I stayed in the upstairs room until Hsun-yang and the servants came. Then we set out and ascended T'ai-su Monastery 太素宮 which faces north. The figure of Yuan-ti 元帝, the presiding god of the monastery, is of a rugged black. Legend has it that birds carrying bits of mud they had brought made the figure, so it is rugged and dark. It is said to have been made during the Sung Dynasty, but the monastery was rebuilt in 1559 and the inscription on the stone in the courtyard was a composition of the emperor Shih-tsung 世宗. On either side of the central hall is a side hall, one dedicated to Wang the god 王靈官 and the other to Chao the general 趙元帥. The architecture of the monastery is grandly beautiful.
Jade Screen 玉屏 is in back of the monastery and Incense Burner Peak 香爐峰 is in front of it. The latter rises abruptly for several hundred feet like an inverted bell, a sight impressive to those who have not seen the more wonderful peaks of T'ien-t'ai and Yen-tang.

Going left from the monastery, we reached Self-surrender Crag 捨身崖. Farther up is Purple Jade Screen 紫玉屏 while west of it is Purple Heaven Crag. Both rise to enormous heights. Farther west are Three Maidens Peak 三姑峰 and Five Old Men Peak 五老峰 with Pavilion of Literary Effusions 文昌閣 in front of them. The peaks of the Five Old Men stand shoulder to shoulder, not very pointed but shaped like a brush supporter.

Returned to Lang-mei Temple, following the path by which we had come the night before. Descended the Sky Ladder 天梯 and came to a place enclosed on three sides by crags which are hollow near the base and protruding above so as to form a covered corridor. Walked along the crag. A waterfall called Pearl Curtain Water flows down on its outside. In its recesses is Arhat's Cave 罗漢洞 which opens wide at the entrance and has a depth of fifteen li, its southeastern end being connected with South Ferry. At the end of the crag is Heavenly Gate whose hollow lower part allows men to walk in and out like a city gate. Outside the Gate, tall nan 楠 trees rear their proud heads in the sky and stretch out their thousand green boughs. Inside the Gate, a range of crags forms the back of Pearl Curtain, making a beautiful sight.

Went back to the monastery for the night and made plans to go to Five Wells 五井 and Bridge Crag 橋岩. The Taoist monk Wang Po-hua 汪伯化 promised to accompany us in the morning.

March 15: Heard some voice in my dream calling "heavy snow." Made the servant hasten to get up and see, and heard the report that snow was covering hill and dale. Therefore I stayed in bed
until nine when I got up and walked with Po-hua for two li to Pavilion of Literary Effusions. Although our plan of visiting Five Wells was frustrated, we were more than compensated by the wonderful sight of the whole universe clothed in snow.

March 16: The servant reported that the clouds were lifting and sunbeams were hovering above the woods. Put my clothes on at once and got up. The sky was a boundless blue, a sight we had not seen for a half a month. But the cold was severe, and I hurried Po-hua to eat breakfast. Breakfast over, a heavy snowstorm started again and soon it was a foot deep. Walking accidentally to the edge of the second storey of the temple, I suddenly caught sight of Incense Burner rearing its enormous height in front of the building. Another Taoist by the name of Ch'eng Chen-hua 程振華 came out from the back quarters of the temple and talked to me about the sights of the Nine Wells, Bridge Crag, and Fu Crag 傅岩.

March 17: Heavy snow and thick fog limited visibility to within one foot. Po-hua carried wine to Self-surrender Crag and we drank in T'i-yüan Pavillion 賜元閣 which is by the crag. Icicles hung all over as far as the eye could see; the largest were as long as ten feet. All sights of mountains and hills were completely blotted out. Even one as close as Incense Burner could not be seen.

March 18: At first one strip of sky made its appearance in the clouds; soon it was all clear. Hsun-yang remained in the temple to nurse his chapped feet. Po-hua and I hastened to descend by West Heaven's Gate. Ten li to Double Stream Street 雙溪街. From here we had an open view of the mountain, but after five li it disappeared again, and the winding streams and beautiful rocks were full of charming delights. Another three li and we entered a narrow path at the head of the stream, passed one hill and reached, two li farther down, Stone Bridge Crag. The enclosing crags by the Bridge are as high and continuous as Purple Heaven.
Under them halls had been built to conform to the natural shapes of the crags. All rocks are purple save one blue stone dragon which is curled up inside the crag with his head hanging down over a foot, with water dripping down. It is called Dragon Saliva Spring 龍涎泉. It is similar to Dragon Nose Water of Yen-tang. To the left of the crag, a mountain with its lower half hollow curves in such a way that it leaves the hollow space underneath exactly in the shape of a half-moon while the mountain is like a rainbow spanning it. It sits under it and faces the peak of another mountain reposing high above. Other hills are standing guard around it. The view here is superior to that of Heaven's Gate. Awe-inspiring as Natural Bridge at T'ien-t'ai may be, it is merely a rock suspended between two hills whereas this is a mountain that is suspended in air over a hollow lower half.

We walked into the [hollow space] for about one li and came to the inner crag which has tumbling springs tossing and sprinkling. Inside is a pleasant looking monastery. We returned to the outer crag for our meal, then found a guide and went down by the left side. The track in the gorge took us between two shaggy mountains overgrown with thickets. It was very hard walking, especially as the snow was coming down thick and fast. The guide advised me to go to Fu Crag and not to Goddess of Mercy Crag, but I was unwilling to miss the sights of Dragon Well 龍井 and Chessboard 磁盤, so I did not take his advice. We went on for two li and found a tarn of unfathomable blue. It is also called a dragon well. Another three li brought us to the end of both the crag and the gorge where a hanging torrent of several dozens of feet drops down from the curve of the mountain. This also is a wonderful sight.

We climbed and walked on the mountain ridge for two li and saw Chessboard Rock which is shaped like an upright mushroom and of a size that takes several men's outstretched arms to girdle. It stands erect on the summit. We scrambled up to its top which
was thickly covered with accumulated snow like white jade. From here we had a view of Fu Crag towering sublimely among the clouds. We discovered that from there it is also easy to get to Chessboard, and we regretted that we had not heeded the guide's words.

Near Chessboard Rock is Manjusri Temple, a beautifully secluded spot of bamboo and rocks. We walked southeastward for two li, passed two hills, and halfway up found the Goddess of Mercy Crag. The monasteries here are neat and regular structures but have nothing else remarkable about them, thus my regret was doubled for not having gone to Fu Crag when we were so near it.

Passed the hill again and went down on the eastern side into a deep hollow. Here the waters in the stone gorge converge from all directions. Deep tarns are all called dragon wells. They are of various sizes and shapes and they met us along the way for a stretch of three li. In the crags traces of rock veins can be seen, and the guide pointed them out to me as a blue dragon and a white dragon. I smiled my assent.

Above the pile of crags one solitary rock appears as if it were inserted in the sky, and water is flowing down from it. It looks like a span similar to Natural Bridge of T'ien-t'ai.

As it was getting late in the afternoon, Po-hua suggested that we follow the gorge to find the Great Dragon Well, but we met a monk from Huang Shan who argued that the only thing going out from here is a big stream, so what else could there be to see? Hence we turned back but took another path which goes to Ch'i-shu Yuan. As we picked our way among rugged rocks and many-forked streams, rays of the setting sun shone into the depths of the woods, affording a long vista of magnificent and quiet beauty. A climb of three li brought us to the top of a hill. I thought that it must be as high as Equalling Clouds, but when we arrived there we found that the Pavilion of Literary Effusions was still higher. Five Old Men Peak faces the Pavilion and to the
east of it is Lonely Shrugging Fortress 獨聳寨. We followed the glen and came out to West Heaven's Gate.

West of Five Old Men is the Peak of Unfurling Banners 展旗峯. Under it is Hibiscus Bridge 芙蓉橋. In the morning we had set out from West Heaven's Gate, and now we were returning by way of this bridge. The sun was still lingering on Three Maids Peak, so I climbed Five Old Men and watched the sunset.

Returned to supper in the temple and recapitulated our day's tour to the monks and learned with regret that Big Dragon Well is just at the head of Big Stream. It seems that we were destined to miss it by the misleading words of the monk we had met, so our steps had actually been within its reach but we had not found it.