Study Guide

I. Literati Artists of the Early to Mid-Ming

Shen Zhou (1427–1509): Scholar, artist, and teacher who lived on the family estate in Suzhou. He is credited as the founder of the Wu school, a school of painting named after the region called Wu (known today as Suzhou), where he and his compatriots lived.

- Landscape (SF Asian Art Museum [AAM], B75D7)
- Walking with a Staff, ca. 1485 (National Palace Museum [NPM])
- Night Vigil, 1492 (NPM)
- Poet on a Mountaintop (Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art)
- Drawing from Life, 1494 (NPM)

Shen Zhou’s Artistic Origins

- Artists and scholars from the Wu region (Suzhou) and nearby regions
- Influential teachers/artists
  - Liu Jue (1410–1472): A scholar-painter who attended the National University, passed the civil service examinations, and held government positions.
  - Du Qiong (1397–1474): A landscape painter who was an impoverished orphan.
    - Friend of Pines (Palace Museum)

Shen Zhou’s Aesthetic Choices: The Four Great Masters of the Yuan Revivalism

- Huang Gongwang (1269–1354).
  - Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains, 1347–50 (NPM)
- Ni Zan (1301–1374)
  - River Pavilion, Mountain Colors, 1368 (AAM, R1989.99)
- Wang Meng (ca. 1308–1385)
- Wu Zhen (1280–1354)

II. The Circle of Wen Zhengming

Wen Zhengming (1470–1559): Painter, calligrapher, and Shen Zhou’s most illustrious student.

- The Pavilion of a Drunken Old Man (AAM, B71D2)
- Discourse in Green Shade (AAM, B68D9)
- Yuan An Sleeping during the Great Snow, 1531 (Private collection)
- Seven Junipers (Honolulu Museum of Art)
- Garden of the Inept Administrator, 1551 (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Wen Jia (1501–1583). Wen Zhengming’s second son; and other family members/descendants

- Yuan An Lying Down in the Snow, 1533 (AAM, 2008.65)
- Peach Blossom Spring, 1577 (AAM, B60D110)
Tang Yin (1470–1524): Friend of Wen Zhengming. He was the son of a restaurateur but showed such literary and artistic promise that he became a protégé of Wen Zhengming’s father, Wen Lin. He painted for a living and navigated between scholar-amateur artists and professional painters.

- Zhenshou Tang, 1486 (Palace Museum)
- The Southern Journey, 1505 (Freer Gallery of Art, F1953.78)
- Whispering Pines on a Mountain Path (NPM)
- Tao Gu Presents a Poem, ca. 1515 (NPM)

III. “Professional” Painters and Patrons

Zhou Chen (ca. 1455–ca. 1535): “Professional” painter and teacher of Tang Yin and Qiu Ying.

- The North Sea (Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 58-55)

Qiu Ying (ca. 1495–1552): Known as one of the Four Masters of the Ming (with Shen Zhou, Wen Zhengming, and Tang Yin). He painted in a number of different styles and had rich patrons.

- Scholar Sitting on a Rocky Promontory; Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove (AAM)
- Pavilions in the Mountains of Immortals, 1550 (NPM)
- Spring Dawn in the Autumn Palace (NPM)

Xiang Yuanbian (1525–1590): Patron and collector

IV. The Literati Ideal and the Wider Visual Culture of the Ming

Dong Qichang (1555–1636): Artist, calligrapher, theorist, and statesman from Huating (modern Songjiang).

- Qingbian Mountains (Cleveland Museum of Art)
- Wanluan Thatched Cottage, dated to 1957

Chen Hongshou (1598–1652): Artist and scholar who made a living through painting, including illustrating woodblock books and playing cards. From Zhuji, Zhejiang province.

- Hermit in Landscape (AAM, B79D8)
- Artist Inebriated, 1627 (MMA, 1999.521)
- A Literary Gathering (Shanghai Museum)
- Woodblock Prints

- Variety of other types of paintings

Suggested Reading

Cahill, James F. Parting at the Shore: Chinese Painting of the Early and Middle Ming Dynasty, 1368–1580. New York: Weatherhill, 1978. [Info on specific artists]

