

Fan-yin T'o-lo (also known as Yin-t'o-lo), 14th century

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"Ch'uan-tzu and Chia-shan"

Hanging scroll, ink on paper
57.4 x 29.1 cm.

Artist's seals:

Sha-men Fan-yin ("The Buddhist Monk Fan-yin"); *Jen-yen tung-li t'ao-hua-juan, wei-pi jen-chien yu tz'u-chih* ("People say in the Immortal's grottos peach blossoms bloom in warm spring; it is not likely that such branches exist in our world too")

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Ebine Toshio: *Gendai Doshaku Jimbutsu Ga* (Buddhist and Taoist Figure Painting of the Yuan Dynasty), Tokyo National Museum, 1975, cat. 31

Kawakami Kei: *Ryokai, Indara* (Liang K'ai, Yin-t'o-lo), *Suiboku Bijutsu Taikai*, vol. IV, Kodansha, Tokyo, 1975, pl.111

Standing on the bank of a river, his pack and staff resting on the ground before him, a bearded man raises his hands in a gesture of supplication toward a boatman who rows his skiff from the other shore around a reedy shoal. The shaved head of the latter together with his opened robe and bare feet identify him as a Buddhist monk or priest.

Ch'uan-tzu Ho-shang, the "Ferryman Priest," was a monk named Te-ch'eng who came from Sui-ning in Szechuan province. After becoming a disciple of the eminent prelate Yao-shan Wei-yen, Te-ch'eng moved to Hua-t'ing, where he acquired a small boat and daily ferried travellers across the river, conversing with them as he worked. One day his passenger was Chia-shan Shan-hui, who apparently was the first to truly respond to the Ferryman's teachings. On leaving the boat to continue on his way, Chia-shan turned to look several times at his new master, who thereupon overturned his boat and drowned, effectively

precluding any further discourse between the two.

This tale is depicted in the present painting in the most economical and direct manner imaginable. The few narrative elements are deployed so as to suggest immediately the psychological relationship that will obtain between the two protagonists, the ferryman being the more open and forceful and the traveller appearing already to question what he will be told, his hesitancy evoked both by posture and by his strongly everted head. The painting style features strong contrasts between the pale ink lines which demarcate figures and ground and the much darker accents applied to portions of the garments and the reeds. The brushwork is direct and forceful, leaving clear evidence of the process by which the images were created, and serves to characterize the ideosyncratic artist as a man of unusual talent and background.

Standard biographical sources in China do not



Fig. 1: Fan-yin T'o-lo: "Han-shan and Shih-te," after Kawakami Kei, compiler: *Ryokai, Indara*, Vol. IV of *Suiboku Bijutsu Taikai*, Tokyo, 1975, pl. 20.

discuss the artist although paintings by him are mentioned in the writings of Ch'u-shih Fan-ch'i (1296-1370), who also wrote colophons on a number of the artist's extant paintings. The early 16th-century Japanese catalogue of the Shogun's collection, the *Kundaikan Sayuchoki*, records the artist as an Indian monk from the T'ien-chu-ssu in Hangchou, a temple in which Ch'u-shih also lived at different periods of time. The legend of the artist's first seal on the present painting states that his proper Buddhist name was Fan-yin (or, less likely, that he was Yin from the country of Fan or India).⁽¹⁾ Other information about the artist is given by his own inscription, placed to the right of that by Ch'u-shih on the painting in the Tokyo National Museum (fig. 1): "Appointed to serve as abbot of the Great Kuang-chiao Ch'an Temple erected to protect the kingdom in the Shang-fang Monastery in Pien-liang, the Great Master of Buddhist wisdom, pure disputation, and complete understanding, 大 梵 音." The character not translated here has been read as *jen*, which in this context could be translated as "great"—i.e. "The Great Fan-yin"—or understood as part of the artist's name, Jen-fan Yin. There is, however, no other evidence to support this last interpretation, and the reading of the character as *jen* has recently been challenged by Yoshiaki Shimizu, who suggested that the character may be the Sanskrit *drah*, for which the Chinese reading would be T'o-lo, the personal Buddhist name of Fan-yin.⁽²⁾ Another possibility for this unknown character is that it is a cipher for T'ien-chu, the name of the Hangchou temple in which both the artist and the writer of the colophon are known to have lived.

The name by which the artist would have been commonly known, T'o-lo, appears in the legend of one of the four seals following his long inscription on the "Han-shan and Shih-te" (fig. 1): "From the Buddhist Monk T'o-lo, a marvel of ink (produced after) an excess of Ch'an." The full proper name of the artist was thus Fan-yin T'o-lo, which apparently was shortened to a more usual three-character name, Yin T'o-lo, a name very familiar in China as the transliteration of the Sanskrit Indra, who lived in the country of T'ien-chu or India just as Fan-yin T'o-lo lived in the T'ien-chu or India Temple. Other paintings by the artist are signed "By Fan-yin from Rajagriha" and "By the Master of Illusion," which take note respectively of his foreign birth and his status as Buddhist painter.

The legends of seals used by Fan-yin T'o-lo on various paintings provide additional insight into his mind and attitudes. One of four on "Han-shan and Shih-te" proclaims his understanding of the nature and goal of meditation: *San-mei cheng-shou*, "Samadhi or perfect union with the object of contemplation obtained through correct intuition of it." Other of his seals present problems of interpretation that function almost as *koan* or subjects for meditation: "Children do not know that snow (can be seen) at the border of heaven by taking the first willow blossom and looking at it upside down." A similar conundrum occurs in the legend of the second seal on the present painting, which is identical to that appearing on the "Han-shan and Shih-te" painting by Yin-t'o-lo in the Tokyo National Museum and also on "The Second Coming of the Fifth Patriarch" now in the Cleveland Museum of Art: "People say in the Immortals' grottoes peach blossoms bloom in warm spring; it is not likely that such branches exist in our world too." In apparent reference to the earthly paradise described by T'ao Ch'ien in his poem "Peach-Blossom Spring," Fan-yin T'o-lo the Buddhist argues that such bliss in this illusory world is not at all likely.

"Ch'uan-tzu and Chia-shan" is one of fewer than twenty extant paintings by this important Ch'an monk, most of whose works are in various Japanese collections today. As was noted above, one of Fan-yin's paintings is in the Cleveland Museum of Art, and another is known to have been in the collection of the former Shah of Iran, an ironic circumstance that would have been greatly appreciated by the artist-monk from Bihar.

1. Several inscriptions written by the artist that also give his name as Fan-yin are mentioned in Yoshiaki Shimizu's important article, "Six Narrative Paintings by Yin T'o-lo: Their Symbolic Content," *Archives of Asian Art*, Vol. XXXIII (1980), p.23, fn.36.
2. *Ibid.* p.22, fn.30.