

Anonymous (16th century)

“Lin Bu with Crane”
“Li Bo Chanting”

Pair of hanging scrolls, each ink on silk
Each 107.9 x 49.5 cm. (49 1/2 x 19 1/2 in.)

In the right-hand scroll a single large figure with staff and attended by crane stands by a rushing stream at the foot of a cliff, from which grows a blossoming plum tree. The figure wears a scholar's robe and hat, and boasts fingernails of a length that precludes any manual labor. The mountain forms are textured with the side of the brush in the quickly-done stroke known as the *ax-cut texture stroke*.

The left-hand painting features two figures, a seated man wearing a scholar's robe and holding a fan attended by a servant boy holding a long staff. The man faces a waterfall appearing to the right of a misty valley; his mouth is open and he is clearly singing or chanting a poem to express his emotional response to the evocative scene. A pine tree enters from the upper left and frames the figures below.

Lin Bu (965-1026), canonized as Master Hojing, was a native of Hangzhou who retired from the world and lived the life of a recluse near West Lake.¹ He there amused himself by growing plum-trees and keeping cranes; never marrying, because, as he said, the former stood him in stead of a wife, the latter of children. He threw away his poems as fast as they were written, declaring that he did not care for fame among his contemporaries, still less with posterity.

Li Bo (705-762), was born in Baxi in Ssichuan, of Imperial descent.² Known as much for his riotous living as for his inspired poetry, Li

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wandered as far as Shantung and formed a coterie that became known as the Six Idlers of the Bamboo Brook. Around the year 742 he reached the capital of Changan, where he became a favorite of Emperor Minghuang. Unfortunately he drew the ire of the powerful eunuch Gao Lishi, who convinced the imperial consort Yang Guifei to approach the emperor and prevent Li from being appointed to an important official post. Permitted to withdraw from court, Li formed a new coterie known as the Eight Immortals of the Winecup. Seeking refuge with a relative, Li was drowned from leaning one night over the edge of his boat in a drunken effort to embrace the reflection of the moon.

The paired images here make a powerful appeal to our emotions and imaginations, just as the poetry of these two paragons affects us even today. In general terms these characteristics are typical of imperial court painting and the Zhe School, analyzed in admirable fashion by Richard M. Barnhart in his path-breaking *Painters of the Great Ming*.³ Among many apt comparisons we may mention here Liu Jun's "Three Daoist Immortals Dancing Around a Frog" (fig. 1) and the anonymous "Daoist Immortal" attributed to Jiang Gui (fig. 2). Dating to the later 15th and the 16th century, these comparisons suggest a date in the early 16th century for the present pair.

1. See his biography in Herbert Giles: *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary*, Taipei, 1968, p. 485.

2. See his biography in Herbert Giles: *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary*, Taipei, 1968, p. 455-56.

3. Richard M. Barnhart: *Painters of the Great Ming*, Dallas, 1993. We are most grateful to Dick for sharing with us his ideas on the present pair of paintings.



Fig. 1. Liu Jun: “Three Daoist Immortals Dancing Around a Frog,” after Richard M. Barnhart: *Painters of the Great Ming*, Dallas, 1993, cat. 38.



Fig. 2. Jiang Gui, att.: “Daoist Immortal,” after Richard M. Barnhart: *Painters of the Great Ming*, Dallas, 1993, cat. 72.