



Chu Ang-chih (1764-1842 or later)

朱昂之

"Enjoying One's Will"

樂志論

Handscroll, ink and color on paper
26.8 x 135 cm.

Inscription:

"The Retired Scholar Hsing-yen wrote out the 'Essay on Enjoying One's Will' for Master Ling-po and asked Ang-chih to add a picture."

Artist's seal:

Ang-chih

Colophons:

- 1) By Meng Yao-t'ing writing the *Le-chih Lun*, "Essay on Enjoying One's Will," composed by Chung-ch'ang T'ung (179-219).
- 2) By Chu Ang-chih: "I painted this more than thirty years ago. In one part are untrammelled men such as appear in the 'Essay (on Enjoying One's Will),' several gentlemen discussing the meaning of this essay on the Tao. However, the three masters Fu-mei, Ling-po, and Hsin-hsien have now returned to the Way of the Mountains, and it is them I recall with sadness. Seen again and recorded during the year 1836 of the Tao-kuang reign-era by Ang-chih." Seal: *Ang-chih*.

Seven figures sit or stand inside a thatched house set within a garden enclosure located in a grove of bamboo and trees on the bank of a slow-flowing river with mountain peaks rising in the distance. Mist and clouds are used effectively to shut out much of the immediate environment and to concentrate attention on the scholarly retreat and the activities taking place within. The figures are neither feasting nor drinking and rather sit in positions of attentive ease, clearly listening to those who are speaking. The restrained aesthetic approach taken here—the general omission of color, the stable arrangement of forms, the lack of facial detail—helps to characterize the concerns of the group as intrinsically important and the mood of the meeting as quiet, reflective and serious.

The artist's short inscription on the painting notes that the painting was requested by a scholar living in retirement to accompany a piece of calligraphy written for presentation to a third friend; it was the calligraphy, in other words, which set the general theme for the painting. The main text of the calligraphy is the "Essay on Enjoying One's Will" composed by Chung-ch'ang T'ung (179-219), who served as a Court Gentleman assigned to duty in the Imperial Secretariat. In this essay Chung-ch'ang postulated an ideal life consisting of life in the countryside living with wife, children and parents, with gardens, fields and servants to see to one's every need, with books to read, music to sing,

fish to catch, and birds to shoot, with good friends with whom to discuss poetry, history, and philosophy, and, finally, with no responsibility for the rest of the world but only to oneself, to developing one's own full potential.

The painting is thus a visualization of much of what was considered the ideal life of a recluse-scholar, and it was clearly painted for a friend who had achieved an approximation of that goal. The artist's second inscription, written more than thirty years later, describes the figures as "discussing the meaning of the essay on the Tao" but then laments the subsequent death of three of the principles—including the calligrapher and the recipient of the painting—a cautionary reminder to all viewers that the good as well as the bad shall eventually pass away.

Chu Ang-chih, *tzu* Ch'ing-li and Lu-li, was from Wu-chin in Kiangsu province but he lived in Suchou and, from 1803-04, worked in Peking. Chu studied first with his father, the painter Chu Wen-jung, and then developed his own style of painting through study of works by the later 17th century masters Wang Hui (1632-1717) and Yun Shou-p'ing (1633-1690). Chu Ang-chih's facility in especially the blue-and-green style of landscape painting was later taught to a remarkable but unfortunately short-lived artist, his student Liu Yen-ch'ung (1809-1847).