Li Hsiu-i (1811-1859 or later)

李修易

"Landscape after Chao Meng-fu" 1854

做趙松雪山水圖

Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper
203 x 72 cm. (80 x 28 3/8 in.)

Inscription:

"The jade-green waves are clear and light,
and the boatman is off among the mulberries,
The time is just right to seek a poem
when everything in the boat is still;
The maples leaves have scattered
and the mountain's reflection wastes away,
The thatched gate across the way is quiet,
the setting sun is autumn cold.

During spring of the year 1854 I decided to enlarge a work by Chao Sung-hsueh (Chao Meng-fu) in response to an elegant request from my venerated elder brother Sou the Sixth and ask for his judgement. Written now by his younger brother Li Hsiu-i, called Tzu-chien, from Hai-yen."

Artist's seals: *Yan-kuan Li Hsiu-i chang;*
Tzu-chien Shih-shu-hua Yin

The composition of this large and attractive painting is dominated by verdant peaks rising above the cloud-filled valley, the poet in his boat half hidden by towering foreground trees and the establishment across the river hidden completely by the heavy mist. The upper surfaces of the mountains are tinged with a light beige color that effectively evokes the late afternoon sun on a cool autumn day mentioned in the poem. The painter also noted that his model for the work was a painting by the great Yuan master Chao Meng-fu (1254-1322), whose extant oeuvre does include landscapes painted in strong color but none with quite this obvious an intent to entice and enthrall the senses of the viewer. The present work is quite conservative for the 19th century and provides evidence for the continuing vitality of orthodox painting emanating from such early Ch'ing masters as Wang Hui (see catalogue 19).

Li Hsiu-i, *tzu* Tzu-chien, *hao* Ch'ien-chai, was born in Hai-yen, Chekiang province. He is said to have begun painting in 1835, at the age of twenty-four, and to have learned his trade in Suchou, ghost-painting for an artist named Shen Chien-ch'uan. Li then worked in Peking for a time but by 1843 he was back in the south, painting for a living in Chia-hsing. During the later 1840s and '50s Li painted on occasion with his wife, the talented artist Hsu Pao-chuan. A good many of Li Hsiu-i's extant paintings are inscribed as having been done after earlier literati masters, artists as diverse as Chao Meng-fu, Wu Chen, Ch'en Shun, Li Liu-fang, and Yun Shou-p'ing, and he thus seems to have continued the approach he learned in Suchou and then to have earned a respectable living fulfilling the requirements of a clientele with a taste for the restraint and elegance of the classic tradition.