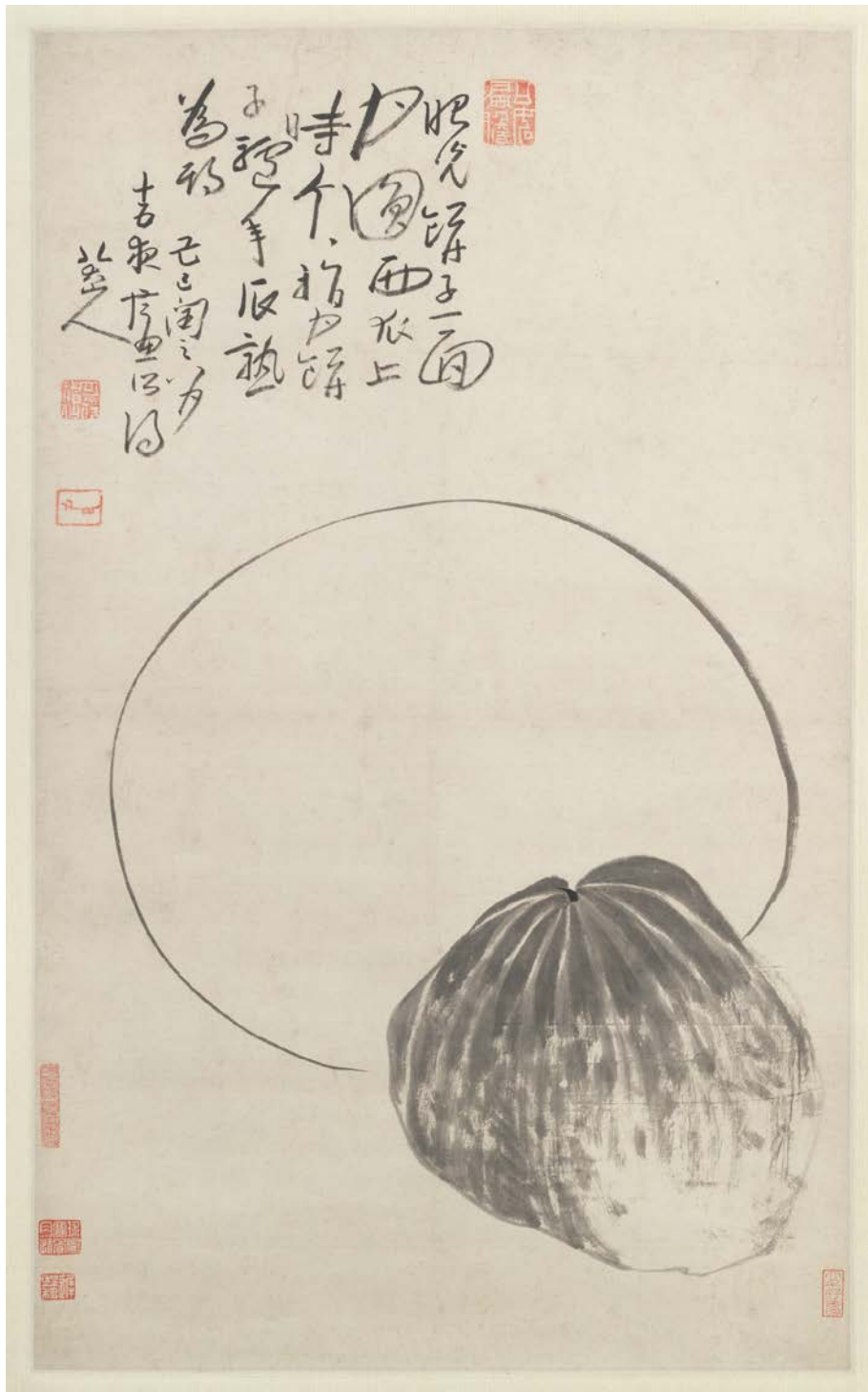


Case 10: Moon and Melon



What's in a circle?

A Circle and A Melon: A Still Life That Makes No Sense

This week's artwork, the *Moon and Melon* (Fig.1), captivates our eyes not with technical virtuosity but a haunting simplicity. On the vertical paper hanging scroll, we see a somewhat ill-shaped, darkened melon placed against a large circle, surrounded by several lines of strange-looking characters on the top and a couple of scattered red seals across the painting. The title informs us that the painting depicts a moon and a melon, but that is as far as it gets us. For all its simplicity, the painting manages to puzzle the viewer and left us wonder: what does it mean?

An intuitive attempt to search for previous models in Chinese painting history quickly proves futile, as there simply had never been a painting that juxtaposes a moon and a melon in China before this (and perhaps in the entire world).¹ For a painting tradition as history-conscious as the Chinese one, this is a disturbing anomaly. Nor can we find anything by analyzing the formal characteristics of the painting. The entire composition only consists of two objects that dramatically contrast each other visually: a full moon depicted only by its round silhouette eclipsed by a melon with heavy ink-wash, and nothing else. The composition suggests the melon is somehow “flying” in the night sky along side the moon, which simply does not make sense. Scratching the back of our heads, we turn to the inscription for any clue that may help us understand the painting. It reads:

A cake radiating with light;
The moon is full, and the watermelon is ripe.
Everyone points to the moon cake,
When the melon ripens in the Donkey's Year, that is the time to meet.
Painting the gain of the night, Fifteenth Day of the Eighth Month of the Jisi Year [1689].
Bada Shanren.

昭光餅子一面
月圓西瓜上時
個個指月餅子
驢年瓜熟為期

己巳之八月十五夜畫所得 八大山人²

Besides pointing out that the painting indeed depicted a full moon [*yueyuan* 月圓 “moon reaching fullness”] and a melon [*xigua* 西瓜 “watermelon”], and that it was painted by the early Qing Dynasty painter Bada Shanren (1626-1705) in 1689, the 39-character inscription barely does nothing but seems to give rise to more confusions.

¹ Wang, Fangyu and Barnhart, Richard. *Master of the Lotus Garden: The Life and Art of Bada Shanren, 1626-1705*, ed. Judith G. Smith. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1990. p.106

² Translation by the author of the paper.

There is a strong interest in “cake”, which appears twice but is not physically depicted in the painting. We are also told about people pointing at the moon cake, who are also absent. And finally, we are told to rendezvous in the Donkey Year, which is non-existent in the Chinese Zodiac system. In short, the painting still makes no sense.

At this point, it may be tempting to blame the nonsense-ness on the artist, Bada Shanren, who was recorded to be mentally unstable in many historical accounts.³ Surely all the incomprehensibility of his forms and motifs can be explained as symptoms of his insanity. This explanation, however, does not do justice for the *Moon and Melon* either, as there is also an undeniable sense of connection among different elements in the composition. This is not only because the poem inscription makes reference to the moon and the melon, but also because the geometrical shapes in the composition carefully mirror each other: the slightly deformed melon’s outline is juxtaposed with the circular silhouette of the moon, which then echoes the unusually rounded characters of *mian* 面, *yue* 月, *yuan* 圓, and *xi* 西 (Fig.2). The fact that these four characters all describe the moon and the melon in the poem hardly seems like a coincidence. Such a deliberate visual integration of the words and the image makes the painting far from a haphazard ink smudges of a lunatic, but instead suggests the presence of a lucid mind behind its design. This leads us to wonder if Bada is hiding some kind of message in the painting, behind all the “madness.”

As we shall discuss, the notion of “hidden meaning” is at the core of Bada Shanren’s art. Scholars agree that Bada’s poetry, calligraphy, and painting were intentionally made strange and hard to understand to disguise or deflect its true purpose to strangers but reveal it to friends.⁴ In doing so, Bada often drew on his personal circumstances or cryptic literary sources.⁵ In other words, Bada’s paintings are not incomprehensible, but they require deep knowledge of context or certain personal allusions to understand. In this way, Bada’s painting is like a puzzle: we must first identify the key pieces and then try to fit them together to reach a larger picture or a message that Bada has hidden there for the viewer. To better find these key pieces, we shall start with the question: who is Bada Shanren?

³ Records of Bada Shanren’s madness are cited in Cahill, James. “The ‘Madness’ in Bada Shanren’s Paintings,” in *Ajia bunka kenkyū*, no.17 (1989): 119-43, 120 and Eoyang, Eugene. “Bada Shanren: Traditional Iconoclast and Riddler of the Past,” *Essays in Romanticism* 7, no. 1 (1999): 51-71, 57. Two of Bada’s contemporaries who left vivid accounts were convinced that he was mad for at least a part of his life.

⁴ Wang and Barnhardt, 106. Eoyang similarly observes that Bada’s calligraphy made allusions to the fully explicit graphemes, abbreviated in ways that were conventional to experience calligraphers but opaque to the laymen. Eoyang, 62.

⁵ James Cahill observes that many of Bada Shanren’s allusions come from Chan Buddhist texts and medieval texts such as *Shishuo xinyu*. Cahill, 121.



Figure 1. Bada Shanren. *Moon and Melon*. 1689. Hanging scroll. Harvard Art Museum.

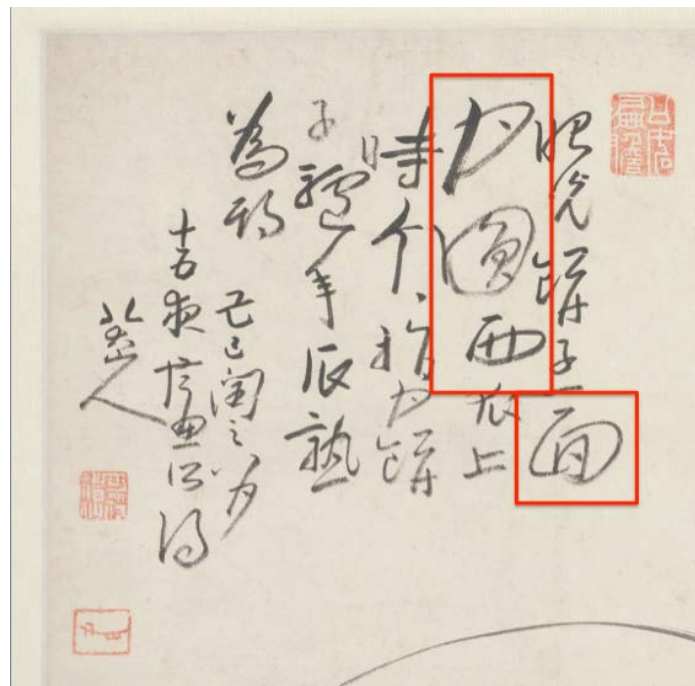


Figure 2. Characters of *mian* 面, *yue* 月, *yuan* 圓, and *xi* 西 in the inscription.

Bada Shanren: An Imperial Scion Gone Mad?

From Princely Mansion to Buddhist Monastery

Bada Shanren's art is inseparable from his dramatic life. Bada was born in 1626 as Zhu Da, a Ming imperial descendent of the Prince of Yiyang from the northeastern part of today's Jiangxi Province. Because of his royal lineage, Bada lived an affluent and leisurely life in a prince's mansion for much of his childhood and adolescent years. However, Bada's fate took a dramatic turn with the invasion of the Manchus and the downfall of the Ming when he was eighteen years old. Fearing persecution at the hand of Manchu invaders, Bada sought refuge in the religious order, becoming a monk in a Buddhist monastery in the Fengxin Mountains near Nanchang. Here, Bada became deeply involved with Buddhist philosophy and literature, especially the teachings of Chan Buddhism.⁶

Bada was evidently successful as a monk, gaining at one point more than a hundred followers. He was also a monk artist, known for his accomplishment in poetry and painting. An example of Bada's work from this period is the 1659 album *Sketches from Life*. In the *Taihu Garden Rock* (Leaf 10, Fig.3), we see Bada's interest in diagonal and cornered composition as well as his mastery of the simple but bold outlines and contrasting ink-shadings that shows influence from the woodblock prints from the late Ming (Fig.4).⁷ In the accompanying poem to the album leaf, Bada boldly fantasizes the Taihu rock as a "chipped-off" fragment of the holies Buddhist cosmic peaks, so as to praise the wonder of the rock's shape.⁸ Such an unconventional association shows his iconoclastic Chan way of thinking in his art making during this period.

Despite his reclusion to Buddhism, Bada had strong loyalist tendencies. This is evident in many of his poems and his social circles such as his active involvement with the White Society, which was founded by a Ming loyalist and had many loyalist members.⁹

⁶ Wang and Barnhart, 14.

⁷ Wen Fong argues that following the fall of the Ming, people fled their homes and family collections were either hidden or dispersed, woodblock printed *huapu* illustrations, showing a full repertory of painting subjects accompanied by poems, were a vital resource, sometimes the only available models, for young early Qing painters. See Fong, Wen. "Stages in the Life and Art of Chu Ta (A.D. 1626-1705)," *Archives of Asian Art*, no.40 (1987): 6-23, 9.

⁸ The original poem translates to: "Smashing the waist of Mount Sumeru,/ Breaking off the tail of Mount Lengjia,/ It is round and whole, showing no chisel marks,/ Disturbing neither the gods, nor the sprits." Translation from Ibid, 9.

⁹ Wang and Barnhart, 84-86.

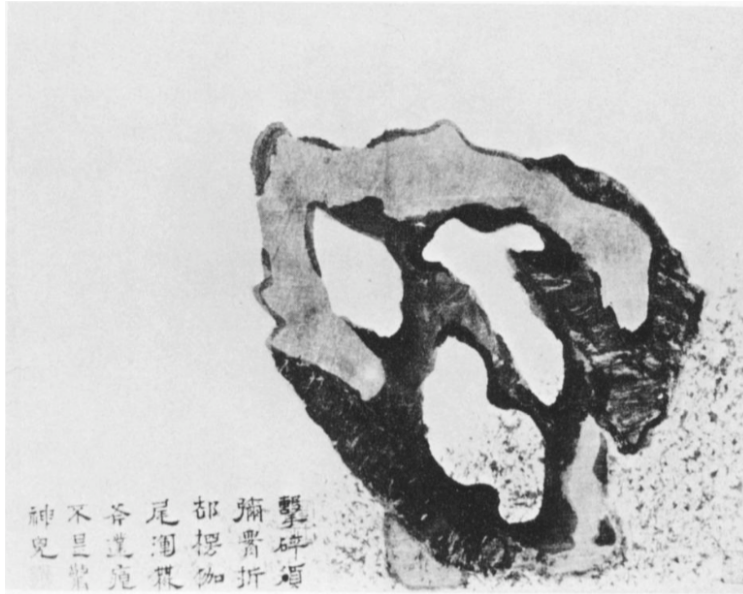


Figure 3. Bada Shanren. “Taihu Garden Rock,” leaf 10, *Sketches from Life* album, 1660. National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Figure 4. “Garden Rock,” woodblock-printed illustration. From Hu Zhengyan (17th c.), *Ten Bamboo Studio Stationery Designs*.

Hiding Behind the Madness

Bada's career as a monk lasted for about thirty years until one day in 1680, when he suddenly went mad, tore off his priest's robe and set it on fire. He then found his way back his hometown in Nanchang and was found roaming the streets as if he was insane. Shao Changheng, a contemporary of Bada who left the most reliable biographical account of the artist, records his madness vividly:

His [Bada Shanren's] mind became confused and he was no longer master of himself. Later he went mad and he spent his days now laughing aloud, now crying out in agony . . . He ran about the market waving his sleeves and spinning round in circles, so that the boys ran after him gaping and yelling with laughter . . .¹⁰

Scholars have speculated on the cause of Bada's sudden breakdown. Some say Bada's madness was feigned to avoid the political entanglement that came with his Ming imperial lineage, either the pressure to conform to the new Qing court or to escape ties from Wu Sangui, a rebellious anti-Manchu leader in power in southern Jiangxi at the time. Others argue that his breakdown was real and that it was due to the risk and pressure that came with his decision to leave the religious order and carry on the duty of producing imperial offspring.¹¹

It is true that Bada showed a strong interest in reclaiming his Ming imperial lineage even when he was still a monk, as we find him using a large seal reading *Xijiang Yiyang wangsun* "Princely Descendant of Yiyang of Xijiang" on a portrait of him done in 1674. Scholars have interpreted this as a sign of Bada's intention to come out of hiding and finding a place for himself in the new Manchu world.¹² Therefore, just like how Bada took refuge in the religious order when the Ming was first overthrown, it is possible that Bada's mental breakdown in 1680 was calculated to protect himself from any kind of political persecutions that may come to him for returning to the Manchu-ruled society. Indeed, "feigning madness" had long been a way of diverting suspicions in the world of politics: we may recall Emperor Cheng of Ming (1360-1424) --- incidentally Bada's imperial relative --- faking madness in the market place to avoid suspicion from his newly enthroned nephew, or Hamlet's famous line "I essentially am not in madness, / But mad in craft."

Importantly for our purposes, it was also in this stage that Bada's artistic persona of a "mad artist" became formulated. During this period, he started to refer to himself as *lu* "donkey" in self-mockery and took on the title "Bada Shanren," which literally meant "the Dweller of the Eight Great Mountains" but he signed in such a manner that it looked like a fusion of the characters for *ku* "to cry" and *xiao* "to laugh" (Fig.5), embodying a contradictory and nonsensical state of mind. His painting from the period also shows

¹⁰ Translation from Eoyang, 57.

¹¹ Cahill, 119-120.

¹² Fong, 8.

characteristics of strangeness, obscurity, and hiddenness that became the hallmark of Bada’s artistic style. The *Moon and Melon*, painted in 1689, was painted exactly during this period.

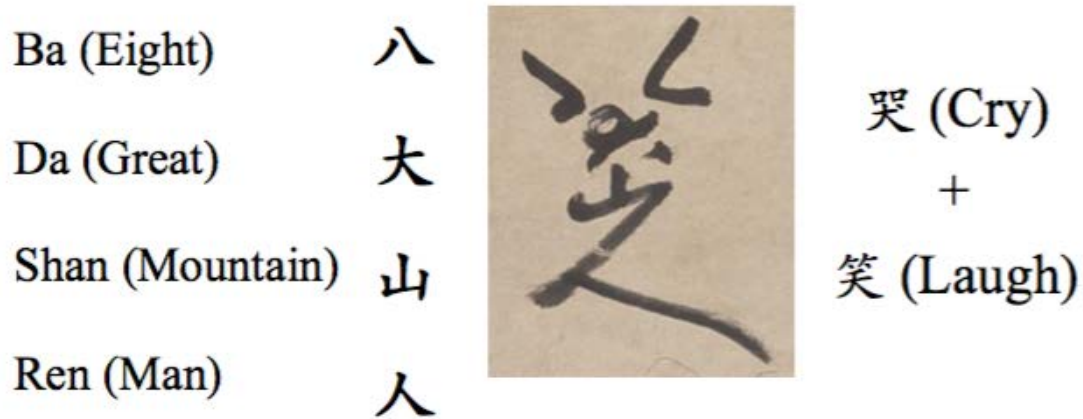


Figure 5. Breakdown of the “Bada Shanren” signature.

Bada Shanren’s Moon, Bada Shanren’s Melon

Remembering the Ming

Taking in consideration Bada’s Ming royal lineage, his loyalist sentiments, and his deep involvement in Chan Buddhism, all the nonsense-ness in the *Moon and Melon* suddenly starts to radiate with potential meanings. To begin with, the inscription by Bada in the painting states that it was painted in the night of the fifteenth day of the eighth month, which is the day of the Mid-Autumn Festival, a traditional festival for family gathering and appreciating the full moon while eating moon cakes. While this explanation makes the depiction of the full moon seemingly innocuous, Bada’s moon alludes to an additional layer of meaning as by his time the Mid-Autumn Festival is also tightly associated with the founding of the Ming Dynasty. Legend has it that Zhu Yuanzhang (1328-1398), the founding emperor the Ming Empire, hid messages in moon cakes on the Mid-Autumn Festival and used them to coordinate the revolt against the Mongol rulers. Since then, the moon cake became a symbol of rebellion against foreign dominance. In this sense, the Mid-Autumn Festival, the full moon and the moon cake in the painting may be understood as an embodiment of Bada’s loyalist sentiments.

The placing of a melon against the moon further supports this speculation, as one of

the melon's long-standing symbolisms also points to the ideal of loyalism and reclusion. As recorded in the Han Dynasty text *Shiji* "Records of the Grand Historian", after the fall of the Qin Dynasty, a high Qin official named Shao Ping lost his position and became a commoner. Declining the offer to hold a high position in the new Han court, Shao chose to live as a melon farmer in recluse, planting melons near the eastern gate of the capital city Chang'an. The melons he grew were famously ripe and delicious, and were nicknamed "Dongling melons" because Shao Ping was originally the Marquis of Dongling during the Qin rule.¹³ In this sense, watermelon had been a symbol of one's refusal to serve the new regime and leading a life of reclusion. We know that Bada was familiar with this allusion, as he repeatedly referred to it several times in his other poems.¹⁴ In this sense, the full moon, the moon cake, and the melon, these pieces of memories and stories of the past in the painting invokes Bada's longing of the fallen Ming and his resolution to live a life of reclusion away from the new Qing government. But is this what Bada is saying in the *Moon and Melon*?

Emptiness of the Circle

The timing of Bada Shanren's painting of the *Moon and Melon* in 1689 is highly suggestive, since there had just been a failed attempt to revolt against the Qing government by the Ming loyalists in Nanchang, Bada's hometown in the year before.¹⁵ The failed revolt was one of the last gasps of the surviving Ming Dynasty loyalists, as by this point the Qing had effectively ruled for more than forty years, and no reasonable man could entertain any real hope for the Ming revival, instead turning to collaborate with the new government.¹⁶

Bada was perhaps conscious about this inevitable course of history. In *Moon and Melon*, Bada ended his poem with a sentiment of futility and vain: "Everyone points to the moon cake,/ When the melon ripens in the Donkey's Year is the time to meet." The resurrection of the Ming will never come to fruition, just like the melon in the non-existent Donkey's Year. This sentiment, however, is not to be simply taken as Bada's surrender. Instead, it reveals yet another dimension of Bada's meditation on human affairs as they unfold during his time, one that is heavily influenced by Chan Buddhism.

One of the strange things about this couplet is the superimposition of the moon and the moon cake in the first half of it. While we may read this double-imagery as a convenient way to evoke the Ming revolt allusion, there is also a Chan way of reading it, as we see in a famous Chan Buddhist text:

¹³ Shao Ping's story is recorded in *Shiji* "Records of the Grand Historian", vol.53, *Xiao xiangguo shijia*.

¹⁴ For example, in another one of his watermelon painting in National Palace Museum, Taipei, Bada writes: "Painting this Sweetness of Qingmen [the watermelon of Shaoping],/ I let loose of my sentiment gently and slowly. 寫此青門賒，綿綿詠長發。"

¹⁵ Wang and Barnhart, 104.

¹⁶ Fong, 8.

This is just like if someone was pointing to the moon, one should follow the pointing finger to look at the moon. If one looks at the finger and think of it as the moon, then one not only loses [true understanding of] the moon, but also loses [true understanding of] the finger. Why is this so? This is because one has mistaken the pointer as the truth.

如人以手指月示人，彼人因指當應看月。若復觀指以為月體，此人豈唯亡失月輪，亦亡其指。何以故？以所標指為明月故。¹⁷

The story explains the attainability of enlightenment (symbolized by the moon) without the help of the numerous scriptures (the pointing finger, which points to the moon but is not to be mistaken as the moon), and warns against the danger of taking the literal as the real essence in the practice of Chan Buddhism. In this sense, the “pointing to the moon and calling it a moon cake” in the poem is metaphorically talking about people’s inability to differentiate between the truth and its material illusions.

The second half of the couplet contains yet more references to Chan Buddhist idioms. The phrase “Donkey’s Year” used in the second half of the couplet in fact also comes from Chan Buddhist texts, commonly used to mean “never” or “not in the foreseeable future,” while the word *gua* 瓜 “melon” means unenlightened people. In addition, the word *shu* 熟 “ripen” is also frequently used in Chan Buddhist texts as a metaphor for enlightenment. In this sense, the couplet and the painting become a somewhat satirical comment on the unattainability of enlightenment/truth for those who cannot see beyond the illusionary surface of things. Looking back at the painting, the ill-shaped melon suddenly looks uninspired, staring at the moon in confusion.

How, then, should we understand the *Moon and Melon* in the historical context of 1689? Was it meant to be a commentary on the futility of Ming loyalist revolt and the inevitable acceptance of the new dynasty? Or was it a more personal contemplation on Bada’s unconventional return to secular life and his determination for reclusion? And what is the “truth/enlightenment” that Bada is trying to suggest in the painting? We do not have an answer for certain, and it is perhaps just meant to be vague as it is. Yet we may still dig deeper, based on other clues left by Bada in the *Moon and Melon*.

“Immortality is Achievable:” Temporality in Moon and Melon

Time is an element that Bada Shanren pays special attention to in the *Moon and Melon*. This is not only because of the use of *shi* 時 “time” and *qi* 期 “promised time/date” in the poem, but is also evident in his inscription following the poem, “Painting the gain of the night, Fifteenth Day of the Eighth Month of the Jisi Year [1689]. Bada Shanren,” which pinpoints the painting’s creation to the night of the Mid-Autumn Festival. What is particularly interesting about this line is Bada’s mentioning that he was painting “the gain of the night,” which refers to the melon. Why would Bada go out at night to get a melon, on the very day of an important festival? And moreover, why did he

¹⁷ *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, vol.2.

have to tell us about it?

One explanation is that Bada is referring to a particular kind of traditional folk activity associated with the Mid-Autumn Festival and the melon called *moqiu* 摸秋 “touching autumn.” The practice and its meaning is recorded in a Qing text:

Accompanying each other, women would go out at night. They would each steal a melon from the field and return [home.] This was considered to be auspicious for giving birth to a boy. The name of the practice is *moqiu*.

女伴秋夜出遊，各於瓜田摘瓜歸，為宜男兆，名曰摸秋。¹⁸

The choice of melon here is not a coincidence. As a fruit, melon has long vines and many seeds, which was associated with long lasting family line and fertility (birth of many “seeds” offspring). Therefore, by “the gain of the night,” Bada is suggesting that the melon depicted was the product of *moqiu*. Considering that by this time Bada had taken a wife to carry on his duty to prolong his imperial family line,¹⁹ it is possible that Bada was also reflecting his engagement in this seasonal activity.

It is interesting to note here that such an interpretation of the melon departs quite far from the political reading of the painting, and it seems impossible to determine what Bada’s true intentions were. On the one hand, there is an undeniable sense of connection between the historical context at the time and Bada’s allusions in the poem; on the other hand, Bada also makes it clear that the melon comes from his engagement in the seasonal activity of “stealing the melon,” which seems to be more about his secular life than about any political concerns. Yet again, we find ourselves in-between sense and nonsense.

A possible way out of this riddle is hidden in one of the seals Bada has imprinted on the painting: *kede shenxian* 可得神仙 “Immortality is achievable” (Fig.6). Bada used this seal in his works during the period of 1686-1705, during which we observe significant changes of his mind and his perception of the world, transitioning from anger and frustration and becoming more and more serene and accepting.²⁰ And interestingly enough, Bada’s writing in this period also shows deep engagement with Daoism, such as what we see in his inscription on the *Fish and Birds* (Fig.7) painted in 1693:

The fish of the Eastern Sea are skilled at transformation. One example is this: the yellow sparrow is a sparrow in the fall, but in the winter it is transformed, entering the sea to become a fish. Another example is this: The blue turtledove is transformed into a turtledove in the summer, but the rest of the year returns to the sea as a fish. All sparrows that transform into fish do so by moulting. From this we understand the truth of what the official of the Lacquer Garden [Zhuangzi] said about the Kun [a legendary cosmic fish] transforming into the Peng [a legendary cosmic bird].

¹⁸ Liang Shaoren 梁紹壬 (18-19th c.). *Liangban qiuyuan suibi* 兩般秋雨盦隨筆

¹⁹ Bada Shanren left poems about his marriage, which seems to have been unhappy. See Eoyang, 60.

²⁰ Wang and Barnhart, 150-151.

東海之魚善化，其一曰黃雀，秋月為雀，冬化入海為魚，其一曰青鳩，夏化為鳩，余月復入海為魚。凡化魚之雀借以肫，以此證知漆園吏之所謂鯤化為鵬。²¹

Besides referencing the Daoist canon, the inscription decidedly points to the idea of seasonal transformation in ancient Chinese cosmology as we have studied in earlier cases.²² The sparrow, turtledove, and fish in Bada's text are not only animals in nature, but also physical manifestations of cosmic energies, whose constant cyclic transformation is embodied by the seasonal interchanging of the birds and the fish.

For the Daoists, becoming a *shenxian* 神仙 “immortal” demanded one's perfect alignment with the working of the cosmos, thus obtaining the same longevity as Heaven and Earth. This meant that one needed to be conscious of the constant transformation of things and act according to its rhythm, doing the correcting things at the right time. In this context, Bada's heightened interest in temporality in the *Moon and Melon* can be understood from a new perspective. On a personal level, it shows that Bada is conscious about the seasonal cycle and living in accordance with it. On a larger political level, it can also be read as a subtle commentary on the political situation at the time --- the Ming passes and the new Qing arises, just like the changing of the moon and the passing of seasons; in the flow of time, nothing is permanent but is under constant transformation, and thus rather than trying to fight it, we shall follow it.

In this sense, “immortality is achievable” may not be there to express Bada's interest in achieving personal immortality, but to suggest a kind of mentality that is more accepting of the changes in the world around him, and a kind of harmonious state that is to come by going along with the natural transformation and flow of things. Thinking back to his Chan Buddhism allusions in the painting, perhaps this is the “true moon” beyond the pointing fingers that Bada hoped to capture in the *Moon and Melon*.

²¹ Translation from *Ibid*, 150, with modification.

²² Here, the bird's transformation into a fish invokes a passage in the *Monthly Ordinances*: “In the third month of Autumn . . . sparrows enter the water and become clams.”

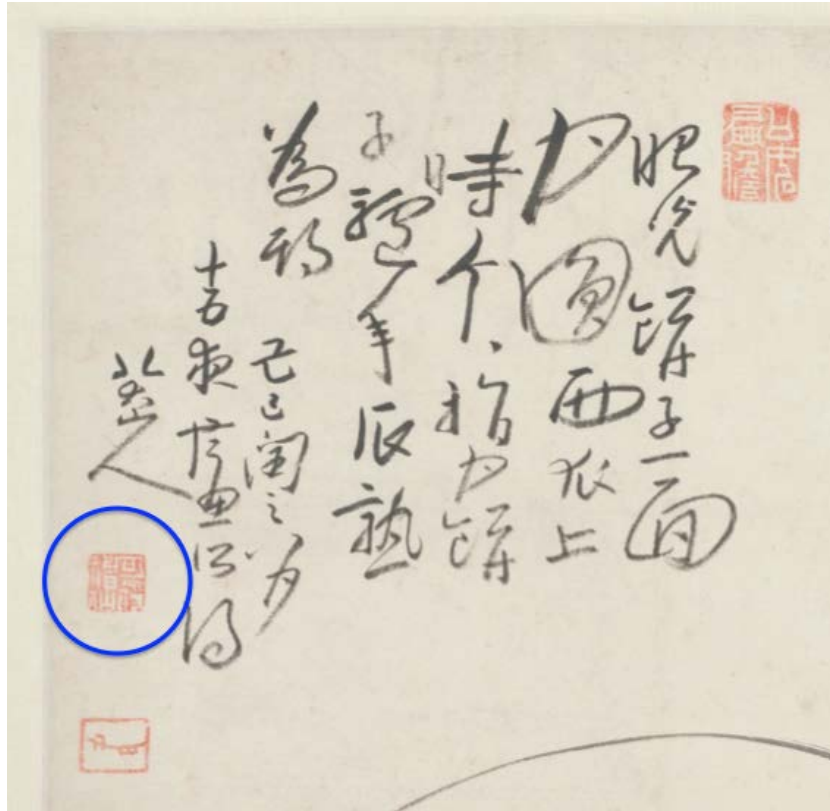


Figure 6. Seal of “Immortality is achievable” on the *Moon and Melon*.



Figure 7. Bada Shanren, *Fish and Birds*, 1693. Hand scroll. Shanghai Museum.

Beyond the Illusions: “Madness” as a Style in Bada Shanren’s Paintings

Bada Shanren's paintings are known for their "madness", especially the ones he created after his return to secular life in 1680. But as we have seen so far, they are not truly insane in the medical sense but are intentionally made strange and abstruse to hide its true intentions.

It should be noted here that eccentricity or madness in painting is in no way Bada Shanren's invention. By Bada's time in the late seventeenth century, there had been numerable precedents of artists who painted in strange manners. For example, Chen Hongshou (1598-1652), who also lived through the collapse of the Ming, manipulated and exaggerated shapes and contours of his figures in peculiar manners to convey their inner states (Fig.8); Xu Wei (1523-96), a truly psychotic artist who mutilated himself and killed his wife, pioneered the *pomo* "splashed ink" technique that resulted in unusually wet and unrestrained gestural brushstrokes (Fig.9).²³ In other words, eccentric or individualistic painting style was nothing new in Chinese painting during Bada's time.

But the "madness" in Bada's painting *was* special. As James Cahill and Zhu Liangzhi observes, Bada's "madness" painting style is distinctive in two key ways.²⁴ The first is his tendency to intentionally twist the shapes of subjects inside his paintings, by which he makes one thing look like another. A good example of this is the *Sleeping Duck* (Fig.10), in which the duck is depicted in a manner that makes it look like a solid piece of rock. The same feature can also be observed in the *Grape and Bird* (Fig.11), in which the bird's body is positioned in such a manner that it also looks like a fish spreading its tail. In doing so, Bada blurs the absolute distinction between things, reminding us that all things are merely a temporary manifestation of the great cosmic transformation. In this sense, a bird *is* indeed a rock, a fish.

The second characteristic of Bada's madness style is his juxtaposition of subjects in a manner that defies spatial logic, resulting in compositions that often confuse the viewers. This is most evident in his paintings of "flying fish", such as what we see in the *Bird, Fish, and Rock* (Fig.12), where a fish is depicted floating in the air above an alarmed bird standing on a seemingly off-balanced rock. In effect this is much similar with our *Moon and Melon*, in which the melon is somehow overlapping the moon as if it is floating in the night sky. The impossibility of the composition is precisely the point: it is not meant to be a representation of the real, objective world, but the subjective world of Bada's mind.

Ultimately, Bada Shanren's paintings strive for something beyond the visual, taking us beyond the boundary of our eyes and into the world of his mind and philosophy. It is

²³ Cahill also notes Xu Wei's influence on Bada Shanren while also pointing out the fundamental difference of their brushstrokes. See Cahill, 124-125.

²⁴ Cahill, 122-123 and Zhu, Liangzhi. "Bada Shanren huihua 'guaiyan' de wenti" in *Wenyi yanjiu*, no.8 (2008): 101-109.

this deconstruction of representation that that allowed Bada to construct his paintings with “personalized imagery” charged with meanings, and it is the subjectivity of the forms and meanings in Bada’s paintings that sets him apart from previous eccentric masters. In studying the *Moon and Melon*, we may try to find its meaning through examining the symbolism, historical context, or personal experience, but in the end, the world of Bada’s paintings remains fluid, uncertain, and subjective, while ideas are implied, scattered, but never definitive. Perhaps in all the nonsense-ness, inconsistency, and madness, the ill-shaped melon is secretly whispering to the full moon: “All is but illusion --- there is no truth other than the Great Transformation.”

Authors: Ziliang Liu and Fangyue Bao
June 2017



Figure 8. Chen Hongshou (1598-1652), "Picking Chrysanthemums" from the hand scroll *Scenes from the Life of Tao Yuanming*. c.1650. Hand scroll. Honolulu Museum of Arts.



Figure 9. Xu Wei (1523-96), *Ink Lotus and Crab*. Hanging scroll. Palace Museum, Beijing.



Figure 10. Bada Shanren, *Sleeping Duck*, 1689. Hanging scroll. Guangdong Provincial Museum.



Figure 11. Bada Shanren, *Grape and Bird*, Private Collection in the United States.



Figure 12. Bada Shanren, *Bird, Fish, and Rock*, 1694, Hanging scroll. Museum Rietberg, Zurich. C. A. Drenowatz Collection.