

## Retrieving the Dragon into the Vase: The Core of Shitao's *Sixteen Luohans* Scroll and a Symbol of His Retreat

By examining the historical context of the *Sixteen Luohans*, a scroll painted in Anhui in 1667 by Shitao, a Buddhist monk and major painter of the 17th century, this article proposes a new chronology of Shitao's early life and explores the autobiographical dimension of the work. Against the pictorial tradition of the Sixteen Luohans, Shitao expanded the dragon-subjugation section, placed it at the center and substituted a vase to a bowl as the tool for the task. This substitution was probably inspired by the legend of the monk Li Chenghui (876–925), who retrieved a dragon into a vase. With the symbolism of wayward dragon as impediments to enlightenment in Chinese Buddhism, Li's story resonated with the tenet of restoring one's stray mind to its original state of purity in Neo-Confucianism as well in later times. The resonance may explain the vase in the dragon-subjugation scenes in, for instance, Wu Bin's and Ding Yunpeng's Luohan paintings, to which Shitao's work is indebted.

*Keywords:* Shitao; Luohan painting; Sixteen Luohans; Dragon-subjugation; Wu Bin; Ding Yunpeng; *xin xue*.