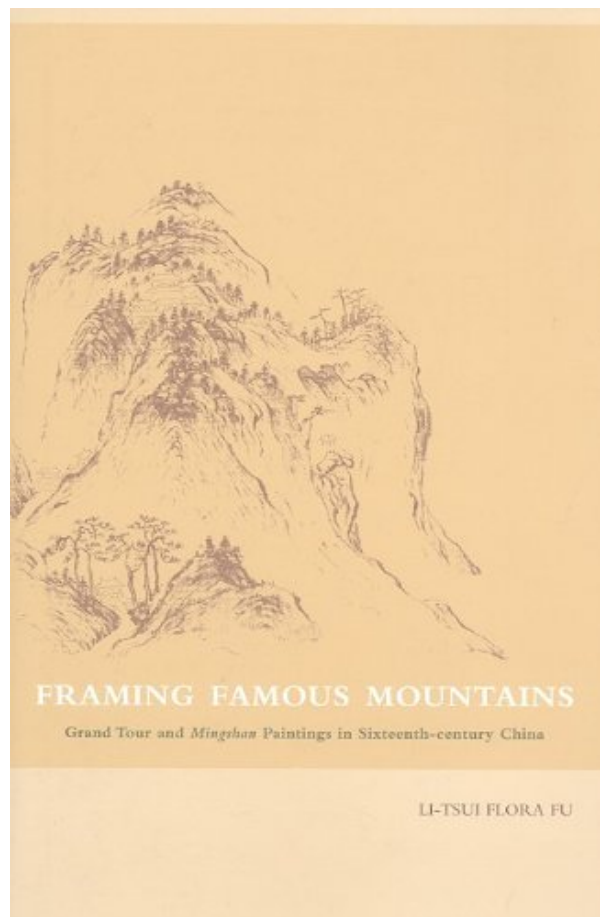
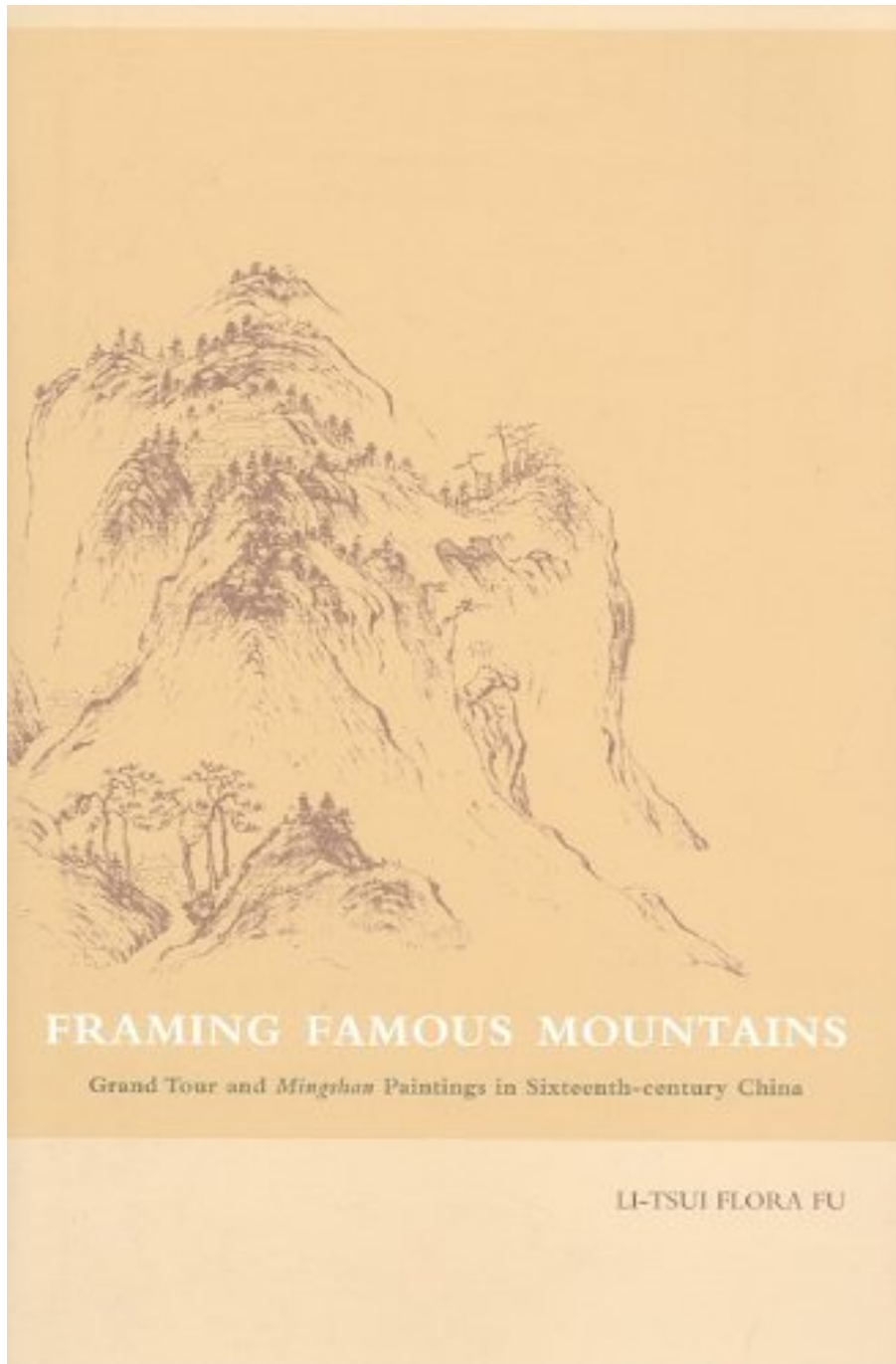


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## About the Author

Flora Li-tsui Fu is associate professor of humanities at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Prior to that, she taught nineteenth- and twentieth-century Chinese painting at the Institute of Art Studies, National Central University, Taiwan. Her research interests include twentieth-century Chinese painting, Ming and Qing painting, and topographical painting.

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# **FRAMING FAMOUS MOUNTAINS: GRAND TOUR AND MINGSHAN PAINTINGS IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY CHINA**

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Mingsha, which literally means "famous mountains", refers to a group of mountains in China that have been set apart for special veneration since ancient times. Over the centuries, the "famous mountains" as a conceptual term has been continually (re)invented, (re)framed and (re)appropriated by different ideological systems. Treating landscape painting as yet another framing system, in both the symbolic and material sense, this book examines sixteenth-century paintings of famous mountains by three major artists in the light of a diachronic account of the evolution of famous mountains over time and a synchronic account of the vogue for the grand tour in late Ming society.

The author adopts a cultural approach in describing the significance of paintings of famous mountains in late Ming and delves into the cultural imagery of famous mountains and their pictorial representation and artistic presentation. This book helps the reader understand Chinese landscape painting from a new and refreshing perspective.

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changing portrayals of mountains in Chinese art  
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Starting in the 16th-century, well-to-do Chinese engaged in what Li-tsui compares to the Grand Tour engaged in by Europeans in the 18th and 19th centuries. The comparison is meant primarily for orientation, however, for Western readers to the author's skilled management of the complexities of her subject which is at the heart of the history and subject matter of Chinese painting. Only a cursory exposure to Chinese painting, and one cannot help but see the central place of mountains in it.

The ubiquitous mountains in Chinese painting are not simply to satisfy an appreciation for the world of nature. The countless paintings with mountains are not simply "nature paintings." As Li-tsui skillfully shows, "Over the centuries [beginning in the 16th] 'famous mountains' were perceived as the abode of gods, a set of spatial symbols contested between different systems of sacred geography." In different periods and as portrayed by different artists, the mountains variously symbolized a realm of the sacred where individuals could retreat for communion with the divine and transformation; temporary retreat as if to a remote, peaceful monastery; physical settings associated with and inspiring the spirituality of Buddhism, Confucianism, and other Asian beliefs; the centrality and majesty of the state as a site for state sacrifices; and popular destinations for pilgrims.

Li-tsui uses three notable 16th-century painters of mountains: Ye Cheng (first decades of the 16th century), Xie Shichen (1487-1561), and Song Xu (1525-1606). Her historical and artistic study exceeds the particular treatment of these however by having the dimensions of a cultural study. The author is interested in the mountain paintings not only because of their prevalence in Chinese painting, but also for how they reflect changes--sometimes subtle changes which are more like colorations--in Chinese culture.

Readers of the art/cultural study come away with not only an understanding of the reasons for mountains as a predominant, abiding subject for much of the history of Chinese painting, but also an eye for the varying, often subtle tonalities, perspectives, compositions, proportions, and styles in portraying mountains and the meanings of these. This is a work of keen and knowledgeable art analysis which is fundamental with respect to its topic (or interplay of topics) and which also coincides with the growing place of Chinese antiquities, including art, along with modern and contemporary Chinese art in the worlds of museums, auctions, scholarship, and the art trade. Li-tsui is an associate professor of humanities at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Twenty-five color plates and 70 black-and-white illustrations give good visual references for the varied types of mountain painting and details of them in her art criticism.

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