

Ma Yuan is a significant painter of the Song Dynasty, together with Xia Gui, they were known as the Ma-Xia School of painting. From a young age, Ma Yuan was exposed to the Chinese traditions of paintings and calligraphy. His family worked in the imperial Painting Academy which became his first push towards becoming a painter. Like a lot of other painters at the time, Li Tang was a great influence on his painting style. He adapted Li Tang's ax-cut brush strokes, creating clear-cut brushstrokes that are more fluid and energetic. Ma Yuan's romantic interpretations of landscapes became an inspiration to many others. He enjoyed his fame and reputation, working in court, he was favored by Emperor Ningzong. Sources show that some of the emperor's poems were inspired by Ma Yuan's landscape paintings.² *Viewing Plum Blossoms by Moonlight* is a spring landscape illustrating a thoughtful scholar who has gone out for a walk and stops on the way to sit and admire the beautiful plum trees that have blossomed under the moonlight. Behind him stands the young servant holding a Qin. Unlike the western culture where a person in the wilderness is often associated with loneliness and depressing moods, in ancient China, the wilderness is often a paradise where scholars, authors, painters would go to escape the harsh realities of life.³ This landscape painting of *Viewing Plum Blossoms by Moonlight* is an alternate space created that can evoke a mixture of emotions that leaves the viewers to savor. The painting shows how following the path of nature can bring balance and contentment.

² Michael Sullivan, "Ma Yuan," Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed November 23, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ma-Yuan-Chinese-painter>.

³ Biosattva, "Traditional Chinese Ink Painting: Plum Blossom," Traditional Chinese Ink Painting: Plum Blossom, July 3, 2013, accessed November 23, 2020, <http://mindfuldiscipline.blogspot.com/2013/07/traditional-chinese-ink-painting-plum.html>.