

# **The Influence of Confucian Philosophical Thought on the Artistic Creation of Chinese Landscape Painting**

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**Abstract:** This paper delves into the influence of Confucian philosophical thought on the artistic creation of Chinese landscape painting. Firstly, the core concepts and historical development of Confucian philosophical thought are summarized, and then the origin, genre and artistic characteristics of Chinese landscape painting are introduced. This paper analyzes in detail the embodiment of Confucian morality in landscape painting, as well as the consistency between Confucian aesthetics and the aesthetic pursuit of landscape painting. Through the interpretation of typical cases, the specific expression of Confucian philosophical thought in landscape painting works is demonstrated, and the relationship between the changes in landscape painting styles and Confucianism in different historical periods is discussed. Finally, the important influence of Confucian philosophy on the creation of landscape painting art is summarized, and the possible new perspectives and methodologies in future research are prospected.

**Keywords:** Confucian Philosophical Thought, Chinese Landscape Painting, Morality, Aesthetic, Artistic Creation, Historical Evolution

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

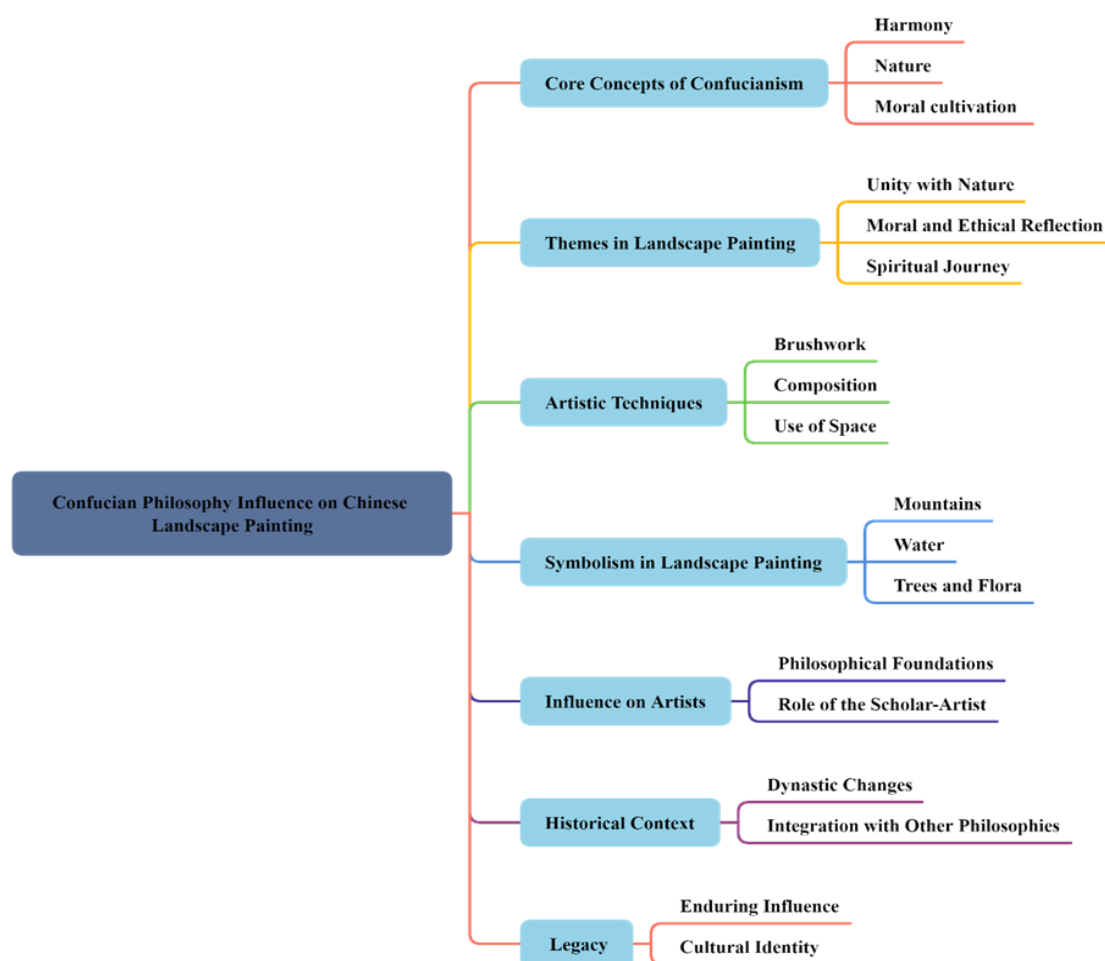
### **1.1 Overview of Confucian Philosophical Thought**

#### **1.1.1 The Historical Development of Confucian Philosophical Thought and its Influence on Chinese Landscape Painting**

As an important part of traditional Chinese culture, Confucian philosophical thought has a long history and has profoundly influenced all aspects of Chinese society, including the field of art (Lai, 2016; Shun, 2004). In the artistic creation of Chinese landscape painting, the influence of

Confucian philosophical thought is particularly significant, which not only shapes the aesthetic concept of landscape painting, but also permeates the painting techniques and creative themes(Tseng, 1973). Confucianism emphasizes the harmonious coexistence of man and nature, and advocates the philosophical concept of "the unity of man and nature". This idea is vividly embodied in Chinese landscape painting. Through the use of brush and ink, landscape painters integrate natural scenery with human emotions, conveying awe and love for nature. In landscape paintings, landscapes are no longer simply natural objects, but have become a carrier for the painter to express his emotions and sustenance(Li & Wegerif, 2014). This kind of personification of natural scenery is the artistic presentation of the concept of "the unity of heaven and man" in Confucian philosophy. In addition, the "golden mean" in Confucian philosophy has also had a profound impact on the artistic creation of Chinese landscape painting. The golden mean emphasizes balance and harmony, and advocates seeking the best balance in the development of things. In the creation of landscape painting, painters follow the principle of the golden mean, and pursue the balance and coordination of the composition of the picture. Through their ingenious layout and brushwork, they make the elements of mountains, water, trees, stones and other elements in the picture echo and complement each other, and jointly create a harmonious and tranquil artistic atmosphere. Confucian philosophy also focuses on people's moral cultivation and social responsibility. In Chinese landscape painting, this idea is reflected in the painters' choice of subject matter(Yang et al., 2016). Many landscape painters express their love for the great rivers and mountains of the motherland by depicting magnificent natural scenery; At the same time, they also convey positive spiritual power through landscape paintings, guiding people to pay attention to nature, society and life. This practice of using art as a medium to promote Confucian moral concepts and social values reflects the profound influence of Confucian philosophical thought in the creation of Chinese landscape painting(Wen & White, 2020). To sum up, the influence of Confucian philosophical thought on the artistic creation of Chinese landscape painting is multifaceted, as shown in Figure 1 It not only shaped the aesthetic concept and creative techniques of landscape painting, but also profoundly influenced the painter's moral concept and sense of social responsibility. In the future development of art, we should continue to tap the profound heritage of Confucian philosophy and combine it with modern art concepts, so as to promote the creation of Chinese landscape painting to a

more brilliant future (Yan, 2023).



**Figure 1:** Confucian Philosophy Influence on Chinese Landscape Painting

## 2. INTRODUCTION TO THE ARTISTIC CREATION OF CHINESE LANDSCAPE PAINTING

### 2.1 The Origin and Genre of Landscape Painting

The art of Chinese landscape painting has a long history, and its origins can be traced back to ancient times. In the long process of development, landscape painting has gradually formed a unique artistic style and expression techniques, and has become an important part of traditional Chinese painting (ALIANE, 2023; Law, 2011). The formation and development of early landscape painting was influenced by many factors, including Confucian philosophical thought. Confucian philosophical thought emphasizes the harmonious coexistence of man and nature, and advocates the concept of "the unity of heaven and man", which has had a profound impact on the creative concept and aesthetic pursuit of landscape painters, as shown in Figure 2



**Figure 2:** Chinese Landscape Painting

In the origin stage of landscape painting, painters expressed the charm of natural landscapes through brush and ink, and strived to convey the awe and worship of nature in the picture. Over time, different genres of landscape painting have gradually developed, and these schools have formed their own distinctive characteristics on the basis of inheriting the tradition(Tan, 2016). Among them, Nanzong's landscape painting is centered on Zhejiang(Wei, 2019), focusing on the charm of brush and ink and the creation of artistic conception, and pursuing the ethereal and far-reaching of the picture; Beizong's landscape painting takes the northern landscape as the theme, emphasizing the majesty and momentum of the composition, showing the magnificence and vastness of nature. In the process of development, these schools borrowed from each other and fused with each other, and jointly promoted the prosperity and development of Chinese landscape painting art (Tähtinen, 2022). Specifically, the representative painters of Nanzong's landscape painting include Dong Yuan and Ju Ran, whose works take the landscape of the south of the Yangtze River as the theme and use the expressive techniques of light ink and light lan to create a hazy and mysterious artistic atmosphere, as shown in Figure 3(Fan, 2024). This kind of expression not only reflects the painter's deep understanding of natural landscapes, but also reflects the concept of "the unity of heaven and man" in Confucian philosophy. The representative painters of Beizong landscape painting include Li Cheng and Fan Kuan, whose works are based on the high mountains and rivers of the north, with rigorous compositions and thick brushwork, showing the

majesty and grandeur of nature. This form of expression also reflects the reverence and worship of nature in Confucian philosophy.



**Figure 3:** Landscape Painting of South Dynasty - Dong Yuan

In addition to the two major schools of Southern and Northern Sects, many other schools and painters emerged in the development of Chinese landscape painting. On the basis of inheriting the tradition, these schools and painters continued to innovate and develop, injecting new vitality into the art of Chinese landscape painting. For example, the Yuan Dynasty painter Huang Gongwang's "Fuchun Mountain Residence" is an epoch-making work, which not only reaches a very high level in the use of brush and ink and composition layout, but also conveys the author's love for nature and deep understanding of life through the picture. The artistic creation of Chinese landscape painting presents rich and diverse characteristics in terms of origin and genre. The formation and development of these characteristics are not only influenced by traditional cultural factors such as Confucian philosophical thought, but also inseparable from the painters' personal talent and innovative spirit. In the future development, we should continue to dig deep into the traditional cultural resources, promote the innovation and development of Chinese landscape painting art, and let this art form with a long history and unique charm shine more brilliantly in the context of the new era.

## 2.2 The Artistic Characteristics and Aesthetic Pursuit of Landscape Painting

Confucian philosophical thought has had a profound and extensive influence on the artistic creation of Chinese landscape painting, and the artistic characteristics and aesthetic pursuit of landscape painting are an important embodiment of this influence. When discussing this issue, we inevitably touch on the core elements of brush and ink techniques and

compositional layout, as well as artistic conception creation and emotional expression. First of all, Confucian philosophy emphasizes harmony and balance, and this concept is vividly reflected in the brush-and-ink techniques of landscape painting. When landscape painters use brush and ink, they pay attention to the changes of brush and ink, such as the shade, dryness and wetness, speed and slowness, in order to pursue the overall harmony of the picture. This harmony is not only reflected in the balance between the various elements of the picture, but also in the tranquil and indifferent atmosphere conveyed by the picture. At the same time, the "golden mean" in Confucianism also influenced the compositional layout of landscape painting. When composing pictures, painters often use techniques such as "distance and proximity method" and "high and far method" to create a picture space that conforms to the laws of nature and has artistic beauty. Secondly, Confucian philosophical thought has had a profound impact on the creation of the artistic conception of landscape painting. Confucianism focuses on the inner cultivation of people and the improvement of moral character, and this concept is fully reflected in landscape painting. By depicting natural landscapes, landscape painters express their awe for nature and their yearning for the harmonious coexistence of man and nature. The creation of this artistic conception not only enhances the artistic taste of landscape painting, but also enables the audience to feel a spiritual sustenance that transcends the mundane when appreciating the paintings. Furthermore, the concept of "emotion" in Confucian philosophical thought has had an important impact on the emotional expression of landscape painting. Confucianism believes that emotions are the innate nature of human beings and are the bridge of communication between people. In landscape painting, the painter integrates his emotions into the picture by using different brush and ink techniques and compositional layouts, which makes the painting have a strong appeal and resonance. When appreciating landscape paintings, the audience can not only feel the beauty conveyed by the paintings, but also experience the emotional world expressed by the painter through the paintings. In order to more specifically illustrate the influence of Confucian philosophical thought on the artistic creation of landscape painting, we can analyze it in combination with some specific cases. For example, the Yuan Dynasty painter Huang Gongwang's Fuchun Mountain Residence is a classic landscape painting deeply influenced by Confucianism. In this painting, Huang Gongwang uses exquisite brush and ink techniques and ingenious compositional layout to vividly depict the beautiful scenery of the mountains and rivers on both sides of the Fuchun River. The landscape

elements in the picture coexist harmoniously, creating a tranquil and indifferent artistic conception atmosphere. At the same time, the painter incorporates his awe of nature and yearning for the harmonious coexistence of man and nature into his paintings, which makes the paintings have profound ideological connotations and strong emotional expressions. To sum up, the influence of Confucian philosophical thought on the artistic creation of Chinese landscape painting is multifaceted, among which the artistic characteristics and aesthetic pursuit of landscape painting are an important embodiment of this influence. Through an in-depth analysis of the brushwork techniques, compositional layout, artistic conception creation and emotional expression of landscape painting, we can more clearly understand the important role played by Confucianism in the artistic creation of landscape painting.

### 3. THE INFLUENCE OF CONFUCIAN PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT ON THE ARTISTIC CREATION OF LANDSCAPE PAINTING

#### 3.1 The Embodiment of Confucian Morality in Landscape Painting

Confucian philosophical thought, as an important part of traditional Chinese culture, has a profound moral concept that has had a profound impact on the creation of Chinese landscape painting. This influence is not only reflected in the moral cultivation and creative concept of landscape painters, but also conveys the essence of Confucian moral concepts through their works. In Confucian philosophical thought, moral cultivation is seen as the foundation of personal growth and social harmony. For landscape painters, this kind of moral cultivation is often internalized into their creative philosophy and becomes the guiding ideology of their artistic creation. While pursuing artistic attainments, landscape painters pay more attention to the cultivation of their own moral character, believing that only people with noble moral character can create works that truly touch people's hearts. Therefore, in the creation of landscape paintings, it is not difficult to see that the painters' depictions of natural scenes often incorporate the understanding and expression of Confucian moral concepts. Specifically, the embodiment of Confucian morality in landscape painting can be analyzed from many aspects. First of all, landscape paintings show a harmonious and tranquil natural beauty through artistic means such as composition, brushwork, etc. This sense of beauty not only stems from the artist's exquisite depiction of natural scenes, but also lies in the Confucian moral concepts such as "harmony, respect, purity, and

silence" behind it. For example, in landscape painting, painters often use compositional techniques such as symmetry and echo to create a sense of balance and harmony, which is the embodiment of Confucian "harmony" thought. At the same time, the use of brush and ink in landscape painting also pays attention to the sense of rhythm and rhythm, and expresses the charm of natural scenery through the priority of brushstrokes and the dryness and wetness of the ink color, conveying the Confucian attitude of "respect". Secondly, in the choice of subject matter, landscape paintings often tend to show those characters or scenes with noble character and moral sentiments. These works convey the core values of Confucian morality by depicting the behavior and spiritual outlook of the characters in the natural landscape. For example, in many landscape paintings, we can see the appearance of hermits, masters and other figures, sitting alone in the secluded fence, or stroking the qin, or tasting tea and discussing the Tao, these images are undoubtedly the embodiment of Confucian moral ideals. Through the shaping of these images, the painters not only express their pursuit and yearning for noble virtues, but also imperceptibly guide the audience to think about and practice Confucian morality. In addition, landscape paintings also convey Confucian morality through allegorical and symbolic techniques. Painters often use natural scenery to express their emotions and ideals, and integrate Confucian moral concepts into them, so that their works have a deeper connotation and meaning. For example, in landscape paintings, pine trees are often used to symbolize the spiritual qualities of perseverance and perseverance; Bamboo symbolizes the moral sentiment of high wind and bright festival and humility and upwardness. These allegories and symbols not only enrich the artistic expression of landscape paintings, but also enable the audience to feel the edification and enlightenment of Confucian moral concepts while appreciating the works. To sum up, the influence of Confucian philosophical thought on the artistic creation of Chinese landscape painting is far-reaching and extensive. It not only shapes the moral cultivation and creative concept of landscape painters, but also conveys the essence and value of Confucian moral concepts through his works. In the future creation of landscape painting, we should continue to uphold the Confucian moral concept, integrate it into artistic creation, and create more landscape painting works with profound connotation and unique charm.

### 3.2 The Consistency Between Confucian Aesthetics and the Aesthetic Pursuit of Landscape Painting

As an important part of traditional Chinese culture, Confucian

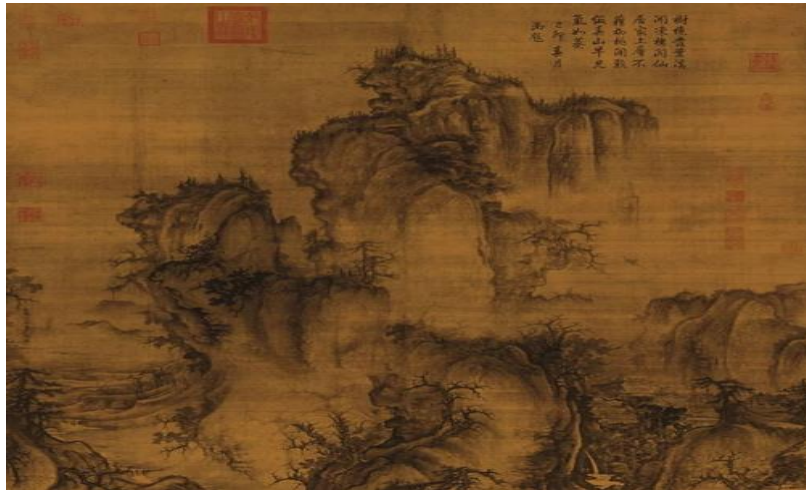


philosophical thought has penetrated into all fields of Chinese art, especially in the creation of Chinese landscape painting(Law, 2011). There is a significant consistency between the aesthetics of Confucianism and the aesthetic pursuit of landscape painting, which is not only reflected in the common pursuit of the beauty of neutrality, but also in the mutual echo between the literati interest and the poetic expression of landscape painting(Wei, 2019). First of all, the beauty of neutrality in Confucian philosophy emphasizes a kind of harmony, balance, and moderation of beauty. This aesthetic concept is fully embodied in Chinese landscape painting. The composition of landscape painting often pursues the overall harmony and balance of the picture. Through the ingenious layout, the painter makes the elements such as mountains, water, trees, and stones have their own places in the picture, echoing each other, and together constitute a harmonious and unified picture. This composition is the specific application of Confucian neutralizing beauty in the creation of landscape painting. For example, in the works of the Song Dynasty painter Guo Xi, we can see how he used the "Three Distances Method" to construct a sense of space in the picture, so that scenes with different distances and heights coexist harmoniously in the picture, showing a kind of neutral beauty. Secondly, the literati interest in Confucian philosophy also had a profound impact on the poetic expression of Chinese landscape painting. The literati emphasized an attitude of life that is detached from the world, pursuing spiritual freedom and personality independence. This attitude to life is vividly reflected in landscape paintings. Through the use of brush and ink, the painter transforms natural scenery into poetic artistic images, thus expressing his love for nature and perception of life. This kind of poetic expression is the natural expression of Confucian literati's interest in the art of landscape painting. For example, in the Yuan Dynasty painter Huang Gongwang's "Fuchun Mountain Residence", we can see how he uses elegant brushwork and simple lines to depict the landscape scenery on both sides of the Fuchun River, making the whole picture full of poetry and charm. To sum up, the influence of Confucian philosophical thought on the artistic creation of Chinese landscape painting is far-reaching and extensive. The consistency between Confucian aesthetics and the aesthetic pursuit of landscape painting is not only reflected in the common pursuit of the beauty of neutrality, but also in the mutual echo between the literati interest and the poetic expression of landscape painting. This influence not only enriches the artistic connotation of landscape painting, but also enhances its aesthetic value and cultural taste. Therefore, when studying and appreciating Chinese landscape paintings, we cannot ignore the

important role played by Confucian philosophical thought.

#### 4. CASE STUDY: THE SPECIFIC EXPRESSION OF CONFUCIAN PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT IN LANDSCAPE PAINTINGS

When analyzing the specific representation of Confucian philosophical ideas in landscape paintings, we should first select representative landscape paintings for in-depth analysis. These works should not only occupy an important place in the history of Chinese landscape painting, but also clearly reflect the influence of Confucian philosophical thought. Through this analysis, we can more clearly understand how Confucian philosophy permeates the artistic creation of Chinese landscape painting, and how this influence is reflected in specific works. Take Guo Xi's Early Spring in the Song Dynasty as an example, as shown in Figure 4. This work is not only known for its exquisite brushwork and compositional layout, but more importantly, it deeply reflects the Confucian philosophy of "the unity of heaven and man" (Liu, 2014; Yang, 2015). In "Early Spring", Guo Xi depicts the vitality of the mountains and rivers in early spring through delicate brushstrokes, showing the beautiful scene of harmonious coexistence between nature and human beings. This praise of the beauty of nature and the pursuit of a harmonious relationship between man and nature are important concepts advocated by Confucian philosophy.



**Figure 4:** Early Spring Painting by Guo Xi in Song Dynasty

Further analysis of the Confucian philosophical elements in Early Spring, we can find that Guo Xi uses the "method of distance and proximity" in the composition, creating a sense of spatial profundity through the distance and near layers of mountains and rivers and the swirling of clouds and mist. This composition not only embodies the "golden mean" in Confucian

philosophy, emphasizing the balance and harmony of things, but also reflects Confucianism's pursuit of cosmic order. In the Confucian view, everything in the universe has its own internal laws and order, and artists should also follow this law in the creative process in order to achieve the inner harmony of the work. In addition, the use of brush and ink in "Early Spring" also fully reflects the influence of Confucian philosophy. Guo Xi pursues the "bone method of using the brush" in pen and ink, paying attention to the change of pen power and the level of ink color, so that the work has both a solid skeleton and rich connotation. The use of this technique not only demonstrates the artist's profound skills, but more importantly, it reflects the importance that Confucian philosophy attaches to "both internal and external cultivation". Confucianism believes that a person must not only have high moral character, but also have solid knowledge and skills, and this concept is perfectly reflected in Guo Xi's "Early Spring". In addition to Early Spring, there are many other landscape paintings that also deeply reflect the influence of Confucian philosophical thought. For example, Huang Gongwang's "Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains" in the Yuan Dynasty shows the beautiful scenery on both sides of the Fuchun River with its extra-long length and grand composition. In Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains, as shown in Figure 5, Huang Gongwang uses elegant brushwork and delicate brushstrokes to depict the mist between the mountains and rivers and the scene of fishing boats singing at night, embodying a feeling of detachment from the world and a return to nature (Xiao-Ming, 2016). This sentiment coincides with the idea of "seclusion" in Confucian philosophy, expressing the artist's yearning for freedom of mind and away from the hustle and bustle.



**Figure 5:** Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains

To sum up, through an in-depth analysis of the Confucian philosophical elements and their artistic expressions in typical landscape paintings, we

can more clearly understand the important influence of Confucian philosophical thought on the artistic creation of Chinese landscape painting. This influence is not only reflected in the choice of subject matter and composition layout of the work, but also in the brushwork technique and the artist's creative philosophy. Therefore, when studying the art of Chinese landscape painting, we cannot ignore the important cultural background and ideological source of Confucian philosophy.

## 5. CONCLUSION

As an important part of traditional Chinese culture, Confucian philosophy has penetrated into all aspects of Chinese landscape painting. In different historical periods, the changes in the style of landscape painting are closely related to the development of Confucianism, and this relationship is not only reflected in the art form, but also in the artist's aesthetic pursuit and spiritual realm. In the pre-Qin period, Confucianism was initially formed, and its emphasis on "benevolence", "righteousness", "propriety", and "wisdom". Moral concepts such as "wisdom" and "faith" have laid an ethical foundation for the artistic creation of landscape painting. Although the landscape paintings of this period have not yet formed an independent painting department, the rudiments of landscape elements can already be glimpsed in the artworks such as bronze, pottery and jade. These landscape elements are often combined with the moral concepts advocated by Confucianism, and convey the pursuit of harmony and order through symbolism and metaphor. With the passage of history, Confucianism was further developed and perfected during the Han and Tang dynasties. The unification ideology of the Han Dynasty and the inclusive spirit of the Tang Dynasty provided a broad cultural soil for the prosperity of landscape painting art. During this period, landscape painting gradually became independent from the background of figure painting, and became an important artistic carrier for expressing natural beauty and expressing emotions. The concept of "the unity of heaven and man" in Confucianism has been vividly reflected in the landscape paintings of this period. Through the use of brush and ink, the artists integrate natural scenery with human emotions, showing a spiritual realm that transcends the outside of objects and breathes and shares the same fate with heaven and earth. During the Song and Yuan dynasties, Confucianism underwent the transformation and sublimation of science, with more emphasis on inner cultivation and moral consciousness. This change of thinking has had a

profound impact on the artistic creation of landscape painting. On the basis of inheriting the tradition of predecessors, the landscape painting of the Song and Yuan dynasties paid more attention to the expressiveness of brush and ink and the creation of artistic conception. Through exquisite brush and ink skills, the artists vividly portray the charm and temperament of landscapes, and at the same time incorporate their own deep perception of nature, life and the universe. This perception echoes the spirit of Confucianism, which embodies the artists' unremitting pursuit of truth and morality. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the dominance of Confucianism in the social and cultural fields was further consolidated. At the same time, the art of landscape painting has also ushered in new development opportunities. On the basis of inheriting the tradition of the Song and Yuan dynasties, landscape painting in the Ming and Qing dynasties paid more attention to personalized and innovative expression. Artists have explored new brush-and-ink languages and compositional methods, in order to convey a more unique and profound aesthetic experience in their works. This aesthetic experience is in line with the Confucian concept of "harmony but difference", showing the artists' yearning and pursuit of the social ideal of harmonious coexistence while pursuing artistic individuality. To sum up, the influence of Confucian philosophical thought on the artistic creation of Chinese landscape painting is all-round and multi-layered. It not only shaped the aesthetic concept and spiritual connotation of landscape painting, but also promoted the continuous development and innovation of landscape painting art in the long history. Through an in-depth analysis of the relationship between the changes in landscape painting styles and Confucianism in different historical periods, we can more clearly understand the far-reaching significance and value of this influence.

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