The Emergence of Chinese Landscape Painting and the Philosophy of the Wei and Jin Dynasties

Xiaoqing Cai
College of education, Anyang University, Anyang 364856, Gyeonggi, Korea

Qingning Lu*
School of Chinese Painting, Hubei Institute of Fine Arts, Wuhan 430205, Hubei, China
20183056@hifa.edu.cn

Abstract: The longest period of political disunity in the history of mainland China was comprised by the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties. At this time, the country was riven with violence, with China's celebrated martial arts occupying a prominent cultural and historical role. Broadly speaking, the same era saw a form of extended confrontation between south and north. The atmosphere of political strife inevitably generated misery for large swathes of the population. For many, the present provoked a sense of despair. Understandably, then, such individuals sought to focus on a nebulous, more favorable future, while popular consciousness reflected trends of seclusion and withdrawal from the world. At the same time, there was a marked increase in the human sense of affinity with nature. In addition to a rise in the popularity of metaphysical thought, furthermore, there was an increase in enthusiasm for Taoism and "foreign" Buddhism, combined with a relative decline in the allure of Confucianism. Inevitably, contemporary art was impacted by these cultural and philosophical developments. In the realm of painting, in particular, a sense of intellectual liberation gave rise to a proliferation of artistic modes and styles, in sharp contrast to the preceding period. Painting also became a favored pastime of China's literati, and the era saw the emergence of numerous, highly skilled artists. Obvious examples included the Western Jin Dynasty's Cao Buxing, and Gu Kaizhi in the Dynasty's Eastern counterpart. Landscape painting, moreover, had begun to evince new developments by the time of the earlier Wei and Jin dynasties. Greater attention, for instance, was devoted to perspective and the delineation of depth. True, landscape art of the period was dominated by the color green, as one may see if one examines the piece, "The Sky and the Water are Empty Blue." Nonetheless, during the dynasties of the Jin and Song, a love of personal freedom and an attraction to nature were combined with a flourishing of metaphysics. These phenomena provided fertile spiritual ground for the emergence of a more autonomous tradition of landscape painting. The latter grew in popularity, as appreciation of nature provided an impetus for artistic endeavor. Previously seen as an adjunct to other forms of artistic expression, landscape painting had largely established itself as an independent genre by the time of the Six Dynasties. Nevertheless, while the art of the period successfully evoked the beauty of rivers and mountains, form and structure remained naïve. Artists, for example, still relied heavily on traditional outlining, with little attention given to nuance or subtlety. At the same time, an objective appreciation of natural scenery and

a subjective passion for "life" permitted a partial transcendence of immature technique. This gave rise, for example, to the particularly elegant and ethereal quality of landscape art in the wake of the Eastern Jin Dynasty. This artistic vision seemed redolent of a longing for personal freedom, latent in Chinese culture for centuries.
Keywords: Metaphysics, Buddhist Philosophy, Landscape Painting, Landscape Painting Theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

While political chaos may have typified the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties, these were also periods of vibrant thought and relatively open social conditions. Such a relaxation of rigid social norms also proved fruitful for the production of art. As the Han Empire collapsed, Confucianism lost its erstwhile position as a dominant orthodoxy, to be progressively supplanted by other intellectual trends, including metaphysics. Political change, as we have noted, also permeated and shaped developments in the visual arts. Furthermore, Buddhism found a fertile breeding ground in a country wracked by violence and social dislocation. Since Earth seemed to offer little but anarchy, danger and despoliation, it was natural for individuals to turn their thoughts to the consolations of heaven (C. Li, 2021; J. Li, 2022).

More cynically, the era's rulers were able to deploy religion as a kind of political tool, using philosophy as a means of legitimizing exploitation, or at least, reconciling the public to their depredations. A populace focused on heaven was less likely to resist injustice in the material world, and consequently, Buddhism spread quickly throughout China as a whole. It flourished, in particular, under the aegis of the Northern and Southern dynasties, where the popularity of the religion was reflected in the proliferation of "Buddha lamps."

The new prevalence of Buddhism, meanwhile, inevitably gave an impetus to Buddhist trends and impulses in the creative arts. The Three Kingdoms period saw the beginning of a large migration of Tianzhu monks to the east of the country. These incomers brought with them substantial quantities of Buddhist statues and scriptures; they also built temples and preached sermons. The eastward movement of the Buddhist religion, moreover, generated a degree of fusion with Chinese traditional art, and "Buddhist" painting found increasing favor with local populations.

This trend continued throughout the Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties, giving rise to a certain hierarchy of artistic achievement. Hence, while the Three Kingdoms were outdone by the two Jin dynasties, the latter

were in turn surpassed by the Northern and Southern dynasties, with the Northern "inferior" to the Southern. In terms of painting, the advantage of the Southern Dynasty over its Northern counterpart, admittedly small, was driven by the enthusiasm of the former emperors for the promotion of visual art (Z. Li, 2021).

The upheavals of this period in Chinese history, then, with the concomitant decay of rigid social norms and the *de facto* toleration of free thought, combined with the mounting influence of metaphysics, Taoism and Buddhism to generate an aesthetic paradigm shift. In the Wei and Southern dynasties, in particular, landscape painting finally came into its own as a respected independent genre. A rich vein of visual-artistic achievement, meanwhile, was driven by a synergy of Buddhist painting, "foreign" Buddhist art and the traditional art of China itself (Lu, 2019; Zhu, 2020).

The sheer number of painters expanded, new masters appeared, and attainment was especially notable in the burgeoning field of landscape art. This period, indeed, saw the emergence of China's first body of visual-artistic theory, with the production of numerous texts on the subject of landscape painting signifying the increasing prestige of the genre. In fact, the flourishing of landscape painting during the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties may be deemed a significant watershed in the evolution of Chinese art *per se*. This was the beginning of a golden era in the field of landscape painting, in particular (Zhang, 2018).

2. MAINSTREAM PHILOSOPHICAL TRENDS IN THE WEI AND JIN DYNASTIES

2.1. The Metaphysics of "Yi," "Lao" and "Zhuang"

The philosophical and cultural changes that characterized this period were underpinned by the metaphysics of the Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties. Within "Wei Jin metaphysics," for example, the word "Xuan" evinced particular meaning. The term originally appeared in the early "Book of Songs," and its significance was linked to certain practices of ancient observation. Semantically and observationally, "Xuan" was closely related to "heaven," just as, in terms of observation, there was a close cultural relationship between "water" and "mystery." Both "water" and "heaven" were pregnant with great latent meaning, and in the absence of modern technologies, contemporaries faced challenges in defining phenomena precisely. This led complex and sophisticated subjects to be

grouped together under the umbrella term of "mystery." In time, however, "mystery" was also used to denote phenomena regarded as unpredictable, "difficult to distinguish," profound, or merely "quiet." The first thinker to attempt to clarify the concept of "Xuan" was Laozi, and in the latter's work, one encounters references to "the designation of similar things as 'Xuan.'"

Moreover, we read that, "Often knowing the form of Jishi is called Xuande," and in turn, this affected the significance of "Xuande" within the metaphysical thought of the Jin and Wei dynasties. The metaphysician Wang Bi perceived "Xuande" in "Laozi" as a form of mysterious, distant phenomenon; much like the "Xuande" within "Xuanxue," this had implications of unknowability. At the same time, "Xuande" was perceived as the foundation of universal consciousness – the consciousness, in other words, of everything within the world (Zhang, 2018; Zhao, 2016).

In the wake of Taoism, great significance was also attached to "Xuan" by Yang Xiong, a thinker of the later Western Han Dynasty. In his magnum opus, "Tai Xuan," this scholar expanded upon the intellectual legacies of "Zhouyi" and "Laozi," treating "Xuan" as the most important component of Tai Xuan thought. More precisely, for Yang Xiong, Xuan Dao was seen as the origin of the universe, while the Xuan diagram provided the schema for the latter, and all earthly and heavenly phenomena were merely specific presentations of that schema. In fact, "Xuan," within the book "Tai Xuan," is represented as immaterial and devoid of image. It is deemed a kind of universal connector, and as a moral imperative that unites the ancient with the modern. Not only does Xuan dominate everything, however; it also determines the manner in which phenomena are transformed or generated. The metaphysics of the Wei and Jin dynasties were, indeed, inspired by the "Tai Xuan," which provided the philosophical underpinning for the formal inception of the three "Yi," "Lao" and "Zhuang" metaphysical paradigms (Shi, 2015).

The work of Lao Zhuang may be regarded as the spiritual core of Wei and Jin metaphysics, for which the primary preoccupations were "heaven," "mankind," and the relationship between nature and religion. During the dynasties of Wei and Jin, metaphysics also referenced the twin phenomena of action and speech, and such thought was expressed with a notable elegance and profundity. Meanwhile, discussions of the nature of the universe and the meaning of life influenced the thought of contemporary artists, providing a foundation for a philosophy of landscape painting that privileged man's relationship with nature. The so-called "Qing discussion," or "Qing Tan," emerged towards the end of the Han Dynasty. This informal association of literati evinced a keen preoccupation with

metaphysics, alongside an enthusiasm for the construction of theoretical systems.

While such intellectuals were concerned with worldly affairs, however, they were often constrained from expressing their views openly. The combination of clear talk and the art of health preservation, scholars eat five stones scattered drinking, mood change, uninhibited behavior, wearing elegant, forming a special style of The Times, known as the Wei and Jin style In fact, the so-called "Wei and Jin" style may be seen as a form of manifestation of externalized metaphysics. The era's metaphysics, in turn, were essentially concerned with spiritual transcendence, the meaning of existence, and the "freedom" of mankind and its inherent nature (Shi, 2015).

2.2. Buddhist philosophy

During the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern dynasties, Buddhist philosophy achieved a formidable academic distinction, and it may be regarded as a central facet of the era's thought. Metaphysics within the period evinced various nuances and vicissitudes, however, and two stages may be detected within the Buddhist philosophy exemplified by the Buddhist *Praina*, namely, the periods of Dao'an and Kumarashi-Sangzhao. Key concerns at this time were the various theoretical distinctions pertaining to space and color.The first climax of Buddhist thought in China, meanwhile, was embodied by the philosophy of Daoan. The period from the Han to the Wei and Jin dynasties was characterized by the continued spread of Buddhist ideas, and this also involved the dissemination of classical Buddhist texts. These included various prophecies, the *Praina,* as translated by Shulan, and the Dharma translation of the Mahayana. Each of these were closely intertwined with the Daoan philosophical tradition, and the resulting thought lay at the center of Jin Buddhism.

The concept of "reality" derives from Kumarosh, with "reality" signifying "emptiness," and "empty" signifying the "reality of things," which is "ultimately empty." The philosophy of emptiness was sublimated to a new degree by "Kumar," and this in turn guided the monastic "no vacuum" principle. "Kumar" held that there is no life, but also no destruction.

From that point onwards, Chinese Buddhism deployed "space" as the foundation of its philosophical system and critical thought. This opened new avenues for the subsequent evolution of Buddhist thought in the country (Cao, 2014). Daoan thought was inherited and further developed

by Huiyan, who also influenced the evolution of Peantan Buddhism, Western Jing Buddhism, the "Chinese view doctrine" and Zen Dharma. A rational premise for Huiyan's proposition of divine non-immortality was provided by his creative interpretation of the Buddhist philosophy of Nerji, and his exploration of the "advanced consciousness" involved in "becoming a Buddha."A further high point in Chinese Buddhist thought was reflected in the thought of Seng Zhao. The latter deployed "common essence," "true essence," and "the existential realm" as the basis for an explanation of reality. Seng Zhao further reflected on the nature of being, "movement and stillness," and the use of the body.

He both summarized and critiqued the thought of China's Prajnaparamita Buddhist school, and he criticized, albeit indirectly, various elements of the Wei Dynasty and Jin Dynasty metaphysics. Both the Zhongdao Thought of the Three Treatises and the Mahayana Prajnaparamita school were substantially developed under the influence of Seng Zhao, who may be said to have established a unique form of "Buddhist philosophy with Chinese characteristics." Indeed, he remains one of the central figures in the evolution of the country's Buddhist tradition.

This critical period in the development of Chinese Buddhist thought was further influenced by the work of Zhu Daosheng. The latter strove to integrate Nirvana, Prajna and Pitan, and his interrogation of the "three sources" created a new paradigm for the country's Buddhism. Zhu Daosheng provided influential reflections on the nature of the Buddha and enlightenment, positing the former's nature as the internal spiritual foundation for the latter and for spiritual liberation. He also expounded on the character of enlightenment as a means of attaining true consciousness. Zhu Daosheng was to prove a critical figure in the later Sinicization of Buddhist thought, particularly in terms of Zen philosophy.

3. THE MAINSTREAM PHILOSOPHICAL TRENDS OF THE WEI AND JIN DYNASTIES, AND WEI AND JIN AESTHETICS

3.1. Aesthetic thoughts in the Wei and Jin metaphysics

The aesthetics of both the Wei and Jin dynasties were profoundly influenced by metaphysics. Indeed, Zhang Jie's *Zen Aesthetics* adumbrates the key attributes of metaphysical aesthetics as embodying "the comprehensive aesthetics of Taoism and Confucianism based on Taoism." The same work examines the ways in which the particular aesthetic

mindsets of the Wei and Jin periods were impacted by metaphysics *per se,* alongside a delineation of the metaphysical "White View." Metaphysics may be regarded as the philosophical sublimation of the two dynasties' aesthetic consciousness, while they also provided the latter's methodological framework.

The individual was thought to evince limitations *vis-à-vis* the inner spirit and the "personality ideal," and in turn, this provided the means whereby aesthetics and metaphysics were internally linked. In terms of the meaning of life and its value, the role of learning was to facilitate the ontological construction of the personality ideal. This would extend to the infinite, beyond the merely finite, and from the arena of daily life to the broader aesthetic environment. Indeed, the emergence of metaphysics provided an important intellectual outlet for scholars (Kang, 2014).

It afforded a viable foundation for thought regarding the divine, form, meaning, movement, "the present," and of course, aesthetics as such. Consequently, Chinese aesthetic terminology centered on a semantic succession of "united opposites." This enhanced the categorization of art, the psychological configuration of which was in turn shaped by metaphysics. The same process also exerted a decisive impact on the evolution of landscape painting. Under the influence of Wei and Jin metaphysics, this period also witnessed the formation of Xuan Dan thought, alongside the "contracted" and "detached" philosophies. Moreover, in terms of landscape art, aesthetic developments under Wei and Jin impacted subsequent aesthetic paradigms.

Examples include the so-called "Five Generations," brushwork techniques, the relationship of landscape to temperament, and the attention paid to "air, rhyme, thought, scene, pen, and ink." Within the metaphysics of the Six Dynasties era, reflections regarding both education and nature *per se* regulated the aesthetic interpretation of simplicity and natural phenomena. Contemporary metaphysics also evinced a preoccupation with the "wonderful," i.e., the ethereal and mysterious. The same concept influenced aesthetic reflections on the so-called complacent image, while literati interrogated putative dialectical relationships between artistic form and artistic image. An example of such thought, in the context of landscape painting, was Zong Bing's notion of the "vivid image". The Wei and Jin intellectuals of the Six Dynasties devoted substantial attention to worldly indifference, "seclusion," introspection, and the individual's relationship with the external world. Literature and art were subordinate to the greater imperative of man's spiritual journey to enlightenment; nonetheless, contemporary ethics did recognize the immense importance of artistic

endeavors in their own right. Meanwhile, new aesthetic possibilities were heralded by the rise in prominence of landscape art, with its particular preoccupations with mountains, rivers and the moon. Landscape painting was no longer seen as the lesser cousin of other, more established genres of art. As the genre evolved, moreover, it began to acquire a richer range of connotations. Landscape art was increasingly regarded, by its practitioners, as the representation of the "pure spiritual land," the epitome of Ningguo Zhou.

3.2. Aesthetic thought in Buddhist philosophy

As indicated above, the dissemination of Buddhist thought in China was closely connected to the rise of landscape painting as a genre. There were three principal components to this relationship, namely, "breaking," "establishing" and "surpassing." First, the emergence of the so-called "methodology of the middle way" led to the marginalization of certain visual and linguistic symbols of traditional Chinese culture: this elision was also a function of the Buddhist concept of emptiness. Second, a kind of spiritual ontology was generated by the introduction of spiritual and metaphysical paradigms to China, and this gave a much freer scope to local speculations regarding the divine, form, space, time, and "world." Thirdly, notions of purpose were subjected to intellectual deconstruction. Non-linguistic methods were often employed, in Buddhist Kongzong, to clarify the concept of emptiness. Indeed, greater efforts were made to explain key Buddhist concepts following the translation of Kumarashi. "Nothingness" is not an exact synonym of "emptiness," but the transformation of the first to the second was clarified, for the Chinese public, by "empty" modes of Buddhist thought. Landscape painting, furthermore, integrated both the category of emptiness and the Buddhist "middle method," and the evolution of the genre was in turn supported by the translation of "emptiness" as a category. Meanwhile, "middle way" methodology supported popular comprehension of concepts such as noumenon and appearance. The negation of everyday phenomena was achieved by a process of "shading," and artistic depictions of phenomena became increasingly independent of those constrained by language. The "negation of image," meanwhile, served as a conceptual forerunner of the later "operation of form and divinity (Hou, 2011)." Zong Bing made a critical contribution to the expansion of the aesthetics of form and the divine, from human beings to natural phenomena such as rivers and mountains. This individual's novel interpretations of issues concerning "god" and "shape" became a cornerstone of the emerging aesthetics of the landscape.

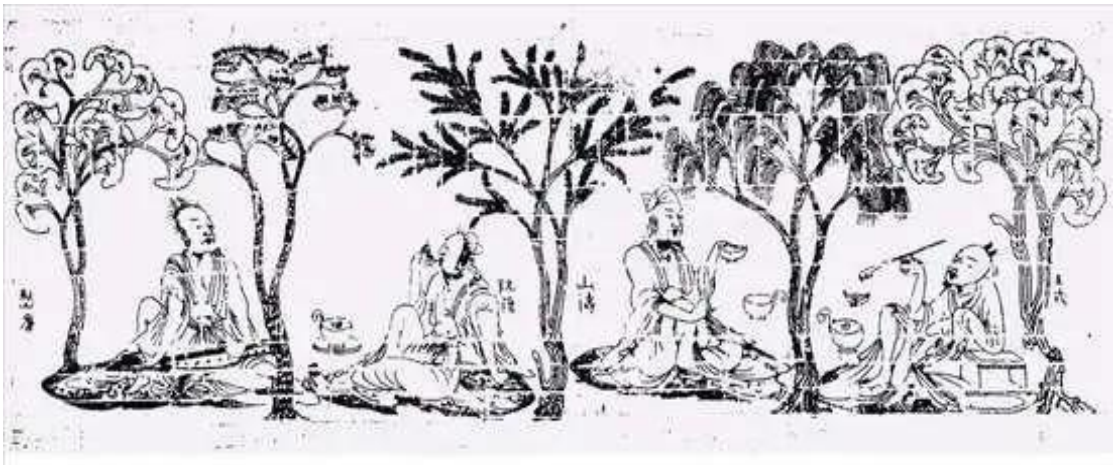
In fact, Zong Bing's contributions to landscape theory were eclectic, but his proposal of the "Chengjiang taste image" was especially significant. He developed a highly original methodology of the senses (visual, physical and aromatic), and he pioneered an imagery of "clarity and taste." True understanding, however, was a matter of the heart, not the senses, and observed imagery remained tied to a subjective state of mind. Conversely, within the "Buddhist environment," the human mind would be the object, and the transference of aesthetic objectivity from "natural scene" to the "environment of the heart" implicated the so-called "Chenghuai taste image." Second, in the particular layout methodology pioneered by Zong Bing for landscape art, a principle of "scattered perspective" was delineated, while the wider method was closely intertwined with Buddhist conceptions of space. While Buddhism affected the artistic endeavors of Wei and Jin China in numerous respects, moreover, it was in the domain of landscape painting that this influence was most pronounced. This was shown with particular clarity in changing attitudes to "layout," as well as in the enhanced status of the landscape genre as an avenue worthy of the best talent (Guo, 2008).

4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF LANDSCAPE PAINTING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF PHILOSOPHICAL TRENDS IN THE WEI AND JIN DYNASTIES

4.1. Landscape painting in embryonic form

In the period of transition from the Han to the Southern and Northern dynasties, the art of the Three Kingdoms and the two Jin dynasties continued to reflect the dominance of traditional painting. Still, natural elements such as terrain and trees began to appear on certain brick-based paintings and murals, even if only in a background capacity. Trees were also deployed as a means of visually separating figures. In "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Forest and Rongqi Qi," a work of the Eastern Jin Dynasty, for example, a total of eight characters were separated by ten trees, the species of which included pine, elm, ginkgo, locust and willow. The trees are charming, even if their representation is stylized. A similar style of depiction can be discerned in the trees in the background of "Luoshen Fu Tu," by Gu Kaizhi. Indeed, this painting deploys not only trees as background material, but also rocks and mountains, within a scene that further includes chariots, mythological imagery, horses and human beings. Again, one notes a degree of stylization rather than naturalism. The trees

are ornate, almost like peacock tails, but they are scarcely realistic. Similarly, the stones and mountains evince little natural coloration, let alone the cracks or irregularities that one would encounter in real life. These are excessively "neat" mountains, reminiscent of those one might see in the murals of the Dunhuang Grottoes of the Northern and Western Mei. In summary, such works indicate that Buddhist aesthetics, and particularly murals, exerted an influence on the landscape painting of the period, but that the latter was not yet stylistically mature (Xu, 2008). Zhang Yanyuan states the following in his Records of Famous Paintings of the Past Dynasties: "Since the Wei and Jin dynasties, famous sites have been seen in the world [sic.]. In the painting of landscapes, the peaks are adorned with rows of rhinoceros, or the water does not flow, or the people are larger than the mountains. They are all accompanied by trees and stones, reflecting the land and vegetation." (See Zhang Yanyuan, Records of Famous Paintings of the Past Dynasties, Volume 1, page 15.) We know of various landscape paintings created by eminent figures of the era, such as Lady Zhao, and indeed, the new generation of artists was not without aristocratic sponsors. Sun Quan, for example, noting that neither Wei nor Shu had "flat" landscapes, desired an artist to provide more realistic depictions of rivers and mountains. Consequently, Lady Zhao produced a painting entitled "The Style of the Nine Mountains in the Jianghu." Regrettably, this work has not survived, so the modern scholar may only speculate on its artistic qualities. In this period, moreover, the influence of Confucian ethics on Chinese society remained significant, and there was a persistent tendency to see the visual arts primarily as an educational medium, a tool in the support of popular, ethical instruction. Mountains and rivers, within this Confucian paradigm, were still regarded with an essentially practical eye. There was little sense, as yet, of their intrinsic value as aesthetic phenomena (Zhou & Shi, 1997).



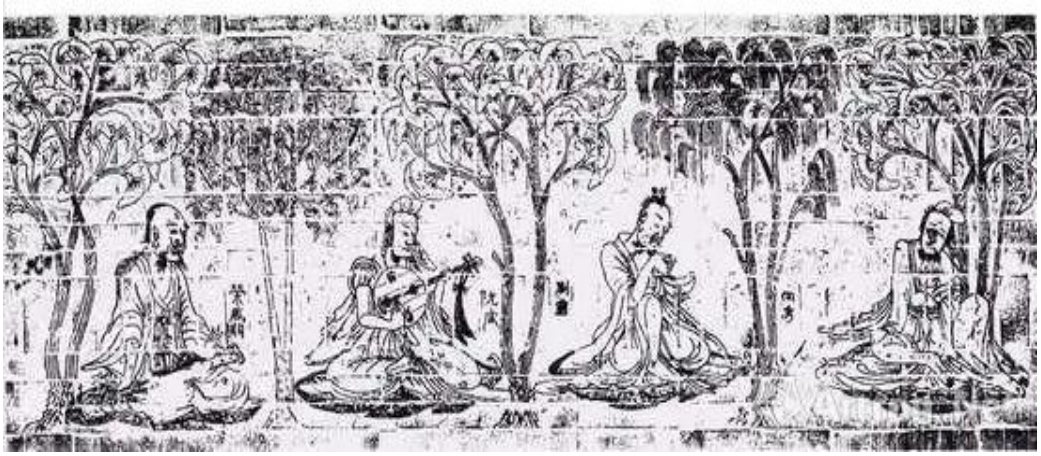


Figure 1: Rubbings of the "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Forest," and Rong Qiqi's portrait bricks

Figure 2: Eastern Jin Dynasty, Gu Kaizhi's "Ode to the God of Luo" (detail)

4.2. The origins of "independent" landscape painting

During the Jin Dynasty, Dai Kui achieved fame as both a portrait artist and a painter of landscapes. Zhang Yanyuan, in his *Famous Paintings of all the Dynasties* (Tang Dynasty), noted that Dai Kui "painted ancient people and had wonderful landscapes." In fact, landscape art as a genre in its own right emerged around the middle of the Wei and Jin dynasties. Dai Kui appears to have chosen a life of seclusion, influenced both by metaphysics, the contemporary social environment, and China's troubled political climate. Alongside mountains, Dai Kui's landscapes contained houses made of stone, although there was a general impression of seclusion. In the depiction of trees and other natural phenomena, in fact, the early Wei / Jin period evinced considerable progress (F. Li, 2022). Rocks, for example, were more naturalistic, and spatial relationships between the components of the era's paintings demonstrated a credible, if compact, sense of perspective. Dai Kui's *oeuvre* demonstrated a kind of quiet elegance, and its deceptive simplicity sat alongside the artist's intuitive command of the

qualities of objective phenomena.

Dai Kui seems to have regarded nature as an instrument for the cultivation of human morality, the promotion of a "good mind," and the pursuit of spiritual freedom. Indeed, he held that the appreciation of natural landscapes offered a credible route towards mental purification. This was to be an influential idea in the subsequent development of Chinese landscape art. Both form and "spirit" were perennial preoccupations of the landscape genre in China, not least because, since its inception, it had been regarded as a form of auxiliary teaching resource. Art was not a matter of mere pleasure. For various reasons, then, Dai Kui was a logical candidate to be the pioneer of landscape painting in the China of his day (Le et al., 2022).

Figure 3: (Eastern Jin Dynasty) Dai Kui (Biography) Shanshan Scroll (Partial)

Confronting each other across the Yangtze River, the Northern and Southern dynasties engaged in frequent warfare. Conversely, relative stability was maintained in Jiangnan, and there was considerable southward migration in the period on the part of both literati and northern elites. Cultural life flourished in the contemporary south, and both literature and painting were developing in parallel with novel philosophical trends. Literati frustrated by the vicissitudes of everyday life found themselves drawn to the natural world, seeking solace in the beauty of rivers and mountains.

Under the impetus of this psychological attraction, landscape painting manifested rapid development (Wan, 2007). Certain figures of the period evinced skill in more than one artistic form. Xiao Ben, for example, a landscape artist of the Liang Dynasty, was also a talented writer and calligraphist. Under the Liang Dynasty, indeed, landscape art reached new heights, transcending the relative immaturity of the Wei and Jin periods,

when (for example) water was represented crudely and human beings appeared larger than mountains. There was also an increased sophistication in the use and depiction of space, and in the general theorization of art. In this vein, Nan Chen Yao observed, in his *Continuation of Painting,* that, "Elegance and precision are difficult to compare, containing a trace of life [sic.], and action must be based on truth. Learning is not for oneself, but for [purposes of] entertainment."

The Northern and Southern dynasties produced numerous painters of distinction, such as Gu Kaizhi, Lu Tanwei, Wu Daozi and Zhang Sengyou. The latter, in particular, achieved distinction in the field of mural painting. His large landscape painting, "Snow Mountain of Mangroves," also evinces signs of mural technique, with its shapes outlined in light-colored ink, and its generous use of white powder, green and vermilion. Such landscape styles also reflected the influence of metaphysics and Buddhism, especially in terms of color, theme, and spatial configuration. In the case of Zhang Sengyou's "Snow Mountain," for instance, spatial lacunae and the general composition suggest the Buddhist perspective of "emptiness," and the use of color is especially reminiscent of Buddhist murals. There is also a sense of seclusion, redolent of contemporary metaphysics (Cao, 2009).

Zhang Sengyou was adept, not merely at Buddhist mural art, but also at the painting of Tianzhu monastic statues, and he was profoundly influenced by the artistic techniques of India. The dissemination of Buddhist thought in the Southern, Northern, Wei and Jin dynasties, meanwhile, was reflected in the proliferation of temples and grottoes in their jurisdictions. Each of these structures contained both painted murals and Buddhist statue art; and murals, in particular, were an important medium for the dissemination of Buddhist ideas. Notably, the north contained numerous grotto murals, with much rich and vigorous painting in the "Western" style. Exquisite examples of such art were located at the Kizil and Maiji grottoes, among others.

These pieces, influenced by Qiuci stylization as well as Buddhism *per se,* were dominated by "stone green" and other "cool" colors, and stylistic innovations were apparent in the early frescoes of Dunhuang, as well as the Kizidya Buddhist murals. Indeed, certain cave murals of the Wei and Jin dynasties partially anticipate later "green" landscape painting. Convex and concave murals conveyed a sense of three dimensions, while art of this period further anticipated the development of the "Cun" method of landscape painting (Feng, 2011).Meanwhile, contemporary demand for Buddhist murals generated an increase in the number of painters, and in turn, this supported the evolution of "green landscape" art. One may say,

in summary, that the foundations for subsequent green landscape painting were provided by the Wei and Jin Buddhist murals.

1 **Figure 4:** (Liang) Zhang Sengyao, "Snow Mountain Red Tree Map"

While the aesthetics of the painters of the period were frequently colorful and "rich," artistic style was not merely a function of abstract ideas. Certainly, the landscape painters of the Wei and Jin dynasties were influenced by Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, as well as by the metaphysics of their time and place. Then as now, however, in terms of artistic style, painters evinced their own personal preferences, and aesthetic forms were by no means homogeneous. The paintings of the era thus defy any attempt at simplistic categorization (Zhang, 2000).

5. LANDSCAPE PAINTING THEORY, AS INFLUENCED BY THE PHILOSOPHICAL TRENDS OF THE WEI AND JIN DYNASTIES

Just as individual painting styles may be subject to diverse influences, painting theory may also be affected by a range of philosophical trends. One early treatise on the art of landscape painting, for instance, was Zong Bing's *Preface to Painting Mountains and Rivers*. It reflected the influence of both metaphysics and Buddhism, and in a period of vigorous artistic, literary and intellectual change, it was unsurprising that contemporary aesthetics were impacted by the various philosophical currents of Wei and Jin society. In addition to Zong Bing's *Preface,* one also finds *On Painting* from Gu Kaizhi, who further authored *Praise of the Prosperity of the Wei and Jin Dynasties,* and *Record of the Painting of Yuntai Mountain.* Alongside these

works, there was also Xiao Yi's *Songshi Ge of Landscape Painting,* and Wang Shei's *Xuhua.*

5.1. Gu Kaizhi's theory of painting

Gu Kaizhi was both a theorist of painting and a painter in his own right. Both his artworks and his commentaries attested to the fact that, in the Wei and Jin period, landscape art was finally emerging as a respected, independent genre. The increasing levels of attainment in the field, meanwhile, helped to secure and enhance this status. It was difficult to imbue human figures, horses and other animals, let alone inert landscapes, with "life," and this challenge was recognized by contemporaries. Fulfilling such a task required a degree of pertinent life experience on the part of the artist, as well as the capacity to integrate and exploit his or her artistic ideas, reflections and subjective emotions. As contemporary artists were beginning to appreciate, artistic depiction needed to be both natural and "lively." This required attention to detail, as well as an appreciation of noumenon metaphysics (Wang, 2002). In Gu Kaizhi's *On Painting,* careful attention was paid to the issue of "copying the method," but the artist was also preoccupied with questions of divinity and form. Both practical importance and theoretical significance were, in fact, attached to the question of "transcribing god with form." Gu Kaizhi was also deeply concerned with the aesthetic concept of "vividness," and this spiritual noumenon figured prominently in his own works of art.

Gu Kaishi provided a record of his own compositional methods in his text *Painting Yuntai Mountain.* The eponymous mountain, in the southeast of Sichuan's Cangxi county, was also the site of a monastery. Gu Kai was personally influenced by Taoism, and while the original painting has been lost, we retain the textual description of its composition. This document provides an important record of contemporary approaches to landscape art. An analysis of the text, therefore, allows us to associate the following characteristics with the genre in its early Chinese manifestation. First, careful attention was paid to color, with references to "red cliffs," the "color of clothing," "purple stone," and "empty green." Second, there was a preoccupation with realism, as reflected in the depiction of the sky, where, "the sky and water colors, all empty green, unexpectedly shift up and down to reflect the sun." Likewise , "the mountain has a face [which is shrouded in] shadow." Clearly, Gu Kaishi's descriptions of nature are rooted in reality and objective perception (Zong, 1981).

Third, and by contrast, the early landscape paintings of Gu Kaishi's era reflect a preoccupation with seclusion and immortality. Their primary focus

is not "nature imagery" in the conventional sense of the term. The text *Painting of Yuntai Mountain* is principally concerned with technique, but the content of the document demonstrates both that landscape art was a recognized genre at the time of writing, but also that its technical and aesthetic evolution was far from complete. This was acknowledged by the scholar Zong Baihua, who noted a preoccupation in contemporary landscapes with "rhythm," the passage of time, layering, and "poetic spirituality." Methodical attempts to "transform reality" were the very "embodiment of the landscape."

5.2. Zong Bing's theory of painting

A painter and calligrapher of the Southern Dynasty, Zong Bing had no formal state appointment, i.e., he was neither an administrator nor a bureaucrat, and he spent the bulk of his life in seclusion. He was, nonetheless, conspicuously learned, with an apparent love of travel, and Taoism lay at the center of his personal philosophy. At the same time, he was proficient in Lao Yi and an adherent of Buddhism, the study of which frequently led him to travel to Huiyuan. He was a frequent academic debater, and his *Preface to Landscape Painting* is the early theoretical work on the topic within the Chinese artistic canon. The text, which evinced a sophisticated combination of metaphysical and Buddhist reflection, achieved substantial influence, simultaneously shaping and reflecting philosophical attitudes to art and painting under the Wei and Jin dynasties.

The *Preface to Landscape Painting* provides a window onto its author's thought and erudition, and it also reflects Zong Bing's views regarding "negative withdrawal." He connects true landscape painting to the "Chengh" perspective or "Chang divinity." The tone for the text is established in the first two sentences, where Zong Bing announces that, "The sage determines the way. The sage has clear taste." The sage himself, in contemporary Buddhist thought, was a man who embodied, and was thoroughly permeated by, Buddhist philosophy, and who would also be proficient in Taoist philosophy. The Tao, maintained Zong Bing, echoing the thought of pre-Qin Taoism, was a mysterious absolute spirit. It was omnipresent at all times, the source and facilitator of all things. In the words of the author, "Today, a Yin and Yang is called Tao. Yin and Yang is called god." Moreover, "Tao is the truth that contains the universe," and it was "a reflection of all things." Indeed, for Zong Bing, all phenomena within the world stemmed from the "Buddha heart," i.e., the externalization of the spirit.

Zong Bing attributed clear tasks to the "sage," namely, "the clarification

of the image," "avoiding the worldly heart," spiritual enlightenment and liberation, communion with the infinite, and an indifference to illusory "reality." With this as a starting point, Zong Bing proceeded to set out his own precepts for successful landscape painting. The sage should deploy his subjective will as a means of imitating natural phenomena, which would thus be rendered accessible. The landscape, with its beautiful appearance, should be a source of happiness and benevolence, ultimately facilitating the purification of the mind. This purification, indeed, was the purpose of both sage and landscape, which were themselves functionally similar. The "true" landscape thus had a critically important role, and yet it might often be physically difficult to "visit famous mountains." Consequently, human beings required landscape painting.

For Zong Bing, form and shape were manifestations of divine creation, and landscape art was not merely a question of mechanically copying nature. Rather, it was an expression of the subjective spirit. If one were simply to transcribe shape to shape, or color to color, one would indeed produce little more than an imitation of nature. In the ideology of Zong Bing, however, the ideal was emphasized, rather than the merely naturalistic. Landscape painting, it followed, was not objective but subjective. To a degree, certainly, the artist must attend to the physical appearance of natural phenomena, but this scenery would be endowed with an "ideal" image, and nature would be shaped in accordance with an ideal vision. Superficial appearances, for Zong Bing, were essentially a means of "hiding the divine." It was not the surface of things that should concern the artist, therefore, but the inner spirit.

Landscape painting, to reiterate, required greater idealization than the natural scenery it sought to capture. When human beings compared such paintings with their original scenes, they should be able to perceive the spirit that lay behind physical manifestations. In this sense, the contemplation of art was an avenue to spiritual truth, and there was no greater joy than the contemplation of skilled landscape painting. As Zong Bing expressed the matter, "Chang God - God is free, and this is the first Yan!" As a painter himself, meanwhile, he pursued his idealized vision with boldness in his own *oeuvre.* He stressed the role of "Chang divinity" within the genre, as we have noted, and he was keenly preoccupied with the functional dimension of landscape art. He exerted a profound influence on subsequent generations of painters, and Zong Bing's theories had much to do with the fact that ancient Chinese landscape art transcended the mere reproduction of form, color and shape. This was the "ideal of the Qito painters." By the time of Zong Bing, in fact, landscape art had established

itself as an independent and well-regarded genre. This was an important watershed in the history of Chinese art. The latter was enriched and extended, and great pleasure was afforded to new generations of audiences. For some, landscape painting was a reflection of unworldly divinity, while for others it was primarily a source of pleasure or a means of recreation. Perceptions of the genre were, in any case, profoundly affected by the philosophical trends of the era, and few contemporary theorists of art were more influential than Zong Bing himself.

5.3. Wang Wei, and other contemporary theorists

Wang Wei was a contemporary of Zong Bing, and naturally enough, the former's ideas were also impacted by the philosophical currents of the Wei and Jin periods. There is, indeed, a good deal of agreement between the ideas set forth in Zong Bing's *Preface to Landscape Painting* and Wang Wei's *Xu Hua.* In the latter work, Wang Wei celebrated the beauty of natural phenomena such as mountains and rivers. Like Zong Bing, however, he emphasized that painting was not merely a question of copying forms. If it were, paintings would be little more than glorified maps. Rather, landscape art was a matter of elevated spirituality, and both the production and consumption of art were replete with emotion. Wang Wei sought to clarify the aesthetic principles underpinning the landscape genre, including the spiritual personification of nature. Thus, the artist had to do far more than "writing form with form, and presenting color with color." Rather, it was necessary to demonstrate a sophisticated metaphysical consciousness. Landscape painting, in sum, required the practitioner to "transcribe the form of the divinity."

In Xuhua, Wang Wei referenced the artist's desire to "accommodate himself" when he "talks about painting." In fact, this "accommodation" was the central proposition of the work, which was replete with aesthetic associations. Drawing and painting were not synonymous, the difference between the two being "Rongshi." For Wang Wei, however, "emptiness and stillness" were closely related to "capacity and momentum." This referenced the ideal state in which the human spirit would be liberated from the constraints of loss, gain, desire or utility, and in this state of supreme calm, objective phenomena would be transcended. The foundational premise of artistic conception was "Xu Jing," and this was a necessary condition for successful painting. More specifically, according to Wang Wei, "Those who are born with the form merge with the spirit, while those who are moved change with the heart". Again, Wang Wei was anxious to distinguish landscape painting from the mere making of maps. Painting was

not a matter of mechanistic copying; rather, it required a heart of sensitivity and flexibility. The painting of landscapes was not merely a matter of reproducing form. The artist needed to see beyond the latter, and what he found there might be described as "capacity," "emptiness," or the divine. Indeed, Wang Wei's emphasis on the synthesis of the "original form and the soul" was reminiscent of Zong Bing's desire to capture "the beauty of mountains and rivers." This required the transcendence of mere form, with the painter striving to evoke the spirit that the landscape contained.

Attempts at "writing the divine in form," as scholars such as Xu Fuguan indicated, were strongly influenced by metaphysical thought, for which painting served as a mode of expression. To create paintings that incorporated both form and spirit, Wang Wei asserted, the artist must "use a single brush to imitate the body of Tai Xu." In other words, all natural phenomena could be captured with this "single brush," but the human imagination was required to evoke the true image of the landscape, not merely its crude, superficial appearance. This concept lay at the heart of the era's aesthetic thought, and in terms of the landscape genre, it provided the foundation for contemporary Chinese rules in a range of areas, including composition, perspective, and the wider creative process.

The artist's personal emotions, according to Wang Wei's *Xuhua,* must be incorporated into his paintings. The text cited a range of aesthetic ideas, such as the "fusion of form and spirit," and "Mingshen Longzhi," which referenced the means whereby creative spirit could be translated into paintings, with (to reiterate) a concomitant unity of spirit and form. With his depictions of rivers, mountains and other natural phenomena, the painter expressed the inner spirit of his subject. This emphasis on the spiritual dimension of the visual arts, in fact, exerted a powerful influence on subsequent generations of landscape painters, for whom Wang Wei's intellectual legacy was highly significant.

Xiao Yi, the Emperor Yuan of Liang, was a skilled calligrapher and poet, as well as an accomplished painter. His text *Pine Stone Pattern of Mountains and Rivers* has survived, and within it, he raised certain novel points. First, he held that the style of a painting was determined by the artist's "cultivation." Second, he made various technical points regarding the deployment of ink, and the various visual effects it could achieve. This tells us, *inter alia,* something about the level of technical proficiency that had been achieved in China at the time. Since the period of the Eastern Jin Dynasty, meanwhile, calligraphy had evinced important advances, and it was known that artistic effects could be significantly influenced by the choice of ink color. Hence, questions of color received increasing attention

in the period.

Indeed, contemporary Chinese theorists were also exercised by the issue of "warm" and "cold" colors. This distinction was first advanced by the artist Xiao Yi, who noted that blue (for example) could be both cold and hot, while crimson and other shades of red were capable of conveying a sense of warmth to the spectator. Green, by contrast, conveyed a sense of coolness and contraction. Since nature itself had endowed human beings with sophisticated sensory receptors, a complex language of color could be employed, and the viewer would readily understand it. The entire natural environment, moreover, was replete with color-coded processes: the rising sun "turned the earth red," while at sunset, the sky changed from blue to green, and finally to black. Temperatures fell, and the earth relinquished its warmth. Color, then, lay at the center of nature, a fundamental signifier of organic and planetary processes. The endemic human feeling for color, so important for the artist, was intrinsically bound up with the natural cycles that color both represented and evoked.

For contemporary theorists, the use of color would not merely depict natural phenomena, such as (e.g.) sunny days: the artist could also use color to manipulate perceptions of space. The ideas of the painters and theorists of the time, indeed, were grounded in a sophisticated and detailed observation of nature, which in turn reflected a metaphysical conception of the universe, a complex system of ontological categories, and clear opinions regarding the character and cultivation that a successful painter required. This theoretical framework established the basis for the subsequent period of formidable achievement in Chinese landscape art.

6. SUMMARY

The philosophical climate of the Wei and Jin dynasties was a sophisticated one, evincing the interplay and interaction of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, as well as the period's own particular metaphysics. Given the political and social upheaval of the times, it was understandable that many individuals, including scholars and painters, sought to flee from the world and take refuge in nature and art. The contemplation of mountains, rivers, and other aspects of nature was seen as both a consolation and a source of spiritual strength. Unsurprisingly, therefore, such phenomena were often the subject of *de facto* pilgrimages by literati and other intellectuals, who would undertake lengthy, hazardous journeys to encounter them at firsthand. One could not always be in the physical

presence of natural beauty, however, and this provided an important impetus for the evolution of China's landscape art. Various philosophical trends in the Wei / Jin period generated a distinction between landscape painting and traditional portraiture, with the former emerging as a discrete, respected genre. With the rise in interest in landscape art, moreover, a body of theory appeared to shape and interpret it, led by figures such as Wang Wei and Zong Bing. The aesthetic theories of such intellectuals reflected eclectic influences, including, to reiterate, metaphysics, Buddhism and Taoism. In due course, they provided a framework for both the creation and the appreciation of Chinese landscape art. The latter, with its emphasis on "freehand brushwork" and the expression of "spirit through form," also prioritized the integration of human emotion and natural scenery, the former being a prerequisite for the effective depiction of the latter. The theoretical foundations established in this period, in short, were to exert a powerful influence on China's painters for centuries to come.

References

Cao, G. (2014). Philosophy and Painting in Wei and Jin Dynasties. *Beauty and The Times (below)*, *07*, 69-71.

Cao, W. (2009). The General History of Chinese Culture. *Beijing Normal University Press*.

Feng, Y. (2011). The History of Chinese Philosophy. *The Commercial Press*, *2*.

Guo, S. (2008). On the aesthetic implication and value of Zong Bing's Painting Landscape Preface. *Vicissitudes of life*, *06*, 235-236.

Hou, J. (2011). Modern interpretation of landscape poetry and painting in the Wei, Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties. *Qufu Normal University*.

Kang, k. (2014). Effect of Buddhism on the early green landscape painting in China. *Guizhou Normal University*.

Le, S., Qin, P., & Ma, T. (2022). General History of Chinese Philosophy, Wei, Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties volume *Jiangsu People's Publishing House*.

Li, C. (2021). On the concept and form of landscape painting in Dunhuang frescoes. *Zhejiang Normal University*.

Li, F. (2022). The History of Painting Art in the Wei, Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties. *Shanghai Science and Technology Academic Press*.

Li, J. (2022). On the reasons for the rise of landscape painting in the Wei and Jin Dynasties [A]. Langfang City Applied Economics Association. Docking with Beijing and Tianjin —— collection. *Langfang Applied Economics Association: Langfang Applied Economics Association*, *4*.

Li, Z. (2021). Research on the creation thought of Painting Landscape Preface. *Zhengzhou University*.

Lu, M. (2019). The rise of landscape painting and the initial formation of natural aesthetics in Wei and Jin Dynasties *Hunan Normal University*.

Shi, T. (2015). Myaphysics and Landscape Spirit of Wei and Jin Dynasties *Xizang University for Nationalities*.

Wan, S. (2007). Cultural history of the Wei, Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties. *Oriental Publishing Center*.

Wang, Z. (2002). The cultural course of Chinese aesthetics *Sichuan People's Publishing House*.

Xu, H. (2008). Varivariation of color and ink painting: green and ink painting in the embryonic period of landscape painting of the Six Dynasties. *Shaanxi Normal University*.

Zhang, F. (2000). The History of Chinese aesthetics. *Shanghai People's Publishing House*.

Zhang, X. (2018). From the early grotto murals analysis of the green landscape painting. *Xinjiang Normal University*.

Zhao, M. (2016). On reading Wang Wei's landscape customs from the perspective of Wei and Jin metaphysics. *Young Writers*, *33*, 193.

Zhou, X., & Shi, L. (1997). The ideal metaphysical life of the famous scholars in the Wei and Jin dynasties unfolds *03*, 20-25.

Zhu, W. (2020). A comparative study of Landscape Preface and Syrian Painting *Yunnan University*.

Zong, B. (1981). Aesthetic walks *Shanghai People's Publishing House*.