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**Influences of Daoist Philosophy in Chinese Landscape Painting during
the Song Dynasty**

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*A Juan Carlos, mi esposo, amigo y compañero del baile que es la vida,
gracias por ser y por estar...*

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Abstract

This dissertation tries to demonstrate how Daoist philosophy had influenced Chinese landscape painting. Based on the most important Daoist treaties, the author has the purpose to point up and analyze some of the principles of Daoism -such as the notion of Dao, naturalness, the non-action, *qi*, *yin-yang* and the emptiness- to recognize them in several important paintings, especially from the Song dynasty. With a selection of paradigmatic landscape paintings of the most recognized Chinese artists, this dissertation exposes the iconographic archetype of Chinese landscape painting. Results show that Chinese landscape painters do not try to impose on nature the order conceived by humans; the painting not only tries to represent nature but wants to be a part of it, as a stone or a tree, because the artist has to be free of all artificiality and be naturally spontaneous. The perfect action is the one realized through non- action (*wuwei*), with the same spontaneity as nature (*ziran*); this action is not the result of a deliberate intention of its author but of a spontaneity without hesitation, a graceful flowing with the Dao. It is concluded that Landscape painting is a superb language through which can be achieved a profound understanding of Chinese thought, specifically Daoist philosophy.

Keywords: Chinese Landscape Painting; Daoism (Taoism); Lao Zi ; Zhuang Zi; Chinese Art.

Resumen

Esta investigación trata de demostrar cómo la filosofía Daoísta influenció a la pintura China de paisaje. Con base en los tratados daoístas más relevantes, el autor tiene el propósito de puntualizar y analizar algunos de los principios fundamentales de este pensamiento –tales como la idea del Dao, la espontaneidad, la no-acción, el *qi*, *yin-yang* y el concepto de vacuidad- para reconocerlos en algunas pinturas fundamentales de la dinastía Song. A través de una selección paradigmática de pinturas de paisajes de los artistas chinos más reconocidos, esta tesis expone el arquetipo iconográfico de este tipo de pinturas. En conclusión, podemos decir, que la pintura china de paisaje no trata de imponer en su visión de la naturaleza un orden concebido por los humanos; estas pinturas no sólo tratan de representar la naturaleza sino ser parte de ella, tal como una roca o un árbol, porque el artista debe ser libre de toda artificialidad y ser naturalmente espontáneo. La acción perfecta es aquella realizada a través de la no-acción (*wuwei*), con la misma espontaneidad de la naturaleza (*ziran*), esta acción no es el resultado de una intención deliberada de su autor sino de una espontaneidad sin titubeo, que es el fluir del Dao mismo. La pintura china de paisajes es un lenguaje supremo a través del cual podemos lograr una profunda comprensión del pensamiento chino, específicamente de la filosofía Daoísta.

Palabras Claves: Pintura China; Paisajismo; Daoísmo; Taoísmo; Lao Zi ; Zhuang Zi; Arte Chino.

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Introduction

Looking at the great cultures of the world, Chinese culture is unique because it is a product of the oldest continuous civilization of humankind. Despite many adversities like tyrannical regimes, foreign invasions, and internal strife, China has managed to survive through it all.

Painting is one of the supreme Chinese arts and is also one of the oldest artistic traditions in the world. However, what makes a painting Chinese? Art establishes an instant contact with the spirit of the people who create it; Chinese painting reveals the creative progress of a *Weltanschauung*: the art of living harmoniously in the world. As Zhang Yanyuan said: “*painting completes culture, helps human relations, and explores the mysteries of the universe*”. In fact, painting is a superb medium through which we can achieve a profound understanding of an ancient culture like the Chinese.

Chinese landscape painting is like a mirror in which we can see an immensity that transcends our knowledge of ourselves and of the universe we live in. It is a marriage of matter and spirit that captures the external appearance of reality as well as its inner essence – realizing the union of opposites.

In this essay, we want to co-relate Daoist thought with the great cultural heritage of Chinese painting, specifically landscape painting during the Song Dynasty, because the painters in this time desired to manifest a profound cultural significance in their paintings

in which penetrated the Daoist reflections.

In the first part of this dissertation, we want to analyze the most essential philosophical concepts of Daoism, such as the notion of Dao, naturalness (*zi ran*) and the non-action (*wu wei*), Qi, Yin Yang and the emptiness. On the other hand, in the second part we would explain the aspects related with technique, the relationship between calligraphy and art, a selection of classical essays about aesthetics and art, which describe the character of Chinese landscape painting, and, finally, the analysis of landscape painting, specifically during Tang and Song dynasties. We will use the Hanyu Pinyin as Romanization system.

Part I:

1. Daoist notions related to Landscape painting

“When one approaches the wonderful,
One knows not whether art is Tao and Tao is art”

Hui Zung

1.1 Dao

The character Dao 道 (pinyin: dào) is composed by two parts, one part means ‘head’ and the other part means ‘to walk’. So, literally it could be interpreted as ‘to direct’ or ‘to lead’; but this character is translated as the ‘way’ or ‘path’, even sometimes as ‘doctrine’ or ‘principle’.

The whole Daoism revolves around the idea of Dao. This notion is one of the most obscure and complex in Chinese philosophy and has been the object of many interpretations by diverse philosophic schools. Neither philosophic nor linguistic analysis of this word can ever capture its essential meaning because it refers to an understanding that can only be comprehended through experience.

Long time before Daoism, we find the expression ‘*Tian Dao*’ (天道 *tiān dào*), the Dao of Heaven used to explain the sky orbits, and by extension, destiny (天命 *tiān mìng*).

Edouard Chavannes defines Dao poetically, as a single principle which reigns over the world; it is both transcendent and immanent; it is also what has neither form nor sound, nor color; which exists before all things, which is unspeakable, and on the other hand, there is what appears in the ephemeral beings such a reflection printed of the supreme reason. But reached these heights, the spirit loves and is silent, sensing that the words of human languages are unable to express: the entity that contains the universe and more than universe in it. To symbolize it, at least in some measure, we call it the Way. The Way, implies the idea of a running power, an action; the last principle is not immutable, on the

contrary, it is absolute and eternal (Chavannes, 19). Besides, Fung Yu Lan describes Dao as the first principle of the universe: “*For the universe to have come into being, there must exist an all- embracing first principle, which is called Tao*” (Fung, 177)

Daoism develops the ontological dimension of Dao. Everything in the universe is considered to be a manifestation of Dao. So, the Dao is the origin of diversity:

*The Tao gives birth to One.
One gives birth to Two.
Two gives birth to Three.
Three gives birth to all things.
(Daodejing, Ch. XLII)*

The Dao is the primal source of everything, and is called the mother of the universe:

*It is the mother of the universe.
For lack of a better name,
I call it the Tao. (Daodejing, Ch. XXV)*

At the same time, Dao is formless, empty, intangible and a non-being (Wú 无). In the

Daodejing it is said:

*The form of the formless
The image of the imageless
It is called indefinable and beyond imagination (Daodejing,
Ch. XIV)*

And, also

*Look, it cannot be seen –it is beyond form.
Listen, it cannot be heard –it is beyond sound.
Grasp, it cannot be held –it is intangible. (Daodejing, Ch.
XIV)*

The significance of the nonexistent is the most manifest and at the same time intangible characteristic of the Dao:

*All things are born of being.
Being is born of non-being. (Daodejing, Ch. XL)*

The Dao is unknowable and ineffable. Due to this unfathomable attribute, neither senses nor reason is the way to know Dao, because its dimension goes beyond duality and dichotomies, where the being and the non-being are identical. Hence, it is impossible to talk about the Dao, is often called the un-nameable:

*The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao (Daodejing,
Ch. I)*

In *Zhuang Zi*, this affirmation is corroborated chapter XXII,

The Tao cannot be heard; heard, it is not the Tao. The Tao cannot be seen; seen, it is not the Tao. The Tao cannot be described; described, it is not the Tao. That which gives form to the formed is itself formless - can you understand that? There is no name that fits the Tao.

(...) He who, when asked about the Tao, gives an answer does not understand the Tao; and he who asked about the Tao has not really heard the Tao explained. The Tao is not to be asked about, and even if it is asked about, there can be no answer.

Maybe here is the key: to exist is to non-exist, in Dao happens the *coincidentia oppositorum*¹, the union of opposites, which starts with the main opposition: being and non-being (Preciado, 72).

¹ *Coincidentia oppositorum* is a Latin phrase meaning ‘coincidence of opposites’. It is a Neoplatonic term attributed to Nicholas of Cusa in his essay, *De Docta Ignorantia* (1440). The

The cosmogonist myths and the symbols and theories about *coincidentia oppositorum* have the determination to understand and to represent the reestablishment of the adequacy of the unity of origin, where everything is supposedly united without dichotomies. This harmonious fusion could be interpreted as the integration of the human being with the only and primary essence, where in the dissolution of the individual self one can realize a mystical experience.

Zhuang Zi, in the Book V: “The Sign of Virtue Complete”, explained -using the alter ego of Confucius- the relativity of facts of life, and the wisdom to supersede all dichotomies and find harmony:

Life, death, preservation, loss, failure, success, poverty, riches, worthiness, unworthiness, slander, fame, hunger, thirst, cold, heat - these are the alternations of the world, the workings of fate. Day and night they change place before us and wisdom cannot spy out their source. Therefore, they should not be enough to destroy your harmony; they should not be allowed to enter the Spirit Storehouse. If you can harmonize and delight in them, master them and never be at a loss for joy, if you can do this day and night without break and make it be spring with everything, mingling with all and creating the moment within your own mind - this is what I call being whole in power.

Some authors arrive to the idea that Dao is a ‘chaotic thing’ (Preciado, 70). Even every sentence in which it appears in the works of Lao Zi, this character is obscure, and multi-interpretative. In chapter XXV, we read:

historian of religion Mircea Eliade, Carl Jung and philosophers such as Henry Corbin and Gershom Scholem also have used this notion extensively.

*Something mysteriously formed,
Born before heaven and earth.*

The character wù 物 (thing, substance), could refer to a spiritual entity, but the expression *hūn chéng* 混成 – mysteriously formed- (‘*hūn*’ means confused, obscure; and ‘*chéng*’ formed, established) clearly indicates to a material reality. That material reality identifies with Dao would be the Qi. Feng Youlan categorically affirms that Dao and Qi are one and the same thing.

Chinese focused on the notion of one power permeating the whole universe, instead of emphasizing the western dualisms of spirit and matter, creator and created, animated and unanimated.

To conclude, Dao cannot be interpreted neither as the absolute Being nor as the absolute Non-being. In Daoist philosophy it is not possible to have that kind of interpretation because both extremes are overcome and annulled in an Absolute that is nothing or a Non-Being that is everything: the Dao (Preciado, 74). Finally, it is evident that Dao is the touchstone of Chinese thought.

1.2 Naturalness and effortless

Ziran (自然; Pinyin: zìrán) is an essential concept of Daoism that is closely attached to the practice of *wuwei* (无为; Pinyin: wúwéi). The Chinese word is composed by two characters

‘zi’ 自, which means ‘nose’, ‘self’ or ‘since’ and ‘rán’ 然 which means ‘right’, ‘correct’, and also is used as a suffix marking adjectives or adverbs².

Ziran generally has three associated meanings: the nature without human intervention or the self-perpetuating balanced order of nature; the spontaneous liberty of the individual, the natural man, free of the restraints of conventions; and the ‘absolute’, a different name for Dao (Balazs, 34-35).

The translation into English or other western languages are challenging, because its meaning is very complex. Frequently, English translators use the words ‘naturalness’, ‘spontaneous’ or ‘innate’. At the same time, the word *zi* should be understood as the reflexive adverbial ‘self’. However, because the English word ‘self’ has a stronger egoistic tone than the Chinese word ‘zi’, which refers to the human self but is not restricted to that. Qingjie James Wang³ in his article explains how it is better to use the neutral pronoun ‘it’ before ‘self’ in order to weaken the egoistic tone of ‘self’. Then, he proposes that the appropriate understanding and translation of the Chinese term *ziran* is ‘it-self-so-ing’ or ‘it-self-becoming’.

There are several problems of these existing English translations.(...) first, the translation of ziran as “nature” may misread it as a noun which refers to an entity rather than to a process of growing and becoming. Second, the translation of “spontaneity” may miss the “active” sense of the term ziran. Third, “self-so-ing” or “self-becoming” may mislead our understanding of the term to fall into an egoistic trick, i.e., to make the naturalistic process “personalized”. (Wang, note 5) (...) It is the natural way of everything's becoming his/her/itself, i.e., a natural process of “it-self-be-coming”, “it-self-growing”, and “it-self-so-ing”. (Wang, 1)

²It is worth mentioning that in Chinese culture, the nose (or *zi*) is a common metaphor for a person's point of view.

³ Qingjie James Wang, “It-self-so-ing and Other-ing in Lao Zi's Concept of *Zi Ran*”.

Another suitable translation into English of this key concept is ‘as-it-isness’ as is proposed by professor Fu⁴.

In the *Daodejing* we find this notion in several chapters⁵. For example in chapter 25, the Dao, Heaven, Earth and man have followed *ziran* as a model. This interpretation implies the nature of the Dao. To become nearer to a state of *ziran*, one must become separate from unnatural influences and returned to an entirely spontaneous state.

*Man follows the earth.
Earth follows the universe.
The universe follows the Tao.
The Tao follows only itself (ziran).*

In a different translation⁶ it is interpreted, “*the law of the Tao is it being what it is*”.

Furthermore, in chapter 51, *ziran* is translated as spontaneous:

*Every being in the universe
is an expression of the Tao.
(...) That is why every being
spontaneously (ziran) honors the Tao.*

Another main concept in Daoism is *wuwei*. *Wú* (無) may be translated as ‘not have’ or ‘without’ and *wéi* (為) may be translated as ‘to be’, ‘to do’, ‘to act’, ‘to serve as’, which is literally interpreted as *non-action* but this term does not mean *doing nothing* but acting

⁴ Fu, C. W. (2000). Lao Tzu's Conception of Tao. B. Gupta & J. N. Mohanty (Eds.) Philosophical Questions East and West. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, p.46-62. Quoted from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ziran>, apr. 10, 2009.

⁵ See Lao Zi's *Daodejing*, Chapters: 17, 23, 25, 51 and 64.

⁶ See James Legge <http://www.sacred-texts.com/tao/taote.htm>

without artificiality and arbitrariness, and also do not interfere in the natural course of things.

According to *wuwei*, a person has to restrict activities to what is necessary and to what is natural, and never over-doing (Fung Yu-lan, 302-303). Hence, *wuwei* can be interpreted as ‘natural action’, ‘effortless doing’ or ‘acting in harmony with the universe’⁷. For example, the sun warms up the earth, this fact is connatural with the sun’s nature, there is no intention, so it does act but without doing it; another good case is the growing process of a tree, the tree “does” grow, but it is acting without really doing. It is only flowing with nature.

Iñaki Preciado⁸ explains that the doctrine of *wuwei* should be interpreted in three different senses and clarifies misunderstandings by affirming that *wuwei* is different from passivity or inaction. Instead, it is the least possible action that does not interfere with the way of the act. Maybe, this is the most plausible explanation. The second refers to spontaneity: the acts of the sage should be natural and spontaneous and the third one implies the refusal of intentionality, the wise acts without intentions and flow with nature, because nature does not act deliberately (Preciado, 95). The second and third explanations are connected with the concept of *ziran*.

“[the sage] achieves without doing a thing” (Daodejing, ch.

47)

⁷ Usually this concept contains the paradox of *wúwéiwú* “acting without action”.

⁸ Iñaki Preciado Idoeta (born in Madrid, 1941) is PhD in Philosophy, translator, Tibetologist y pioneer of modern Sinology in Spain.

“Therefore the Master acts without doing anything and teaches without saying anything.” (Daodejing, ch. 2)

The concept of *wuwei* is found in Zhuang Zi:

A fully achieved person is like a spirit! The great marshes could be set on fire, but she wouldn't feel hot. The rivers in China could all freeze over, but she wouldn't feel cold. Thunder could suddenly echo through the mountains, wind could cause a tsunami in the ocean, but she wouldn't be startled. A person like that could ride through the sky on the floating clouds, straddle the sun and moon, and travel beyond the four seas. Neither death nor life can cause changes within him, and there's little reason for him to even consider benefit or harm. (Zhuang Zi, Ch. VI)

Also, those two concepts are clearly related to each other and have a strong connection with another key concept in Daoism called *De*, the virtue (德; pinyin: *dé*).

De is the manifestation of the Dao, immanent to the beings. This character suffered a semantic evolution since its primary meaning. The character is formed by three components, which are: ‘to walk’, ‘mind/heart’ and ‘righteous’. In the old times it represented ‘a directed walking by a righteous mind’, which is synonymous with a good behavior and a virtuous behavior. It is because of these origins and a common translation of ‘virtue’, in modern Chinese this character belongs to terms like ‘*dexing*’ and ‘*daode*’, which translated mean our ‘virtue’ in a moral way. However, in Daoism the character *Dé* is analogous to Latin ‘*virtus*’: ‘strength’, ‘efficacy’, ‘power’ (Preciado, 69) and for Elourdy to the greek word ‘*dynamis*’ as is used by Gnostics.

The Dao is the Totality and throughout *De* becomes manifest in the particularity of beings.

De is the bridge between Dao and the beings, between absolute and relative.

On the other hand, Victor Mair (135) considers that Daoist *De* is best translated as ‘integrity’, which “*means no more than the wholeness or completeness of a given entity*”, because “*it represents the selfhood of every being in the universe*”. In that sense *De* is the nature of every being or what a being is by nature. Therefore, when it is said in Daoism “*act in a natural way*” it means follow our own *De*, act in conformity to our own nature.

In the case of art, where the artist must attain the fruit of effortlessness, this idea implies more than simple spontaneity. It is necessary that harmony between the artist and universe be like a mystical union. Many Chinese writings, comments, and stories speak of the preparation of an artist to become synchronized with the universe, and of the importance of meditation to reach the highest state of creative readiness. It is in this state that the artist could ‘grasp the natural without effort’. Here, effortlessness is linked with inevitability. (Rowley, 35) As Ching Hao said “*Heart follows, brush executes, selects forms without doubt*”.

The Daoist maxim that the greatest skill is like clumsiness or the best art is a sort of artlessness (Barnet, 64) is explained in several examples. For instance, Zhuang Zi says that a drunken person who falls out of a moving carriage will not be injured because he does not know he is riding in it. “*In his spontaneity and unselfconsciousness the apparently artless drunkard is the emblem of a man whose spirit is whole, a man who has retained his calm, heavenly nature, a man free from chasing after the one-sided fragmentary values of the world*” (Barnet, 24)

The sage who wants to be one with the Dao must have a heart empty of all attachment and be empty of ego. We have to say that the artist who wants to create a meaningful piece, needs to live according to the Dao. Chinese landscape painters do not try to impose on nature the order conceived by humans. Their paintings not only try to represent nature but become a part of it -like a stone or a tree-, because the artist has to be free of all artificiality and be naturally spontaneous. The artisan in Zhuang Zi's anecdote does not need to pay attention to the technique (shù 術) because he was one with it; he is in the Dao-shù 道術.

Artisan Ch'ui could draw as true as a compass or a T square because his fingers changed along with things and he didn't let his mind get in the way. Therefore his Spirit Tower remained unified and unobstructed. You forget your feet when the shoes are comfortable. You forget your waist when the belt is comfortable. Understanding forgets right and wrong when the mind is comfortable. (Zhuang Zi, XIX: XII)

If we are thinking while we are doing something, probably we could create a self-interference in the process. For example, when we dance it is impossible to think about the dancing process. If we focused on the steps, choreography, etc., the art of dancing itself would not be fluid. Of course we need to know the technique but during the act we need to forget everything and just be one with the music, or as is the case in Zhuang Zi's story, be one with the brush and paper. In the same chapter XIX, Zhuang Zi points out about this self-interference:

When you're betting for tiles in an archery contest, you shoot with skill. When you're betting for fancy belt buckles, you worry about your aim. And when you're betting for real gold, you're a nervous wreck. Your skill is the same in all three cases - but because one prize means more to you than another, you let outside considerations weigh on your mind.

He who looks too hard at the outside gets clumsy on the inside. (Zhuang Zi, XIX: IV)

The fear to lose, or like Jean Paul Sartre called ‘the anguish’, creates a doubt in the mind of the artificer that became a noise that could probably interfere in the perfection of the realization of the action, even if he has the skill to do it. A unification of attention and concentration is needed.

Confucius said, ‘A good swimmer will in no time get the knack of it - that means he's forgotten the water. If a man can swim under water, he may never have seen a boat before and still he'll know how to handle it - that's because he sees the water as so much dry land, and regards the capsizing of a boat as he would the overturning of a cart’. (Zhuang Zi, XIX: IV)

Also, in chapter XIX, there is another section where Zhuang Zi also mentions the ability of a great swimmer who becomes one with water. In this section Confucius happens to be in Lüliang near some waterfalls where the water current was so strong that nothing could swim in it. He sees a man dive in this water and get in trouble. Thinking this man is trying to commit suicide, he tries to help him:

Confucius ran after him and said, ‘At first I thought you were a ghost, but now I see you're a man. May I ask if you have some special way of staying afloat in the water?’ ‘I have no way. I began with what I was used to, grew up with my nature, and let things come to completion with fate. I go under with the swirls and come out with the currents, following along the way the water goes and never thinking about myself. That's how I can stay afloat’. Confucius said, ‘What do you mean by saying that you began with what you were used to, grew up with your nature, and let things come to completion with fate?’ ‘I was born on the dry land and felt safe on the dry land - that was what I was used to. I grew

up with the water and felt safe in the water - that was my nature. I don't know why I do what I do - that's fate'. (XIX, IX)

The swimmer follows his nature (自然, Ziran) and becomes apart from any self-interference. This same self-interference is described in a poem in English for little children:

*The centipede was happy quite, until a toad in fun said,
'Pray, which leg goes after which?'
That worked her mind to such a pitch,
She lay distracted in a ditch
Considering how to run. (Mrs. Edward Craster, 1871)*

The perfect action is the one by the *wuwei*, with the same spontaneity as nature *ziran*. This action is not the result of a deliberate intention but the spontaneity without hesitation, a graceful flowing with the Dao. In art, the artist becomes one with the piece of art, and there is no distinction between an element that takes control and the other aspect that is controlled. This kind of artist becomes a True-man, as described in Zhuang Zi, chapter XXXI: "The Old Fisherman", where the stranger says to Confucius:

(...) 'By the Truth' I mean purity and sincerity in their highest degree. He who lacks purity and sincerity cannot move others. Therefore he who forces himself to lament, though he may sound sad, will awaken no grief. He who forces himself to be angry, though he may sound fierce, will arouse no awe. And he who forces himself to be affectionate, though he may smile, will create no air of harmony. True sadness need make no sound to awaken grief; true anger need not show itself to arouse awe; true affection need not smile to create harmony. When a man has the Truth within himself, his spirit may move among external things. That is why the Truth is to be prized!' (...)

Only when the artist reaches that ‘state of purity’, he can move the spectators. To perform an action spontaneously, the artist must be in a state of emptiness – his actions must not be a result of conscious intention and his brushstrokes should not betray any hesitation (Capriles, 103-112) and be related with the concept of *wuwei*.

In *Zhuang Zi*, we find the story of the butcher (sometimes translated as ‘cook’) Pao Ding. This story talks about the perfect action and the act of butchering an animal as a piece of art. Ding explained to Lord Wenhui how to attain the highest perfection in his art and tells him how a good butcher (or cook) like him have used his knife for many years (nineteen in this case) without losing the blade.

Cook Ting [Ding] was cutting up an ox for Lord Wen-hui. At every touch of his hand, every heave of his shoulder, every move of his feet, every thrust of his knee - zip! zoop! He slithered the knife along with a zing, and all was in perfect rhythm, as though he were performing the dance of the Mulberry Grove or keeping time to the Ching-shou music.

Cook Ting laid down his knife and replied, "What I care about is the Way [Dao], which goes beyond skill. When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years I no longer saw the whole ox. And now - now I go at it by spirit and don't look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop and spirit moves where it wants. I go along with the natural makeup, strike in the big hollows, guide the knife through the big openings, and follow things as they are. So I never touch the smallest ligament or tendon, much less a main joint. (Zhuang Zi, Ch. III)

1.3 Qi and Yin-Yang

Even though the literal translation of Qi (氣 / 气; Pinyin *qì*) is ‘air’, ‘breath’, or ‘gas’, it is normally translated as ‘energy flow’ or ‘life breath’. In traditional Chinese culture the character was 氣. The etymological description for the traditional form of the ‘*qi*’ logogram is steam 气 rising from rice 米 as it cooks. If we compare ‘*qi*’ with the original connotation of the word ‘*spiritus*’ in Latin, the meaning is very close: ‘breathing’; also happens with the Greek word ‘*πνεῦμα*’ (pneuma). It has the exact meaning of *qi*: ‘air’, ‘breath’ but also ‘spirit’. Moreover, the Sanskrit term ‘*prāna*’ (‘breath’, ‘energy’) is related with ‘*qi*’ as well. Qi is implicit in the life-process as a ‘flow’ of energy that maintains living beings. However, not just animals and human beings were understood to have ‘*qi*’. In Chinese context ‘*qi*’ is a force that exists in nature, and this concept is always relates to life or vitality.

Manfred Porkert explains its relationship to Western universal concepts; he said that the term ‘*qi*’ comes as close as possible to constituting a generic designation equivalent to our word energy: “*when Chinese thinkers are unable to fix the quality of an energetic phenomenon, the character qi inevitably flows from their brushes*” (Porkert, 5).

Zhuang Zi pointed out that the wind is the breath (*qi*) of the earth.

*The Great Clod belches out breath and its name is wind (qi).
So long as it doesn't come forth, nothing happens. But when
it does, then ten thousand hollows begin crying wildly. Can't
you hear them, long drawn out? (Zhuang Zi, Ch.II)*

Also, this philosopher said that human's birth depends of the accumulation of 'qi'. When it accumulates there is life. When it disperses there is death. There is one 'qi' that links and infuses everything in the world.

Life is the companion of death, death is the beginning of life. Who understands their workings? Man's life is a coming-together of breath. If it comes together, there is life; if it scatters, there is death. And if life and death are companions to each other, then what is there for us to be anxious about? (Zhuang Zi, Ch. XXII)

Daoism already understood what quantum physics realized in the XX century in the West, the idea of the whole universe as one energy field. Zhuang Zi was very specific in this aspect.

The ten thousand things are really one. We look on some as beautiful because they are rare or unearthly; we look on others as ugly because they are foul and rotten. But the foul and rotten may turn into the rare and unearthly, and the rare and unearthly may turn into the foul and rotten. So it is said, You have only to comprehend the one breath (qi) that is the world. The sage never ceases to value oneness. (Zhuang Zi, Ch. XXII)

On the other hand, the *yin-yang* (yin 陰, pinyin: yīn) (yang 陽, pinyin: yáng) is one of the central concepts shared by different schools all through the history of Chinese philosophy. This notion represents complementary opposites. Both are interconnected forces, which constantly interact and describe opposing qualities in phenomena. It is impossible to abstract the yin or the yang without some reference to their opposite: yin–yang are ingrained together. Yin includes the potential for yang, and yang for yin. They are

balanced: “*yin–yang is a dynamic equilibrium*” (Porkert, 7)

Yin is the receptive principle. It is associated with the feminine, night, water, earth, metal, and is usually characterized as slow, soft, insubstantial, cold, wet, etc. Yang, on the contrary, represents the active principle. It is associated with masculinity, day, mountains, fire, wood, and air, and is characterized as hard, fast, solid, dry, hot, etc. The interaction of the two gives birth to things.

There are three essential ideas as the foundation of the concept Yin Yang in Chinese philosophy:

- 1) as the coherent constitution of nature and mind, revealed in all existence,
- 2) as interaction (*jiao*) between the increasing and declining of the cosmic and human spheres, and
- 3) as a process of harmonization ensuring a constant, dynamic balance of all things.

(Wang, <http://www.iep.utm.edu>)

The earliest Chinese characters for yin and yang are found in inscriptions made on ‘oracle bones’ used for divination practices around the 14th century B.C. According to the earliest comprehensive dictionary of Chinese characters (c. 100 A.D.): *Xu Shen’s Shuowen jiezi* (Explaining Single-component Graphs and Analyzing Compound Characters), ‘yin’ refers to “*a closed door, darkness and the south bank of a river and the north side of a mountain*”. And ‘Yang’ refers to “*height, brightness and the south side of a mountain*”.

(Wang, <http://www.iep.utm.edu>).

In the Book of Changes (*Yijing*), we find this important revelation: “*at the origin of the changes is the Taiji, which begat the Yin and Yang*”. In this classic book yin-yang are represented by broken and solid lines: yang is solid (-) and yin is broken (--).

Yin and yang appear from an original emptiness. Before, we mentioned *Daodejing*, chapter XLII, where the Daoist question about the origin of all beings is examined. Analyzing chapters IV, XXV and XL, the conclusion is that the Dao is different of all beings but also existed before them as their root. Dao not only is previous to all beings, but while every being is in a changing process, Dao on the contrary is the absolute, non- conditioned and remains identical with itself in his immutability. The role of yin-yang is a bond in the process of the creation of the universe. As we can see, all aspects of the objective reality are accessible in its contradictory conditioning. Like it is completely explain in the *Daodejing*:

Being and non-being create each other (Daodejing, ch. II)

The most conventional interpretation of yin-yang in Chinese philosophy is linked to the idea of *qi*. According to this, yin and yang are seen as *qi* operating in the universe.

*All things have their backs to the female
and stand facing the male.
When male and female combine,
all things achieve harmony. (Daodejing, ch. XLII)*

But in a different translation we can understand better this idea:

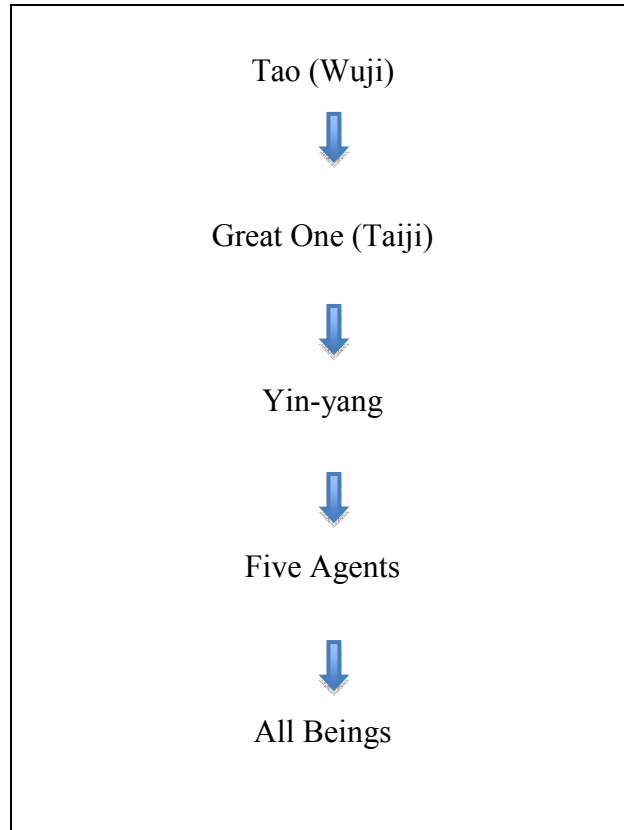
*The ten thousand things carry the **yin** as some back or behind, and hug the **yang** in front. Through the blending of the pervading principles as some abstract union, and by a further blending [designing] the material force (qi) they can gain [sound] harmony⁹ (Daodejing, ch. XLII)*

The Neo-Confucian and cosmologist philosopher Zhou Dunyi (1017-1073 A.D.) during the Song Dynasty explained the relationship between human conduct and universal forces. In his book *Taiji Tushuo* 太極圖說 “*Explanations of the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate*” he fused Confucian ethics and concepts from the Yijing (The Book of Changes) with Daoist naturalism. He developed a metaphysics based on the idea that *the many are ultimately one and the one is ultimate*. It contained his theory of creation, which can be summarized in the following quote:

In the beginning, there was taiji (the great ultimate of being), which was fundamentally identical with wuji (the ultimate of non-being). Because of the abundance of energy within taiji, it began to move and thus produced the yang (the positive cosmic force). When the activity of the yang reached its limit, it reverted to tranquility. Through tranquility the yin (the negative cosmic force) was generated. When tranquility reached its limit, it returned to movement (yang). Thus yin and yang generated each other. Then, through the union of the yin and the yang the transformation of both, the five agents (or elements) of metal, wood, water, fire and earth were brought into being. These five agents are conceived of as material principles rather than as concrete things. They can therefore be considered the common basis of all things. The interaction of the yin and yang through different combinations of the five agents generates all things in a process of endless transformation. (Arrington, 46)

⁹ Translation by Tormod Kinnes.

This process described by Zhou Dunyi (see image #5) is possible to summarize in the following scheme:



In the *Zhuang Zi*, it is explained how things are born by the balance of Yin and Yang:

The highest Yin is the most restrained. The highest Yang is the most exuberant. The restrained comes forth from Heaven. The exuberant issues forth from Earth. The two intertwine and penetrate forming a harmony, and [as a result] things are born. (Zhuang Zi, Ch. XXI)

1.4 Emptiness

In Daoist philosophy, as we have mentioned before, there is a strong analogy of Dao and Non-being. In the *Daodejing*, chapter XIV it is said that Dao is “*image without an image, subtle, beyond all conception*”; additionally, in chapter XL: “*all things are born of being.*

Being is born of non-being". Even though it is not mentioned explicitly in chapters IV and V, we still find a connection between Dao and the non-being.

Different characters represent vacuity: one of it is xū 虛, which derivates from a pictogram that symbolizes a high plateau that, as a desolate highland, transmits the idea of emptiness. Later in Daoism this character was used to mean 'vacuity' as an essential characteristic of Dao. Buddhists also used the character xū to translate the sutras as being equivalent to 'śūnyatā', the essential concept in Mahāyāna. Another character used by Buddhists to translate 'śūnyatā' was 'kōng' 空 (empty, space, sky) which is nearer to the spatial dimension of their idea of śūnyatā (Preciado, 74).

One great Buddhist philosopher who profoundly understood the concept of vacuity was Nāgārjuna, the most important master of mādhyamaka school of Mahāyāna Buddhism. In fact, Nāgārjuna's primary contribution to Buddhist philosophy is the further development of the concept of 'śūnyatā' or emptiness. He developed a very interesting theory of Vacuity, where the absolute was as empty as relative things. According to him, the impermanent nature of form meant that nothing possessed essential and enduring identity. Nagarjuna said:

'Everything exists': That is one extreme. 'Everything doesn't exist': That is a second extreme. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathagata teaches the Dhamma via the middle...(Kaccānagottasuttam, 1.2.5)

Two concepts are really significant in Daoism: *Yǒu* 有, which means ‘to exist’, ‘to have’, and also ‘existence’; and *Wú* 無, which means ‘nothing’ or ‘vacuity’ and also ‘do not have’. From the Dao, identified with *Wú*, born the Being (*Yǒu*), the visible world and then all the beings.

In some fragments of the *Daodejing*, two characters represent the idea of ‘emptiness’: *wú yǒu* 無有, which literally mean ‘do not exist’, and which implies ‘emptiness’ or ‘nothing’.

In other fragments, we could find the characters: *wú wù* 無物 (literally ‘have nothing’).

Guo Xiang, the important Daoist philosopher from the IV century, in an observation to a section of the *Zhuang Zi* that leaves open the question of whether there is a creator, asks himself if this ‘creator’ is something (*Yǒu*) or nothing (*Wú*):

The myriad things have myriad attributes, the adopting and discarding [of their attributes] is different, as if there was a true ruler making them do so. But if we search for evidence or a trace of this ruler, in the end we will not find it. We will then understand that things arise of themselves, and are not caused by something else. (Zhuangzi commentary, chapter 2)

In Daoism non-being it is not a purely negative term; as it is identified with Dao, it implies the origin of all existence, it is the cosmogonic principle. Vacuity and the utility of emptiness is treated by Lao Zi in chapter IV,

The Tao is like an empty vessel that yet can be drawn from without ever needing to be filled.

Emptiness is also mentioned in *Daodejing*, chapter V:

Space between Heaven and Earth is like a bellows, empty, yet never ceasing its supply. The more it moves, the more it yields.

Lao Zi said that in existence 有 resides the interest and in vacuity 無 there is utility. As explained in chapter XI:

Thirty spokes are united around the hub of a wheel, but the usefulness of the wheel depends on the space where nothing exists. Clay is molded into a vessel, but the usefulness of the vessel depends on the space where nothing exists. Doors and windows are cut out of the walls of a house, and the usefulness of the house depends on the space where nothing exists. Therefore take advantage of what exists, and use what does not exist. (Daodejing, XI)

In the *Zhuang Zi*, chapter XII, “Heaven and Earth” it is said: “*in the Great Beginning, there was no-being; there was no being, no name*”; also in the *Huainanzi*, Book I, it is said “*Dao is the non-being, which exists as if does not exist*”. Also, in *Zhuang Zi*, chapter IV, emptiness is mentioned:

The Way gathers in emptiness alone. Emptiness is the fasting of the mind.

Emptiness has different meanings in Daoist philosophy. The *Daodejing* tells us that sages (*shèng rén*) empty themselves, becoming void of pretense. Sages concentrate their internal energies (Qi) to clean their vision:

*Can you coax your mind from its wandering
and keep to the original oneness?
Can you let your body become*

*supple as a newborn child's?
Can you cleanse your inner vision
until you see nothing but the light? (Daodejing, ch. 10)*

Part II:

2. Chinese Landscape Painting during Song Dynasty

*“Although painting is only one of the fine arts,
it contains the Tao”
Wang Yu*

2.1. Remarks about technique

The special temperament of Chinese painting and calligraphy is a result of the nature of the technique used to create them. The essential material used is ink, which is mixed with water and rubbed on an ink-stone until the desired texture is reached. To do so, the calligrapher or painter uses a brush made with the hair of a deer, goat or a wolf that is set in a tube of bamboo.

Pigments derived from mineral sources are preferred for painting on silk, while translucent vegetable pigments predominate in paintings on paper and produce a more delicate effect. Painting on walls and screens is an ancient art in China. However, in the past millennium the vertical hanging scroll (perhaps derived from the Buddhist devotional banners), and the horizontal hand scroll became more popular. These scrolls would be of any length up to about 15 meters. It is very interesting that a scroll painting must be experienced ‘in time’ like music or literature.

Additionally, color theory is a very important feature for painting: “(...)color is added to make the effect more true to life or to add decorative accent and rarely as a structural element in the design, as in Western art” (Encyclopædia Britannica, 28 Jun. 2008). Seen from this view, black and white are two original colors of landscape paintings by *shui mo* technique during Song dynasty. Black is the color that do not emits or reflects light, because of this, black is sometimes described as an achromatic color; and white was the fundamental color of light. A white visual stimulation will be void of hue. Black and white represent the highest contrast and is often used to represent opposites, in Chinese culture Yin and Yang. Su Shi, one of the most famous artist and poet from Song dynasty, said that

splendid colors remain with light even colorless. Why did he say that? Dao is immaterial and Qi invisible, colorless. As all the matter, everything presented to the landscape paintings were made of Qi or Dao, Shui-Mo became a way to describe the essence of landscape.

Primarily, there are two main techniques in Chinese painting:

- Meticulous or *Gong bi* (工筆) (habitually referred to as ‘court-style’ painting.)
- Freehand or *Shui mo* (水墨) freely termed watercolor or brush painting. The Chinese character ‘mo’ means ink and ‘shui’ means water. This style is also referred to as ‘*xiě yì* 写意 or freehand style (*xiě* 写 means writing and *yì* 意 means emotion, motif, taste, etc.). (en.wikipedia.org, 3 Jul. 2008).

The freehand type of Chinese painting must be executed in one stroke, without any possible retouching. In general, the brush must be held in the right hand and the hand can never rest on the paper. The stroke must be very smooth and fluid, and the brush should move continually – as if it is dancing on the roll. The master Shitao¹⁰ said “[the] ink seems to be there by itself, and [the] brush moves as if not doing anything (*wu wei*)(...) One who keeps his mind calm will find that ignorance is replaced by wisdom and conventionality by purity of mind”.

These artists and calligraphers use silk or paper to create their art on. Since both paper and silk surfaces are absorbent, they do not allow any rectifications. Therefore, to paint or

¹⁰ Shitao, “An Expressionist Credo”, see Part II, 2.3 Chinese Aesthetics theories.

write on them requires great control and mastery. Even though Chinese always insisted on the excellence of the technique, they never forgot that art is a vehicle for man's deepest thoughts and inspiration.

According to the practice of traditional painting, the whole composition must be in the mind and heart of the artist before he begins his painting. As Meng Jiao (715-814 A.D.) said, "*the sky and earth come to my heart, the images are my own design. The past and present are absorbed in an instant, the four seas clash in a second*". The artist must know at the onset what he wants to do, and he must possess the self-confidence and a mastery of the techniques required. These traits can only be acquired through prolonged training.

Besides, the artist's signature and stamps are an integral part of the composition. A picture can amplify significantly in relevance and value from the colophons added by later connoisseurs.

The Chinese term for art is 'yì shù' 藝術, but painting in the traditional style is today known as 'guó huà' 國畫, in opposition to Western styles of art, which became popular in China since the 20th century.

2.2 Calligraphy

In China the art of calligraphy is widely practiced and revered. Calligraphy is considered one of the fine arts, and it is judged as important as poetry, music and painting; sometimes even above them. Traditionally, every literate person in China learns to write from

childhood by copying the standard forms of Chinese ideographs. Progressively, the student is exposed to different interpretations of these characters. With time the practitioner develops his own personal style.

The Chinese do not speak of ‘fine handwriting’¹¹ – instead, simply of the ‘art of writing’ that encompasses both ‘fine handwriting’ and ‘normal handwriting’. In classical Chinese they only use the word *shū* 書: ‘writing’. The characters to say calligraphy in Chinese are 書法 *shū fǎ*; 書 ‘*shū*’ means book and also writing (see image #2), and 法 ‘*fǎ*’ means method or art.

The art of painting in the West is directly connected to sculpture. Since the Renaissance it is required to present a realistic solid form to their subjects, stressing the treatment of light and shade with the help of colors to produce a realistic perspective.

In China it occurred in a different way. *“The earliest written scripts were pictorial, evolving gradually into abstract structures of finely shaped calligraphic strokes without any concern for light and shade”* (Chiang, 206). Likewise, in paintings the use of light and shade plays a modest role. Chinese calligraphy and painting derived from ancient scripts and both are executed with the same kind of brush and ink, and the same type of paper or silk. Actually, it is usual that a Chinese painter say he is ‘writing a painting’, instead ‘painting a painting’ (Chiang, 207). Technically, painting and calligraphy do not differ in the uses of brush and ink. Additionally, many paintings from the Song period onward often include an inscription that used to be a short poem which add meaning to the piece of art.

¹¹ The word “calligraphy” is a transliteration from Greek language, meaning “beautiful writing” (κάλλος *kallos* "beauty" and γραφή *graphē* "writing")

On the desk of a Chinese scholar lie the “Four Treasures of the Study” (文房四寶 *wén fāng sì bǎo*), the symbols of his vocation: paper, brush, ink slab and the ink-stone. To get the inspiration is as important as the execution. Once the calligrapher gets it, he delicately grinds the ink and mixes it with water and then, using the brush as a medium, he lets his spirit flow on to a carefully selected paper.

Since ancient times, calligraphy has been associated in China with spiritual communications and the calligrapher’s own harmony. Inscriptions have been found on oracle bones and tortoise shells that were used for divination during the Shang dynasty (1600 B.C. to 1100 B.C). Since 300 A.D., calligraphy has been considered supreme among all visual arts in China.

Calligraphy is really important in China because it demands enormous expertise and sophistication and, perhaps more importantly it can reveal the range and mastery of the calligrapher. By controlling the concentration of ink, the thickness of the lines, adsorption of the paper, and the flexibility of the brush, the artist is free to produce an infinite variety of styles and forms.

In contrast, calligraphy is regarded as a minor art in the West. During the Middle Ages, calligraphy flourished in Western art. The first letter of each book or chapter written during that period was usually calligraphed. A decorative “carpet page” filled with geometrical, bestial and colorful depictions would precede each chapter. The Lindisfarne Gospels (715-720 AD) is an early example of that (see image #4).

While western calligraphy habitually follows font-like regularity, homogeneity, and is always stylized and ornamental, Chinese calligraphy, on the other hand, puts more emphasis on spontaneous emotions and demonstrates the personality of the writer (see image#3). Diffusing ink blots and dry brush strokes are viewed by the Chinese as a natural expression rather than a fault.

Chinese calligraphy has become a medium of great richness and delicacy because it offers an almost unlimited repertory of forms that no other alphabet can rival, and because the brush is an instrument that registers every move of the hand (see image #3). It is said that *“the Chinese calligrapher uses it to record forces arising from the depths of his being: while Western calligraphy produces arrested forms, Chinese calligraphy is in essence an art of movement”* (Billeter, 11).

For a Chinese artist, calligraphy is a meditation that harmonizes body and mind. It is a peaceful yet an extremely disciplined exercise. To be able to fully appreciate calligraphy and to produce it, highly developed personal qualities, discipline, and advanced aesthetic sensitivities are required. To understand its finer points requires experience and sensibility of a high order.

In addition to being an art form in its own right, calligraphy has also influenced ink and wash paintings, which are done using similar tools and techniques.

2.3 Chinese aesthetics theories

Theory of art and aesthetics helps in fully understanding and appreciating Chinese painting. Even though there is a lot of material on these topics, many of it is very similar. As Lin Yutang clearly explains in the introduction of his anthology of classical essays¹²: “Chinese writers on art have the habit of quoting the ancients (...) As they all agree with the same ancient tradition, they tend to agree with one another. Thus the works of many are repetitious” (4)

The following selections of texts describe the most important traits of Chinese landscape painting. They were written by artists and art critics over a period of several centuries and they discuss its technique, style and taste.

Around the fifth century A.D., Xie He (谢赫) a writer, art historian and critic, wrote his book *The Record of the Classification of Old Painters* (古画品录, Gǔhuà pǐnlù), which rates twenty-seven painters (in some editions twenty-nine) divided into six grades in skills and excellence. The author makes small comments about them. (Lin Yutang, 34-36)

Xie is renowned for his “*Six principles of Chinese painting*” (绘画六法, Huìhuà liùfǎ) that he identifies in the preface of his book. In the opinion of Lin Yutang this is the most influential paragraph ever written on the art of Chinese painting (34). These principles became the criteria for the painter’s training and art criticism. The principles are:

1. *Create a lifelike tone and atmosphere.*

¹² Lin Yutang. *The Chinese Theory of Art. Translations from the Masters of Chinese Art*. London, Heinemann, 1967

2. *Structural use of the brush or Bone Method*. This principle refers not only to texture and brush stroke, but to the close link between handwriting and personality.
3. *Correspondence to the Object*, or the depicting of form, which would include shape and line.
4. *Suitability to Type* or the application of color, including layers, value and tone.
5. *Division and Planning* or placement and arrangement corresponding to composition, space and depth.
6. *Transmission by Copying* or the copying of models, not only from life but also the works of classical masters of the antiquity.

The first principle itself became the aspiration of art in China and the primary focus of a painter and refers to the notion of Dao. The other five principles are also important but are not considered that fundamental.

Xie's first proposition: 'create a lifelike tone and atmosphere' or '*qì yún shēng dòng*' 气韵生动 almost can't be translated into other language. This expression refers the vitality of the piece of art and the aim to translate the nervous energy from the artist into the work.

This phrase is composed by '*qì yún*' 气韵; literally, means the rhythm of *Qi*. This bi-syllabic word meaning tone and atmosphere; '*shēng dòng*' 生动 is another bi-syllabic word, an adjective, meaning: *fully alive, lifelike*. The translation of these four characters has been really difficult to many translators into English. Lin Yuntang said that many of

these translators lacking familiarity with the usage of Chinese words and phrases and translates each word by itself, missing the real meaning¹³.

For Xie He the highest aspiration of an artist should be expressing *qì yún shēng dòng*, life and movement of objects that he wants to represent. The idea that a noble artist could reveal his personality through his paintings is also attributed to him. On the other hand, Xie He claims that an immoral artist cannot communicate the grace and finesse of *qì yún shēng dòng* even if he mastered the technique. This is similar to what Georges Buffon said: “*le style c’est l’homme même*” (“the style is the man himself”) (Houghton, 23-25).

Besides, the bone method is not just a study of the anatomical structure of forms, but something superior where we experience the mysterious foundation of drawing. The artist should achieve the adequate expression of the internal structure of things and evokes a sense of tangibility that provides the reflection of the eternal principle in it. The brush, lends a mysterious life to the form in which it captured the essence.

The combination of spirituality and naturalism is found in the text of the early 5th century, “*Preface on Landscape Painting*” (*Hua shan shui xu*) which is the first Chinese essay about this topic, attributed to Zong Ping. Zong suggests that if well-painted -that is, if both visually accurate and aesthetically compelling- a landscape can truly substitute for real nature, for, even though miniaturized, it can attract vital energy (Qi) from the spirit-filled

¹³ There are many versions of the phrase: “*qì yún shēng dòng*”. Following are some interpretations from the translators: “resonance of the spirit” (Osvold Sirén), “rhythmic vitality” (Herbert A. Giles), “spiritual element: life motion” (Friedrich Hirth), “spiritual tone and life-movement” (Taki Seiichi), “spiritual rhythm expressed in the movement of life” (Laurence Binyon), “a picture should be inspired and possess life itself” (Benjamin March); also, “spirit harmony- life’s motion” (Arthur Waley) or “animation through spirit consonance” (A. C. Soper).

void (Dao), just as its real, material counterpart does. As Zong said in his *Preface on Landscape Painting*:

When this spiritual contact is established, the true forms are realized and the spirit is recaptured. Is it not as good as seeing the mountains themselves? Moreover, the spirit has no form of its own, but takes form in things. The inner law of things (li) can be traced through light and darkness. If these things are skilfully represented, they are truth itself. (Lin Yutang, 32)

This interaction between macrocosm and microcosm became a constant foundation of Chinese spiritual thought and aesthetics.

Another essay, attributed to the famous poet and painter and musician of Tang Dynasty, Wang Wei (王维) (699-759 A.D.), includes some fundamental observations and important formulas about composition for landscape painting. These rules passed from generation to generation since Tang dynasty:

In painting landscape, the concept should lead the brush along. Ten-foot hills, one-foot trees, one-inch horses, and tenth-of-a-inch men. Distant faces do not show eyes; distant trees do not show branches. Distant hills do not show rocks, but are half seen like eyebrows; distant waters do not show ripples, but reach towards the clouds on the horizon. These are certain formulas (Lin Yutang, 39).

A painting must show huge mountains, small trees and animals, and finally, human beings as the smallest entity in the composition. This perspective that minimizes the importance of human element reveals a vision of man being one with nature that is consistent with Daoist thought. Every detail is described clearly, nothing happens by chance. The painting should find the medium:

A number of lofty peaks should be shown in their majesty. Too many of them will confuse; too few will make the picture slack. Just the medium, with distances shown and distinguished. Temples and huts may be placed in a recess mid-hills; a small bridge can well stand over a steep embankment. (Lin Yutang, 40)

Also Wang explains how to represent seasons, distinct weather and different times of the day:

In spring, the mist may spread over the landscape while chimney-smoke hovers in the air. (...) In summer, tall trees block out the sky, and the green waters are still; waterfalls descend from great heights, and a lonely pavilion stands over the water nearby. In autumn, the sky is pale like water (...) In winter, snow covers the land, woodcutters are passing by with their loads, and fishing boats are tied up along the shore (...)

For Wang Wei landscape painting is a symbolic language through which the painter may express not a relative aspect of nature, seen at a specified moment from a specified perspective, but a total truth, beyond time and place (Sullivan, 97).

The Record of famous Paintings (841 A.D.) by Zhang Yanyuan (张彦远) (active c.847 A.D.) is probably the most important source of information on ancient Chinese art history. This work consists of seven books of comments on ancient painters, including some from the Tang dynasty. It also contains many extracts from the writings of other artists which otherwise would have been lost forever. Three more books that analyze general art issues precede this work.

Zhang said that there are certain things in a painting that go beyond mere realistic

resemblance.

There is something difficult to explain to the common people. Modern paintings often fail too make the tone and atmosphere come alive, although they may succeed in verisimilitude. If one aims at catching the lifelike atmosphere, the likeness is implicit. (Lin Yutang, 52)

Zhang's art theory involves some unique characteristics: He coincides with the theory of Xie He that art should have ethical and political purposes. Zhang also gave emphasis to the magnitude of innovation and inspiration in painting, and he diverged with stereotyped painting styles.

Guo Xi (郭熙) (c. 1000- c.1090) was a landscape painter who lived during the Northern Song dynasty. In his treatise on landscape painting, Guo emphasized the direct observation of nature in its continuous transformation from season to season and in the weather variations. The artists should capture the constant flow of nature in a total vision of landscape, but without forgetting the taste for the details in it.

Guo Xi rationalized why people love nature. He said that it is human nature “*to resent the hustle and bustle of society, and to wish to see (...) immortals hidden among the clouds*” (Lin Yutang, 71). The painters can reproduce those sights and sound of nature for the joy of viewers. He observed: “*that is why paintings of landscapes are so much in demand. To approach such paintings without the requisite state of mind would be committing a sin against such natural beauties*” (71). There is a way of painting landscapes and also a way of looking at them. “*The same painting may seem of inestimable value if looked at with the heart of a retired scholar, or completely valueless if looked at with the mind of a snob*”

(72).

As well, Guo believed in traditional methods:

Learning painting is like learning calligraphy –one must work with models. By copying models (...) one comes to resemble them.

However, he alerted the artists to avoid copying only one school or style, because this uniformity limited mastery and the piece could result dead. Everybody, he said, hates uniformity and likes to see freshness and novelty. Also, his exceptionally detailed system of brushstrokes became very important for later painters.

Ku Ningyuan (fl. 1570) was an artist who lived in the sixteenth century A.D. His essay “*On Brush-work*” (Hua Yin) is very short but extraordinarily sharp. In this work he analyzed the “*Six principles of Chinese painting*” of Xie He and pointed out that a real master does not need to follow rules because he applies ink under perfect control.

The goal in painting should be freshness (sheng) after mastery (shu). But it is difficult to be fresh [and spontaneous] after one has gained mastery. (...) It is better to be blunt (chuo) than skilful, and it is difficult to be blunt (naïve) when one has attained skill. (Lin, 122)

‘*Shēng*’ 生, literally means ‘raw’, ‘uncooked’, and ‘*shú*’ 熟 means ‘cooked’, ‘familiar’.

Also, ‘*zhuō*’ 拙 means ‘clumsy’, ‘blunt’. Ku was correct in his appreciation of Chinese painting. His notions about ‘fresh’ and ‘blunt’ strokes, refer to spontaneity and a certain rugged strength that looks like a ‘primitive’ quality. As an example, Ku Ningyuan pointed to remarkable children’s drawings for their bluntness and spontaneity.

(...)Woman and children and unpretentious people often draw for their own pleasure (...) such drawings (...) have something which the accomplished artist do not have, and that is the quality of sheng and chuo, freshness and naïveté. (...) For them [the children], the original nature is not yet developed, like the beginning of the creation out of chaos – they are making, as it were, their first drafts of the universe. (Lin Yutang, 123)

This idea originally came from Lao Zi who used the metaphor of a new-born baby, who still have the undifferentiated nature: *“He who is filled with Virtue is like a newborn child”* (Daodejing, ch. LV).

The concept of ‘freshness’ said Ku, “prevents pomposity”, and “bluntness prevents laboriousness”. (Lin Yutang, 124)

One of the most precise and outstanding treatises about technique and the purpose of Chinese painting is *“The Art of Painting”* dated 1781 from Shen Zong Qian. In this work, Shen Zong Qian also closely examines the deeper issues of form, style and psychology of art.

All things formed by the forces of the universe have an expression. To paint them is not only to catch their forms, but also their expression. (Lin Yutang, 160)

Shen Zong Qian explains that artists have two possibilities trying to capture that expression, one by a few casual strokes and another one by trying to set off all the details. The author describes exhaustively how to use the brush and different types of brush strokes, from the contour line to the vertical, horizontal or slanting lines, the texture of the

strokes, and the dryness of the brush and the uses of ink. He also explains how to learn painting and how to master the techniques to make interesting lines come alive. He even suggests where a student must start learning this process.

He said that the brush should be guided by the wrist to avoid trembling (it should not be manipulated with the fingers) and move smoothly along the paper. Metaphorically speaking, the firmness of the line and its strength should be equal to energy required to “*lift a bronze tripod*”. In applying a brush force (Qi) is very important because with this force comes the strength of stroke that makes a line come alive with energy. It is said, “*the line has spirit*”. (Lin Yutang, 164) These book’s instructions are very accurate about the technique of the brush at it pertains to its touching, speed, angle and direction:

When the bone (sinuous strokes) of a painting is there, it is possible to connect up the cartilages and tendons, and flesh and skin (surface and mass) can be formed around it. To attend to the surface effects without inner bone structure would be like gilding an earthen wall; it is beautiful on the outside but without a proper base the lustre will soon wear off. That was why the ancients concentrated on the brush-stroke. (Lin Yutang, 165)

Also, the essay called “*Expressionist credo: Sayings of Monk Bitter-Melon*” (苦瓜和尚畫語錄, Kugua Heshang huayulu) written by the revolutionary artist Shitao (1642–1707) was unique and presents a deep insight into the practice of artistic creation. Shitao’s real name was Zhu Ruoji and he was a member of the Ming royal house. In 1644, he evaded by chance the devastation around Manchurians’ invasion and civil rebellion. Around 1651 he became a Buddhist monk and assumed the name Yuanji Shitao, but he also signed himself as ‘Blind Abbot’, ‘Great Wash-Stick’ and ‘Monk Bitter-Melon’. The art he created was revolutionary in its transgressions of the rigidly codified techniques and

styles that dictated what was considered beautiful.

In his essays, Shitao uses many simple words to express philosophical ideas. The most important are:

- *Method* (法, *fǎ*), means the method of drawing, with disapproval of the methods of those imitating the old masters.
- *Recognition* (視, *shì*), means the gift of insight.
- *Development* (化, *huà*), means the flexibility that comes from true understanding.
- *Reception* (受, *shòu*), refers often to a natural ‘born gift’, but also means to ‘inspired by’.
- *Substance* (質, *zhì*), refers the essential nature underlying phenomena.
- *Decoration* (飾, *shì*) this concept is self-explanatory.
- *Paradigm* (例, *lì*), refers to the inner law of beings, the inner nature of things.
- *Function* (任, *rèn*), refers to the logical place in nature of a phenomenon. Everything in nature has a proper logical function in the universe and the artist needs to penetrate into the life of things and expresses it by his technique.

The aesthetics of Chinese art are centered on their ‘oneness’. Shitao wrote:

In the ancient days there were no method for the creation of art; all things were combined in one wholeness. When this

very wholeness began to separate, the method for creation started. How did this method start? It started from 'one brush-stroke' (yi hua). This very first 'one brush-stroke' is the origin of all compositions and the root of the myriad phenomena. It is innate in the power of the supernatural being but can be employed by men. (...) (Chiang, 217)

Shitao strongly criticized the doctrine of 'imitating the ancient', because in his time this practice had reduced itself to an absurdity. He respected the old masters but he saw ancient styles more as knowledge to be increased upon than as direct font of inspiration. As these old patterns have been copied by centuries -since Wang Wei-, it is impossible for artists to achieve the stature of the ancients, they are coping the copies without any spontaneity. In this respect, he said:

(...) since the ancients have established certain models, modern artists are not permitted to create new models. The consequence is that there is no chance of creating a new style. The artists copy the techniques of the old masters, but not the minds which employed such techniques. That is why there is no spontaneity. Is it not sad to think of it? (Lin Yutang, 157)

For Shitao the art should be different, unique and independent. He proposes a method, the theory of 'one-stroke', which means that the artist dips his brush in ink and is ready to paint, like the creator about to create forms and shapes out of chaos. He must seek the ephemeral inspiration and allows the picture grow out of his brush:

A man should be able to show the universe in one stroke, his idea clearly expressed, the execution well done. (Lin Yutang, 141)

Shitao speaks of 'a style of no style':

The establishment of this one-stroke method creates a method out of no-method, and a method which covers all methods. (142)

Finally, the *Jieziyuan Huazhuan* (芥子園畫傳 "Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden"), also identified as *Jieziyuan Huapu* (芥子園畫譜), is a consistent encyclopedia of Chinese Painting written during the early-Qing Dynasty. This treaty is a fusion of antique aesthetic laws, and obtains the instructions and examples of the greatest masters without giving preference to one particular school or at a particular time. This work is essential because it provides abundance of philosophical, historical and technical information.

Shen Xinyou (沈心友), son-in-law of the renowned writer Li Yu, was commissioned to do this book. Li Yu's mansion in Jinling was known as *Jieziyuan*, or "Mustard Seed Garden". Shen possessed the teaching materials of Li Liufang (李流芳), a painter of the late-Ming Dynasty, and commissioned Wang Gai (王概) to edit and enlarge those materials with the aspiration of producing a manual for landscape painting. The result was the first part of *Jieziyuan Huazhuan* in five fascicles (卷), published in 1679 in five colors. The first fascicle deals with the general principles of landscape painting, the second is about the painting of trees, the third of hills and stones, the fourth of people and houses, and the fifth comprises the selected works of great landscape painters. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jieziyuan_Huazhuan). Wang produced two more parts. Shen promised a fourth part, but never published it.

In *Jieziyuan Huazhuan* also we can find quotes of important masters of the past, such the famous Xie He's "*Six principles of Chinese painting*".

The introduction of Lu Chai-shi about the main principles of the Chinese aesthetic presents an important subject. From the beginning, the author establishes the subordination of technique and the higher estimation of inspiration. But, at the same time, he explains how the inspiration is nothing without having proficiency in the technique. The lack of knowledge of the media to express oneself makes impossible to create a piece of art.

Lu Chai-shi said: (...) some people consider it is noble to have a method, others see as noble not to have a method. Have no method is bad. Remain entirely within a method is even worse. At first, it is necessary to follow a strict rule (...) The purpose of the possession of a method is [be like if we had] no method (Jieziyuan Huazhuan, 28)

It is clear that the technique is only a medium, but an indispensable one. Therefore, we must follow first a strict rule. But once the skill is gained, it must dominate enough to forget it. This is the real mastery. Have no method is bad, but stay fully in the method is worst.

In the west, Leonardo da Vinci in his *Trattato della pittura* (Treatise on Painting) stresses the necessity to explore the world of forms dealing first with the means by which the painter must express himself. Leonardo said that the mind of the painter must continually be transformed into such many forms as notable figures of objects appear before his eyes. Lu Chai-shi similarly said: “*You must penetrate with intelligence all the changes*”.

The artist who is not anymore a prisoner of the techniques he learned, and forget the methods (*the greatest skill is like clumsiness*), he can return to candor and spontaneity of a child, could be flexible to change with the forms he evokes and can reach to express what

he sees and what he understands, not with the eyes of the body, but with the subtle sense of interior sight and he reveals a piece of this mysterious and wonderful phenomena that is the beauty.

2.4 Art History

2.4.1 First steps

In China, during the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.) artists began to represent the world around them. We could find chronicles about earliest Chinese paintings; we know, for example, that in Han dynasty they decorated their palace walls with frescos. During second and third centuries B.C., the brushes were improved, and the artists started to use paper and ink. The writing changed considerably and the ideograms had a new appearance.

Painting in China remains coupled with calligraphy. In general, artists from the Han dynasty (206 B.C.) to the Tang dynasty (618-907 A.D.) mostly painted human figures.

During the time of Eastern Jin Dynasty 晉 (317-420 A.D.) lived a famous erudite, poet, painter of portraits and figurines named Gu Kaizhi (顾恺之). Gu Kaizhi (c. 344-406) was born in Wuxi, Jiangsu province. He was probably the first example of an intellectual artist

and he is considered to have set new standards for figure painting. Before him, artists who painted palace walls were thought of as artisans, as was the case in Europe during the Middle Ages.

In our times, Gu Kaizhi's art is widely known from written records and paintings that are connected with him. One of the most celebrated paintings was the hand scroll known as the *Nymph of the Luo River (Luo shen fu)*, illustrating a Daoist poem (see image #1). This painting was derived from the essay "Ode to The Nymph of the Luo River" written by Cao Zhi, and illustrates the meeting between Cao Zhi and the Nymph at Luo River. It vividly captures the mood of their first meeting and eventual separation. The painter emphasized his subjects' expressions with ornamental stones, mountains, and trees (Encyclopædia Britannica, 27 Jun. 2008).

2.4.2 The Tang (618-907 A.D.) and Song dynasties (960–1279 A.D.)

Tang epoch is considered as the golden age of Chinese culture. The art and literature from this period is regarded as splendid in its simplicity. Many contemporary documents from the time of the Tang dynasty have survived the devastation of time. They include descriptions, catalogues, artists' biographies, and philosophic disquisitions. Unfortunately, not many authentic paintings from that era have survived. The ones that have are indeed very rare.

Towards the end of Tang dynasty, landscape painting developed into an autonomous genre that represented the aspiration of cultivated men to connect with nature. Such images might also express a certain social, philosophical and political conviction. When this dynasty ended in 907 A.D., the theme of retirement into the natural world became a key topic for contemporary artists. The disappointment caused by the collapse of social order drove erudite men to seek permanence inside nature. They retreated into the mountains, looking for a sanctuary away from the chaos of dynastic collapse. In their visionary landscapes, the great mountain that towered above the lesser mountains, trees, and men, represented a monarch among his subjects, a master among servants.

After that, Song dynasty was established in 960 A.D., and is regarded as culturally the most brilliant period in later imperial Chinese history. It was an epoch of big social and economic change. Literature and art from this period is considered to be classic. With their inherent beauty, spiritual contents and technical perfection, Song paintings should be considered as the apex of Chinese pictorial art.

During the Song dynasty, visions of natural order became similes of a well-regulated state. At the same time, images of the private retreat proliferated among a new class of scholar-officials. These men celebrated the virtues of self-cultivation and affirmed their identity as *literati* through poetry, calligraphy, and a new style of painting. The monochrome painting of trees, rocks, and new way of life created by these scholar-artists became symbols of their spirit (<http://www.metmuseum.org>, October 2001).

The first half of this era is known as the Northern Song period (960 - 1127 A.D.). During this time the capital of China was Bianliang (today Kaifeng). The early Northern Song

dynasty witnessed the flowering of one of the supreme artistic expressions of Chinese civilization: monumental landscape painting. (<http://www.metmuseum.org>, October 2001)

During the Southern Song dynasty the scale was reduced to a few elements in contrast to the multiple mountains of the earlier landscapes, but the goal is the same by opposite means. These artists perfected a “*new pictorial language of brush pointing and monochrome washes by which the known forms faded off into the void of the unknown*”.

(Rowley, 7)

During the Tang (618-907) and Song Dynasties (960- 1279), numerous pieces of art were characterized by a profound expressive quality. Many landscape painters of that time created a tradition that represented natural life using many ideas taken from Daoist and Chan philosophies. These artists represented a world that belongs to man but one that he does not dominate. This world was created for no one, and had its own purpose.

2.5 Landscape painting

Many critics regard portrayal of landscapes to be the supreme form of Chinese painting. The Chinese expression to refer Landscape painting is ‘*shān shuǐ huà*’ 山水畫, that literally means: ‘*huà*’ 畫 signify ‘painting or drawing’, ‘*shān*’ 山 ‘mountain’, and ‘*shuǐ*’ 水 ‘water’.

The mountain is a symbol that characterizes not only quietness and immobility, but also highness. For this reason it symbolizes transcendence or spiritual elevation; in contrast, water represents vitality, change, and purification. Water, as opposite to fire is ‘yin’, and represents the North, the coldness, the solstice of winter, and the color black. Therefore,

both polarities are involved in landscape paintings of that era: movement and calm, hot and cold, yin and yang. As G. Rowley said: *“Landscape itself is a mountain-water picture in which opposites need one another for completion”* (8).

In general, Chinese landscape painting illustrates the untamed nature: mountains, waterfalls, lakes and when represents human habitat choose those that express a relation with nature not a domination of it. *“This natural world, however, existed for itself and not as a vehicle for the moods of men; it was completely anonymous. As Li Taibo wrote, it is another sky and earth, not the world of man.”* (Rowley, 6)

A pavilion or a thatched cottage indicates a scholar’s mountain retreat, a temple or palace are places to meditate on mysteries of nature. The reaching of engineering are avoided or anything which would suggest man’s conquest of nature. Also human activities into the landscape are carefully selected, we could see scholars playing an instrument, walking or climbing a mountain, seated figures looking at the moon or a waterfall, figures in boats meditating rather than fishing. There is no separation between nature and the life of humans. Landscape can be thought of as a visible symbol of all-embracing universe that includes mankind.

In the west, this genre was developed much later than its Chinese counterpart. This was because in western paintings, landscape was viewed as a background for different themes like religious iconography or portraits. Later, in the second half of XVIIIth and then in XIXth centuries, landscape paintings were sometimes a study of the sky, the sea, the forests, or of other dominant features. Also, in western painting the importance of ‘mimesis’, the imitation of the appearance of nature was extreme. Western paintings span

two extremes: Human beings depicted either as lord and master of creation, or as a victim of the cruel forces of nature (Rowley, 20). Another distinction of note is that Chinese depict landscape as being limitless as opposed to being domesticated.

Unlike its western counterpart, Chinese landscape painting does not represent the world around us. Chinese painters realized that truth can only be discovered inside us and therefore, they did not copy landscapes directly and objectively. In their minds, the landscape representation comes from the inner qualities of the subject; they try to discover the Qi of nature and then represent it in their art. Painting is seen as a meditation, it has the solemnity of a ritual in which the spirit of the painter should be connected with the liveliness of the landscape.

Chinese artists did not try to copy the appearance of nature itself, his aim was not a mere 'likeness', instead, they observed nature and then reproduced its 'qi' in their landscapes. A Chinese artist did not try to copy a rock as an inert object. He tried to reproduce its vital energy to make the rock a living thing. To paint a mountain is not just to paint a particular mountain, it is the very embodiment of 'mountainness'. As the great poet Wang Wei said:

*These beautiful days in Xiang-yang,
Make drunken my old mountain heart.*

One of the ways to find the truth is by contemplation of nature. During this contemplation, we could experiment a vision of essential reality that is beyond the veil of appearances. The painter should perceive foremost, through the movement of forms, the cosmic principle that they express: beyond appearances, he must grasp the meaning of the universe. (Petrucci 1910-2, 37).

Also, the viewers feel an emotional delight parallel to that of direct contact with natural beauty, because in those Chinese paintings every twig of a tree is alive, and every tiny stroke are inspired by some natural object and has the energy of a living thing (Chiang, 112). No stroke may be added or deleted for the sake of decorative effect; every part of the composition is fundamental. The artist should know when he arrives to a balance.

The artists should impregnate the strokes with spontaneous and unconscious spirit, when a stroke is 'painted', meaning 'deliberately formed in direct imitation of a natural object'; its superficial verisimilitude prevents it having the true vitality of art. (Chiang, 112)

One of the strongest features in Chinese landscape painting is the emphasis given to the element in the forefront, leaving much of the area unpainted. There is a relative emptiness in composition for a reason. The emptiness is used to create space. This vacuity is a fundamental part of the image, and not a mere background to paint over. This technique of painting by not painting is sometimes described as 'playing a lute without strings'. It is a harmony between space and form, and the artist must realize when enough has been said.

This idea is shocking in the West. Western artworks and paintings are sustained by color, perspective and, in general, all canvas are occupied by figures or forms, color and lines; the concept of emptiness only arrives in the XXth century with Malevitch's Suprematism or Minimalism since the 1960 (images #17 and #18).

Another crucial aesthetic principle for the Chinese landscape composition is looking for the asymmetry rather than symmetry. "*Symmetrical arrangement tends to form a pattern,*

and a pattern means artificiality and lack of free movement” (Chiang, 220) but an asymmetrical composition recede from any pattern, toward naturalness.

Each thing is represented in conformity with its own nature then, the artwork becomes the image of a perfect world where the basic principles are balanced in a harmonious proportion. The painter does not seek to imitate the immediately apparent, but to achieve a synthesis of forms, which express the natural laws. These formulas correspond to a very ancient concepts of Chinese philosophy.

2.5.1 Perspective

The science of perspective¹⁴ reached the illusion of a third dimension and represented continuity to the spatial unit. Nevertheless, in Western art the Euclidian perspective lays the experience of space into a strait jacket in which it was seen from a single fixed point of view and was limited to a constrained quantity of space. Is because of that, the ‘*perspectiva artificialis*’ is called ‘one-eyed’ and ‘lames’ system, for the reason that it represents the space from one immobile point of view: this representation is a mental creation, an abstraction and have no relation with reality because we have two eyes, and we move into the space.

¹⁴ During the Renaissance’s Quattrocento, Filippo Brunelleschi demonstrated the geometrical method of perspective, by painting the outlines of various buildings onto a mirror. Some years later in 1435, Leon Battista Alberti wrote *De pictura*. In this treatise his most original contribution was what has ever since become known as ‘Alberti’s window’, “*an open frame gridded by perpendicular threads through which the artist should view the scene to be painted, and then transfer the coordinate details in scale onto his similarly gridded picture*”. (Edgerton, <http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php>).

In the rendering of landscape the use of one-point perspective is artificial because it diverges completely of our experience of nature; outside, our eyes are obligated to rotate in every direction to cover the whole scene. Euclidian perspective persisted in western paintings until the first half of the nineteenth century. With some exceptions since the second half of XIX century, such as the Impressionist movement or Cubism, the representation of space in western art remained consistent with that view.

Chinese painters practiced the principle of moving focus, by which the eye could wander while the spectator also wandered in imagination through the landscape. These designs must be a memory picture, which the artist created after months of living with nature and absorbing the principles of landscape in his heart. Then, the artist can freely and deliberately avoided the arithmetic perspective that is so significant for Western art.

Chinese perspective is a very different system from the monocular perspective: it disregards the usual height of the eye relative to the table. Sometimes the horizon is very high, like in the cavalier perspective, also called cavalier projection¹⁵. The parallel lines, rather than join the horizon remain parallel. The various levels ranging from one above the other, so that the light covers a huge panoramic area.

In Song dynasty, Shen Gua criticized painters for “painting the eaves from below”, that inhibited to “*view the part from the angle of totality*”. He believes that looking up one perceives the eaves of a pagoda as a person on the level ground and is able to see the beams and rafters of its structure. For Shen that was absurd. All landscapes have to be

¹⁵The cavalier perspective is a way to represent a three-dimensional object on a flat drawing, a type of oblique projection.

viewed from ‘the angle of totality to behold the part’, much in the manner in which we look at an artificial rockery in our gardens. If we apply the method to the painting of real mountains, we are unable to see more than one layer of the mountain at a time. (Sullivan, 156) “*What the Chinese artist record is not a single visual confrontation, but an accumulation of experience touched off perhaps by one moment’s exaltation before the beauty of nature*” (Sullivan, 157)

2.5.2 Distinction between Northern and Southern schools:

Around the year 1600 A.D., during the Ming Dynasty, Dong Qiqiang formulated a division between two schools of Chinese painting: one from the North and the other from the South. For Western people this classification is very confusing because do not refer of North or South of China, but allude to two Chan sects.

These terms of Northern and Southern Schools, must not be taken literally. These two terms do not define, in fact, anything we call an art school in the West. They only distinguish styles: the Northern school is characterized by the use of vigorous lines; the landscapes are magnificent but with certain harshness. The Southern school is distinctive by its softness with blurry tones; in a different way, the landscapes are full of charm, and melancholy. Northern School put more attention on shading, while Southern one accentuated contours and texture brushstrokes. While the Northern Song landscapes suggest immeasurable spirit of nature through diverse forms, in Southern Song the mystery of that spirit is subtly suggested by the elimination of form. In both cases though, the same point is arrived at. Space is not viewed as an entity but a means to suggest the immeasurable vastness of nature. Because of that the landscape became a symbol of an

extensive universe (Rowley,7). Shen Zongqian says “*the Southern School mostly uses beak-ink, while the Northern School uses splash-ink. But both ways give luminous results.*” (Lin Yutang, 166). Northern or Southern schools are terms to distinguish different styles, so the same painter could use both styles.

In the *Jieziyuan Huazhuan*, master Li Liufang said that in Buddhism there was two branches the Northern and the Southern, but the painting followed the same pattern. This division began during Tang Dynasty (*Jieziyuan Huazhuan*, Ch. VII). The records established that Li Sixun was the founder of the Northern School. Li was related to the imperial family. His son, Li Zhaodao, was also a famous painter. Both artists Li Sixun and Li Zhaodao are recognized to have painted in a highly decorative and meticulous style, employing a precise line technique, but unfortunately no genuine works of them survive. Dong considered Wang Wei as the father of the Southern School.

During the Tang Dynasty, Wang Wei (A.D. 699-759) dominated landscape painting. He was also an official at the court in the western capital. Wang found a new freedom with brushwork to provide a wider range of effects of texture and tone. Chan Buddhist painters brought still further freedoms with the brush to religious painting. Today none of his original paintings survive, but there are many copies of his works. He influenced what became known as the Southern school of Chinese landscape art.

Professor Yu Jianhua, author of the *History of Chinese Painting* (in Chinese), believes that Northern School has been underestimated because the promoters of the Southern School wrote more than the artists from the Northern school. Dong Qiqiang also wrote at a time when Southern School was the current style.

Even though this division is widely accepted, many critics contend that Dong's division of Chinese painting between Northern and Southern Schools is arbitrary and unscientific. According to these critics, Dong's classification is more based on his personal likes and dislikes rather than on any scientific foundation.¹⁶

2.5.3 A few indispensable examples of landscape paintings of Song Dynasty

One of the most important figures in landscape painting during the Northern Song dynasty was Guo Xi (郭熙) (ca. 1000- ca.1090). He was the preeminent landscape painter of the late eleventh century.

Early Spring (see images #6, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3) is his most recognized work. This masterpiece was completed in 1072 A.D. and it embodies his technique to create multiple perspectives, which he calls 'the angle of totality'. By moving focus, from part to part, by avoiding compositional axes, and by opening up the views at the sides the designs suggested a sequential experience in time and a movement beyond the limits of the painting into the boundless infinity of the universe (Rowley, 6). This strategy of representing multiple perspectives is interesting and is also very different from how the Western pictures used to be. In Guo's paintings there is no imitation of the mechanics of human vision. Instead of viewing a scene from only one spot, he shows us different visions or perspectives of the same scene.

There are three traditional ways in which Chinese artists conceptualize landscape:

¹⁶ Chung-kuo Huihua Shih, Bk.II, p.132. Commercial Press, Hong Kong, 1962 (Quoted by Lin Yutang, Op. Cit., p.11)

- *Level-distance (pingyuan)* composition is a view across a large valley area
- *High-distance (gaoyuan)*, a view of towering mountains, and
- *Deep distance (shenyuan)* a view past tall mountains into a distance

Guo Xi's paintings are a variant on the traditional level-distance method that was originally created by Li Cheng: an elevated forefront trees set adjacent to a spacious river valley. In fact, the three way (methods) of *yuan* (远) refer to perspective.

Another important painting of this Master is *Old Trees, Level Distance* (see images #7, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4). Guo Xi “continued the idiom of crab-claw (*xiezhao*) trees and devil-face (*guimian*) rocks developed by Li Cheng (919-967)” (Hearn, 28). Differently from the earlier master's severe style, Guo Xi's innovative brushwork and use of ink are rich, almost extravagant. In both paintings, background forms materialize from and decline into a dense moisture-laden atmosphere: rocks and distant mountains are suggested by outlines, texture strokes, and ink washes that run into one another to create an impression of wet hazy facade.

Guo Xi describes his technique in *Linqun gaozhi* (“Lofty Ambitions in Forests and Streams”), a treatise of painting:

After the outlines are made clear by dark ink strokes, use ink wash mixed with blue to retrace these outlines repeatedly so that, even if the ink outlines are clear, they appear always as if they had just come out of the mist and dew.

From left to right, crossing a little bridge, two aged figures walk slowly in the direction of a hut (see images # 7.1, 7.2). The outlines of the old men are the echo from the two rough

foreground trees, which apparently are connected by the roots. In the hut, a man is cooking a meal while several attendants with food baskets are arriving (see image #7.2). Almost imperceptible are two fishermen in their boats and travelers in the composition (see image #7.3).

Maxwell Hearn suggests the probability that this painting could be a late work done for a member of government on the eve of his retirement (31). This idea is supported by the advanced age of the two men; also the preparation of the event in the hut could represent the farewell celebration for a departing friend. The intense mist and leafless trees transmit a lonely autumnal air to the landscape. These delicate human attitudes are in agreement with the suggested mood of the landscape. This is a very poetic painting, which reflects different emotions such as melancholy, and the sweet sadness of farewell.

In the hand-scroll *Summer Mountains* (see images #8, 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.4, 8.5), attributed to Qu Ding (active ca. 1023- 1056), it is possible to see a lush forest immerse with mist as it often happens in midsummer evenings. This painting was executed on finely woven silk and has the seals of Emperor Huizong. On the left-hand corner of the painting, it bears Ming palace inventory seals—including one of the Qianlong emperor (1736-95), who has also added a poetic inscription in the right-hand corner of the composition (Hearn, 20).

The crucial point is the biggest mountain that is placed majestically in the middle of the composition, above the temple roofs, the climax to man's universe. This overwhelming peak is placed just above a temple located in a high valley, which is surrounded by a cloud formation. The temple, suspended on a rocky edge, offers refuge to travelers for contemplation and renewal. In the twilight, travelers speed up in the direction of the temple, where some visitors are seated together enjoying the moment. Next to the road, a fisherman throws his net for the last time. A man with his donkey and his companion cross

a little bridge, probably returning home (see image #8.3). The oblique line of the river leads the eye of the viewer into the foreground.

One of the most overwhelming pieces is Fan Kuan's "*Passengers between mountains and streams*" (see image # 9) painted during the Song Dynasty. This piece is almost two meters high and one meter wide. Fan goes beyond the limits of visual perception, building a new world.

If we see the photography of Hua Shan, the mountain used as a model for this painting (see image # 10) we notice that the perspective that the artist uses is not realistic. The painter employed three perspectives: the close, intermediate and distant; this is called "mobile perspective". By moving focus and avoiding compositional axes, and by opening up the views, the designs suggest a sequential experience in time that is beyond the limits of the painting into the boundless infinity of the universe. In the flux is the movement.

*It flows through all things, inside and outside, and returns
to the origin of all things (Daodejing, Ch.XXV)*

The composition is made enjoyable by the artist's skilful use of water, mist and clouds to break the margins of space, and to integrate different scenes into one. The magnificent mountains abruptly appear from the mist and the waterfall. Because of its composition, when someone is in viewing the painting from the front, he is forced to navigate through all the changes in appearance of the mountains like he is travelling between them. He has to make a huge effort to see the passengers in the painting and that makes him realize how small he is compared to the big picture of nature.

The historian Patricia Buckley-Ebrey said that the:

...foreground, presented at eye level, is executed in crisp, well-defined brush strokes. Jutting boulders, tough scrub trees, a mule train on the road, and a temple in the forest on the cliff are all vividly depicted. There is a suitable break between the foreground and the towering central peak behind, which is treated as if it were a backdrop, suspended and fitted into a slot behind the foreground. There are human figures in this scene, but it is easy to imagine them overpowered by the magnitude and mystery of their surroundings (Buckley-Ebrey, 163)

Liang Kai (c. 1140 - c. 1210) was originally a painter in attendance at the imperial painting academy in Hangzhou during the Southern Song period.

For indeterminate motivations, he left the academy to be converted into a Chan Buddhist priest, and his later paintings reflect his interest with Buddhism. He became a priest in a temple near Hangzhou, the capital city of the Southern Song dynasty. Because Chan painting generally, and that of the Southern Song in particular, has not been popular with the Chinese collector of more restrained Confucian sensibility, all the extant works that can be accepted as by Liang Kai are now in Japan. They have been much prized and imitated there (<http://www.britannica.com>).

In his work “*Poet Strolling by a Marshy Bank*” (see image# 11, 11.1) we can see a small landscape in the Southern Song compositional formula of “one-corner” style. He leaves half of the picture unpainted and the landscape looks illusory and remote, reflecting the Chan notions of the illusory nature of existence. Also, this painting represents a monk walking along the water. The mountain is dissolved in the mist but come into sight remote peaks. The image results mystique with some air of mystery.

Xia Gui (夏圭, active ca. 1195–1230)¹⁷ was a painter of the Song Dynasty and one of the greatest masters of the Southern Song landscape style. Along with Ma Yuan, he founded Ma-Xia school. He usually painted on the album leaf and the hand scroll. A Xia Gui painting has a characteristic for being made from ink monochrome, usually with just a few touches of color. His style is distinguished by brief, incisive, uses angular strokes which reflecting a quick execution.

This painter made a rupture with the detailed ornamental style to cultivate a minimal and more emotive method based on earlier masters of the Tang Dynasty. Xia's landscapes are characterized by asymmetrical composition and a talented ink technique, extraordinarily delicate that created complex atmospheric effects of mist and infinity.

The painting “*Mountain Market, Clear with Rising Mist*” (Album Leaf) (see images # 12, 12.1, 12.2) depicts one of the Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers. This theme became common in the late eleventh century after the Chan Buddhist monk Huihong (1071- 1128) composed eight poems about it. His poem “*Mountain Mist, Clear with Rising Mist*” creates evocative images that are then interpreted in paintings such as Xia Gui's.

Last night's rain is letting up, mountain air is heavy,

¹⁷ The exact details of birth and death of Xia Gui are unknown. He was born in (or near) the city of Hangzhou in Zhejiang province, which was the capital of China at that time. Xia was moved to the imperial court in the early 12th century when the north of China was invaded by the Jin Tatars. Because of this move, the latter half of the Song Dynasty is known as the Southern Song period (1127–1279). According to most Chinese sources, he served in the Imperial Academy under the emperor Ning Zong (reigned 1194/95–1224/25), eventually attaining the rank of “painter in attendance,” and being awarded the highest honor a court painter could receive, the Golden Belt.

*Steam rising, sun and shadow, shifting light amid trees;
The silkworm market comes to a close, the crowd thins out,
Roadside willows by the market bridge: golden threads play;
Whose house with flower-filled plot is across the valley?
A smooth-tongued yellow bird calls in spring breeze;
Wine flag in hazy distance –look and you can see:
It's the one west of the road to The Tree Ridge Valley.*

In his interpretation in painting, Xia Gui implemented audacious and expressive brushstrokes and ink marks that are full of gestures, creating an abstract language more than simply descriptive shapes. “*Xia Gui simplifies his rocks to a few angular outlines and ax-cut hatch-marks along the face of the boulder, yet the layering of contour lines and unlinked passages creates a convincing evocation of depth and cubic mass*”. (Hearn, 60)

Many sources concur that Xia Gui followed the style of Li Tang. This great master of landscape painting changed the vast, impressive landscape variety of the 11th century into an innovative, more intimate representation of natural world. While early Song painters had been circumspectly creating very detailed and complex microcosms, Li made his pieces simpler yet impressive. He created the new style of landscape called lyric.

Like other disciples of Li, Xia faithfully followed Li's technique and depictions of shapes. However, he liked to restrain the range of view to focus the viewer's attention. Powerful contrasts in tones provided greater volume to the rocks by chiaroscuro. The ink brushstrokes confer irregular textures. This technique is the result of Li's ‘*small ax-cut*’ texture strokes, so called because they suggest a surface cut with an axe. Another interesting technique used by Xia is the ‘split brush’, where the brush tip is split so it is possible to do two or more strokes at the same time. This method is very useful to paint tree foliage. Xia said he preferred to use a brush with a damaged tip. This was perhaps because he wanted his paintings to be different from the over-refined, smooth drawing of other Southern Song academy artists.

Xia Wenyan, in Tuhui Baojian (1365), wrote of him:

His works have an exciting quality. His ink tones give the effect of colors; his brushwork is mature and controlled; the ink washes are applied rich and wet, a remarkable achievement. (...) Of all the Academy masters of landscape after Li Tang, none was his equal.

Dong Qichang (1555–1636), great Art Critic of the late Ming period, who was normally disdainful of the entire academy tradition, made an exception for Xia from his extensive criticism:

Xia Gui followed Li Tang but added the element of simplicity to his style. What he did was like what clay-workers call “reduced modeling.” In his conceptions and intent, he is quite devoid of the “shortcuts” of imitativeness. With some forms hidden, some sunk [into mist], he has the “ink-plays” of the two Mi’s at his brush-tip.

In his ‘*Pure and Remote View of Hills and Streams*’ (see images 13, 13.1, 13.2, 13.3) the style of Xia Gui is almost expressionist. His brilliant virtuosity and at the same time violent passion are connected in a harmonic brush-stroke.

The void in the middle of the forefront of the landscape helps to create the natural perspective. The idea of space is accomplished by leaving a part of the picture empty, doing by do not doing (*wuwei*). The figures outlined increase the sensation of movement and the blurring effects creates the idea of a foggy and humid atmosphere.

Xia’s composition illustrates an impressive concurrence of solid and void, distance and proximity. Remote parts of the picture are painted in diffused ink, a basic device for achieving a sense of space in Chinese landscape paintings that is known as atmospheric perspective. One gets an impression of a spacious, misty, peaceful terrain in twilight.

Ma Yuan (active ca.1190-1225) was an influential landscape painter, whose work -as we

said before- formed the basis of the Ma-Xia School of painting. This artist belonged a recognized fourth-generation family of painters and was the epitome of the Southern Song School in Hangzhou¹⁸.

Even though Ma painted flowers some times, he is celebrated for his landscape paintings. Ma Yuan's style is intimate and lyrical; he was famous for the asymmetry of his compositions, he is master of 'one-corner' painting, in which visual interest is focused in a corner of the work, breaking the balance of the composition. His style becoming a model for later painters, so he was repeatedly copied, and sometimes is difficult to separate genuine works from those of his followers.

In that time¹⁹ the monumental Northern landscape style was largely abandoned, the artists started to work in smaller formats, such Ma Yuan did. In contrast to the detailed execution of Northern Song masters like Fan Kuan, the emphasis here is on 'less' rather than 'more', on suggestion rather than full statement. Light washes are used to blur the horizon, and the resulting sight is much more intimate than in Northern Song art.

Ma Yuan's *Viewing Plum Blossoms by Moonlight* (see image #14) is a visual poem that suggests a mood of stillness. The tones in the trees and rocks contrast with the light grayish tones of the cliff to suggest the mist-filled, the moonlight atmosphere of an early spring evening. The old settled gentleman gazes the moon, framed by the dark angular forms of the landscape, perfectly counterbalances the moon in its setting of limitless space. This composition evokes a yin-yang cosmic diagram with its implication of positive within

¹⁸ Ma was born into a family of court painters: his great grandfather, Ma Fen, at the Northern Song court about 1119–25; both his grandfather Ma Xingzu and his father, Ma Shirong, at the Southern Song court in the middle decades of the 12th century. Ma Yuan began his career under the emperor Xiaozong, later under Emperor Guangzong, and received the highest Chinese honour, the Golden Belt, under Emperor Ningzong. His son Ma Lin, was the last of the Ma artistic dynasty. Encyclopædia Britannica. 2009. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 05 Aug. 2009 <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/353432/Ma-Xia-school>>

¹⁹In 1127 the Song court was forced to relocate to the South. (Hearn, 56)

negative, light within dark, solid within void, the painting may be read as an emblem of man's dual nature: tied to the physical world, man's spirit is not contained by it but, like the plum, achieves growing to participate of the infinite. (<http://www.metmuseum.org/>)

In the album leaf: *Scholar by a Waterfall* (see image # 15), we can see a gentleman in a peaceful scenery; the sharp pattern of the pine tree branches differ intensely with the calm mood of the scholar, who stares meditatively into the sparkling rapids of the waterfall. Ma Yuan concentrates nature to a lyrical geometry of angular forms and emptiness. The silhouette of the scholar is suggested rather than described; mass and volume are merely insinuated.

Ma Yuan's son, Ma Lin also had the melancholic style of Southern school. In his *Sunset Landscape* (see image # 16) we can see a very minimal composition with some swallows flying over the water towards the sunset. In the vastness, the mountains are lost among the mist, and we look towards the shining sky from the bottom where the painter has written the following phrases from the poet Wang Wei of the Tang Dynasty:

*Mountains hold the autumn color near
Swallows cross the evening slowly.*

The content of the painting has been reduced to a minimum by the immersion in a mist-blurred atmosphere. Simplifying the outline, in order to capture the essential shape of the object and at the same time to form an aesthetically pleasing composition. The void creates here the space. He painted this landscape giving shape to things that have no shape and returned things that have shape to the shapeless.

Ma Lin truly captures the essential reminiscence mood through this weightless and dematerialized scene, which represent a transitory world.

Many scholars have detected a melancholy mood in Ma Lin's paintings, but, since it was the emperor that commissioned these works, their sadness cannot solely be attributed to the artist. In Ma Lin, the predestined Song dynasty court found the perfect voice to sing their swan song as they presided over the end of a great empire.

Finally, we could say that landscape painting is a symbol of the transforming cosmic process; it can be comprehended as the artist's interpretation of the universe.

The painters during Song Dynasty have created an overwhelming sense of majesty and vastness of nature in their masterpieces. The painter's aspiration was never a documentary or architectonic study of nature but a representation of an inner essence, an interpretation of nature and of man's relationship to nature.

Conclusions:

The natural mysticism of Daoism was reflected in Chinese landscape painting through the representation of universal harmony, a communion among all things where man, Heaven and Earth become equal.

George Rowley said that “*art, like religion, deals with inner reality*” and we agree. The artists were able to approach where the Dao is hidden and through it they could understand the very same essence of everything. As Lu Chai-shi said: “*only those who have reached the highest peaks of knowledge as the insight of an artist, will be able to express one day, in one immortal masterpiece, the beating heart of this giant of the world through the appearance of natural forms*”.

Also, through art the viewers are able to understand directly the absolute: the Dao.

Therefore, the paintings have more significance than their simple representations. They become a truthful creation through which it is possible to understand the very principle of the Dao.

This paper demonstrates how Chinese landscape paintings symbolize the Daoist principles as a whole and quietly enlighten an essential meaning to all mankind. These paintings represent remote sceneries, but at the same time, integrate intimate human activities in the pictures. However, these activities are almost insignificant. The narrative of the paintings suggests the human experience in perspective of the big picture and never shows the

domination of nature by human beings. These ideas today could be understood through an eco-centric approach. It is helpful to diagnose the human domination of nature in terms of the central Daoist doctrines. It could be the alternative to present-day materialistic attitude and would serve to develop an ethic of sustainability and an ecological sensibility.

To conclude we could say that art is a path through which human beings can be introduced to the origins of everything. So the essence of art is to make the true manifest itself and return to the essence of reality. It could be said that art is a way to arrive at the unique principle, that of the Dao.

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