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**Landscape Network**

A Thesis Presented

by

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to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

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in

**Art History and Criticism**

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Abstract of the Thesis

**Landscape Network**

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Wen Zhengming's *Deep Snow in Guanshan Mountains*, as many other landscape paintings in China, is usually interpreted and appreciated as the spirituality extended from the artist. It also relates the common value of aesthetics come from traditional Chinese philosophy, and the value system completes itself as a mature system of appreciating artworks. However, since traditional literature of art criticism and appreciation in China tends to be generalized, concise, and implicative, and there are certain viewpoints that are tacitly agreed among artists and art critics, it is often self-evident for people who are familiar with the system of Chinese aesthetics, but extremely confusing for those who are not. Therefore, I want to introduce a concept, *network*, that may seem modern and "Western," but that I think could be a point endowing East Asian aesthetics and philosophy with an articulation from its Western counterpart, in order to further explain both of the seemingly non-relevant or even conflict systems. By interpreting a landscape scroll painting as a network, I mean to indicate and interpret the complexity and flexibility of such a painting and explain what's beyond its pictorial surface, to connect joints that articulate the relevance and hold the structure, to unfold a fluid space that explains the dynamic. To accomplish this discourse, I will introduce several Western thinkers who may not be specialists for Chinese painting, even do not refer to East Asian art at all, but actually contribute to the interpretation of Chinese landscape painting in a way that Chinese art appreciators and critics would hardly make such interpretation with their own methodologies in the system of Chinese aesthetics. In this way, both of the interpretation from the traditional China and the modern West work for the explanation of the creating process and the product of conventional Chinese landscape paintings, only in different approaches.



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Fig.2(left), 3(right). Details of *Deep Snow in Guanshan Mountains*.



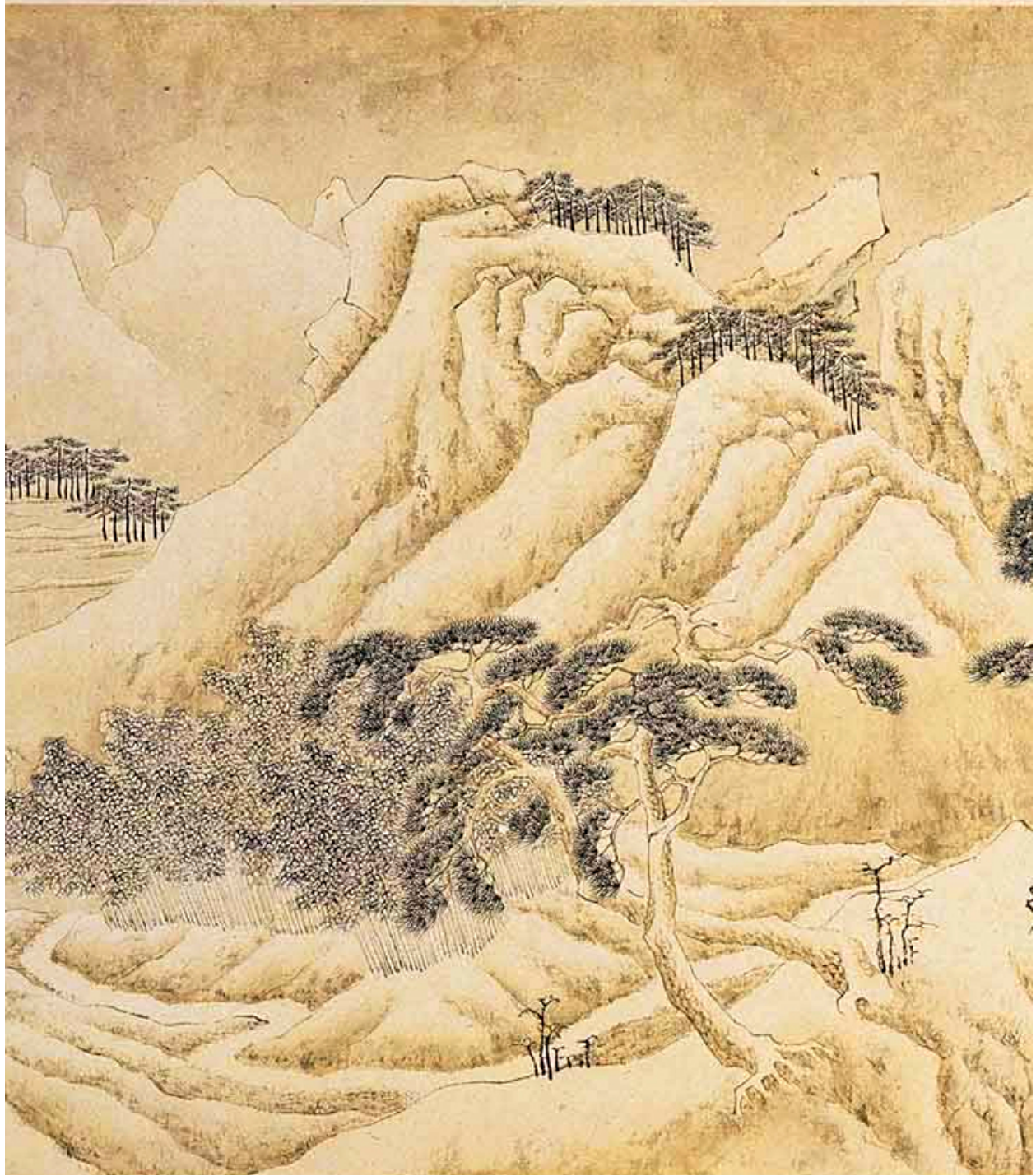


Fig.4. Detail of *Deep Snow in Guanshan Mountains*.



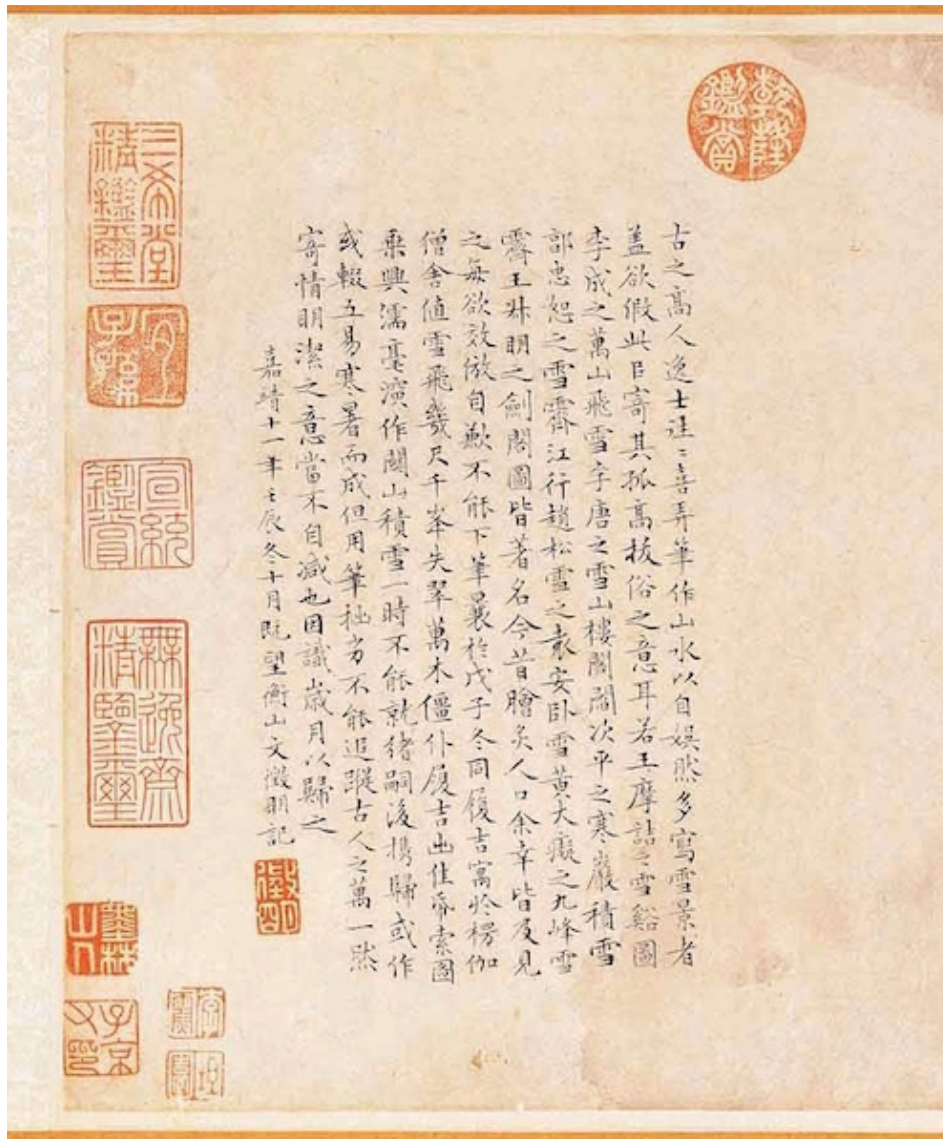


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古之高人逸士往往喜弄筆作山水以自娛然多寫雪景者  
 蓋欲假此以寄其孤高拔俗之意耳若王摩詰之雪谿圖  
 李成之萬山飛雪字唐之雪山樓閣閣次平之寒巖積雪  
 郭忠恕之雪霽江行趙松雪之衣安卧雪黃大癡之九峰雪  
 霽王琳明之劍閣圖皆著名今昔贈矣人口余幸皆及見  
 之無欲效倣自歎不能下筆最於戊子冬同履吉富於榜伽  
 僧舍值雪飛幾尺千峯先翠萬木僵仆履吉出佳帚索圖  
 乘輿濡毫演作關山積雪一時不能就緒嗣後携歸或作  
 或輟互易寒暑而成但用筆拙劣不能追躡古人之萬一然  
 寄情明潔之意當不自減也因識歲月以歸之

嘉靖十一年壬辰冬十月既望衡山文徵明記

徵明

Fig.7. Detail of Deep Snow in Guanshan Mountains.

## Landscape Network

In 1528 Wen Zhengming (1470-1559), one of the most famous artists in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) and in the history of Chinese art, finished a masterpiece of landscape painting, *Guanshan Jixue Tujian* (*Deep Snow in Guanshan Mountains*, Fig.1). It is a handscroll painting, black ink and color pigments on silk, painted in 1528-1532, and it is now in National Palace Museum, Taipei. The artist applied light azurite blue, malachite green and reddish purple to render the continuous mountains stretching along the long scroll, and used deep red for some of the figures and tree leaves. The primary subject of this painting is snow, but we actually cannot see any direct representation of the substance of snow; instead, the snow is represented by its absence – the blankness the artist deliberately left.

Landscape painting is one of the main genres of painting in Chinese art history. It is called *shan-shui hua* in Chinese, which literally means the painting of mountains and water. For Chinese artists as early as in the Han dynasty, mountains came to be not only the common sight in the territory where they lived, but also represented a spiritual world they longed for to escape from the mundane. This belief originated from the ancient natural worship, and enhanced by Daoism and Buddhism in Chinese philosophy. Landscape painting began to appear in the Five dynasties (907-979) and became highly developed in the Song dynasty (960-1279). By the Ming dynasty, as a genre of painting it became mature and conventional. I choose Wen's painting, a work in the Ming dynasty as an example for analysis, because it is on the one hand representative in the mature period of Chinese landscape painting, and on the other hand it began to be more conventional in its technique and style while there was still some space for innovation.

Wen Zhengming was born in Suzhou in 1470. He was not successful in his official career, but he enjoyed great reputation on his painting and calligraphy works. He succeeded Shen Zhou, the founder of the landscape painting of Wu School in the early Ming dynasty, and later he also became the leader of Wu School. Wen is considered to be one of "Ming si-jia" (four masters in the Ming dynasty), and the other three painters are Shen Zhou, Tang Yin, and Qiu Ying.

Wen's *Deep Snow in Guanshan Mountains*, as many other landscape paintings in China, is usually interpreted and appreciated as the spirituality extended from the artist, showing his *gu* (strength of personality) and *qi* (energy of life and spirit). It also relates the common value of aesthetics come from traditional Chinese philosophy such as Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, and the value system completes itself as a mature system of appreciating artworks. Xu Fuguan, a Chinese scholar as well as a contemporary Confucian, has clearly summarized this Chinese aesthetic system and the philosophy that drives it by examining ancient literature texts and restoring the historical context that produces Chinese art, and I will further explain this system later according to his discourses. However, since traditional literature of art criticism and appreciation in China tends to be generalized, concise, and implicative, and there are certain viewpoints that are tacitly agreed among artists and art critics, it is often self-evident for people who are familiar with the system of Chinese aesthetics, but extremely confusing for those who are not. Therefore, I want to introduce a concept, *network*, that may seem modern and "Western," but that I think could be a point endowing East Asian aesthetics and philosophy with an articulation from its Western counterpart, in order to further explain both of the seemingly non-relevant or even conflict systems.

I think a conventional Chinese landscape painting, such as Wen's *Deep Snow in Guanshan Mountains*, resembles a structured, intertwining *network* of landscape and human nature. In my argument, such *network* represents an open system to possibilities. It has joints – nodes and lines that are capable of linking and combining with multiple fragments of representation. It has a kind of depth, which is the three-dimensionality of a system of nodes and lines, and meshes here should have some volume rather than sustaining a plane. It is also fluid and dynamic, rather than still and static: a *network* in the modern notion, such as the Internet, is something unstable and unrepresentable, but more multicentric, opening to more possibilities.

By interpreting a landscape scroll painting as a network, I mean to indicate and interpret the complexity and flexibility of such a painting and explain what's beyond its pictorial surface, to connect

joints that articulate the relevance and hold the structure, to unfold a fluid space that explains the dynamic. To accomplish this discourse, I will introduce several Western thinkers who may not be specialists for Chinese painting, even do not refer to East Asian art at all, but actually contribute to the interpretation of Chinese landscape painting in a way that Chinese art appreciators and critics would hardly make such interpretation with their own methodologies in the system of Chinese aesthetics. In this way, both of the interpretation from the traditional China and the modern West work for the explanation of the creating process and the product of conventional Chinese landscape paintings, only in different approaches.

### **Landscape as a Living Place**

Wen Zhengming represented an actual place in his long scroll – Lengqie Mountains, and this place is somewhere that accommodates human, for there are paths in the mountains and several riders are walking through. Since landscape painting was developed in the Five dynasties and the Song dynasty, this intimate relationship between nature and human has been a basic notion in the landscape painting. In as early as 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, intellectual thoughts, such as Confucianism and Daoism, started to appear in China, and people were gradually awoken from the ignorant belief in which mountains were mysterious and terrified for human. They came to realize that the mountains were not horrible natural forces, but they were so relevant and intimate to human life.<sup>1</sup>

For Chinese landscape painter, the landscape should also be somewhere people could come to and be within. Guo Xi (1023-1085), the great landscape painter and art theorist in the Song dynasty, suggested that painters should choose the specific sites in the mountains that people could visit and reside in as the subject of their work in his *Shanshui Xun* (Advice on landscape painting):

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<sup>1</sup> Xu Fuguan, *Zhongguo Yishu Jingshen (The Spirit of Chinese Art)* (Shanghai: Huadong Shifan Daxue Chubanshe (East China



It is said that the represented landscape could be somewhere people could pass, overlook, visit, or reside, and such landscape paintings could be considered as masterpieces. However, the landscape where people could pass and overlook is not so good as that where people could visit and reside. Why? Mountains can stretch for hundreds of miles, but people could only visit or reside in a part of them. Tasted people admire the landscape because they could wander ground and taste it, and it is the advantage of landscape painting. Thus, the artist should make such places as the subject matter for his work, and the viewer should look at the painting as if they are visiting or residing in it. It is how we will not lose the essence of landscape painting.<sup>2</sup>

Guo Xi thinks that the landscape that accommodates people is naturally intimate to people, resonant to the emotion both of the artist and the viewer.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the landscape is not something separated from human, but it becomes an intimate place where people can actually wander around.

A Chinese landscape painting, as Michael Sullivan has already summarized precisely, is a combination of space and time: the viewer is not only looking at the scene it represents, but actually can wander around in its expanse of space.<sup>4</sup> Guo has further described this spiritual wandering in his *Shanshui Xun*:

To look at a particular painting puts you in the corresponding mood. You seem in fact to be in those mountains... You see a white path disappearing into the blue and think of traveling on it. You see the glow of the setting sun over level waters and dream of gazing on it. You see hermits and mountain dwellers, and think of lodging with them. You see cliffs by lucid water or streams over rocks, and long to wander there.<sup>5</sup>

Basically, a Chinese landscape painting is not accorded with our sight. It is more than the vision of human eye, and the viewer cannot see everything of the painting within a glimpse. There, as Guo Xi advised, the viewer needs to spend time to explore, to learn, and to understand what there are throughout the painting.

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<sup>2</sup> Guo Xi, *Shanshui Xun* (Advice on landscape painting), cited in Xu, *Zhongguo Yishu Jingshen*, 207-208. The original text is: “世之笃论，谓山水有可行者，有可望者，有可游者，有可居者。画凡至此，皆入妙品。但可行可望，不如可居可游之为得。何者，观今山川，地占数百里，可游可居之处，十无三四。而必取可居可游之品，君子之所以渴慕林泉者，正谓此佳处故也。故画者当以此意造，而鉴者又当以此意穷之。此之谓不失其本意。”

<sup>3</sup> Xu, *Zhongguo Yishu Jingshen*, 207.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Sullivan, “The Five Dynasties and Song Dynasty” in *Arts of China* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2008; 5<sup>th</sup> edition), 178.

<sup>5</sup> Guo, *Shanshui Xun*, cited in Sullivan, “Five Dynasties and Song Dynasty,” 178-179. The original text is: “看此画令人生此意，如真在此山中……见青烟白道而思行，见平川落照而思望，见幽人山客而思居，见岩崩泉石而思游。”

In *Deep Snow in Guanshan Mountains*, we have an even more direct feeling of wandering around in the place depicted, for it's a very long scroll, making it impossible to just give a glance to this painting.

The format of the painting and the way the viewer looks at it reinforces this spiritual journey. As a handscroll painting, *Deep Snow in Guanshan Mountains* should have only been viewed by the artist's intimate friends in a private occasion, very different from being fully unrolled and publicly displayed in the museum nowadays. In fact, it was one of the works that Wen had bestowed to his friend Wang Chong (1494-1533) as a symbol of their friendship.<sup>6</sup> When the handscroll was stored, it was wrapped; and when someone wanted to view this painting, he unrolled the scroll, then gradually the representation of landscape was unveiled in front of him. In this way he started the journey from the beginning of the scroll – the rightmost, and little by little going through the narrow path to the leftmost of the painting, but not the end of the journey, because he could continue his journey in his imagination, following the artist's implication by the repeating and seemingly endless mountains.

It's not surprising that when Edward Casey considers landscape painting as an important way of representing place for "landscape paintings possess the decidedly nonpractical function of helping us to appreciate the natural world's inherent beauty and sublimity,"<sup>7</sup> he especially builds a bridge to Chinese landscape painting. The representation of a place might not be the depiction of a particular place of the surrounding world, but it should have "intrinsic power of its own."<sup>8</sup> In the Northern Song landscape paintings, Casey finds a very different tradition of landscape painting from the Western. He discusses that Chinese artists began to represent landscape, the place people were living, self-consciously in a very early time compared to the Western artists. Sullivan supports Casey's assertion: "In this early period [i.e., of the Han dynasty] Chinese artists and craftsmen were already strongly inclined toward representing landscape wherever there was the least excuse to do so. Indeed, while the craftsman of classical Europe or ancient India instinctively filled a space to be decorated with human figures, animals, or plant forms, his

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<sup>6</sup> Recorded in the colophon of *Deep Snow in Guanshan Mountains* by Lu Shidao (1510-1573) in 1557, Ming dynasty.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Casey, *Representing place: landscape painting and maps* (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xiv.

<sup>8</sup> Casey, *Representing place*, 92.

Chinese counterpart thought first of a landscape...”<sup>9</sup> Later in the Wei and Jin dynasties (220-420 CE), this spontaneous selection of motifs was transformed into conscious and active appreciation of landscape.<sup>10</sup> It is because, in Casey’s words, for Western painters nature is without, while for Chinese painters nature is within – their views of nature were more respectful than their Western counterpart.<sup>11</sup> To be within a landscape for Chinese painters, would not position themselves against nature but think of themselves as a part of it. Thus to represent the landscape is a way to represent the human themselves. This point will be important in my further argument.

### **Multi-point Perspective as Nodes**

Just as single-point perspective works as the structure of a traditional Western painting, multi-point perspective works as that of a conventional Chinese landscape painting. A Renaissance European painter would observe from one fixed point, model a scene with diagonals that converge to a vanishing point, and basically create a precise enclosure within the pictorial space. A Chinese painter in the Song dynasty would create a more unstable space jointed by multiple viewpoints, like multiple nodes are connected with each other and form the skeleton of a network. This space would not be so precise as the three-dimensional spatial depth created by single-point perspective, but disclosed to possibilities.

Different from the single-point perspective, multi-point perspective combines visions from multiple viewpoints, and in the specific example of Chinese landscape painting such visions are not necessarily real. In *Deep Snow in Guanshan Mountains*, it is almost like the artist went to the mountains, walked along the path in the valleys, and painted them when he was traveling. But in fact, these kinds of

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Sullivan, *The Birth of Landscape Painting in China* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1962), 42. Cited in Edward Casey, *Representing place: landscape painting and maps* (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 94.

<sup>10</sup> Xu, *Zhongguo Yishu Jingshen*, 137-138.

<sup>11</sup> Casey, *Representing place*, 95.

landscape scrolls were more likely to be finished according to the artist's practice of the conventional brushstroke techniques,<sup>12</sup> his memory and imagination of the real scene,<sup>13</sup> and his understanding of the cosmos in his philosophy. In the context of Chinese aesthetics, it is considered an interaction between the exterior surroundings and the interior mind.<sup>14</sup> Wen also agreed with this idea by demonstrating that "the scenery and the mind should be integrated."<sup>15</sup> Thus, the artist was not necessarily observing the scenery from "multiple standpoints" physically, but he was walking through it mentally, selecting the most wonderful sceneries for him and realizing them as a whole by the practice of his skilled hand.

I think what Norman Bryson defines as *visuality* contributes to the articulation of this construction of visions. Bryson has raised the question about vision and visuality with consideration of the painting of East Asia in his 1988 treatise *The Gaze in the Expanded Field*. He divided the concept of vision and visuality: vision is what is directly perceived by the human eyes, "notion of unmediated visual experience," limited to our sight, while visuality is the "cultural construct," made up by the "entire sum of discourses" between the subject and the world.<sup>16</sup> In this way, he develops the argument that the painting should be more than a human's vision, and it can be directly perceived in a painting of multi-point perspective in East Asia.

From the point of vision and visuality, Wen Zhengming and his *Deep Snow in Guanshan Mountains*, as the relationship between artist's vision and the landscape scroll, could be considered further. In the scroll, the several horse riders Wen depicted (see Fig.2), who were passing through the mountains, could not see the whole picture, because they were in that picture themselves, and the position of these figures reflects that of the artist himself. The painting started on the occasion that Wen and his friend Wang

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<sup>12</sup> For example, *cun* (texture strokes), one of the conventional brushstroke techniques, came from the observation of the landscape and formed mainly in Song dynasty. To some extent they are knowledge of the visual aspects of nature, the visions from the previous masters.

<sup>13</sup> Gu Kaizhi (348-405), a legendary painter in the Jin dynasty, said in his *Lun Hua* (Comments on Painting): "The painter uses his imagination and accesses the essence of his subject matter." Cited in Xu, *Zhongguo Yishu Jingshen*, 116.

<sup>14</sup> Liu Gangji, *Wen Zhengming* (Changchun: Jilin Meishu Chubanshe, 1996), 28.

<sup>15</sup> Cited in Liu, *Wen Zhengming*, 79. The original text is: "景与神会，象与心融。"

<sup>16</sup> Norman Bryson, "The Gaze in the Expanded Field," in *Vision and Visuality*, edit. Hal Foster, (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), 91-92.

Chong were watching the view of snow in Lengqie Mountains together,<sup>17</sup> so he had actually once put himself into the scenery physically instead of standing by and looking at it. But he didn't finish the painting on that occasion. Actually, it took Wen Zhengming five years before he finally finished *Deep Snow in Guanshan Mountains*.<sup>18</sup> He would paint for some time and would leave the painting for some time, to continue his journey both in the physical and mental world, to combine his visions, the visual experiences, both real and imaginary, into *visuality*. The *visuality* is an integration formed by the artist, and it forms what he thought of the essence, the *truth* of the landscape rather than the resemblance.

Through this perspective structure, the long-distance journey could be realized in one continuous representation. The mountains stretch further without interruption, and the long pathways appear among the mountains, so the landscape seems to be infinite. Compared to that infinity, though it has been represented in such a long scroll, the painting itself is still limited to only an implication of the much grander nature. The landscape painting is a glance at that world, but it somehow provides the viewer with a perception of the infinite.

### **(Non-) Rendering as Meshes**

Only a few colors were applied in Wen's painting. His work continued the traditional style that was established since the Tang and Song dynasties. The mountains and the sky were distinguished mainly by ink lines instead of colors, only some pale colors of azurite blue, malachite green and reddish purple were applied, though the interspersed figures and trees were deep green and red, which draw the viewer's eye. The boundary between land and river is even more obscure. In the middle of the scroll, several boats

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<sup>17</sup> Recorded in the colophon of *Deep Snow in Guanshan Mountains* by Lu Shidao. *Lengqie* is the Buddhist name of Guanshan mountains.

<sup>18</sup> Recorded in Wen's inscription at the end of the scroll. See Fig.7.

show that there should be a river beside the path the riders are passing through, but there are no lines between land and river, and the differences of color are hard to distinguish (see Fig.3).

When we see brushstrokes and pale colors as are present in Wen's painting, we should not forget about the absence: the preserved blankness infused. The concept of blankness was important for painting as well as calligraphy in traditional Chinese art criticism. In the context of Chinese art, calligraphy and painting have always been closely connected to each other, and indeed, the blankness that surrounds those lines and colors functioned in a similar way. Liu Gangji, a Chinese scholar who specializes in the study of Wen Zhengming, has properly summarized this relationship in his analysis of Wen: "In many works of Wen Zhengming...even the size and location of the blankness in the scroll could not be shifted and modified. His painting was like a well-compositional Chinese character. The viewer looks at it over and over again, and could not find anywhere out of its place."<sup>19</sup> To see a work of calligraphy, besides the ink characters, it is equally important to see the blankness left between strokes inside every individual character, between characters, and between columns; to see a work of painting, it is also equally important to see the places where the painter didn't leave any trace of ink or color. Blankness is no doubt a necessary part of representation for the artist and appreciation for the viewer.

In *Deep Snow Guanshan Mountains*, blankness was used to represent different things: some parts of the mountains, the sky, the river, and the important subject matter for this particular work – the snow. Snow infuses here and there, filling gleamingly in the sky, the mountains, and the paths. Wen also left small blank spots among the tree leaves (see Fig.4 as an example). The snow was depicted by the absence rather than the presence, taken away in order to represent. In Bryson's words about the blankness in the paintings of East Asia, it comes out that "the viewer's eyes look out at a segment of the total field that

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<sup>19</sup> Liu, *Wen Zhengming*, 146. The original text is: "文氏的许多作品……连幅中空白处的宽窄偏正, 也似乎不可移易。文氏的每一幅画, 就象一个结构得很好的字, 虽经观者反复推敲, 也难找出不妥当、不满意的地方。"

surrounds the viewer omnidirectionally,”<sup>20</sup> instead of being in front of the viewer. The snow is nowhere and then everywhere, and the whole unified snowing scenery was created.

I think the rendering of ink and color, especially the blankness, resembles the meshes of a network, and this thought comes from Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty had no intention to interpret East Asian paintings; instead, his philosophical theories are pointed to the Impressionists and especially Paul Cézanne. However, the subversion of traditional linear perspective, the blurring of boundaries between objects and surroundings, and the flatness in the rendering of colors in Cézanne’s work are strikingly similar to the conventional Chinese landscape paintings after the tenth century. In this way, Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation about Cézanne’s landscape paintings could work not only for our understanding of Cézanne and the successive modern Western art, but could also help inspiring the interpretation about the conventional Chinese art.

Merleau-Ponty has distinguished vision from the visible, and the *vision* in his discourses is different from Bryson. For Merleau-Ponty vision is not something unmediated perceived by our eyes, but “the gaze itself envelops them, clothes them with its own flesh.”<sup>21</sup> By using the word *flesh* Merleau-Ponty implies that a thing is more than an atom and it affects its surroundings and its atmospheric space. Cézanne’s revolutionary idea is to restore the natural vision, to eliminate the outline or contour that defines the object of the visible as an “object.” We are not organizing the visible into a vision, but the visible “[organizes] itself before our eyes.”<sup>22</sup>

This idea is not totally new for Chinese painters. However, the articulation of this idea from Merleau-Ponty helps us interpret the scroll paintings from a different angle. The lines in a painting are not necessarily used as confirming the form of the things in *Deep Snow Guanshan Mountains* and other Chinese landscape paintings. Rather, ink lines are a part of the brushstrokes and mixed with *cun* (texture

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<sup>20</sup> Bryson, “Gaze in the Expanded Field,” 100.

<sup>21</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Intertwining – The Chiasm,” in *The Visible and The Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 131.

<sup>22</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Cézanne’s Doubt,” in *Sense and Nonsense* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 14.

strokes), one of the conventional techniques in Chinese paintings, radically rendering things as a whole instead of distinguishing them from separate forms. For example, the snow in *Deep Snow Guanshan Mountains* is implied by the rendering of mountains, paths, trees, rivers, and the sky, and it cannot be distinguished from the representation of these motifs. Therefore, what Cézanne discovers is a “discovery” only in the Western traditions of painting, and what Merleau-Ponty wrote on Cézanne on the contrary steps into the traditions different from them: “If the painter is to express the world, the arrangement of his colors must carry with it this indivisible whole, or else his picture will only hint at things and will not give them in the imperious unity, the presence, the insurpassable plenitude which is for us the definition of the real.”<sup>23</sup> The unity is emphasized in order to provide “the definition of the real,” and this is partly in accord with the traditional Chinese art theory that, for a painting, especially a landscape painting, the artist should link up and achieve balance within its representation between the details and the whole picture. So the representation might not access form-likeness, but the *truth* of landscape in order to complete itself into a unity.<sup>24</sup>

For Merleau-Ponty, a color is also never “a naked color” but constructed from more than its visual aspect. The color is a variant, a constellation, “a certain node in the woof of the simultaneous and the successive,” which comes from the visible and symbolizes or represents for the invisible.<sup>25</sup> This is the second point where I connect Merleau-Ponty to Chinese landscape paintings. The restrained colors, the azurite blue, malachite green and reddish purple rendering the continuous mountains, were a category of closely related colors that applied to symbolize the invisible feelings and ideas, rather than to depict the visual features of mountains organized by the artist.

But Merleau-Ponty has never talked about the non-color, the blankness, which makes his interpretation inadequate for an important part of Chinese art. In fact, the blankness is also a constellation

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<sup>23</sup> Merleau-Ponty, “Cézanne’s Doubt,” 15.

<sup>24</sup> In the traditional Chinese art criticism, this question has been presented in the debates between *xing-si* (form-likeness) and *qi-yun* (spirit resonance). Discussed in Xu, *Zhongguo Yishu Jingshen*, 117-123.

<sup>25</sup> Merleau-Ponty, “The Intertwining – The Chiasm,” 132.



that could symbolize different meanings in one painting, such as the mountains, the sky, the river and especially the snow in *Deep Snow Guanshan Mountains*. With rendering strokes on the whole painting, snow is not directly represented as distinguished form or color, but rather fused with mountains and rivers. Like the presence of color in a painting, the absence of color also represents, as a more radical and abstract yet appropriate discourse, the invisible. The blankness also works as the meshes of a network; there's nothing substantial in the meshes, but there's everything rich in its meanings.

Thus Cézanne's flatness in his paintings, his various Mont. St. Victoire (see Fig.5 as an example), is a recession from the pictorial depth, but a searching for a different kind of depth, which is formulated beautifully in Merleau-Ponty's words and strikingly articulates the multi-point perspective and the combined visions in Chinese landscape paintings: "Depth thus understood is, rather, the experience of the reversibility of dimensions, of a global "locality" in which everything is in the same place at the same time, a locality from which height, width, and depth are abstracted, a voluminosity we express in a word when we say that a thing is *there*."<sup>26</sup> The searching of this kind of depth seems to partly explain why Chinese landscape painters constructed their vision, knowledge and experience of the landscape and the understanding of the world by sacrificing the exact resemblance and three-dimensional spatial depth, why Wen Zhengming embodied the experience of his long journey onto a single pictorial surface.

### **Painting towards a Fluid Network**

A painting is infused with thoughts and feelings in its own pictorial space, and the thoughts and feelings are framed, structured and influenced by the artist's knowledge of the world. By using the word *knowledge*, I mean nothing about the cognitive, particular and analytic knowledge, which was not plentifully achieved and even deliberately denied by literati, the educated class in old time China; but a

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<sup>26</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *Merleau-Ponty's Essays on Painting* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 140.

more general, intuitive knowledge, more close to loose philosophical ideas than specialized accumulation that instructed the artist's practice and performance within the work. I think these thoughts, knowledge, and ideas resemble a loosely-structured, fluid network, in which the painting itself appears as a glimpse of that fluid space, an immobile representation of the mobile entirety.

To formulate this argument more completely and carefully, I'm introducing Henri Bergson and his metaphysics. Like Merleau-Ponty, Bergson has no reference to Chinese art, but his explanation of images in metaphysics gives a broader understanding that articulates art in general.<sup>27</sup> For Bergson metaphysics imply that the better way we know a thing is to enter it, instead of moving around it. He distinguishes intuition and analysis, and it is intuition that can make us enter a thing as a simple act. The concept of intuition is very important to indicate the general understanding of Chinese artists, because this generalization is not a strict summarization of knowledge and experience, but a more speculative and intuitive process of knowing.

What I describe as a fluid space, in Bergson's word, is an unrolling *duration*, which resembles "in some of its aspects the unity of an advancing movement and in others the multiplicity of expanding states."<sup>28</sup> Images cannot represent this duration, though the format of handscroll in Chinese painting mimics the act of unrolling; they are more likely than concepts to suggest the duration in an indirect way, for they are in the very attempt of seizing the intuition: "...the image has at least this advantage, that it keeps us in the concrete. No image can replace the intuition of duration, but many diverse images, borrowed from very different orders of things, may, by the convergence of their action, direct consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to be seized."<sup>29</sup> A scroll landscape painting actually presents as diverse images, since it is constructed by a series of visions. The handscroll format of *Deep Snow Guanshan Mountains*, the unrolling act by the viewer, makes it possible to infinitely

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<sup>27</sup> Merleau-Ponty also quotes from Bergson in his *Eye and Mind* when he makes his discourses about lines in painting.

<sup>28</sup> Henri Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1903) (New York and London: The Knickerbocker Press, 1912), 14-15.

<sup>29</sup> Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 16.

approach the intuition of duration, just like moving images in a cinema.<sup>30</sup> However, it is also different from a cinema because the sequence of the images can be reversed and disorganized by the viewer: when the viewer finishes viewing the scroll to the far left, he can re-view it from the left to the right, or enter it at any point, without disrupting the experience of appreciating the whole scroll.<sup>31</sup>

Let us now think about Cézanne's repeated but various paintings of Mont. St. Victoire. Cézanne once said: "They (classical Western artists) created pictures; we are attempting a piece of nature."<sup>32</sup> It is his individual efforts to capture something of nature, through the repeated practice of the same theme, which he might never successfully seize or be satisfied enough with himself. And let us also think about the multiple artists in the history of Chinese landscape paintings, Wen Zhengming, the masters before or after him, their repetition of similar mountains and water in the conventional practice, generation after generation. Weren't they attempting to seize something unrepresentable, not in the individual sense, but shared in the common ground? The artists immobilized the mobility of this fluid or floating network where the truth of landscape and the ideas of people intertwined, captured the various aspects of duration and describe or define them to suggest the fluid space within a painting.

The fluid network of philosophical knowledge and ideas could be possible for at least two reasons. First, it is because of the multiple identities of Chinese artists: they might be painters as well as calligraphers, poets and literatists, since paintings, calligraphy and poetry have been blended with each other in Chinese art since the Tang dynasty (618-907).<sup>33</sup> The whole system of Chinese landscape painting that we value today is highly overlapped with that of literati painting. Literati painting means that the producers of these paintings were literati, the elite, educated people. They were both artists and scholars,

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<sup>30</sup> Wu Hung has discussed the relationship between handscroll and cinema. He points out how the format of handscroll brings different viewing experience, but he concentrates on the voyeuristic gaze in viewing a narrative handscroll painting, which resembles cinema. See Wu Hung, *The Double Screen: Medium and Representation in Chinese Painting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1996), 68-71.

<sup>31</sup> Wu, *Double Screen*, 57-58.

<sup>32</sup> Cited in Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt," 12.

<sup>33</sup> Xu, *Zhongguo Yishu Jingshen*, 155-156. The most direct example of the integration of the three art forms is a poem written in the blank place of a painting; however, implicit integration is more than it. Poetry and painting can project to and reflect from each other in the aspects of themes, contents and feelings, so they compensate and reinforce each other.

as the latter they are highly educated and influenced by the philosophical thoughts mainly from Confucianism, but also from Daoism and Buddhism (an exotic religion first but localized and integrated to be an important part of Chinese philosophy), the other two mainstream ideologies in old time China.

Wen Zhengming was no doubt one of the famous literati. Even Wen spent very little time in his life being a government official, he received orthodox Confucian education from his family, and he was concerned with the nation and government affairs and kept participating the imperial competitive examination (an official selecting examination, which also needed extensive learning of Confucian doctrine) throughout his life. Confucianism had endowed his painting with a kind of temperament of *zhong-he*, which means neutralization and balancing, an important ideology in Confucianism.

Because of his short official career, Wen mainly lived in Suzhou throughout his life, and Suzhou was the cultural center in the middle and late Ming dynasty. What he depicted in *Deep Snow in Guanshan Mountains* was actually the snowing scenery of Lengqie Mountains in Suzhou.<sup>34</sup> Besides painting, Wen was also famous for his calligraphy, and he was one of the founders of both *Wumen Huapai* (*Wu School*) and *Wumen Shupai*, the representative regional group of painters and calligraphists in Suzhou.<sup>35</sup> In *Mingshi: Wen Zhengming Zhuan* (History of the Ming dynasty: Wen Zhengming's Biography) there is a record about Wen's cultural position in the literati group:

Since Wu Kuan and Wang Mou led the literati group with their great articles in Wuzhong, Shen Zhou and Zhu Yunming has also become famous and created a good literary environment. Wen Zhengming, Cai Yu, Huang Shengzeng, Yuan Biao, and Huangfu Chong with his brother, came after them soon. Wen led the literati group for several decades, and associated with Wang Chong, Lu Shidao, Chen Daofu, Wang Yixiang, Peng Nian, Zhou Tianqiu, and Qian Yi, etc. These people were also famous for their literary work.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Recorded in the colophon of the handscroll.

<sup>35</sup> "Wumen," and "Wuzhong" follows in this paragraph, were common-used names of Suzhou in the Ming dynasty.

<sup>36</sup> Cited in Di Xiaoping, "Jianlun Mingzhongye Wuzhong Wenren Jituan de Xingcheng" ("On the Formation of Man-of-letters-Group in Wuzhong Mid-ming"), *Beijing Keji Daxue Xuebao (Shehui Kexue Ban) (Journal of University of Science and Technology Beijing (Social Sciences Edition))* 21 (2005), 74. The original text is: "吴中自吴宽、王鏊以文章领袖馆阁，一时名士沈周、祝允明辈与并驰骋，文风极盛。征明及蔡羽、黄省曾、袁宏、皇甫冲兄弟稍后出。而征明主风雅数十年，与之游者王宠、

The above record shows Wen inherited rich traditions from earlier literati and he was very close to the circle of literati in Suzhou, sharing a common cultural atmosphere with them. Wang Chong, a close friend of Wen, was the one whom Wen presented with *Deep Snow in Guanshan Mountains*.

In general, the literati believed in Confucianism more than other doctrines, but in the aspect of art, they painted for recreation and pastime, escaping temporarily from the mundane, where they needed to follow the order and obey the rules, but in the process of creating, they could express their individual feelings. Thus, the solitary and eremitic idea from Daoism and Buddhism was very attractive for them, and though distinct from Confucianism, these two doctrines constituted with it as the basic aesthetic idea of their works.

For example, the motifs of natural landscape fit the taste of Confucian literati and represent their ideas that a man is an integral part of nature, and he only occupies a very small place compared to the landscape in the whole cosmos. *He* (harmony) is a nuclear concept in Confucianism, and this pursuit of harmony means not only the relationship between people, but also between nature and human. Jing Hao, one of the important landscape painters in the Five dynasties, said that people should not be larger than trees.<sup>37</sup> His words should not be simply understood as a purpose for pictorial realism but rather for the deeper significance of nature. The figures are no more important than trees and rocks in truth, so they won't be larger in scale in the representation.

Blankness in the painting is a direct embodiment of Daoist theory about non-effort. One of the important views of Daoism is “Wu wei er zhi” (to govern by doing nothing that goes against nature),<sup>38</sup> which firstly indicates an advocate of a small government as its political ideology, but also resonates with its artistic implication, and the deliberately preserved blankness exactly incarnates the usefulness of the uselessness.

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陆师道、陈道复、王毅祥、彭年、周天球、钱毅之属，亦皆以词翰名于世。”

<sup>37</sup> Sullivan, “The Five Dynasties and Song Dynasty,” 175.

<sup>38</sup> Original text is “无为而治。”

Xu Fuguan further suggests that Confucianism and Daoism have fused with each other in the intellectual history, especially in the contribution to the aesthetic concept, because they have the similar idea that a person could make himself a work of art by improving his spirituality and enhancing his morality.<sup>39</sup> In this way both Confucianism and Daoism relate the artwork to the producer: the producer's personality will infuse in his work, and the artwork will also reflect his personality. This relationship between the artist and his work is very important for the traditional Chinese art criticism, and I will articulate it further in my argument. Moreover, Daoism also links up and fuses with Chan (one of the Buddhist sects in China) because their reclusive ideas have similarities with each other.

The ancient belief that every matter, no matter living or nonliving, has its own spirit was later emphasized by Buddhism and embodied as the artistic aspiration in the conventional painting. Before the Song dynasty, painters often believed that a portrait should express the spirit of human, but later they gradually realized that this pursuit could be also applied to landscape painting. In the Song dynasty, Deng Chun wrote in his book *Huaji* (A succession of painting studies): "People only know that painting can express human's spirit, but they do not know that the spirit of matter can also be expressed by painting."<sup>40</sup> The spiritual aspect of painting not only existed in the representation of human, divines, or other creatures, but also in that of landscape.<sup>41</sup>

Compared to his contemporaries, Wen was a more authentic Confucian literatus and less directly influenced by Daoism and Buddhism in his work of art. Thus, Wen's work has no Daoist or Buddhist symbols, and is characterized as moderate and serene, which lacks the unruly features in some works of his contemporaries, such as Tang Yin (see Fig.6 as an example). However, before Ming dynasty, though Confucianism had mostly dominated the cultural atmosphere, the different philosophies had influenced and absorbed from each other for a very long time. The anchoretic temperament in Wen's work showed the Confucianism that he followed had already included the ideology of Daoism and Buddhism in a subtle

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<sup>39</sup> Xu, *Zhongguo Yishu Jingshen*, 27-34.

<sup>40</sup> Deng Chun, *Huaji*, cited in Xu, *Zhongguo Yishu Jingshen*, 109. The original text is: "世徒知人之有神，而不知物之有神。"

<sup>41</sup> Xu, *Zhongguo Yishu Jingshen*, 109.

but intrinsic way. In fact, Wen appreciated *Xuan-xue* (literally means ‘metaphysics’), an ideology produced in the Wei and Jin dynasties (220-420 CE), which hugely absorbed Daoism and provided Confucianism with powerful thoughts to overcome its inevitable limitations.<sup>42</sup>

The second reason for such a possible fluid network of philosophical ideas is the fact that the scroll paintings were normally viewed in a more private way rather than being displayed publicly. The artist does not consider a bunch of viewers but only his intimate friend, or even without considering anyone at all. The artist elaborately represented the landscape on paper or silk, but few would think that they should consider the viewer, especially in literati art. “The recluses in the past were keen for painting the landscape for recreation. Many of them preferred painting snow sceneries, because they wanted to express their lonely pride and their freedom from the mundane...” The inscription at the end of *Deep Snow in Guanshan Mountains* by Wen Zhengming explains the idea about his scroll painting (Fig.7). It shows the aim of such landscape paintings is far from depicting the snowing scenery for the viewer, but mainly for expressing the artist’s mood and feelings through the corresponding landscape. Painting was not for anyone else who was going to see the work, even not for his friend Wang Chong that Wen was going to present aesthetically, and if one considered how the viewer would think, then the work would be ruined for its lack of purity, because the artist was not devotedly expressing his spirituality.

However, the exclusion wouldn’t confuse the viewers in his contemporaries or in later generations, because they share the same identification of the conventional signs and the corresponding knowledge of nature. Casey explains this common ground in Chinese landscape painting for the artist and the viewer spanning the expansive space and time: “These forms – forms of mountains and rivers, hills and huts, trees and bushes, pathways and bridges – amounted to a virtual visual vocabulary, a coherent set of conventional symbols whose ready interpretability and recognizability could be counted on not only by a painter’s own contemporaries but by many succeeding generations of viewers...”<sup>43</sup> Though I will argue

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<sup>42</sup> Liu, *Wen Zhengming*, 64-71.

<sup>43</sup> Casey, *Representing place*, 96.

that “form” and “symbol,” terms in common use for classical Western paintings, are not precise to describe the vocabulary of Chinese landscape painting – instead I will use “sign” because it does not necessarily refer to specific form and conveys a meaning closer to gesture, I think Casey has captured a core explanation for how the landscape paintings could resonate with viewers in the contemporary and in many future generations, while the artist excluded them out of his sphere.

The artist’s practice of the conventional brushstroke techniques was very important to make this interpretability and recognizability possible. The snowing scenery in *Deep Snow in Guanshan Mountains* represented Wen’s own memory and imagination, but it was also massively based on the pictorial conventions of representing snow in the Tang and Song dynasties.<sup>44</sup> In the inscription at the end of the scroll, Wen listed the pieces that depict snowing scenery by past artists, including Wang Wei, Huang Gongwang, Zhao Mengfu, etc. (see Fig.7). Wen widely generalized and refined the conventional painting techniques from different periods, and created his own style and led his contemporaries and successors to carry forward the style of their period. Henceforth, though the style of artists was changing in every period, the signs and knowledge represented in the landscape paintings have remained comparatively unchanged and unchangeable for hundreds of years, instead of dying out as a result of its stasis, it continues to exist even today. They continue to be recognizable and comprehensible for Chinese viewers.

This exclusion even occurred in the artist himself. One of the most important founders of Daoism, Zhuangzi (about 369-286 BCE), emphasized *wu-ji* (forgetting oneself) as an important idea for refining the individual spiritual status, suggesting that “the perfect man forgets himself.”<sup>45</sup> The attitude he proclaimed profoundly affected the political ideologies, as well as the view of life and the art creation and appreciation in the Chinese history. In *Deep Snow in Guanshan Mountains*, Wen expressed his thoughts and feelings in an abstract and refined way (and it was recorded briefly in the inscriptions in the painting: “though I cannot use the brush that well as the old masters, I can still express my honest and clear

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<sup>44</sup> Liu, *Wen Zhengming*, 130.

<sup>45</sup> The original text is “至人无己.”



thoughts”), but we could not find the specific intention of the artist. What meaning did he indicate by depicting the snow in Lengqie Mountains? Why did he choose this subject matter? It seems both the artist and the viewer were not concerned about it. Either his intention was ambiguous and unimportant, or, there was a tacit agreement between the artist and the viewer that went without saying: to forget the self and blend with nature, accorded with Zhuangzi’s words. Zhang Geng (1685-1760), a connoisseur and specialist on landscape painting in the Qing dynasty, wrote in his *Tuhua Jingyi Shi* (Recognition of the Spirit and Meaning in Painting):

*Qi-yun* (spirit resonance) may come from ink, brush, the intention of the painter, or the non-intention of the painter. The most superior level is that from the non-intention; the second most is that from the intention; the third most is that from the brush; the most inferior is that from the ink...What is called non-intention? When the painter concentrates his spirit and meditates, spontaneously and adeptly moving his eyes to see and his hands to draw, he does not intend to make a great painting, but suddenly it comes out to be a masterpiece.<sup>46</sup>

*Qi-yun* is a very important idea for criticizing and appreciating work of art in the context of Chinese aesthetics, and I will explain this term later in this paper. Here, though Zhang mistakenly belittled the ink in appreciation of a painting, he made a clarified argument that highly values the artist’s non-intention.

The literati had their own intellectual thoughts, so keeping it out of the representation or expression was very necessary and meaningful. It is *wang-zhi* (forgetting knowledge) in Zhuangzi’s words. *Wang-zhi* delivers similar meanings with *wu-ji*, but it particularly point to literati because they have much intellectual knowledge and could hardly follow their intuition, which is considered to be essential in creating art.<sup>47</sup> The technique of multi-point perspective clearly helped with this idea. The artist was trying to make himself disappear from the position of a thoughtful observer. There should be no observer of the whole landscape, because the artist was himself inside of it. He waited for the truth of landscape revealed

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<sup>46</sup> Zhang Geng, *Tuhua Jingyi Shi* (Recognize of the Spirit and Meaning in Painting), cited in Xu, *Zhongguo Yishu Jingshen*, 112. The original text is: “气韵有发于墨者，有发于笔者，有发于意者，有发于无意者。发于无意者为上，发于意者次之，发于笔者又次之，发于墨者下矣……何谓发于无意者？当其凝神注想，流盼运腕，不意如是，而忽然如是是也。”

<sup>47</sup> Xu, *Zhongguo Yishu Jingshen*, 45.

itself to him and within him, “not only must the natural order, the order of essence, be manifested to him; it must also be *incorporated into him* before creative work can occur.”<sup>48</sup> The presentation of the mountains itself replaces the representation by the artist. Cézanne said: “The landscape thinks itself in me, and I am its consciousness.”<sup>49</sup>

### ***Yi-jing*, Space, and Network**

To explain the presentation of landscape itself more than the representation of signs in the context of Chinese landscape painting, the term *yi-jing* (poetic space) should be introduced. Since the painting has always intertwined with poetry in Chinese art history, the metaphor of poetry was introduced into a painting to describe a certain space, which is normally what *yi-jing* refers to. Zhang Yanyuan (815-907) commented on Gu Kaizhi (348-405 CE), one of the legendary painters before the Tang dynasty, in his *Lidai Minghua Ji* (Record of famous painters of successive dynasties): “*Yi-jing* exists before the painter leaves traces with his brush on the silk. When he finishes his painting, when the representation ends in the edge of the silk, *yi-jing* continues to exist.”<sup>50</sup> This comment precisely indicates the relationship between *yi-jing* and the pictorial surface in the traditional Chinese notion, as well as how *yi-jing* works during the process of creating a painting.

To better illustrate *yi-jing*, the poetic space, Bryson’s great metaphor of proscenium and choreographic space should be cited here. He wrote in the epilog of his book, *Vision and Painting*, about his feeling towards Juran’s scroll, a Chinese painter in the period of the Five dynasties, and described a kind of space that comes into being from the representation: “[T]he strokes also exist in *another space* apart from the space of spectacle; a space not so much convergent with the silk as with the

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<sup>48</sup> Casey, *Representing place*, 107.

<sup>49</sup> Cited in Merleau-Ponty, “Cézanne’s Doubt,” 17.

<sup>50</sup> Zhang Yanyuan, *Lidai Minghua Ji* (Record of famous painters of successive dynasties), cited in Xu, *Zhongguo Yishu Jingshen*, 162. The original text is: “意尽笔先，画尽意在。”

body of the painter; it is in *his* space, and in a sense it is blind... in the Chu Jan,<sup>51</sup> it is this choreographic space, behind the proscenium surface...<sup>52</sup> This choreographic space resembles what Chinese artists and art critics appreciate as *yi-jing*, formed by the philosophical thoughts and ideas, and the body, suggested by Bryson, of the artist that makes the painting a masterpiece. Bryson's suggestion of the body of the painter is not articulated in Chinese art criticism but is at the same time not new to Chinese philosophy, for Chinese do not frame mind and body into a binary system that is typical in Cartesian philosophy; the words *shen* (body) and *xin* (mind) are alternatively used according to the context and not distinguished clearly, and some ideologies, such as Confucianism and Daoism, roughly indicate that the body and the mind depend on each other, act as a part of each other, and should be unified as a complete personality, just like the harmony between nature and human.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the body of the painter, just as the knowledge and ideas are considered a product of the mind, has been understood in both the theory and practice of landscape painting's poetic space. Based on the idea of a unification of nature and human, *yi-jing*, the poetic space, endows the work with unique temperament and personality of both the artist and nature (nature has always been likened to a human body metaphorically), individually and anonymously at the same time.

Then, what makes the transition from the pictorial spectacle to the poetic space within the silk surface, that relates to the philosophical thoughts and ideas of the artist? I think one of the bridges is *gu*. *Gu* literally means 'skeleton,' but extends to the description of a clear and articulated structure, a great personality or an impressive temperament of art or literature. I regard *gu* as a kind of implicit philosophical framework, borrowing this explanation from Casey: "General and eternal at least for all those for whom they are transparent in their significance, thanks to sharing the same philosophical and

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<sup>51</sup> Chu Jan is the Wade–Giles format of Juran.

<sup>52</sup> Norman Bryson, "The Invisible Body," in *Vision and Painting: the logic of the gaze* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 164.

<sup>53</sup> Zhang Xuezhi. "Several Modalities of Body-Mind Relations in the Traditional Chinese Philosophy." *Journal of Peking University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)* 42 (2005): 7-14.

social framework – and meaningful for all others who can, even from afar, sense and savor this significance.”<sup>54</sup> This further explains my previous argument about the tacit agreement between the artist and the viewers. The agreement is not restrained to the conventional signs but extends to the invisible ideas that are implicitly framed and commonly shared. *Gu* might come from the effect of multi-point perspective, which technically leaves the space for the complexity of visuality, but it transcends that: it establishes the structure of idea and temperament rather than that of the pictorial technique. It is constructed with the artist’s intuitive thoughts as the expression of his tasteful personality and spiritual strength, which is built or considered to be built with the Confucian ideology.

Another bridge between pictorial surface and poetic space is *qi*. The original meaning of *qi* is air or atmosphere, and directly incarnated as clouds and mist in landscape paintings. It also extends to abstract meanings such as the energy of human body parts and organs and the status of a person’s spirit in traditional Chinese medicine and corresponding philosophy. In art and literature, it specifically describes the atmospheric aesthetics, both of human and of nature. Since Cao Pi (187-226 CE), the first emperor of the Wei dynasty (220-265 CE), as well as an important literalist, had put forward that “literature should be developed mainly through *qi*,”<sup>55</sup> *qi* became widely used in the criticism of literature as well as of art. By reviewing the historical development of the concept of *qi*, Xu Fuguan has a very precise explanation of it: he thinks *qi* works as a medium between the human body and the artwork. It tends to refer to the totality of the physical and spiritual energy of the human body, and through this totality, an external expression of the artist’s personality and temperament could be formed. The artist’s ideas, feelings, and imagination can only be expressed through *qi* to his artwork, and in this process, *qi* has been loaded with these ideas, feelings, and imagination to be capable of creating and expressing on the silk or paper. Therefore, the production of artwork is made possible through *qi*, and personality and temperament of the artist and that of his artwork is unified.<sup>56</sup> Here we can connect *qi* with Merleau-Ponty’s *flesh* in order to

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<sup>54</sup> Casey, *Representing place*, 96.

<sup>55</sup> Cao Pi, *Dianlun Lun Wen*, cited in Xu, *Zhongguo Yishu Jingshen*, 97. The original text is: “文以气为主。”

<sup>56</sup> Xu, *Zhongguo Yishu Jingshen*, 97.

better explain both of them, since they both refer to something that surrounds, mediates between human body and the work it produces. If *flesh* explains how the visible is mediated and reappears in the eyes as vision, *qi* explains how the vision is realized or restored on the painting surface by the artist handling his brush.

*Qi* not only fills in the human body but also constructs the whole cosmos in the traditional Chinese philosophy. In this way human and nature fuse and harmonize with each other: human is both a part of nature and a miniature of the cosmos. Casey has also accessed the very explanation of *qi* and he further emphasized its projection from the subject to the surrounding place. For him, *qi* is the energy that facilitates and interanimates the human and nonhuman worlds into a unity, “as sheer cosmic energy is...the basis of all relationships between things and their respective places,” by providing a “significant consonance” of them and making them “more same than different.”<sup>57</sup>

In traditional Chinese art criticism, *qi* has different meanings, implications, and usages in various historical periods and contexts. *Qi* was sometimes referred to or replaced by *gu* for similar meanings, as it indicated the individual temperaments of the artist and the intrinsic power of his work inspired from his temperament and projected to the pictorial surface.<sup>58</sup> Here I will distinguish *gu* from *qi*, in order to define them and make them explicit, though it will to some extent distort the original context. I regard *gu* as its basic meaning of structure, of the spiritual strength by referring it to a more clarified pictorial and philosophical framework of the representational landscape. Though far from explicit and changed according to context, *gu* basically has these two layers of meanings in Chinese art criticism: it could refer to the pressure the artist was using his hand and his brush, as well as the strength of his own personality. It constructs the groundwork of *yi-jing*. As for *qi*, I regard it as the more fluid elements projected from the artist, that render *yi-jing* of the painting and deepen this poetic space, fusing the landscape into a unified, somewhat unrepresentable but existent and perceptible wholeness.

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<sup>57</sup> Casey, *Representing place*, 95, 98.

<sup>58</sup> Xu, *Zhongguo Yishu Jingshen*, 97-98.

*Qi-yun* is a more delicate word to describe the bridge from the pictorial spectacle to the poetic space, for it emphasizes the synthesis and resonance of the spirit and the material substance. The earliest use of *qi-yun* as a specific term to describe the landscape painting was in Jing Hao's *Bifaji* (Record of brush methods).<sup>59</sup> *Yun* literally means 'rhythm', but it will be misleading to refer to *yun* as something related to music. Instead, *yun* is more about the relation between poetry and painting, especially in the phrase *qi-yun*, for in Chinese art, the painting is considered to resonate with poetry more than music, though there are some parts metaphorically the same between art and music. Xu defines *qi-yun* as the spirit of the subject matter in a painting, including human and nonhuman. For landscape painting, the spirit of landscape exists in the expansive space of the painting where the viewer could wander around mentally, and this place becomes a residence of human spirit.<sup>60</sup> Also, it refers to the spirit of the artist reflected in his work, since the capture of the spirit of landscape must rely on the artist. This communication of landscape and human is where *qi-yun* exists. Casey's explanation is also on the same track while he articulates it in a different way. He considered *qi-yun* as spirit resonance, and it is a specific form of *qi*, "including ourselves as an integral part of all that is." We appreciate places that we inhabit or explore through this spirit resonance with them, in which "its way of being present to us, not before us or against us, or even in us, but *with* us."<sup>61</sup> In this way, *qi-yun* connects *yi-jing*, the poetic space of painting, to the presence of landscape.

The multi-point perspective resembles the nodes and lines of the network; the brush strokes, restrained colors and preserved blankness then, resemble the meshes of the network of the landscape scroll. However, either perspective method or the way of rendering is only a technique approaching that fluid network within the painting, a simplified and temporary representation, a description of what is at least difficult, if not impossible, to describe. As Wen Zhengming once wrote in his poem: "The landscape

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<sup>59</sup> Xu, *Zhongguo Yishu Jingshen*, 109.

<sup>60</sup> Xu, *Zhongguo Yishu Jingshen*, 110.

<sup>61</sup> Casey, *Representing place*, 95, 98.

in Wuzhong is clear and brilliant, and it could not be represented in a painting,”<sup>62</sup> he apparently noticed the difficulties of that description as well. *Gu* and *qi* seem to be two worthy-considering terms to discuss *yi-jing*, the poetic space within the pictorial surface. If we simplify the discourse, we could consider *gu* as nodes and lines that frame and structure the wholeness with strength and clarity, and *qi* as meshes that infuse this structure to make it ambiguous but unified. They constitute the fluid network within the landscape painting. The landscape is therefore neither the physical nature outside us nor the human nature inside us. It is at the same time nowhere and everywhere, filled in and extended to by *gu* and *qi* both the pictorial world and the real one. The artist captures an immobile segment from the whole fluid network, restores it from this network and reconstructs and enriches it to “try to exhibit the same comprehensiveness as the landscape it represents,”<sup>63</sup> showing it to us as a window of the dynamic in which the philosophical and spiritual inner might never be completely seized.

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<sup>62</sup> Wen Zhengming, “Ti Zhao Boju Hangaozu Ruguan Tu”(Poem about Zhao Boju’s painting *Hangaozu Conquering the Central Plain*), in *Wen Zhengming Ji (Anthology of Wen Zhengming)*. Cited in Liu, *Wen Zhengming*, 26. The original text is: “吴中山水不可作，吴中山水含清辉。”

<sup>63</sup> Casey, *Representing place*, 95.

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