

Landscape Painting as a Critical Cross-Cultural Art Practice

Exploring how the theories and methodologies in ancient Chinese painting can be fused into contemporary landscape art practice to expand existing artistic formats.

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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The 50% component of the submission is in the form of an art exhibition in the Peter Scott Gallery, Lancaster University 8th – 16th September 2016. This exhibition will be documented through photographs compiled on a CD included in the permanent binding of this thesis.

Declaration

I declare that the thesis is my own work, and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

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October 2016

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Abstract

This thesis is part of a practice-based Ph.D. study that investigates the genre of landscape painting through a cross-cultural perspective and method of practice. It attempts to link and step across the fields of ancient Chinese and contemporary Western art, with a focus on how to critically understand and use Chinese aesthetic traditions to make a contribution to contemporary landscape painting practice. This study argues that ancient Chinese art theory can provide unique insights and ways of thought, as a different interpretive strategy from the Western art tradition; and the traditional Chinese pictorial methodology is able to integrate into contemporary landscape painting practice and, as a result, expand existing artistic formats. This study aims to provide a cross-cultural perspective on thinking and the methods of analysis, broadening the cultural boundary of landscape painting and enriching the current understanding in the field. The theoretical section aims to provide the direction and systematic inquiry to develop a critical awareness and the appropriate methodology of studio practice. Studio practice, in the study, seeks the possibilities to create new forms of contemporary landscape painting as well as the new methods of making it, which include diverse aesthetic traditions and cultural understandings.

Introduction

Contemporary art practice has witnessed a great enthusiasm for studies of cross-cultural topics.¹

Nowadays, cultural hybridization is not merely a unique phenomenon of modern life but indicates a profound change in our perception of the world, whereby traditional and popular cultures have been absorbed and re-formed into original and new forms. This has been made possible thanks to the continuing development of digital technology that helps to spread visual images and cultural information all over the world, encouraging ideas about cultural fusion. Art practice in today's information age has no longer to be examined by one single cultural theory or artistic mode, but can be shared as an ongoing global resource.

Despite the widespread interest and an increasing number of publications concerning the interaction of different cultural and artistic modes, many scholars and contemporary artists put their focus on the topic and context of post-colonialism, which more or less emphasize the Western aesthetic mode and its influence on the rest of the world. James Elkins in his book *Is Art History Global?* argues that despite an emerging interest in non-Western art in recent years,

¹ We can see this from the number of academic conferences and discussions involved. For example, *Translating the Image: Cross Cultural Contemporary Arts* (September 2000 – August 2005), (Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board) is an interdisciplinary project headed by Professor Irit Rogoff, and housed in the Art History/Visual Culture Department of Goldsmiths College, University of London. It posits a series of questions concerning notions of location, singularity, proximity and notions of visual culture. We can also see a range of international and local artists who attempt to explore cross-cultural influences between the West and East. For instance, Christin Bolewski (Loughborough University)'s practice-based research project *Video Scroll 'Shan-Shui-Hua'* investigates Western film and digital visualization, but access is through Eastern aesthetics, emphasizing the pictorial concept of distance in traditional Chinese painting. Or, we can see Chinese artist Xu Bing's *A Book From the Sky* (1987-1991), a contemporary installation of hand-printed books and ceiling and wall scrolls inspired by the form and typography of traditional Chinese woodblock publications.

‘the interpretive strategies remain very Western’ (Elkins 2006, p.19). He explains that the current art-historical literature concerning Chinese art, for example, has been written according to Western methods of analysis, including psychoanalysis, semiotics, iconography, or identity theory, etc. However, the non-Western cultures, including China, Japan and India have their own traditions of art theories and methodologies that ask similar and different questions to Western art history, so that a complete understanding of non-Western art and its aesthetic mode becomes difficult. According to Elkins, there is a gap between the understanding of ancient Eastern art and the interpretive strategies of Western art history.

By the end of the 20th-century, a small number of Western scholars had attempted to introduce the aesthetic ideas of Asian art as a source for European artists (Binyon 1936), (Sullivan 1973, 1979), (Bush 1985), (Damisch 1972), (Elkins 2010). However, possibly due to the limited resources of Eastern literature and original art available, many 20th-century works of literature of Asian art have been kept as kinds of introductory texts, providing some exciting perspectives, but lacking systematic and in-depth research in both theoretical and practical aspects. A cross-cultural study of art, especially in the field of landscape painting, between ancient East and contemporary West is still relatively unexplored.

● **Landscape Painting**

Landscape is a natural scene mediated by culture. It is both a represented and presented space, both a signifier and a signified, both a frame and what a frame contains, both a real place and its simulacrum, both a package and the commodity inside the package ... Landscape is a medium found in all cultures.

(Mitchell 1994, p.5)

Landscape painting is my theme and the field of exploration in this cross-cultural study, in which I use landscape as a medium for cultural research, linking culture and nature to invoke in-depth thought about people's spiritual perception of the land. Often seen as a genre of painting, landscape can make visual communication and convey common emotional cognition; it is considered as a boundless visual language of different cultures.² As Kenneth Clark said: 'With the exception of love, there is perhaps nothing else by which people of all kinds are more united than by their pleasure in a good view.' (Clark 1949, p.74).

Furthermore, landscape can be seen as a kind of symbol or image to capture artistic and cultural patterns, demonstrating different ways of seeing based on cultural diversity. 'Landscape is a medium found in all cultures.' (Mitchell 1994, p.5). W. J. T. Mitchell in his essay 'Imperial Landscape' describes it as a medium of exchange between humans and nature, and the self and the other – 'good for nothing in itself, but expressive of a potentially limitless reserve of value'(Ibid.). Mitchell suggests thinking about landscape as a medium or a vast network of cultural codes, rather than an assemblage of isolated objects (Ibid. pp. 13-15). He also argues landscape is not only a unique quality in Western art, as in the Chinese tradition, it is doubly important in this context, as it subverts the claim of landscape as having a Western lineage, and

² Here we can see the famous network questionnaire 'The People's Choice – the Most Wanted Paintings' created by Russian emigrant artists Vitaly Komar and Alex Melamid. In this survey, thousands of people from different countries were invited to complete a questionnaire in order to discover which subject matter in painting (still life, portrait, human figure, animal, and landscape, etc.) people preferred, and which they least preferred. The most preferred was landscape. Also, one interesting thing is that people have a similar opinion about the structure, proportion, and composition of their favourite landscape painting. See <http://awp.diaart.org/km/intro.html>

its aesthetics of landscape also plays a crucial role in interpreting English 18th-century landscape art (Ibid. p.9). His argument reminds us of the various functions and values that landscape can provide in relation to visual representation and cultural research.

For Mitchell, the rise of landscape painting in ancient China provides a mirror to measure the imperial power, in which landscape's blooming and decline imply the imperial status of development. He argues it is also a common principle that also applied in other societies –Rome, 17th-century Holland and France, and 18-19th century Britain (Ibid). Mitchell proposes that taking Chinese traditions into the discourse of Western landscape can be a further method of pondering culture and art. As he writes: 'the representation of landscape is not only a matter of internal politics and national or class ideology but also an international, global phenomenon, intimately bound up with the discourses of imperialism.'(Ibid.)

Indeed, culture structures the approach of landscape painting. Landscape as a theme of study can be placed in a specific, historical point; and research can be carried out, which addresses the social, economic and cultural condition at that time; it can also be used to make a cross-cultural comparison and contrast between different social and cultural modes, so as to develop new practice and exploration, and fill in the gaps of knowledge.

Landscape painting in the Western art tradition appeared at least in 15th-century Italy, developed into an independent subject in 17th-century Holland, and became enriched in 19th-century France (Clark 1949). During the 18th-century industrial period in England, Turner's painting

brought the viewer a romanticist atmosphere and natural and mysterious perspective by emphasizing the light, colour, steam, and cloud. Inspired by the theory of John Ruskin, Pre-Raphaelite painters considered landscape painting as a way to represent ‘truth to nature’³ in relation to literature and poetry in the late industrial stage. Early Impressionism in 19th-century France interpreted landscape through the perspectives of light, colour and brush strokes, emphasizing the pictorial element rather than the actual object that can be obtained from photography. The Modernist art movements in the 20th-century brought the genre of landscape painting into an abstract field to provoke the exploration of the formal language of art in relation to the production and consumption of commodities.⁴ Indeed, each century has witnessed various interpretations towards landscape painting in Western art. Through examining the content and form of landscape painting, the social, economic and cultural conditions are unfolded.

Fig. 1 Gu Kaizhi Detail of *Luo Shen Fu Picture* (c. 265-420) Ink on silk 27.1 × 572.8cm National Palace Museum Taipei.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

Fig. 2 Gu Kaizhi Detail of *Luo Shen Fu Picture* (c. 265-420) Ink on silk 27.1 × 572.8cm National Palace Museum Taipei.

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³ John Ruskin proposed in *Modern Painters* (published in 5 volumes, 1843-60), in which he argues that the artist's main role is ‘truth to nature’.

⁴ We can see the landscape paintings made by Piet Mondrian, Kandinsky, and Paul Klee in relation to the Modernist art movements such as De Stijl, Constructivism and Bauhaus School, etc.

Landscape tradition in ancient China can be dated back to the Wei-Jin and Six Dynasty (220-589) in which landscape painting was developed in relation to the philosophy of Daoism (or Taoism), and it was combined with the myth and legend about an imaginary life of the God/Goddess (see Figs. 1, 2). The social stability and commercial expansion in the Tang, Five Dynasties and Song (618-1279) had promoted the growth and prosperity of culture and art, and Chinese landscape painting was at its peak in the Song Dynasty (960-1279). We can see the existing masterpieces *Early Spring* (Fig. 3) and *Mount Lu* (Fig. 4) made by Chinese painter Guo Xi (c.1000-1087) and Jing Hao (c.855-915) as typical landscape painting examples of that time. The Tang to Song periods of landscape paintings provide us with the most significant understandings of aesthetic tradition and methodology of art in ancient China, and the following Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties more or less followed the artistic traditions of the Tang and Song. In this study, my area of reference is mainly based on the theories and methods of these periods.

Indeed, landscape as a cultural practice plays an important role within the discourses of both Western and Chinese art; it evokes the common visual and emotional cognition and makes a cross-cultural study possible. It also indicates a profound perception and intricate relations between people and environment, in which cultures have been absorbed and re-formed into diverse forms of art. In this study, I focus on landscape as a pictorial expression of painting to explore cultural fusion and enrich our current understanding of the cross-cultural study.

Fig.3 Guo Xi *Early Spring* (1072) Hanging scroll, Ink and colour on silk 158.3×108.1cm National Palace Museum Taipei.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

Fig. 4 Jing Hao *Mount Lu* (unknown year) Hanging scroll, Ink and colour on silk 185.8×106.8cm
National Palace Museum Taipei.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

● Research Questions

This study asks one main research question: How can theories and methodologies in ancient Chinese landscape painting be fused into contemporary art practice to expand existing artistic formats?

In order to organize this main research question into a theoretical and practical process, the thesis is divided into three chapters, and each one focuses on one cross-cultural point of research through a series of further questions and discussions. All these associated questions and discussions are integral parts of this practice-based study, contributing to expound the main research question. The following associated questions are specifically addressed:

1. How can we understand landscape as a critical and cross-cultural art practice by studying the existing landscape theories, and by discussing the relation of self and environment in terms of the traditions of Western and Chinese landscape painting?
(Chapter 1)
2. What are the different understandings and uses of pictorial space between Western and Chinese painting, and can we establish a new spatial and perspectival mode in landscape painting by referencing the ancient Chinese methodology of art? (Chapter 2)

3. How does the ancient Chinese philosophic idea of ‘emptiness’ as a pictorial methodology create the spatial diversity, and evoke symbolic meaning and aesthetic thought in landscape painting? (Chapter 3)

Through exploring the cross-cultural theory and methodology via landscape painting, in my studio practice (the section of Thoughts and Practices), I also elaborate my understandings about contemporary issues, such as climate change, the hybrid state of natural and cultural environments, and the sense of crisis and uncertainty in contemporary life. These concerns, in my studio practice, are all closely related to the main research question. My studio works, which seek to answer the questions proposed, also demonstrate how a cross-cultural practice of landscape painting helps to express the contemporary topic – the harmony or tension between self and environment.

● Theory and Practice

This study involves practice-based research, in which both academic writing and studio practice act as integral parts. On the one hand, the theoretical study attempts to provide systematic inquiries to develop a critical awareness and the appropriate methodologies for studio practice. On the other hand, the text itself is a part of the critical exploration and original contribution, and an effort to fill in the gap between the Chinese tradition and its interpretive method in current Western art theory. By referencing the ancient aesthetics of art, the theoretical study

attempts to provide an alternative strategy of interpretation in landscape painting, contributing to the up-to-date cross-cultural study.

Supported by the theoretical discussion, my studio practice attempts to create new forms of landscape painting and new approaches to making it, through absorbing and combining ancient Chinese and contemporary Western methodologies of art. Studio practice and artworks try to visualize the theoretical notions, discussions, and arguments, displaying appropriate technical skills and representing an original contribution to the field. Through the studio practice, the cross-cultural forms of landscape painting and methods of making art will be displayed, to demonstrate a cultural fusion of aesthetic features of ancient Chinese and contemporary Western art.

Although there is an emphasis on Chinese landscape painting, this study does not simply reference its content and form to contribute to Western art, but aims to provide a specific and clear cultural context where Chinese painting and its aesthetic mode has formed, and also establish a relationship between ancient art theory and contemporary art practice. This study brings together the significant texts and artworks of traditional China, and relevant modern and contemporary Western theories, investigating, comparing and re-using their arguments and methodologies to create a cross-cultural platform for discussion. Each chapter in the thesis is followed by my thoughts and studio practices that explain and elaborate my understanding and my engagement within this cross-cultural study.

● Chapter Contents

The first chapter reviews the current definitions and approaches of landscape and landscape painting by discussing a number of existing scholarships, including both contemporary Western literature and ancient Chinese art texts. It first sees landscape as a critical term, which includes a complex structure and proportion of the land's appearance, and involves the understandings of social and cultural implications. Later, it discusses landscape as a way of seeing that refers to the ideological participation in understanding landscape's representation. It does this by discussing the relation of self and environment in landscape painting. The different relations of the self and nature, subject and object, spectator and spectacle, between Western and Chinese painting, decide the different methods of landscape's visual representation. Here, Western landscape tradition implies a scientific process of explorer and explored between people and nature; while Chinese landscape painting represents an ideological or spiritual fusion of self and environment. This chapter is an effort to recognize the context and ground of the existing landscape theories and methodologies, and provide a cross-cultural perspective by introducing traditional Chinese paintings as alternative examples of interpretation. In the Thoughts and Practices section, I expound my studio exploration about how to use ancient Chinese art methodologies to express my concern and my understanding about the harmony or tension between self and environment in landscape painting.

Chapter 2 addresses the pictorial space and methods of perspective used in traditional Western and Chinese painting, also with a focus on Chinese art methodology as an alternative strategy to structure a new spatial mode in landscape painting practice. It discusses Western linear perspective and its critically theoretical thoughts in existing scholarship. In contrast to the linear perspective, the text later discusses the ancient Chinese art theory *Forests and Streams* (c. 1075), written by Song Dynasty painter Guo Xi, as a main theoretical reference to unfold the perspectival spatial structure in Chinese landscape painting. It also discusses how the pictorial materials and supports (the Western canvas and Chinese scroll painting) help to achieve different methods of single focus or multi-focus perspective. The third section in this chapter reviews French philosopher Hubert Damisch's text *Theory of Cloud: Toward a History of Painting*, which is one of the most significant books in the 20th-century that highlights a cross-cultural comparison of space and perspective in visual representation. The final section explains my thoughts and methods in studio practice about how I absorb and fuse the ancient Chinese aesthetic of art, especially Guo's art theory, as an integrated methodology, in an effort to create diverse spatial structures and the concept of time duration in the painting works.

Chapter 3 explores landscape painting through a method of making 'emptiness'. It first interprets the original notion of emptiness in Chinese Daoist philosophy, and its understanding and use as a pictorial method to create space and composition in landscape painting. Here the emptiness is not an area of nothing or meaninglessness but structures the diverse models of spatial representation. It also refers to a dialectically ideological state, in relation to the 'fullness' as its contrasting pair, to convey symbolic meaning and evoke a broad range of aesthetic thought

in landscape painting. Through analyzing a number of landscape painting practices in traditional and contemporary fields, this chapter attempts to specify how an ideological notion of emptiness is an important cross-cultural methodology used in both Chinese and Western landscape paintings. Also, this chapter includes my thoughts and practices about how to absorb the philosophic idea ‘emptiness’ as a pictorial strategy and aesthetic quality in Western oil painting, to bring new form and thought in landscape art practice.

Chapter 1 Landscape as a Critical Mode of Art Practice

● Meaning and Ground

Half a century ago, Kenneth Clark in *Landscape into Art* saw landscape as a means of poetical expression that marks the stages of people's perception of nature. Landscape's rise and development in painting suggest how people attempt to create a mode of harmony with the environment (Clark 1949, p.17). In the book, Clark divides historical styles of landscape paintings – the symbolic, actual, ideal, fantastic, and natural landscape, according to their methods and values of visual representation. For example, Clark addresses Dürer's drawings of the Castle of Innsbrück as pure topographic representations drawn from German Renaissance artists' earnest desire to give every available detail (Ibid. p. 34). Also, Clark's stylistic division of 17th-century Dutch art – landscape of fact, is considered as 'a bourgeois form of art' which responds to the desire of the middle-class to portray a 'recognizable experience' or a realist view of their country (Ibid. p.43). Clark also compared some specific methodological differences between the individual artists and the general trend of art style of the times, for example, the light and shadow were more dramatic and imaginative in Rembrandt's and Rubens's treatments of landscape, while the other Flemish landscape painters emphasized more about a faithful expression of nature (Ibid. pp. 43-45). Clark's landscape aesthetics implies a sign of respect for natural beauty in which nature enlightens and inspires people's consciousness, ambition, skepticism, and methods of visual expression.

Landscape, from the dictionary's definition, is first an area of land or territory with all the

visible features the eye can capture, which indicates it as a natural or physical phenomenon. It also involves the representation of land in art: the genre of landscape painting, or a picture representing an area of countryside.⁵ In *Landscape and Western Art*, Malcolm Andrews proposes that the understanding of landscape as art should go through a separate procedure that is 'land into landscape', and 'landscape into art' (Andrews 1999, p.3). Different than Clark's idea that landscape is the original material to pursue the natural beauty in art creation, Andrews considers the raw materials such as trees, stones, mountains and rivers not as landscape but the elements of the land. He points out there will be a judgment between the natural land and what we call a 'landscape' which is more like 'a complex mix of visual facts and imaginative construction' (Ibid.) For him, the interpretation of landscape involves not merely the land's appearance but implies a special process of choice, assessment, suppressing or subordinating some visual information in order to perfect the visual features as a whole. And he writes: 'The landscape acquires significant organization as a result of certain extrinsic and intrinsic factors. A frame establishes the outer boundaries of the view; it gives the landscape definition.' (Ibid. pp.3-5).

The German term, *Landschaft* or *Lantschaft* also has a different meaning as 'a restricted piece of land', divided by region and political boundaries. For example, in the Swiss canton of Basel Landschaft (near southern Germany), the adjacent rural territory was referred to as the landscape of the town (Ibid. pp.28-29). Here the landscape is a combination of the lands, a defined space and range, similar to the way the geographic areas of early England were

⁵ Oxford Dictionaries, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/landscape>

described as 'shires', and indeed, are still described as such, for example, Lancashire or Oxfordshire, etc. As J. B. Jackson points out: 'If "housescape" meant the organization of the personnel of a house, if "township" eventually came to mean an administrative unit, then "landscape" could well have meant something like an organization, a system of rural farm spaces.' (Jackson 1986, p. 68). The physical boundary and a divided range give the land a 'frame' to structure and enable a certain way of visual representation. Although the value of a landscape today is more than a view from a camera viewfinder, a fixed frame can initially provide the natural appearance with a particular, visual composition to connect the physical phenomenon and visual expression; when the land's appearance is able to form a landscape, from the raw materials up to the process of visual appreciation.

Art historian John Barrell believes the recognition of landscape involves a contemplation towards the formal structure of the land, not a mere combination of objects, trees, hills, fields on the surface, but 'as a complex of associations and meanings, and, more important, as a composition, in which each object bore a specific and analyzable relationship to the others' (Barrell 1972, p. 5). For Barrell, the English taste of landscape by the middle of the 18th-century was predominantly influenced by the picturesque Italian tradition and tended to view landscape as a genre of painting, and the collecting of landscape painting became a fashionable activity. Then the pictorial principle of composition and connoisseurship derived from the Roman landscape painters of the 17th-century established the English landscape patterns (Ibid. pp.4-6).

Barrell takes Claude Lorrain's painting, *Landscape with David at the Cave of Adullam* (Fig. 5)

as an example to demonstrate a complex formal structure of a landscape. He points out, first, this painting employs a relatively high viewpoint – high enough for the eye to move from the foreground straight to the far distance. It is important because the high perspective and visual structure create a scene of association – foreground to background, rather than showing the independent landscape objects. Furthermore, the use of source of light in the painting illuminates the background that distinguishes it from the foreground contents. The building, trees, and figures of the front are all painted in a suitable proportion on the right places of the work. All these create an immediate response to the structure of a landscape, as a designed world or an organized land. Here, the ‘land into landscape’ (Andrews 1999, p.3) is not derived from a physical division of boundary or frame, but from the traditional pictorial principle of composition.

Fig. 5 Claude Lorrain *Landscape with David at the Cave of Adullam* (1658) Oil on canvas
111.4×186.5cm The National Gallery London.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

‘One of the consistent purposes of landscape painting has been to present an image of order and proportioned control, to suppress evidence of tension and conflict between social groups and within human relations in the environment.’

(Cosgrove 1985, p. 58)

Cultural geographer Denis E. Cosgrove in *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* describes landscape as a ‘controlled space’, in which ‘an illusion of order’ could be sustained (Cosgrove 1984, p. 20). His book emphasizes an understanding of landscape as a symbolic form – its origins and development were related to political, cultural and economic aspects, especially the state of land ownership. Referring to the origins of landscape, he quotes J. B. Jackson’s words to point out that the emergence of European painting was similar to the development of the modern theatre as a formal art, in which a designed and controlled environment has been achieved – ‘scenes composed of regulated space and illusory settings’ (Jackson 1979 in Cosgrove 1984, p. 20). For Cosgrove, the visual control of space is dominated by human’s method of intervention, for example, the linear perspective originally emerged in the 15th-century Italian Renaissance to represent the visual truth that can be seen as one of the devices for controlling the world of order. ‘Here perspective, proportion and landscape are united within a single claim for the role of the individual artist as a controlling creator.’ (Ibid. pp. 20-25).

Landscape in ancient China was often called the picture of *Shan Shui* (literally meaning mountain and water), which defined landscape by a certain proportion of the visual combination of wild mountains, rivers, and lakes. In the ancient philosophic perspective, the *Shan* (mountain) and *Shui* (water) can be seen as two significant prototypes of nature, not as separate entities, but an associated state to evoke a sense of order and harmony in which the earth is an organic

whole. ‘The wise find joy in water; the benevolent find joy in mountains.’ (Confucius c.220 in Chen 2001, p. 53).

The emergence of *Shan Shui* as a Chinese painting tradition can be traced back to the 4th-century. To constitute a *Shan Shui*, the spatial arrangement of the subjects of mountain and water, and the contrast of ink and blank space all have to abide by a certain proportion or pictorial principle in the painting (Han 2010, p. 49. Trans. Yuping Li). How the subjects should be introduced into a pictorial plane, and how many brushstrokes could be used to keep a balance in the work, have to abide by a certain visual rule through ancient Chinese artists’ understanding. For example, *Early Spring* (Fig. 3) and *Mount Lu* (Fig. 4) display a similar and typical pictorial composition of traditional Chinese *Shan Shui* painting, in which mountain and water are well-proportioned by an inter-related and regular order – the falls, rivers, and lakes are moving around the mountains and peaks, dividing them into different spaces and perspectives from background to foreground. Here we can find a regular method of composition in both the paintings: the painted places begin from the undulating hills at the top center, developing via a meandering form and pattern in the middle area, and finally disappear at the bottom right of the pictorial plane. This pictorial composition of *Shan Shui* was quite often represented in the landscape painting of the Five Dynasties (907-960) and Northern Song periods (960-1127), and it illustrates how the ancient Chinese people understood the beauty of nature and communicated it through the pictorial language.

Fig. 6 Xia Gui *Drizzle on River Yangtze* (unknown year) Ink and colour on silk 24.9×26.3cm Shang Hai Museum Collection.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

Furthermore, this certain form of composition or the perfect proportion of landscape was going through the changes with the replacement of Chinese empires and so the changes of people's perception of beauty and art. For example, *Shan Shui* painting in Five Dynasties was used to paint the subjects – mountain, rock, and river in the center location of a pictorial plane, according to a hierarchical arrangement of the components; while Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279) landscape painting emphasized the importance of the 'edge' and 'corner', putting the contents and brushstrokes on the edge, or one or two corner(s) of the pictorial plane, at the same time, leaving some empty spaces in the center area to evoke the aesthetic atmosphere and cloudy effect. Painter Xia Gui's *Drizzle on river Yangtze* (Fig. 6) is a typical example of Southern Song Dynasty landscape painting that shows the transformation of pictorial composition towards a more emotional and poetical expression. This painting displays a very brief style and the master skill of the brushstrokes. By presenting a few vague and cloudy peaks, it implies the rolling mountains; through drawing a few twisted linear shapes in the middle area, it suggests the extended shape of the land. Very few brushstrokes and ink are used in the work

but they evoke an unlimited space of imagination through which the viewer can find his/her own understanding. Indeed, this painting reflects the aesthetic pursuit of the Chinese Southern Song Dynasty and brings the viewer into a realm of thought that goes beyond the image. Here the emphasis in the aesthetic idea is not to represent the natural truth but to demonstrate the aesthetic atmosphere and spiritual significance in the landscape.

Michael Sullivan started his book *Symbols of Eternity* by proposing a question: why traditional Chinese paintings always show similar subjects and forms – ‘the same misty mountains, the same scholars gazing at waterfalls or pretending to fish’ (Sullivan 1979, p. 1). He then answered that to say the theme of painting in oriental art is inseparable from its form, and both of them interpret an ‘all-embracing philosophical attitude toward the visible world’ (Ibid. pp.1-2). Sullivan believes enjoying a Chinese painting is a purely aesthetic experience, in which the matter is not the novelty of the theme, but the artist’s own interpretation of it and a philosophical perception of nature (Ibid.) Indeed, a spiritual expression of natural harmony and philosophical insight are significant features that distinguish traditional Chinese landscape painting from the other forms of art. However, a philosophical understanding of natural spirit is the main artistic pursuit in Chinese art rather than a method to organize the subjects into a composition of landscape painting. It seems Sullivan did not provide a straightforward answer why similar and repeated subjects were always represented in Chinese painting, but emphasized the importance of the philosophical attitude in the art.

Here, I shall argue that the choice of artistic subjects such as mountain and waterfall, depends

on the ancients' pictorial methodology. In their mode of thought, these certain contents and forms can maximize the release of the aesthetic value of landscape. Philosophical attitude demonstrates a spiritual pursuit as a purpose in painting; although it is important, it is not a pictorial methodology itself. The painters created a certain visual proportion and composition of mountains and waters in the work according to the ancient standard and definition of beauty. Here, beauty is a combination of natural scenery including mountains, trees, lakes and waterfalls, or an association of linear language and empty space on the pictorial plane. As the Qing Dynasty landscape painter Shi Tao (1630-1724) said: 'The magnificence of a mountain is not depending on its altitude; the beauty of a lake is not relying on its depth, the wisdom lies in an inter-relationship between the mountain and lake, and so to evoke the beauty of nature' (Shi 2009, p. 65. Trans. Yuping Li). By following this standard of beauty, the forms of land can be considered and transformed into a suitable work of landscape painting.

According to Richard Muir, landscape study can be generally divided into two main approaches: on the one hand, is the conventional understanding regarding landscape as a material practice through the scientific and environmental study and land planning, etc. On the other hand, the landscape is a cultural production, which has been interpreted by a more complex social, historical and cultural system, especially in associated with Cosgrove and Daniel's iconographic theory that interprets landscape as a painterly way of symbolic representation. (Muir 1999, Introduction. p. Xiv).

The physical approaches (landscape archaeology, topography or ecology, etc.) and the cultural

interpretations (landscape iconography, cultural geography or humanistic geography) are narrating different ideas, however, they are connecting and overlapping in terms of landscape's meaning, function and value. For instance, landscape archaeologist Matthew Johnson approaches landscape through the local practices and participation in the field works. He also discusses landscape archaeology in relation to cultural movements and empirical strengths, and believes a significant factor that transforms the land into a landscape is a particular way of thinking and seeing. Landscape concerns how the land is viewed, how people understand it in the past, and what the cognitive and appreciative systems are (Johnson 2007, pp.3-4). In seeking the material foundation for the landscape idea, Elizabeth Helsinger in 'Blindness and Insights' points out an important thing that distinguishes landscape from the land is the participation of people (Helsinger in Delue & Elkins 2008, p.323). The human involvement and interaction give landscape a unique cultural and historical manifestation. 'Landscapes only become such when they are both made and noticed, acted or lived or thought with some degree of consciousness.' (Ibid).

Cosgrove concerns cultural geography as a formal discipline and addresses landscape as a symbolic approach to representation; he also sees the physical changes of the land via social behaviors. For instance, he believes the settlement patterns, population and the emergence of European capitalism brought the radical changes in the social space, which created a well-established capitalist state in Western and Southern Europe. Whilst, in North America, the process of urbanization operated more slowly and sometimes reversed through in-migration and agricultural transformation covering a wider range of different land regions, and the lands

there were divided and reorganized according to the regional economic model (Cosgrove 1984, pp. 4-5). Here, Cosgrove sees the different ways and human behaviors to capitalism had formed the structure of land and spatial order in different models of representation. Malcolm Andrews comments on Cosgrove's discussion about landscape's transformation through the change of ownership from feudalism to modern capitalism, by saying, when the aesthetic value of land is able to replace its use value, the land is reconstituted as landscape (Andrews 1999, p.21).

In an article 'The Morphology of Landscape' American cultural geographer Carl O. Sauer considers landscape as an area made up of a unique association of forms (or morphologic elements) from both physical and cultural aspects (Sauer 1925, p. 300). He believes landscape inheres an 'organic quality', where every component has individuality and also has to relate to the other components that constitute a general system. 'One has not fully understood the nature of an area until one has learned to see it as an organic unit, to comprehend land and life in terms of each other.' (Bluntschli 1921 in Sauer 1925, p. 300).

Through a morphologic method of study, Sauer sees landscape and culture through a complex process of association: First, culture itself has been changing through time, and absorbing foreign cultures to form new modes of cultural understanding and cognition. And then, it has been expressed and displayed as natural phenomena and physical forms such as housing plans and structure, etc., using the landscape as a medium. Ultimately, the process of interaction between the natural form and the cultural group merges into a synthesized 'cultural landscape' (Sauer 1925, pp. 309-310). 'Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural

landscape the result. The shaping force, however, lies in the culture itself.’(Ibid. p.310).

Sauer’s cultural geography emphasizes an identification of the cultural landscape in terms of the ways that human and human behaviors transform the natural environment. His idea of the organic association in landscape, in my opinion, can be seen together with Chinese Daoist philosophy. In particular, the early Daoism sought to create a sense of order and harmony in nature and saw the different natural objects not as separate entities, but as parts of a unified whole – the early and plain cosmology. The different concern in Sauer’s theory is it focuses on human’s intervention as an initiating factor to transform and change the environment, physically and culturally; whilst, Daoism understands humans themselves as a unit of nature like all the beings in the world. The focus in Daoism is an orderly connection or systematic sequence in which every component involved plays a suitable role to keep a harmonious balance in the cosmos.

I am a unit in the midst of space and time. In winter, I wear skins and fur; in summer, grass-cloth; in spring, I plough and sow, my strength being equal to the task; in autumn, I gather in my harvest. At sunrise, I get up and work; at sunset, I rest. I enjoy myself between heaven and earth, and my mind is content.

(Zong in Max-Muller & Legg 1962, p. 150)

The above quote is a Daoist monk Zong Bing’s (375-444) description of his spiritual state when he was wandering in nature, feeling the joy of being a part of that environment. Zong was a devout Daoist and also an influential art theorist and landscape painter of his age. His monograph *The Ideas of Landscape Painting* (Zong c. 430)⁶ is recognized as the earliest

⁶ There are some different versions of translation on Zong’s book, such as the *Daoism Landscape or Ecological*

Chinese theoretical text on the theme of landscape. The main discussions in the text are around the idea of making landscape painting with an aim to understanding and pondering the philosophical idea of *Dao* (Chen 2001, p. 9. Trans. Yuping Li).

The term *Dao* in Chinese culture involves a number of different things, and things sometimes contradictory to each other, such as metaphysics, the stage of *Wuwei* (effortless action), *Ziran* (naturalness), *Zen* (inner authenticity) and the religion of *Dao*. Such a complete account of all the ideas proposed about *Dao* would fill an encyclopedia. Here, Zong's theory addresses this term only from its artistic expression, which sees man as a part of the natural environment, and seeking a harmonious association of man and nature in painting. In other words, he advocates that making landscape painting is in order to seek a philosophic perception of being and the self in nature.

In the text, Zong argues obtaining the spirit of art in landscape needs the painter to observe and experience the actual scenery to perceive the original state of the cosmos and the wisdom of the sage. (Zong c. 430 in Chen 2001, p. 9. Trans. Yuping Li). In order to better represent a harmonious spirit of landscape, an 'all-embracing visual form' – the totality, and the inter-relationship between the subjects and scenery in the painting need to be introduced (Ibid.). He also stresses the need for observation and thought as a whole to understand the meaning and value of landscape; here, observation is achieved through a state of thought, and landscape as an artistic expression reflects a mode of people's thought towards nature (Ibid.). His monograph

Aesthetics of Landscape Painting, here I translated according to its literal meaning only.

made in the 5th-century merged Daoism's idea of harmonious association into landscape painting and endowed it with the social and religious functions. With the prevalence of Daoism as a philosophic branch and religious belief in ancient China, landscape painting – *Shan Shui* was always considered as a high art related to spiritual introspection.

The Chinese contemporary scholar Yang Zhu⁷ believes the most significant influence that Daoism had on Chinese landscape painting is the spiritual and emotional relationship between man and environment, in which every being is a unit of the cosmos, running and developing through an organic order (Yang 2011, p. 173. Trans. Yuping Li). Under the influence of Daoism, to capture a sense of logic or intrinsic order is more important than representing a physical reality in traditional Chinese landscape painting. Daoism also includes the term *Zen* that emphasizes authenticity as an ideological concept that exists in people's mind, which is different from the scientific and physical truth. Here I shall take a look at the Qing Dynasty painter Wang Hui's *Countless Peaks and Vales* (Fig. 7) to explain how a Chinese landscape painting reflects Daoist theory about an orderly connection or the harmonious mode of man and nature.

Countless Peaks and Vales (Fig. 7) is painted on a vertical Chinese scroll form which represents a range of physical features of nature – the wide geological scenery or a comprehensive visual understanding of the land. Like the traditional Chinese landscape composition, the continuous mountain ranges develop and extend in the work in association with the forms of water – falls

⁷ Yang Zhu is a contemporary Chinese art theorist and professor of Beijing University.

are merging into streams, and streams are running up to the lakes. These scenes cannot be seen by a quick glance of the eye in the actual landscape, but come from the artist's observation and impression of diverse mountains and hills, and different forms of water crossing thousands of miles in the Southern China (Chen 2001, p. 545. Trans. Yuping Li). The painting displays to us a high ability of association of spatial depths and perspectives, for example, we can see the mountains, vales, rivers, and lakes have all inter-woven in a suitable proportion and spatial order. What the artist wants to emphasize is not the specific subjects or the physical features of the lands, but a unified and ordered state between the subjects. Here, the sky, clouds, lands, trees and people are integrated elements that contribute to a whole of organic association.

The importance and original aim of making this landscape painting are not in a pursuit of representing material authenticity, like the 17th-century Dutch painting that sincerely records people's social and cultural life. Rather, the painting (Fig. 7) focuses on an ideological and spiritual truth – a harmonious relationship between different scenes and human life. Furthermore, the landscape is not without humans. We can see in Fig. 8 a detail of the figures at the bottom of this painting. Here, the figures are set in a tiny proportion in the pictorial composition, and their behaviors seem interesting: they are studying, observing and experiencing the nature, in a sense to provoke the thought that man is a unit in natural space and time. The freedom of expression of the figures and the calm and relaxed atmosphere also symbolize a harmonious state of an evening waterside in the painting.

Fig. 7 Wang Hui *Countless Peaks and Vales* (1693) Ink and colour on silk Ht. 254.1cm National Palace Museum Taipei.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

Fig. 8 Detail of Wang Hui *Countless Peaks and Vales*.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

Daoism focuses on the harmonious and organic association between man and nature and sees man as a small unit like all the natural beings in the cosmos. Its idea reflects in the pictorial language of landscape painting is to emphasize the method to organize a number of different subjects and scenes, in a complex but orderly association to achieve a visual harmony and balance. From Figs.7-8, we can see that landscape painting was used as a vehicle in order to respond and express philosophic ideas in ancient China. It was a pictorial form of the painter's perceptions and experience of nature, in which creating a unique union through connecting every being in the painting was the methodology to demonstrate the philosophic spirit of the artist. The form that landscape as a certain and orderly association of natural beings has been generally considered, in today's cultural context, as a typical visual form of traditional Chinese painting, reflecting a different way of seeing the world.

In this section, I have reviewed some current discussions about the ideas of landscape, such as

its physical definition by the division of the lands, its pictorial interpretations in painting, the art history and cultural geography views, and the ancient philosophic understandings in China. This is not to address these inter-disciplinary and cross-cultural theories particularly, but in an effort to recognize the ground of the existing landscape theories, and the complexity and overlapping methodologies of landscape knowledge. I attempt to use and analyze some traditional Chinese paintings from Five Dynasties, the Song to Qing periods, as the alternative examples and complements in the text in order to visualize diverse understandings about the idea of 'landscape into art'. In the next text, I focus on one of the interesting perspectives that concerns the landscape as a way of seeing through the ideological participation in it, and also the relation of self and environment reflected in both traditional Chinese and Western landscape paintings.

- **Self and Landscape: a Method of Seeing**

By quoting E. H. Gombrich's theory of perceptual psychology as a mode of drawing, Malcolm Andrews in *Landscape and Western Art* argues the meaning of landscape does not exist in the spectacle but depends on how the perceiver understands and accepts it, and how social and cultural factors act on the perceiver's knowledge of it (Andrews 1999, pp. 4-5). He writes: 'we are not passive consumers of landscape images ... Landscape in art tells us, or asks us to think about, where we belong.' (Ibid. p.2). Indeed, along with the development of landscape theory in diverse methods and disciplines, we are not merely understanding landscape as a picture of

beauty or a representation of natural scenery, but how we can receive and respond to the meaning and value of it. Thus, a landscape can be also considered as the viewer's ways of seeing the physical land in accordance with the certain cultural traditions, aesthetics and their own mode of evaluation.

W. J. T. Mitchell in *Landscape and Power* proposes to change the term 'Landscape' from a noun to a verb. He points out this refers our method to thought landscape 'as a process by which social and subjective identities are formed' (Mitchell 1994, p. 1). He believes landscape signifies the cultural value and national identities in relation to the ideological construction of the spectator. 'Thus, landscape (whether urban or rural, artificial or natural) always greets us as space, as environment, as that within which we find – or lose – ourselves.' (Ibid. p. 2). Mitchell's claim also emphasizes landscape's ways of seeing as determined by historical and cultural factors, enriching this term from a phenomenon itself to a medium of all cultures. Here, landscape is an active action of exploration between man and environment (physical and social) instead of a passive process of landscape representation as a visual subject.

Ways of Seeing is the title of John Berger's book constituted by seven literal and pictorial essays as a theoretical extension of his BBC television series. In the book, Berger argues we see things through a way of choice and seeking affected by our knowledge and beliefs, and we always see the changed relations between the things and ourselves with an increasing consciousness of individuality and awareness of history (Berger 1972, pp. 8-10). For example, the sight of fire burning must reflect a different meaning in the Middle Age when people believed in a physical

existence of Hell (Ibid. p. 8). Also, the invention of the camera changed the ways of seeing that was immediately reflected in painting: the Impressionists transformed their eye to the language of light, shadow and colour; and the Cubists sought no longer a visual expression for the single eye, but ‘the totality of possible views taken from points all round the object being depicted’ (Ibid. p. 18). Berger believes our concept and cognition of art is affected by ‘a whole series of learnt assumptions about art’, and these traditional assumptions such as beauty, truth, genius, form and taste, etc. are usually perceived in a different way in today’s understanding, hence the cultural mystification. ‘What you saw depended upon where you were when. What you saw was relative to your position in time and space.’(Ibid.). Indeed, Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* demonstrates a creative thinking and reading of the language of image based on people’s perception and their contextual knowledge, and the book, in its time, arouses the thoughts of the changed vision between tradition and modern.

Landscape represents a way of seeing – a way in which some Europeans have represented to themselves and to others the world about them and their relationships with it, and through which they have commented on social relations. Landscape is a way of seeing that has its own history, but a history that can be understood only as part of a wider history of economy and society; that has its own assumptions and consequences, but assumptions and consequences whose origins and implications extend well beyond the used and perception of land; that has its own techniques of expression, but technique which it shares with other areas of cultural practice.

(Cosgrove 1984, p. 13)

Cosgrove believes, in landscape, we are dealing with an ideological transformation in which the external world is ‘mediated through subjective human experience’ (Cosgrove 2008, p. 17). He believes landscape’s complexities and ambiguities request a more intelligent and social-historical interpretation. His idea concerning landscape as an ideological response is related to

its symbolic attributes, that is, landscape is a symbolic construction derived from social, historical and cultural factors. In association with Stephen Daniels's essay, Cosgrove's symbolic representation is treated as an iconographical method that emphasizes the conceptualization of the landscape imagery from its theoretical and historical contexts, and particularly, the ideological implication in the imagery.

Iconography, was initially introduced to explain the Renaissance artwork, discussed by Aby Warburg and developed via Erwin Panofsky as a method of analysis in visual art. Panofsky distinguishes 'three-levels' of visual interpretation among the form, content, and historic-cultural aspects of the image. First, according to Panofsky, the 'pre-iconography' refers to an interpretation towards the content and form of the image. This process of analysis is mainly focused on to visualize what can be seen through the subject itself. Secondly, the 'iconography' in a further step to interpret the image's concept and meaning, which also involves seeing the related knowledge, stories and literary sources of the image. Finally, the 'iconology' approaches a deep analysis of intrinsic meaning and symbolical significance that involves the social-cultural history and psychological aspects of the image (Panofsky 1939, pp. 5-7).

In *Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation*, Cosgrove and Daniels believes the iconographic theory is closely related to the Western landscape traditions (Cosgrove & Daniels 1988, pp. 7-8). For instance, they point out that landscape's rise in England in the latter half of the 19th-century, initiated by John Ruskin, was also accompanied by an increasing emergence of a corpus of iconographical study. Even Ruskin's art theory,

Modern Painter (1843) referred to a similar method of analyzing and examining image from deepest moral and artistic truths, putting landscape painting in a broader context than formal and stylistic descriptions. Later, Clark's discussions of landscape into art more or less followed Ruskin's method of art analysis (Ibid. pp. 4-6).

In the book, Cosgrove and Daniels do not provide a strict division between Panofsky's terms 'iconography' and 'iconology', but stress the social implication and symbolic power of the image used in the analysis. They believe the post-modern apprehension of the world emphasizes our ability to symbolically treat the meaning of the image. Landscape is a cultural image, while iconographic method remains central to the cultural enquiry (Ibid. p. 8). In fact, the method of iconography regards image as a kind of visual sign or code to evoke the hidden historical and cultural significance, and the process between the 'pre-iconography' to 'iconology' itself demonstrates a transformation of the ways of observation and thinking. For Cosgrove and Daniels, the iconography of landscape refers to a way of perceiving and representing of landscape as a pictorial symbol, not merely through the conventional analysis of art, rather, 'iconology probed a deeper stratum of meaning.' (Ibid. p. 2).

Cosgrove and Daniels introduce the iconographic method into the field of cultural geography, and combine the interrelated methodologies together to enrich the landscape interpretation. Their theory sees landscape as a pictorial method of symbolic representation from an analysis of image to an interpretation of context and method of landscape, which establishes a common ground for a range of disciplines such as geography, fine art, psychology and anthropology. A

significant factor for this ground is the ideological participation in landscape – a way of seeing.

Landscape is an ideological concept. It represents a way in which certain classes of people have signified themselves and their world through their imagined relationship with nature, and through which they have underlined and communicated their own social role and that of others with respect to external nature.

(Cosgrove 1984, p. 15)

All visual representation has an ideological function. Studying landscape through a way of seeing or an iconographic analysis is to emphasize an ideological transformation not in a single visual gaze, but a method of the gaze through which it establishes a unique connection between humans, society, history and environment. In other words, we can see the method of seeing evokes a relation of the subject and object, or the receptor and processor of visual information. An interesting perspective to explain here is to see the landscape from the tourist's gaze, and how visitors and tourists seek, choose and experience the landscape and respond to the meaning and value of it.

'Tourists can transform a highly different world into a unified system, creating the landscape in their own image.' (Bourassa 1991, p. 7). In *The Tourist Gaze*, John Urry points out tourists look at the scenery of nature as 'consuming goods and services' because they seek a pleasurable experience which is different from their daily routine (Urry 1990, p. 1). With an interest and curiosity towards a different environment or culture, tourists anticipate landscape through some factors like daydreaming, fantasy and some 'non-tourist practices', socially and culturally. These 'non-tourist practices', as Urry mentions, such as film, TV, literature, magazines, photographs or postcards, etc. are what the tourists have experienced before, which can bring a

contextual knowledge to re-produce and re-capture their gaze of a landscape (Ibid. pp. 1-3).

Urry also believes tourism involves a collection of signs. The tourists visit the attractions that include the specific historical and cultural symbols and meanings. 'When tourists see two people kissing in Paris what they capture in the gaze is "timeless romantic Paris". When a small village in England is seen, what they gaze upon is the "real olde England".' (Ibid. p. 3). The attractions might be the historical or natural heritages that possess certain symbolic values and meanings of culture or social identity. The historical and cultural significance of the attractions is associated with tourists' anticipation and their cultural contexts to evoke this anticipation, together to constitute a complex and comprehensive framework that acts on the tourists' perception and response to the landscape.

In the article 'Making of the Lake District', Urry addresses some specific factors that explain the popularity of the Lake District landscape as a part of England's attraction. For example, the ways of leisure have changed from an acoustic mode – 'the sense of the ear' in the theater before the 18th-century, to a visual mode of connoisseurship on works of arts, buildings and landscapes. Thus, landscape becomes an object of 'comparative aesthetic evaluation' (Urry 1995, p. 195). Also, the development of rail to Windermere and Penrith, the rise of outdoor sports and the increasingly widespread belief that walking is a valuable exercise for people and society, all contribute to the reproduction of the Lake District's landscape. Urry believes the Lake District has not been considered as a fascinating landscape until some visitors use the land as the literary and artistic reference. 'The area had to be discovered; then it had to be interpreted

as appropriately aesthetic.’ (Ibid. p. 193). Visitors from elsewhere with different contexts have reproduced the Lake District in various cultural expressions so to create its landscape out of the wild and untamed nature. Urry quotes N. Green’s argument to say that ‘nature is not a universal but is something that is historically and culturally constituted.’ (Green 1990 in Urry 1995, p.198).

To make the landscape of England, Urry also argues, the Lake District reflects a particular kind of ‘place-myth’, which is to an extent reflected by its geographic features. The association of mountains and lakes constitute a ‘shrine to nature’ that allows the visitor to enjoy a calm, slow and deliberate state in solitude. ‘The relationship with nature is established through walking in the countryside with relatively few other visitors being even visible.’ (Urry 1995, p.197). A state of solitude makes visitors unconsciously enter into a realm of thought, and provides spiritual comfort and relaxation in relation with nature. Indeed, quiet scenery gives an environment of thought for literature and art, and later, the popularity of literature and art based on the landscape also enables the Lake District to be seen as a cultural production of England’s landscape. Thus, the landscape in the Lake District has developed to some extent through an approach to natural and cultural circulation. Here, landscape provides the visitor with a visual beauty and emotional pleasure; these unique physical and mental experiences through literary and artistic processing, in return, contribute to the landscape’s meaning and value. As Berger says: ‘Sometimes a landscape seems to be less a setting for the life of its inhabitants than a curtain behind which their struggles, achievements and accidents take place.’ (Berger 1976, pp. 13-15).

Landscape architect, Anne Whiston Spirn in an essay 'One with Nature: Landscape, Language, Empathy, and Imagination' addresses landscape as an ongoing dialogue that refers to a sense of empathy – the process to transmit one's own perception into another being (Spirn in Delue & Elkins 2008, p. 44). Her empathetic idea is also involved in the symbolical understanding, using and conveying of the meanings of the scenery, especially through invoking a common cognition or imagination of it. For example, she points out cloud's visual form, flowing in the air, brings a sense of motion as a fundamental process, with which 'to feel the kinship between the animate and inanimate' (Ibid). Also, a tree, is a sign of water or human settlement which has physical and cultural implications, such as its relationships with the environment as a source of shelter and fuel, the growth and decaying, and its cultural connection with human knowledge. 'A Tree of Knowledge may derive from trees' long lifespan and the association of age with wisdom.'(Ibid. p. 55). Through the symbolic meanings that the natural subjects understood in the cultural contexts, landscape demonstrates a metaphoric quality and develops a range of common cognition to acquire a sense of empathy. Her idea is similar to Cosgrove's methodology on symbolic landscape and iconographic interpretation, which emphasizes that studying landscape requires 'a critical recognition of the contexts in which the landscape idea has intellectually evolved and a sensitivity to the range and subtlety of human creativity in making and experiencing the environment' (Cosgrove 1984, pp. 15-16).

John Wylie in the first chapter of *Landscape* argues this term implies a distinct tension between observation and inhabitation (Wylie, 2007, pp. 4-6). It is not merely seen as the observable material fact, but observation in a method of inhabitation – 'sometimes have the sense of getting

closer to it, sometimes even of getting inside it' (Ibid. p. 5). He takes Paul Cézanne's series of paintings of Mont Saint Victoire in Provence as an example to demonstrate how the artist combines the self and the landscape in his artwork, here, the observation and visual exploration are 'so intense that Cézanne seems to be inside the landscape he is painting' (Ibid.). Wylie also quotes the phenomenologist, Merleau Ponty's argument that Cézanne's art brings a 'tactile reality', making visible how the world touches us, which shows a unique visual expression of his own argument, where 'observer and observed, self and landscape, are essentially enlaced and intertwined, in a "being-in-the-world" that precedes and preconditions rationality and objectivity.' (Ibid. p.3).

For Wylie, understanding landscape involves a way of seeing the interconnectivity of self, knowledge and environment. Like Cézanne's pictorial experience in painting – making landscape is a method to explore the external world and the internal itself. Wylie also considers landscape as a human and culturally dominated phenomenon itself, including specifically historical and cultural practices and values, but the tensions between observation and inhabitation, the relation of viewer and viewed, or the subject and object need to be clearly recognized. He believes a gap lies in contemporary landscape studies in terms of a critical interpretation of self and others.

Cosgrove has a similar claim about landscape in relation to its observation and observed that it is based on the perspective of the 'outsider'. Local people who are the users of the land find it difficult to judge the cultural and aesthetic value of the landscape, rather the tourist can find it

through a special gaze:

For the insider there is no clear separation of self from scene, subject from object. There is, rather, a fused, unsophisticated and social meaning embodied in the milieu. The insider does not enjoy the privilege of being able to walk away from the scene as we can walk away from a framed picture or from a tourist viewpoint.

(Cosgrove 1984, p. 19)

From this point of view, the natives have lost an insight of the landscape as a whole because they are inside, or part of the environment, and unable to address the scene through a distanced observation, or understand landscape through seeing a different confrontation. For example, a person who was born and lives in China, once travelling to the Lake District of England, will immediately identify the differences of both natural and cultural scenery as well as the national identity implied in the landscape. If we consider landscape studying involves a way of seeing, or a method to explore the self and environment, the question how to put the self in, or out of the environment might contribute to the development of the landscape idea.

By comparing the historical traditions of landscape painting between the West and China, Steven M. Leuthold in an essay 'A Sense of Place' proposes a question – why did the genre of landscape painting appear in Western art later than that in China? Leuthold believes the theme of landscape did not spontaneously move to the center of Western art since the painting was a medium of visual representation⁸; whilst, from the early appearance of the painting in Chinese art, landscape was a dominating theme in its own right (Leuthold 2011, pp. 173-174). For

⁸ Leuthold believes Western art has been oriented toward human theme; landscape only played a secondary role, until its importance was found in Holland art of the 17th-century. And later, landscape painting reached its fullest expression in 19th-century France.

Leuthold, nature in the West has been treated as an object to be altered, via a scientific attitude of study and human behaviors. The relation of people and nature then represents a sense of analysis and control of the natural materiality: ‘Historically, nature has been seen as a threat that must be controlled. In the process of learning how to control it, nature came to be regarded as an object of analysis, and manipulated for human progress and gain.’(Ibid. p. 174). On the contrary, Chinese painting conveys a sense of immateriality and wholeness – the scenery has been idealized, and people and environment are both integrated elements to express the philosophic idea of organic association in Daoism (Ibid. p.175). Thus, Western landscape tradition implies a state of explorer and explored between people and nature; while Chinese landscape painting represents a process of fusion or association of self and environment.

From this point of view, Western landscape painting, its forms and methods of representation keep changing according to different ways that Europeans explore and treat the nature – the subject to object relation. For example, the mediaeval landscape image was generally serviced as a background setting for the figural subjects to narrate religious and historical stories (See Lorenzetti’s *Scenes from the Life of the Blessed Humility*, Fig. 9). ‘Landscape in this period has conventionally only a supplementary role to play, it is marginal to the main human or divine subject, it is “parergon” to the Argument. It occupies a low status in a hierarchy dominated by the human presence.’(Andrews 1999, p.28). Whether cartographical or painterly, landscape was seen as a subsidiary or peripheral status in the mediaeval period that is closely related to Christian cultural tradition in a sense to strengthen the doctrine’s expression. Here the heroic human, the icon of Saint, and the divine subjects are always bestowed with the majestic

meanings in visual forms of art. According to Clark, the mediaeval landscape image was kept in an un-exploited status – the Gothic landscape remains ‘unreal’ because the medieval man was not concerned entirely with natural observation (Clark 1949, p. 27).

Fig. 9 Lorenzetti *Scenes from the Life of the Blessed Humility* (unknown year) Uffizi Gallery.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

Until the 15th-century, with the weakness of feudalism and the beginning of capitalism in the countries of western and southern Europe, the original condition of nature was changed by a quickly establishing new capitalist state (Cosgrove 1984, p. 3). At this time, landscape represented in art was gradually developed towards a comparatively independent subject as people began to seek a broader range and perspective of the land, as well as an eagerness to regress the original balance of nature. Landscape then became an interesting attraction for the painter, as ‘cities develop their own distinctive cultures and pressures to the point where the citizen begins to sense that there is a profound division between the civilized and the natural.’

(Andrews 1999, p. 31). Many paintings of the early Italian and Northern Renaissance reflect a scene of voluntary exile from the centers of civilization (See Pieter Bruegel's *Landscape with Flight into Egypt*, Fig. 10; Giovanni Bellini's *St Francis in the Desert*, c. 1480; Joachim Patinir's *Landscape with St Jerome*, c. 1515-19, etc.). The landscape is idealized, representing a solitary and sublime perception or reflecting a pastoral ideal of classical poetry. The eagerness to be remote from the city and civilization then promoted the development of countryside landscape as an artistic language, bringing people's perspective and the participation of the icon of the Saint into a broader natural environment. Also, the Protestant Reformation and the ideological challenges to the Roman Church helped push forward the development of landscape art further. The artist, by representing the Saint in the isolated natural surroundings, was able to explore the idea of solitude, the tension between city and country, or the status of self and the natural world.

Fig. 10 Pieter Bruegel the Elder *Landscape with the Flight into Egypt* (1563) Oil on canvas 37×56cm.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

From its participation in the mediaeval image to early Renaissance painting, it seems that landscape's appearance, use and development in Western art history cannot be separated from

a changing relation between the subject and object, observer and observed, and self and environment. Indeed, each century witnesses various forms and contents of landscape painting according to the change of this relationship. We can also quickly look at Meindert Hobbema's *The Avenue at Middelharnis* (Fig. 11) as a good example of landscape in the in 17th-century Holland when the changed relation of people and environment resulted in a new form of landscape art.

This painting displays a regular social and cultural life in 17th-century Holland: a scene of the avenue, village and church of Middelharnis in the province of South Holland. The main subject matter – the avenue is a channel of trade, and Hobbema put it right in the middle from foreground to background. This composition creates a seemingly realistic depth of space and draws people's eyes into the landscape. Comparing an idealized mode of landscape painting in the North Renaissance, it concentrates on a faithful representation of what can be seen from the land and daily country life. There was a particular passion for the depictions of reality, which shows people's concern and admiration of nature and countryside, and also confidence with the secular scenery is itself an art to be expressed. 'The overarching innovative concept of seventeenth century Dutch landscape painting is that it began to focus on the natural local environment and was painted with a seemingly realistic likeness.' (Kempe 2011, p. 4).

Fig. 11 Meindert Hobbema *The Avenue at Middelharnis* (1689) Oil on canvas 104×141cm National Gallery London.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

The elevation of the bourgeois in the Dutch Golden Age influenced and changed the role and aesthetic value of art where the scenes of life had begun to be regarded as art. Dutch artists were well trained in art skills and practiced landscape painting as a kind of naturalistic and secular expression of daily life. This painting also well succeeds the linear perspective invented in the Renaissance – an effective pictorial method to imitate realistic space and create physical authenticity in the flat visual art. By using this traditional Western perspective principle, it reflects the changed status of social stratum and a demand for the new content and form of painting in the 17th-century Holland. The ‘Bourgeois had good reason to be proud of its land and its people. The love of facts and the sharp observation which had earlier characterized the artists of the Netherlands now came to the fore.’ (Jeffares 1979, p. 44).

Here I do not want to excessively elaborate on this specific artwork through an art-historical method of analysis, but by emphasizing landscape’s rise and fall in the Western art world

implies a changed process of self and environment, in which nature is treated as an object, or a target of analysis, via people's attitude and understanding. There is a long time process of exploration between people and nature until the landscape becomes a theme of art in its own right. Here, self and environment are undergoing a relationship of observer and observed – people are the main subject; nature is the explored object; landscape painting is a way of seeing the objective world.

Before the late 19th-century, Western landscape painting was more or less focused on the faithful expression of visual reality and scientific understanding of nature in art. Since then it has been transformed into more various forms and methods of visual representation, firstly treated by post-impressionist painters. With the Japanese print – the Ukiyo-e had arrived in the European art market, a number of artists began to seek a different, Eastern aesthetics of art that can be used for landscape making. For example, Van Gogh and his contemporaries Gauguin, Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Whistler studied the bright colour, graphic composition, and subject matter from Japanese prints to explore a new spirit in Western art (Leuthold 2011, p. 180). Even in some of Van Gogh's oil paintings we can clearly find he attempted to use the images of the Ukiyo-e as a background of his oil work via a method of pictorial 'grafting'. 'Western artists were increasingly open to new artistic methods at the turn of the century. Examining the ideas of Chinese and Japanese aesthetics was one way to reflexively consider the limitations of Western ideas about art.' (Ibid.).

According to Leuthold, the changes in attitudes in landscape painting by the mid-20th century

were influenced primarily by the East, not only from the visual image but also from the Eastern philosophic spirit and their different worldview. In the Eastern understanding of landscape painting, there is a significant difference that takes place in thinking about artistic aim, function, and value (Ibid.). Thus, landscape in China undertakes a fairly different route to its rise and development in the West.⁹ Leuthold's discussion about the ways of seeing the relation between self and environment, or subject and object, in my view, unfolds a mode of cross-cultural inquiry. However, his analysis in the description of traditional Chinese painting is vague in terms of landscape's aim and value displayed in the artwork. Here, I shall give a theoretical supplement and embody a few points of discussion about how self and environment have been reflected in the tradition of Chinese painting, which shows a different understanding of subject-object relation with that of the West.

1. The relationship between self and environment in ancient Chinese landscape painting reflects an experience of 'being in nature' rather than 'seeing nature' (Law 2011, p. 378). This being does not refer to the physical existence when people encounter nature, but focuses on a spiritual and emotional connection with nature – an ideological state to see the self and others. As discussed early, Daoist philosophy since the 5th-century has influenced the aesthetics of Chinese landscape painting, in which all the beings – man, animal, plant, mountain, river, lake, cloud and mist are together to constitute one organic association, mentally reflecting a self-renewing harmony of a totality of the cosmos. The subject to object relation is obtained by a mutually contained and inter-determined process; while,

⁹ As early discussed, Leuthold believes landscape in Western painting has not become an independent subject until 17th-century Europe, but it is a dominating theme in Chinese art from the start to present.

making landscape painting is a pursuit to perceive philosophical spirit. Chinese painters did not concern nature as a target of physical or objective research, rather, they took it as an artistic vehicle or a medium to express a spiritual introspection of being in nature.

Traditional Western landscape painting, in contrast, reflects a method of ‘seeing nature’, which is not merely seeing the physical feature and fact, but from an iconographic perspective, or more often, the Marxist art and culture perspective to address landscape from the complex historical and social contexts. With the transformation of social stratum (feudalism to capitalism, for example) and people’s change of attitude and understanding towards nature, landscape painting has been developed from a subsidiary or peripheral status of art (the medieval period) to an independent visual subject itself. (17th-century Holland or 19th-century France, etc.) At the time people begin to scientifically study nature via the language of painting, this subject to object relation is undergoing a state of observer and observed or explorer and explored.

2. In China, landscape is always a better theme to evoke the connection between people and nature than other subjects such as still life, portrait or historical painting. First, under the philosophic influence, painting landscape is in order to pursue a harmonic spirit of self and environment. Landscape itself represents a unique natural and peaceful scenery that encourages an in-depth thought of philosophy and the state of the cosmos. Furthermore, landscape painting connects all categories of Chinese aesthetics, philosophy and art. Its significance is equal to, if not more than, the other Chinese cultural heritages such as

calligraphy and ancient poetry. These three artistic and literary expressions are sometimes interrelated in a way that a poem is represented by writing on one corner of the landscape painting, to demonstrate the painter's spiritual state when he/she is making the artwork (see Figs. 3-4). These might explain why landscape painting has always kept a remarkably a central role in Chinese art history; whilst, in Western art, it has gone through a process of transformation until it finally acquired an independent form of its own. Indeed, landscape's rise and development in the West and China depend on their different artistic and aesthetic pursuits, scientific or philosophic, rational or emotional, and also decided by how people put the self in the environment, and in the artwork.

3. The definition of visual authenticity in Chinese landscape painting is not equal to the physical reality that is represented in Western art. Here the visual truth reflects a spiritual and ideological state to comprehensively perceive the various aspects of nature, rather than a scientific exploration based on a visual instant. Daoist term *Zen* (authenticity) focuses on an intrinsic quality to understand objective things. The ancient Chinese art theorists, for example, Xie He in *Six Principles*¹⁰ (c. 6th-century) and Zhang Yanyuan in *Lidai Minghua Ji* (Famous Paintings through History, c. 9th-century) believed the external depiction of a subject – the likeness, is not the essence to create a master piece. Rather, the artwork needs to reveal a kind of eternal spirit that goes beyond the subject itself – a spirit to express a profound state of life (Shi 2014, pp. 2-3. Trans. Yuping Li). If we consider Holland 17th-

¹⁰ *Six Principles* were established by Chinese art theorist Xie He (479-502), which demonstrate six standards to judge and comment the historical Chinese paintings, including 'Spirit Resonance', 'Methods of Brushwork', 'Correspondence to the Object', 'Application of colour', 'Compositional planning', and 'Studying by Copying'. Xie He's *Six Principles* have influenced the aesthetic understanding of ancient Chinese painters for centuries.

century landscape painting, *The Avenue at Middelharnis* (Fig. 11), as a pictorial language to respect the reality of everyday life, I shall argue that Chinese landscape reflects a state of thought, as a kind of truth, in which it creates a balance between the physical and spiritual reality of nature. Here landscape painting does not completely detach from the material substance, and also relies on the visual forms and proportions of mountain, river and cloud as its method of visual representation, but the value and importance exist in whether and how the painting can demonstrate a deeply ideological state of a harmonious association.

Countless Peaks and Vales (Fig. 7), as a typical Chinese scroll landscape painting, represents to the viewer an ordered pictorial appearance of association of subjects – people, mountains, rivers, trees and clouds are all integrated elements to constitute the work as an organic whole. It does not represent a visual instant, or a certain time and space like Hobbema's *The Avenue at Middelharnis*, but emphasizes a logical order between every being in the work. If we see linear perspective as a pictorial method that Western painters use to represent nature to achieve a visual truth in a single space, ancient Chinese painters prefer to use a 'multi-focus' perspective, following with a movable viewpoint in the painting to run a continuously spatial order for every being. For example, in Fig. 7, with a change of the viewpoint in the pictorial plane, the viewer's eye seems to be going through 'an up to down visual movement', crossing a range of scenes in the painting, to acquire a 'real' perception of the landscape.¹¹ While, the sense of self is being a part of this movement, keeping inside of the painting to create a 'being in nature' rather than 'seeing nature'.

¹¹ I shall specifically discuss in the second chapter about a perceptual truth interpreted by Song Dynasty painter Guo Xi in relation to the multi-focus perspective in Chinese scroll painting.

Traditional Western linear perspective requests only one vanishing point represented in the work, and the viewer and the point of sight have to keep a certain distance against the painting. This is a hypothesis that the viewer's standpoint is fixed. In contrast, method and structure of Chinese painting require the viewer to read the different scenes and contents step by step like how we read the literal language. 'Seeing' a picture here is more like a process of 'experiencing' the landscapes crossing a period of time. As Leuthold said: 'One way that landscape painting creates a sense of place, then, is by representing an environment that viewers can "tour, enjoy and live in" in their imagination.' (Leuthold 2011, p. 169). The pictorial space in Fig. 7 demonstrates an 'absolute' spatial mode; it is almost never specific and is not bound to a particular place or time, like the traditional Western painting. This method, by connecting the spatio-temporal specificity in visual representation and emphasizing an everlasting space-time state, indeed gives landscape painting a possibility to release spiritual awareness in accordance with the idea of Daoist philosophy.

'Underlying an infinite space and time of the cosmos, where is the place people should be?'¹² (Jin in Zhu 2013, p. 5. Trans. Yuping Li). This is a question that many traditional Chinese landscape painters attempt to answer in their artwork, just like Paul Gauguin's inquiry through the title of his Tahiti painting (1897-98): 'Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?' Chinese Ming Dynasty painter, Li Rihua once wrote: 'The greatest art always brings to us an eternal inspiration of human life rather than the subject itself. So that, only

¹² Chinese Qing Dynasty painter Jin Nong (1687-1763) asked himself when he was painting a landscape.

concentrating on the apparent representation of the subject might lead to losing a spiritual significance of the artwork' (Li c.1565- 1635, Trans. Yuping Li). Indeed, making landscape painting evokes the thought that goes beyond the artwork itself. Through different ways of seeing or exploring the relation of self and environment, ancient Chinese painters pursued and concerned with the existence and value of humans as a unit of the cosmos.

Thus, the fundamental difference between traditional Western and Chinese landscape painting lies in their respective reflection and definition of landscape's meaning and value, either for a scientific exploration of objective fact, or for a philosophic pursuit of the eternal spirit. To a great extent, the different processes of development of Western and Chinese painting, depend on how people understand the relation of self and the environment in landscape painting. By discussing the ways of seeing, the relation of subject and object, self and landscape, we can distinguish these two aesthetic traditions and evaluated modes to critically succeed and absorb both their methods and features for a cross-cultural art exploration, enriching the existing format of landscape painting.

In this section, I attempt to provide a cross-cultural perspective about the ways of seeing landscape, especially in relation to self and the environment reflect in the landscape painting, and its methods of representation. The text reviews the existing Western landscape theories such as Mitchell, Cosgrove, Urry and Wylie's methods to interpret landscape as people's ideological reflection of social and cultural life, and later contrastively discusses how the sense of self has been used in both Western and Chinese landscape painting to bring about the

different processes of art development. The awareness of self is always combined in the ancient Chinese landscape painting in order to pursue a perpetually spiritual harmony of man and nature. It is also important to see the cultural and methodological differences, such as the perspective used to create a single visual space in traditional Western art, or to evoke a movement of the eye to experience a spatial journey in ancient Chinese landscape painting. In the second chapter, I shall specifically discuss the spatial method and perspective applied in a cross-cultural context, with a focus on ancient Chinese aesthetics and methodology as the alternative strategies to structure new spatial mode in landscape painting. The following section in this chapter explains my studio practices and elaborates how I consider making landscape painting as a critical cross-cultural art practice to explore the relationship of people and environment.

● **Thoughts and Practices**

Mitchell's argument to change the term landscape from a noun to a verb, or from a visual phenomenon itself to a medium of all cultures, similarly, in my studio practice, I consider landscape painting as a critical cross-cultural practice. Firstly, landscape represents a critical mode of observation and thought, in which seeing through a way of thinking, not in a single visual gaze, but as a method of gaze enables us to find a state of self and others. Furthermore, the rise and development of landscape in painting have been influenced by various cultural contexts, especially in today's globalization. The traditional and foreign cultures, and the new and old civilizations contribute together to develop the diverse modes of landscape representation (Sauer 1925, p. 309). By absorbing different cultural and aesthetic values,

landscape painting is able to change its form, content and meaning to contribute to the development and innovation of art and culture. In addition, I understand landscape painting possesses a function to unite a wide range of cultural differences, and to combine various methodologies of art between the ancient and modern time. Through exploring the cross-cultural forms and methods via landscape painting, I expound my understanding towards the contemporary issues – the harmony or tension between people and environment. I also emphasize how ancient Chinese methodologies can be fused into contemporary landscape painting practice to expand the existing artistic formats.

The works *Inhabitanace No.1-4* (Figs. 12-14) display a series of four independent landscape paintings in an effort to express the potential environment crisis of our time and the tensions between people, nature and dwelling. Climate change that leads to natural disaster is a current global issue, which has influenced our social and cultural life already. This is not merely a natural phenomenon to be predicted or a scientific task to be studied, but should be put into a deeper cultural field of thought to evoke a common cognition about its significance. Indeed, the physical relation of people and nature, and the mental state of self and environment are not always in a harmonious balance like the ancient artistic and philosophic pursuits. Most of the time, it represents a state of displacement or a process of contradiction and conflict, in which we find or lose ourselves. Thus, how to find the meaning and value of self in today's conflicting civilization is possibly a method to critically succeed the ancient Chinese spirit of art that people and the environment are an unseparated whole.

In the works (Figs. 12-14), I create a mixed and hybrid space-time structure and the scenes caused by natural disasters, in which a temporary visual balance between the subjects and space is existing in a generally dramatic sense of crisis. I choose some seemingly desolate and deserted houses, fully or partly damaged by the earthquake, flood and tornado, as a kind of symbolic subject to reflect the background meanings that people's dwellings are experiencing unexpected and unpredictable changes. As discussed earlier, Cosgrove believes landscape possesses a symbolic construction which refers to an ideological status of the sense of place in relation to social and cultural factors. Also, Panofsky's idea of iconology sees a deep analysis of intrinsic meaning and psychological thought of the image. Both writers extend the study of landscape from a visual phenomenon to a method of exploring the complexly historical and cultural contexts. To reflect their idea, in this group painting works, I attempt to practice a pictorial vision of myself that concerns landscape as a symbolic visual representation.

I borrow these symbolic subjects (the damaged living places) from actual cases and reproduced them in the works as the visual signals. They have a metaphoric quality to convey a feeling of displacement, unsettlement or lack of belonging, implying the context of crisis and the potential stories behind them. In Fig. 12, two damaged houses, one of them with only 'half' a body, are drifting on the icy water, like a kind of nature's 'daily rubbish' after a serious earthquake. I attempt to paint these houses in a realistic way with Western brush skills, clearly depicting the chaotic interior scenes – the destroyed furniture and bed to increase the dramatic tension in the work. Once nature has recovered her temperament, here the painting represents to us a new spatial configuration of the land, implying the tiny power of human beings. By arranging these

symbolic subjects via a certain perspectival spatial structure, I address an ideological state of tension, panic and uncertain mood beyond the appearance of landscape as a visual phenomenon.



Fig. 12 Yuping Li *Inhabitation No.3* (2016) Oil on canvas 120×80cm.

In these series of painting works, I attempt to introduce a spatial mode that reflects landscape as a process of experiencing things. For instance, in Fig. 13, I represent the process of a natural disaster that happened during different times in one pictorial plane. The top one third of the work shows a past time when the tornado eroded the whole village causing the enormous destruction of the buildings. Later, in the middle area, the declining small house and a signal of a tornado in the distance intimate the unavoidable disaster is coming. On the bottom third area – the peaceful lake and the reflection of water represent a future time and space of the work: whether the tornado will come here is unpredictable. A single boat, I put it in the foreground, has undergone natural or man-made damage, but might have to wait for a second destruction soon. These symbolic subjects, through a particularly spatial arrangement in the pictorial plane, compose a consequent process of a disaster happening from the background to the foreground that is perceptible. This spatial mode also provides a logical order and a way of seeing the artwork.

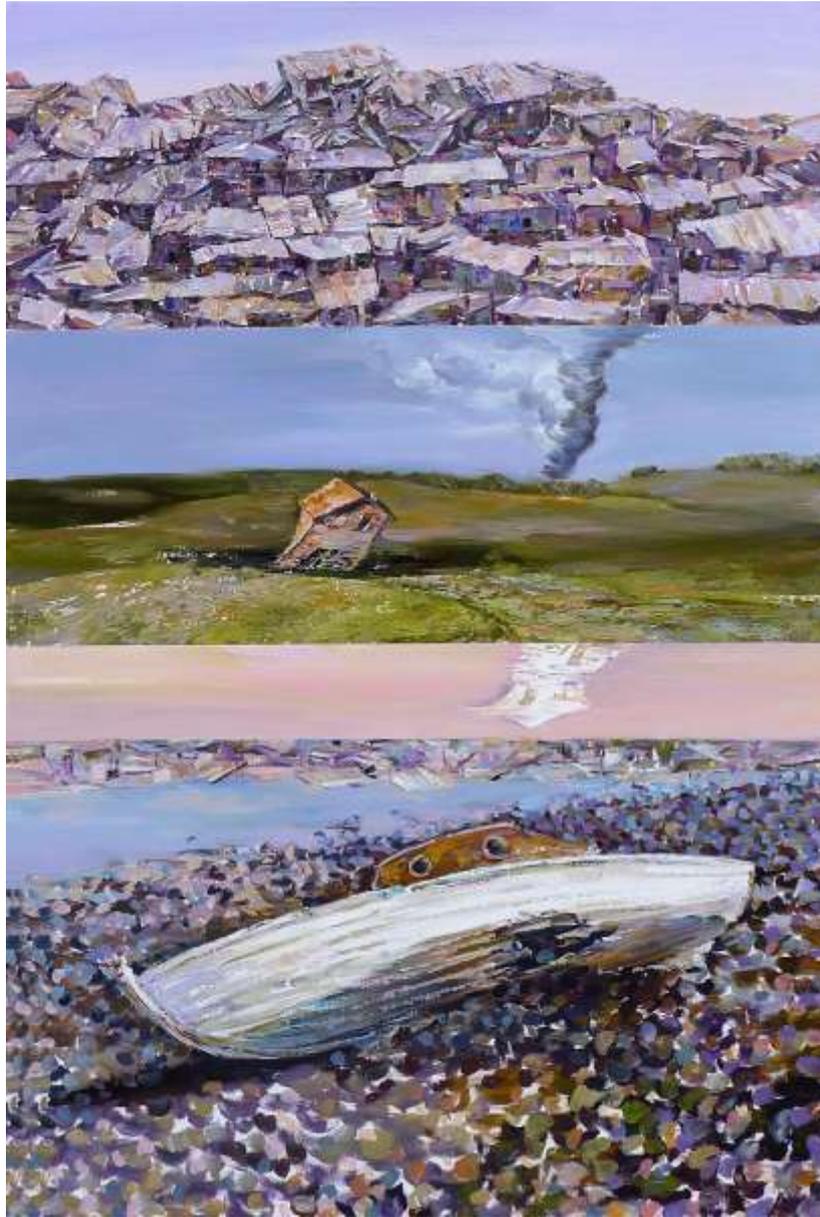


Fig. 13 Yuping Li *Inhabitation No.4* (2016) Oil on canvas 120×80cm.

Here, my method to divide the pictorial space and make the composition involve an understanding of the ‘multi-focus’ perspective in traditional Chinese landscape painting. I emphasize a spatial order crossing a period of time and a movable viewpoint displayed on the pictorial plane, rather than a specific space-time arrangement. This is in order to lead the

viewer's eye to experience the process of a landscape's change and things happening behind the painting. Following Daoist philosophical tradition, Chinese painting stresses a spiritual or ideological state to comprehensively understand the different aspects and developmental process of every being. That is my direction of practice in these series of works. Here, I understand landscape's expression as referring to an inner perception as a process of experiencing and things happening, into which the sense of self can be fused. With the change of the content, time and space in the work from the background to the foreground, the viewers and the point of sight are no longer fixed in one place, but rather, via physical or visual movement, participate in the spatial exploration on the pictorial plane. The sense of self is a part of the landscape being.



Fig. 14 Yiping Li *Inhabitation No. 1-3* (2016) Oil on canvas 120×80cm each.

Wylie addresses landscape as both the phenomenon itself and our perception of it, and further explains that it is not only what we see but also how we look at things from a particular way or perspective – ‘studying landscape involves thinking about how our gaze, our way of looking at the world, is always already laden with particular cultural values, attitudes, ideologies and expectations.’(Wylie 2007, p.7). With the participation of self, in this group of practices, landscape painting is not a still subject to be watched from a certain distance. It can be considered as an artistic ‘narration’ to be read, like people read the literal language step by step to gain the development of plots in a time duration. And most importantly, it is also a thing to evoke the thoughts towards the different cultures and aesthetic value involved in, as well as the social and environment problems that go beyond the painting itself. These four landscape paintings have their symbolic contexts that imply different types of natural disasters, but are painted through a cross-cultural practice, referencing both the perspectival and spatial methodologies between Western and Chinese painting, in order to evoke a distinct tension among the observation, experience and inhabitation.

As discussed earlier, the ancient Chinese landscape painting was represented by a visual association of the certain proportions of mountain and water. In this group of practices (Figs. 12-14), I structure the landscape by the different combinations of natural and artificial habitats – houses, land and water, which I consider as the necessary living spaces for contemporary life. Along with the development of transport and vehicle, our awareness of space become more complex and ambiguous. When we are transforming the physical spaces around us, the ideological spaces in our minds are consequently a complicated diversification. To reflect a

spatial diversity and ambiguity, in each work, I set up a 'blank' space in the middle area of the painting as a 'shadow' of these damaged houses, or the water reflection to imply a state of ideological 'emptiness'. It can be also seen as another spatio-temporal order to evoke an unlimited imagination of perceptual and hidden space in the work. The idea of emptiness, I reference from the pictorial methodology of the Chinese Southern Song period painting that prefers to use blank spaces left on the pictorial plane to emphasize the aesthetic atmosphere. Term 'emptiness' originally comes from the Daoist philosophy, but has been applied to aesthetic and artistic fields as a unique methodology used in traditional Chinese landscape painting, which I shall specifically discuss in relation to various landscape painting practices in Chapter 3.

Chinese aesthetics of art sees the language of water as a symbol of wisdom and emphasizes by introspecting the form and organism of water to understand the wisdom of life. In my painting works, I consider the symbolic subject – water, used as a visual component of landscape painting, reflects nature's existence like a complicated and changeable mirror. Here, nature is represented through an insight of itself, via the reflection of the water, creating a connection between reality and imagination in the painting. I see the image of water used in painting as a special method to arouse a thought of 'space towards space'. Like the ancient Chinese landscape painting focuses on an eternal spatial mode, here, the ever changing visual form of water is better to evoke a perpetually spiritual state and the thought of natural being.

The Cultural Geographic Landscape (Fig. 15) shows a group of six vertical forms of Chinese

screen paintings combined with Western oil paint on canvas. Each screen panel can be seen as an independent work, though together, the work displays a total visual effect of the landscape. This traditional form of screen painting, originally was produced from the Chinese Tang Dynasty (618-907) via a kind of folding screen which was extremely popular as the interior art display at that time (Zhu 2012, p. 78). This visual form is also related to the process of view, similar to the way of reading the ancient Chinese scroll bamboo, for both the artist and the viewer will open the scroll to paint or read the contents and plots from one side to the other side during a period of time. Although the strip bamboo was later replaced by the scroll paper or silk, the making and appreciation of painting through a process of time development has not changed in Chinese aesthetics of art.

Through a way of separated but associated visual display, I consider this form of screen paintings can evoke the concept of time passing in the flat visual art, and this involves the understanding of traditional Chinese culture and art history. Screen paintings can also demonstrate a state of movable viewpoint and the multi-perspective effect that correspond to the aesthetic value of ancient Chinese landscape painting. In the studio practice, I borrow this form and its cultural implication here to explore the contemporary issue about spatial display and time passing in painting. For example, Fig. 15 represents a wide range of geographic features: valley, river, lake, cultivated field, glacier, desert and forest, changing over a period of a year. These geographic features suggest the different states of natural evolution and growth, and each screen panel displays a certain moment in the total of one year's duration. Once the panels have been put together, they demonstrate a visual experience of the seasonal changes

and natural circulation.



Fig. 15 Yuping Li *The Cultural Geographic Landscape* (2015) Oil on canvas 100×50cm each by six panels.

This screen work aims to demonstrate a spatial state in which a landscape has formed through the development of time, the cultural combination and the form of art display. Visual authenticity in the work is different from the representation of physical reality that the eye can see once, like the traditional Western oil painting. Daoism understands the term *Zen* as an intrinsic quality of objective things. Its authenticity reflects an ideological state to comprehensively perceive the various aspects of nature, rather than a visual moment of landscape. The single space-time state is not the point of my emphasis, rather, the changing space, scenes and different colours represented in the work all suggest a process of movement of the land – the birth, development and recession of nature. Here I focus on creating a balance between the physical and spiritual reality of nature. Like the ancient Chinese landscape pursues a harmonic order to express natural spirit, this practical screen work was painted in an aim to evoke the thought towards an eternal state of natural movement that goes beyond the work itself.

I call this screen work a ‘cultural geographic landscape’ because it involves not only the

expression of the broad geographic features, but also the cross-cultural methodologies practiced in my studio exploration. For example, I reference the way of perspective in traditional Chinese scroll painting, particularly on the Chinese Song Dynasty painter Guo Xi's spatial theory – making landscape through 'three levels of distance' to connect the different scenes as well as the process of viewing. In the work, each panel of painting has a 'multi-focus' perspective with a movable viewpoint to bring the viewer's eye up to down on the pictorial plane. At the same time, this six panels' combination creates a left to right process of reading and experiencing nature's change and development during a period of time. It is more like enjoying a visual landscape journey of the natural beauty and associated features of mountain and water through a process of seeing. Fig. 16 demonstrates a studio painting process in which I attempted to practice the different scenes and perspectival spatial method in different steps.



Fig. 16 Yuping Li Photo of *The Cultural Geographic Landscape* (2015).

Furthermore, how to use the visual blank – the 'emptiness' as a linear language to connect and separate the pictorial plane is another cross-cultural method I explore in this work. In the early

Chinese philosophy, emptiness represents an original status of the cosmos, and every being in the world comes from an unlimited concept of emptiness. I consider this philosophic term as the initial being of things that help developing an idea about time passing on painting. For example, the 'blank lines' left on the canvas can display painting's past, as the time goes during the process of painting, the mountain, forest, desert and river gradually begin to take shape on the pictorial plane. Here, emptiness is a linear form to separate and create the visual spaces in each panel, and at the same time, to connect the painting panels and the diverse geographic features of landscape into one visual whole.

As Urry points out, the natural landscape provides a spiritual shrine, making people unconsciously enter into a realm of thought for literature and art creation. Through the physical experience of landscape, we are able to gain a kind of spiritual perception from the objective fact, and our perception is also affected by our ongoing social-cultural backgrounds and knowledge systems. Thus, the physical experiences and cultural contexts act together on our understanding and treatment of landscape as a physical practice or pictorial expression. Here, my painting works reflect my cultural contexts and previous study experiences of both Western oil and Chinese ink painting. In this practice-based research, I attempt to develop my artwork up to a theoretical level that contributes the cross-cultural form and methodological innovation. The work (Fig. 15), made after around two and half years of this study, represents a general visual effect of my cross-cultural explorations through landscape painting. My specific points of research and study of methodologies from the ancient Chinese aesthetics are all integrated into this work to contribute a different form of landscape painting, exploring the contemporary

topics about spatial display and time passing. Here, I put the work in this chapter to demonstrate the visual effect of my cross-cultural landscape practice and provide a general impression of my studio productions.

If we consider the traditional Western painting represents a scientific method of art to explore the objective fact, and ancient Chinese landscape painting as an expression of spiritual pursuit, in my studio practice, I hope to combine both the visual and emotional features between Western and Chinese art. In my painting works, I reference the natural scenery, the human dwellings and their symbolic representations via the language of Western oil painting; while I focus on the aesthetics in ancient Chinese art as an alternative method of practice to expand the contemporary form and value of landscape painting. I also emphasize landscape painting as a critical mode of thought, which expresses a deeply ideological perception when all life and residence are experiencing orderly harmony or suffering the threat of natural disaster. Making landscape painting in this study is, yet, a method to explore the harmony or tension between self and the others, observation and thought, and subject and object. Here, landscape is not a subject to be watched, but a process of experience through a deep relation of self and environment. In Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, I shall specifically discuss the theory and method of perspective and the language 'emptiness' in Chinese landscape painting, and how I reference these pictorial methodologies in my own studio practice.

Chapter 2 A Dialogue of Space and Perspective

Perspectival techniques of picturing have had a broad influence on both our sense of ourselves and our perception of the world (Wylie 2007, p. 57). This chapter discusses the pictorial spaces and methods of perspective used by Western and Chinese art with a focus on ancient Chinese aesthetics and methodology as the alternative strategies to structure a new spatial mode in landscape painting practice. My two areas of discussion are the principle of linear perspective that has influenced the traditional Western ways of seeing the world for hundreds of years, and the ‘multi-focus’ perspective used in ancient Chinese scroll landscape painting. I consider these traditional methods of spatial representation can demonstrate the most typical cultural and aesthetic features of Western and Eastern art, and are the best references to address cultural differences, in order to find the new possibility in spatial expression to enrich the contemporary field of landscape painting.

The comparison and contrast between the pictorial space in Chinese and Western art are largely based on a consideration of two distinct cultures. The first section discusses the origin of linear perspective, and its critically theoretical thoughts in the existing Western scholarships. The second section addresses the Chinese Song Dynasty painter Guo Xi’s *Forests and Streams* (c. 1075), which is considered as a theoretical foundation of spatial representation in Chinese landscape painting. In the third section, I review French philosopher Hubert Damisch’s text *Theory of Cloud: Toward a History of Painting* (1972), which is one of the most significant

texts in the 20th-century that addresses the theories of space and perspective in relation to visual representation. These sections also include some relevant comparisons and contrasts between the artworks of China and the West. The final section explains my thoughts and methods in studio practice: how I understand and reference the ancient Chinese methodology of art into my current painting practice to bring a different and cross-cultural insight.

● **Origin of Perspective**

Linear perspective in Renaissance art provides a mathematical and geometric system that enables the depiction of three-dimensional spaces upon two-dimensional surfaces. It specifies a scientific way of seeing landscape in the Western art traditions. Cosgrove in an essay 'Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea' believes the original landscape idea in the Renaissance humanists' search requires a certainty of our reproductions of nature in art rather than a subjectivity, and the basic theory and technique of the landscape's way of seeing is linear perspective (Cosgrove 1984, p. 45). Cosgrove cites J. B. Jackson's words that landscape as a 'controlled' environment – 'scenes composed of regulated space and illusory settings' (Jackson 1979 in Cosgrove 1984, p. 20); perspective is indeed the central technique to achieve this 'control' in landscape painting. Cosgrove writes: 'Linear perspective organizes and controls spatial coordinates, and because it was founded in geometry it was regarded as the discovery of inherent properties of space itself.' (Cosgrove 1984, p. 51).

Linear perspective, originated in Florence, Italy, is inseparable from the fields of architecture, mathematics and optics. For example, Italian architect Filippo Brunelleschi precisely used the principle of the central vanishing point to structure the inner space of the dome of Florence Cathedral. Masaccio's fresco *The Holy Trinity* (Fig. 17) in the church of *Santa Maria Novella* is also considered as the earliest surviving picture of one focus perspective that created a visual fusion between an altar fresco and the actual space in the church. This work represents an accurate scale and proportion of linear perspective and the viewer's viewpoint is set up above the altar edge – just at a point of observation when the viewer is standing on the church floor. Thus the fresco brings a sense of the depth of illusion that extends the actual space of the church.

Fig. 17 Perspectival Analysis of Masaccio's fresco *The Holy Trinity* (1427-28) 667 × 317cm Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

Architect Leon Battista Alberti raised the linear perspective up to a theoretical level in his *De Pictura* (c. 1435). This text is generally seen as the earliest systematic description of the use of mathematical science as a means of controlling reality. In the text, Alberti provides a mathematically reticulated net that allows the painter to control and locate the objects in space, and see their relation to each other in the pictorial plane (Alberti, c.1435, p. 20). He also formulates the structure of linear perspective that depends on the arrangement of the visual rays.¹³ The rays move in a direction from the eye to the vanishing point as a triangle of the ray's extension to form a visual pyramid (Alberti, c.1435, pp. 47-48) (Fig.18). Alberti explains:

The pyramid is a figure of a body from whose base lines are drawn upward, terminating at a single point. The base of the pyramid is the plane which is seen. The sides of the pyramid are the rays which I have called extrinsic. The cuspid, that is the point of the pyramid, is located within the eye where the angle of the quantity is.'

(Alberti, c.1435, pp. 47-48)

A painting is, however, coming from 'an intersection of this pyramid equidistant to the plane seen and at an established distance from the eye' (Spencer 1967, p. 21) (Fig. 19). By calculating the visual rays, their height, width and depth, the objects and their sizes and locations on the pictorial plane can be determined by the mathematical system.

¹³ Alberti summarizes three kinds of ray according to different strengths and functions – the extrinsic, median and centric rays.

Fig.18 Alberti, *Della Pittura*, Section of the Visual Pyramid and the Picture Plane (1435).

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

Fig.19 Nicéron, *La Perspective Curieuse*, (1663).

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

Alberti's linear perspective provides the painter with a way of observing and organizing different things from a specific time and space that the eye can see at once. This mathematical system and method of measuring also locate the scenes and objects on their suitable spatial locations on the pictorial plan. Its rise in 15th-century Florence provided a new direction and methodology from the old spatial mode of medieval painting. Thus, mathematical and geometric elements such as point, line, plane and angle were then directly involved in spatial control in painting. In addition, the study of optics developed in the Middle Age and into the 14th-century helped create a rational and objective order of observation of things (Edgerton 1975, p. 60). As Samuel Y. Edgerton writes: 'The initial impetus to study optics in medieval Europe was that its geometric concept of light-filled space provided some kind of rationalization of how God's grace pervaded the universe.'(Ibid). Indeed, the theory of linear perspective is a product of mathematical, architectural and optical developments, as a result of

reflecting on art practice. It actually is a combination of science and art, for the Renaissance's pursuits of reason, rationality and order were the highest priority.

Fig. 20 Leonardo Da Vinci *Last Supper* (1495-1498)Tempera on gesso 460×880cm Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

The most typical Renaissance example of linear perspective used in painting can be seen in Leonardo Da Vinci's fresco the *Last Supper* (Fig.20). Here, the pictorial plane is a rectangle shape with a fixed proportion of length and width – an assumed visual plane between the viewer and scenes needs to be seen, according to Alberti's claim. In the fresco, Leonardo places Jesus at the position of the vanishing point of the center, so that every line, connecting the pictorial plane, leads the viewers' eye to the image of Jesus, which creates a three-dimensional depth of space from a flat surface. There is also in the requirement that the viewer who sees the artwork is standing in a fixed position, or in a certain viewpoint of observation. This fresco was painted on one of the walls in the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan where Leonardo also made use of the architectural structure to extend the depth of the fresco. It brings a sense that the fresco itself can be seen as a part of the overall function of the architecture, in which linear perspective was introduced in order to imitate the realistic space on the wall, emphasizing

spatial depth and visual significance.

William V. Dunning in *Changing Images of Pictorial Space* believes the method of perspective should be addressed earlier from the Greco-Roman traditions, in which each object has its own separate perspective and set of vanishing points (Dunning 1991, p. 2). He states that the Greeks saw and painted the individual figure according to its own spatial structure rather than within a unified space, so that each figure was seen from a separate viewpoint, and the size and shape of the figures did not rely on their position in relation to the viewer's eye (Ibid. pp.2-3). Renaissance painters, however, saw their object and figure from the same viewpoint from the diminishing size of objects to visual angles (Ibid). Dunning believes, after the developments of mathematical and optical theories in the late medieval period, Renaissance painters had inverted and re-structured the separated perspectival mode from the Greco-Roman method of observation to an orderly and unified visual illusion. Mathematical principle was then the source and path for people to gain knowledge and truth (Ibid. pp. 3-5).

Dunning does not consider the Renaissance system of perspective a rigid system designed for creating a spatial illusion, and he divides it into four affiliated types of perspective – the linear perspective, separation of planes, atmospheric and colour perspective. These four perspectives are interrelated to create a rational and orderly space of depth for Renaissance art. Firstly, linear perspective is the conventional spatial mode resulting from Alberti's concepts of the visual rays, vanishing point and intersecting plane via a mathematical proportion available for the architectural depiction. Separation of planes, according to Dunning, is a perspective and spatial

arrangement created by the overlapping pictorial planes. For example, Dunning discussed Sandro Botticelli's *The Miracle of St. Zenobius* (Fig. 21) as a typical example of division of perspective by the separated planes. However, this method of perspective can be seen as a further expansion of linear perspective because the plane is visually formed by an assembly of a majority of lines, and its use in this picture (Fig. 21) is also directed by the principle of focus perspective.

Fig. 21. Sandro Botticelli's *The Miracle of St. Zenobius* (1500) Tempera on wood 64.8×139.7cm.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

In addition, atmospheric perspective is more flexible than the mathematical method of linear or plane perspectives with an emphasis on dissolving distant objects into the background by the use of focus and value contrast between objects and their surroundings. 'If an object or figure is sharply focused and contrasts with the value of a blurred ground, it appears to advance. If the figure is blurred and remains similar in value to the ground, it tends to recede.' (Dunning 1991, p. 46) For Dunning, atmospheric perspective is the most effective method to create distance between separated planes to clarify and organize the objects on the ground. Dunning also points out some similar terms: 'aerial perspective', 'vanishing perspective' and 'diminishing perspective' were introduced as early as the 16th-century in Leonardo's notebooks, which give

evidence that perspective had been used via an elastic approach to building the space of Renaissance art (Ibid. pp. 44-45). The atmospheric perspective used in Renaissance art, however, has to be seen as an associated means of linear perspective. Because in the Renaissance pictorial system, the structure of perspective depends on the change of focus and the location of the eye; whilst the value contrast, and the clear and blur between objects and their surroundings do not decide the main structure of pictorial space. The atmospheric perspective here cannot play a decisive role to create spatial depth if we want to define it alone. Thus, Dunning's definition of atmospheric perspective should be more accurately seen as an associated means in the main direction of linear perspective.

Atmospheric perspective also evokes a thinking about colour change in distance. The air or atmosphere acts as a filter between the viewer and viewed object, plus the greying effect of moisture or dust particles in the air, thus colour tends to shift towards a greyed blue with distance (Ibid. pp. 48-49). Dunning's stated colour perspective is based on the physical observation that 'warm colors appear to advance and cool colours to recede' (Ibid. pp. 48). However, again, Renaissance's application of colour on painting has its historical limitations. It was not like the 19th-century French Impressionist painters who used the principles of cool and warm colour as a main and independent painting language to create visual contrast and mood. The use of colour in Renaissance art needs to be seen together with the other means of perspective to create space as a whole, especially as linear perspective was a core to connect all these means to contribute a traditional spatial mode of visual representation in Western painting.

The Renaissance system of linear perspective should be also considered in its specific age, which gave painters a tool they could use to create a new order in pursuit of rationality and objectivity. However, it also includes its limitation in terms of the approach of observation of the age. Although its emphasis on art imitating nature, and scientific and mathematical understanding of realistic space, linear perspective was based on a monocular vision, and based on a hypothesis that the viewer's viewpoint is fixed. Once the eye begins to move, the focus and perspective inevitably change so that the visual reality – the truth created in this perspectival system is yet a relative truth. As Dunning points out, the painter has to emphasize or choose one aspect instead of all the other aspects they can see from nature that is far less than those aspects we can access in the external world, and he writes: 'No single painting can depict a whole truth. Each painting is only a supplementary view of any external truth.' (Ibid. p. 36).

Since the publishing of Panofsky's 'Die Perspektive als symbolische Form' (1924-25), how to define the concept and method of perspective in pictorial art has been controversial. Panofsky believes the ancients had noticed that the change of distance would lead to a marginal distortion on the pictorial plane, which is different from Renaissance's straight line perspective. For example, he points out the ancient texts had mentioned that architectural pillars should be drawn and built as convex curves on the margin, which can be seen as an evidence of the understanding of the retinal image. Panofsky makes a strict division between the retinal image and the result of perspectival representation, and argues that linear perspective requires us to ignore the marginal distortions which the sizes and forms of the object suffer on the retina, because the image 'is a projection not on a flat but on a concave surface' (Panofsky 1924-25, p. 31). In

talking about the perspectival system in Renaissance, Panofsky argues that it ignores the fact that people see things not with a single fixed eye but with two constantly moving eyes, resulting in a spheroidal field of vision (Ibid.). He writes: 'In a sense, perspective transforms psychophysiological space into mathematical space...it takes no account of the enormous difference between the psychologically conditioned visual image through which the visible world is brought to our consciousness.' (Ibid.).

If we consider perspective is used for representing an illusion of visual reality, for Panofsky, reality or truth is the overall material and spiritual phenomena, which has to obey a certain law defined in relation to the dimensions of space and time. Panofsky believes works of art involves two ways of existence: the objective world and our cognition of it, and he calls perspective the 'objectification of the subjective' (Ibid. p.66), or the 'carrying over of artistic objectivity into the domain of the phenomenal' (Ibid. p. 72). He considers perspective as an abstract of the perceptual space system, linking the social, cognitive, psychological, and especially technical practices as a whole. In the third parts of his text, he demonstrates how perceptual and aesthetic conceptions acted on the spatial mode and perspectival scheme in art in Medieval, Byzantine and Gothic art, explicating their distinct spatial systems and particular coherence and compatibility. As artwork belongs to both the reality and our sense and empirical knowledge, Panofsky's understanding of perspective is not merely a way to represent the visible truth but also implies that there is a greater symbol of the modes of knowledge, belief, and cultural differences.

Panofsky borrows the Neo-Kantianism and Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic form to form an art-historical interpretation and his own spatial theory. Also, Alois Riegl's idea – the *Kunstwollen* (artistic will) that considers the motivation of stylistic development lies in the intrinsic cause of art, and Wölfflin's art stylistic division of Renaissance and Baroque art provides two different interpretative systems for Panofsky's contexts of reference. Here, I do not intend to address the theoretical systems that form Panofsky's argument, which might evoke more controversies involving the ideological shift of the eras. However, Panofsky's idea that perspective is determined by both external phenomenon and subjective perception offers new spatial possibilities with regard to the flat painting. His emphasis on the spiritual significance of visual representation, indeed, evokes a cross-cultural connection with the ancient Chinese art. Here, I shall use Panofsky's claim of perceptual and spiritual space to draw forth the perspectival spatial method in traditional Chinese landscape painting.

Early criticism aims at Chinese painting by Western scholars tended to believe that Chinese paintings have no perspective (March 1927, p. 69). This is, however, an isolated understanding, considering that the Western principle of a single vanishing point cannot be found in traditional Chinese painting. Although perspective was originally defined and limited to some methods of art used in the West, Chinese painting has its own spatial mode in visual representation to response, not the material, but the spiritual significance of the landscape. If we can define perspective as a means for representing distance and spatial depth on a flat surface, Chinese painting has a unique method of perspective that might reflect Panofsky's argument that art represents our perception of the objective world.

Here, we can see Guo's painting *Early Spring* (Fig. 3) as an example to demonstrate a typically spatial mode of landscape painting predominant in the Chinese Song Dynasty (960-1279). This painting, in the Taipei National Palace Museum, is a rare existing scroll painting executed by a professional court painter who signed and dated his work (Chen 2001, p.120). It consists at least three levels of spatial depth from different points of view, including one from below looking upwards (the top one third area of the painting), from the front looking to the back (the middle area with the path in the left), and from a high point overlooking the valley in the distance (the one third of the bottom area). There is no single vanishing point, visual rays and scientific measuring available to organize the perspective or locate the objects on the pictorial plane in a way like Alberti's linear theory. Instead, there is a method of perspective including the multi-focus in the painting, so as to bring a movable viewpoint throughout the painting to evoke an up to down eye movement. Its typical feature is a consideration that the viewer is not seeing the landscape in a fixed place, but the eye keeps moving according to the physical changes of time and space between man and nature. 'The artist is forever concerned with the sequences of spatial diversities of up and down and near and far. Space appears to freely manipulate itself as an agent for uninterrupted breathing in and around all things.' (Vanderstappen 2014, p. 53).

In contrast with the Western one focus perspective that emphasizes a specific time and space of reality, perspective used in Chinese painting stresses an unlimited ideological state of pictorial space. Also, the spatial division is in order to express an inner or spiritual perception of truth

about how the ancient painter understood a harmonic association between man and nature. If we see landscape painting as a way of seeing the world, involving not merely the objective representation but also the subjective factors and understandings, perspective, as the central technique to achieve ways of seeing, can also respond to a non-objective and non-scientific mode, which is a subjective and perceptual mode of pictorial space. Here, Chinese landscape painting provides a very different spatial strategy in contrast with the Renaissance's system of linear perspective, implying a spiritual and perceptual space rather than a mathematical and scientific space.

Guo's *Early Spring* (Fig. 3) is a visual demonstration of his theoretical claim in *Forests and Streams* (c. 1075),¹⁴ which includes the discussions of aesthetics, art appreciation, pictorial methodology, and painter's self-cultivation. Unlike the Tang or pre-Tang period art theorists who concerned more or less the discussion of figures, religious or secular paintings, Guo stressed only the theme of landscape painting and its aesthetic value as the highest spiritual expression of his time (Chen 2001, p. 119). Guo's art theory generally succeeds the Daoist philosophic idea of a harmonious association between man and nature, which had been proposed early in the Chinese Wei-Jin and Six Dynasties period (220-589) by Daoist Zong Bing. In order to better gain an aesthetic and spiritual significance in artwork Guo critically developed

¹⁴ *Forests and Streams* (c.1075), also called *Lin Quan Gao Zhi*, is a written collection discussing Chinese *Shan Shui* painting, written by Northern Song Dynasty court painter and theorist Guo Xi (c.1000-1087) and his successors, which includes six theoretical volumes – the 'Shan Shui Standard', 'Significant Meaning', 'Method and Principle', 'Title', 'Quality and Style', and 'Painting Notes'. The first four volumes had been written by Guo Xi during his lifetime to demonstrate the artist's aesthetic claims, and the latter two volumes collected and finished by his successors according to the oral communications with the artist.

Zong's artistic claim through diverse theoretical discussions and enriched landscape painting practice via a new perspectival spatial methodology. Indeed, his theoretical volumes involve an all-around discussion and definition of landscape in relation to its aesthetic value and authenticity, and the practical methodology and skills of scroll painting, etc.

These theoretical volumes possess great value to study and research art and aesthetics in the Chinese Song Dynasty, not merely because Guo himself was an imperial court painter, succeeding the previous academic traditions from Wei-Jin (220-420), Tang (618-907) to Five Dynasties (907-960), but also, in the Song period, landscape painting had developed to an unprecedented peak in Chinese art history, and the aesthetic standard had matured to a high level. Indeed, Guo's text can be considered as a theoretical study and summary of Chinese landscape painting before the Song Dynasty, which also assimilates the new ideas and methods of art practices by the artist and his peers. Chinese contemporary scholar Xu Fuguan comments to say these written volumes, from their pictorial methodology and aesthetic pursuit, can be seen as a literary foundation of hundreds of years of Chinese landscape painting (Xu 2001, p. 199).

In order to understand an alternative methodology of space and perspective in Chinese landscape painting, it is necessary to specifically discuss Guo's theoretical text *Forests and Streams* where he elaborates how he understands the significance and aesthetic value of landscape painting, and defines what contributes to a real landscape in visual expression. It is also necessary to see the Chinese social and cultural contexts from the Wei-Jin period to the

Tang and Song Dynasties, and the pictorial support – the scroll painting that influenced the methods of perspective at that time, which will be specifically explained and addressed in the next section.

● *Forests and Streams*

Why is the theme of landscape always favoured by the ancient sage? Because the natural mountain and river go beyond the secular world and are rich in meaning. They can provide man a sense of spiritual liberation and a poetic habitat of mind. This is a reason that landscape has a wide aesthetic foundation in the history of Chinese painting. Men are living in the material world rather than the natural and original land, however the beauty of landscape can remedy the contradiction of physical and mental demands – the different reality and ideal requirements of human life.

(Guo c.1075, Trans. Yuping Li)

Guo's aesthetic understanding in *Forests and Streams* is mainly embodied in the first two volumes – the 'Shan Shui Standard' and 'Significant Meaning' which focus on the value and aesthetic contributions of landscape painting. For Guo, making painting is an ideological perception of a harmonic balance between the internal self and external world. He emphasizes the painter should travel a lot to experience the diverse and real nature's forms – mountain and river, etc. putting himself as an unit of nature, breathing the fresh air and feeling nature's temperament, so to gain a comprehensive impression or perception of landscapes for artistic creation (Guo, c. 1075). Once the painter has achieved an understanding of the totality of landscape, the actual process of painting can begin.

Guo believes landscape can be divided according to four types of physical and emotional

features: the scenery for seeing, for wandering, for experiencing, and for living. The first is considered relatively low grade as the subject of aesthetics and artwork. He points out that the eye can capture the actual landscape crossing thousands of miles, but the scenery that can be used to live or to evoke people's interest in experiencing and wandering is very limited. So the painter needs to carefully select the typical scenery and subjects in order to demonstrate the maximum aesthetic value of landscape painting (Ibid.).

When people are seeing the curling light smoke released into the atmosphere above a village, they will have the wish to wander in; when they are watching the sunset in the wilderness, they will wish to gaze into the distance; When they are seeing a pavilion (or house) located in the mountains; they will expect to stay or live in it; when people are viewing the scenery of waterfall and rivers flowing around the feet of the mountains, they will wish to physically experience that scenery themselves.

(Guo c. 1075, Trans. Yuping Li)

According to Guo, the typical scenery is able to evoke people's common emotional cognition, and endows landscape painting with a function to produce aesthetic significance. He also believes the same scenery at different seasons, different times of day, or under varying weather conditions can evoke diverse emotional and ideological responses. For example, he states that: mountains in spring are surrounded by mists and clouds, bringing a feeling of liveliness; in summer, they are covered by the green forest and shade, seeming bright and energetic; in autumn mountains evoke a sense of serenity and solemnity; and mountains in winter display a static and solitary mood (Ibid.). Landscape painting thus needs to provide the viewers a feeling that they are traveling in the real nature of time and space, so to gain a totality of the landscape's authenticity.

In volume II of Guo's text, the choice of typical scenery depends on the painter's self-cultivation and ideological participation as an integrated part of making the artwork. For Guo, a landscape of truth is not a representation of scenery itself in painting, but the scenery that can imply or reflect the landscape's spiritual state or a vitality of human life. Once people's thoughts and minds are involved in landscape's artistic expression, the significant meaning comes. To create a real landscape painting, Guo emphasizes the painter should broadly study and carefully observe from thousands of miles of nature's shapes and features, understanding their various atmosphere and mood in the different time before the painting process begins. He also initiates the painters' rich self-cultivation to study and experience the natural scenery and a serious attitude towards the process of art creation, and these two human qualities, in Guo's argument, are the essential things to achieve the authentic understanding and emotional appeal in landscape painting:

Landscape painting as a spiritual medium also requires the painter has a calm, undisturbed and reflecting mind to paint. Creating landscape through a secular attitude of living that makes the art lose both its meaning and value. The precondition to be a landscape painter is the rich self-cultivation or the wide range of landscape knowledge and experiences.

Painters must give their whole attention to every subject painted on the work, and during the whole process of painting creation as well. If the mind is not concentrating enough, the inner vitality of landscape painting will be lost, and the brushstrokes will seem hesitant and powerless.

The value of landscape painting does not depend on their objective being, but upon a kind of 'discovery' towards the artistic essence of the object, which relies on an inquisitive mind towards the relation between man and object. If a painter fails to get at the essentials he will fail to present the soul of his theme. Here, the painter's spiritual cultivation plays a significant factor to understand the relation of self and nature. Moreover, the knowledge of art connoisseurship is important

for every young painter which requires the same aesthetic perception for art creation.

(Guo c. 1075, Trans. Yuping Li)

Guo argues a spirituality obtained from the original forests and streams in nature is necessary to evoke the aesthetic value of landscape painting. This spirituality can be also understood as an ideological status of original nature that goes beyond the secular world. He quotes the Tang period landscape painter, Zhang Cao's words to say: 'Outwardly, nature has been my teacher, but inwardly I follow the springs of inspiration in my heart.' (Zhang cited by Guo in Sullivan 1979, p. 48). Guo believes in achieving a spirituality of nature in painting, the painter needs not merely to select the typical scenery and wholeheartedly involve himself in the process of art creation, while the most important thing is to understand about what contributes to a real landscape and how to achieve a real understanding of landscape painting.

Guo's definition of a real landscape is based on the early Daoist philosophic term *Zen* (authenticity), and pre-Tang period painter and theorist, Jing Hao's claim about the truth that is represented in figure and landscape painting in his *Essay on Brush Methods* (c. 900). *Zen*, in contrast with the Renaissance's physical or scientific truth, is a kind of idealist doctrine that stresses a subjective and ideological truth. For example, one of the Daoist main creeds – *Duo Wu Xiang Er Qu Qin Zhen* (to truthfully understand the inner essence of every being) defines *Zen* as an inner and intrinsic quality – the perceptual truth in the mind. This creed also includes a meaning to address things from their original state of being.

Around the 10th-century China, Jing Hao developed Daoist idea of *Zen* into the pictorial field as a significantly spiritual pursuit in art. He proposes every being in the world has an inner vigor, and as the artistic representation, this vigor is always more important than the external depiction. The painter needs to deeply understand the intrinsic quality of the painted subject through the rich communicating and careful observation in order to express how Daoist claim of *Zen* lies in the mind. In his *Essay on Brush Methods*, Jing also states that no sophisticated brush skills are better than the ability to effectively catch the soul and vigor of the theme (Jing c. 900).

Consequently, Guo's idea of a real landscape was proposed based on these theoretical foundations towards an inner authenticity. He discusses how the ancient's method to observe a branch of bamboo was equal to painting a landscape painting, and says that:

A real understanding of the shape and feature of bamboo is not just seeing it from a single profile, but planting its root in the soil and observing it from above, like the sage's way to see it, so that each angle and profile of the bamboo can be captured by the painter to gain a deep visual understanding of the bamboo.

(Guo c. 1075, Trans. Yuping Li)

Guo believes making landscape painting is like observing bamboo, but the observable areas and scenery must be expanded up to a range of the actual landscapes. The painter should physically travel to experience the various nature and scenery, feeling the atmosphere of nature and the ways that man lies in between the mountain and water. For example, he states: 'To express a real valley lies in discovering its quiet and serene mood; to represent a peak depends on effectively grasping its remote atmosphere and imposing manner in distance.' (Guo c. 1075,

Trans. Yuping Li). Guo also describes how clouds and mists in the natural environment can change the state and spirit of nature in different seasons. A landscape painter should find and understand the general rules and patterns of how clouds are flowing and displaying in different climate conditions, rather than merely studying their outward appearance. ‘The clouds and mists in spring should be soft and moist; in summer, rich and clear; in autumn, sparse and dry; and in winter, faint and grey.’ (Guo c.1075 in Law 2011, p. 376).

Guo’s description about how to express landscape’s authenticity in relation to bamboo, clouds and mists visualizes the ancient’s understanding towards an ideological or perceptual truth. Here the concept of truth is obviously different from that interpreted in the traditional Western art such as a Renaissance fresco. Guo’s theory emphasizes a comprehensive knowledge and systematic understanding of nature in its every profile to attain a spiritual truth for art creation; while, the visual truth in Western art, for hundreds of years, was a kind of scientific, rational and objective reality that has been expressed in association with the linear perspective to create an illusion of spatial depth on a flat surface. As Western scholar Sullivan writes:

The realism (in Chinese landscape painting) was not the relatively unselective realism of an artist such as Gustave Courbet, but a deep concentration of the mind on essentials. Once the “true” forms were felt to have been discovered and distilled, however, the seeds of the conventionalization of landscape painting were sown, and the gradual retreat from realism would begin.

(Sullivan 1979, p. 59)

To acquire a spiritual or perceptual truth, Guo proposes a specific pictorial methodology to re-structure spatial order in Chinese scroll landscape painting – the ‘three levels of distance’ (Guo

c. 1075, Trans. Yuping Li), which suggests three different but harmonic spatial depths to be expressed in one visual plane. These three distances, Guo explains as: *Gao Yuan* (the lofty and far distance), *Ping Yuan* (the depth distance), and *Shen Yuan* (the valley distance), and he proposes a ‘multi-focus’ perspective to connect these three spatial distances (Guo c. 1075). Guo also points out that landscape painting has a certain rule, which expresses things in a visual range between sky and land. In this available range of observation, three levels of distance and the multi-focus perspective can help to create the pictorial composition, atmosphere and re-structure the landscape’s visual representation, reflecting a spiritual relationship between man and nature (Ibid.). This pictorial methodology provides the static eye of the viewer a movable way of seeing to experience the changing scenery in scroll painting, which adds the concept of time and space onto the flat visual art.

Let us revisit Guo’s painting *Early Spring* (Fig. 3) as a good example to demonstrate his theoretical claim. The main subject matter expressed in the work is the spring coming to a Chinese valley, with every natural living being is beginning to grow – a scene of rebirth. In response to Guo’s three levels of distance, the top one third area, first, represents an upward depth of space – the ‘lofty and far distance’, through the two mountain peaks, surrounded by mist and cloud to form an independent space in the far distance. Second, ‘the depth distance’ is more like the traditional Western perspective where the viewer needs to look at its depth horizontally. This spatial range has been displayed through the left-side’s tortuous and winding stone path and the right-side temples on the hill in the middle area of the painting. Clouds and moisture are pictorial tools here to separate these two levels of perspective. Finally, ‘the valley

depth' is obviously a scene the viewer needs to look into the distance, indicated by the flowing waterfall down to the bottom right of the painting, merging into the lake. These three levels of distance through a method of multi-focus perspective have been associated together in one pictorial plane to bring a magnificent sight and a comprehensive visual effect to show a real feeling that spring is coming in a beautiful valley.

Guo's pictorial methodology in relation to spatial representation in painting helps to express landscape in various visual and mental profiles. It also demonstrates the Daoist idea of a harmonious association of every being, and Jing's claim about understanding the inner vigor as an authentic expression of artwork. Similar to the invention of linear perspective that changed the spatial pattern of Western painting in the 16th-century, Guo's spatial strategy and his aesthetic attitude in landscape painting impacted the later painters' methods of art. The landscape paintings in the later dynasties more or less followed this spatial and perspectival method. For instance, we can see the *Fishing Picture* (Fig. 22) and *Nine Peaks in Snow* (Fig. 23) painted by Yuan Dynasty painters Wu Zhen (1280-1354) and Huang Gong Wang (1269-1354). Both the paintings represent to the viewer a longitudinal composition including mainly three different spaces and distances from top to bottom, which show how Guo's spatial methodology was inherited and developed.

Fig. 22 Wu Zhen *Fishing Picture* (c.1300) Ink and colour on silk 176.1×95.6cm National Palace Museum Taipei.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

Fig. 23 Huang Gong Wang *Nine Peaks in Snow* (1349) Ink and colour on silk 117.2×55.3cm National Palace Museum Taipei.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

In *Fishing Picture* (Fig. 22), the top one third can be considered as ‘lofty and far distance’ displayed by a continuous mountains range in a relatively small visual proportion becoming vague at the edge. The middle area of the painting – ‘the depth distance’ represents an association of some rocks, hills, old pine trees and a meandering river, which are the typical scenes and geological features come from the physical Chinese lands. In the last third area at

the bottom, ‘the valley distance’ is constituted by two tall pine trees, the lake, water plants and a man in a fishing boat. These three spaces of distance are nearly taking up an equal proportion on the pictorial plane, but they are harmonically connected into one painting through a method of movable viewpoint and the multi-focus perspective. The painter may believe the visual composition was not enough steady, so he wrote a poem in relation to the spirit of fishing in nature on the top of the painting as a visual pattern to balance the composition. This painting well demonstrates how Wu had succeeded and developed Guo’s pictorial methodology about space and perspective.

Painter Huang Gong Wang’s *Nine Peaks in Snow* (Fig. 23) displays a solemn silence and sublime atmosphere of landscape with a very different light and darkness association in contrast with Wu’s *Fishing Picture*. Here, the main subjects that should be originally painted with black ink and brushstrokes are yet left as white and blank spaces – the positive and negative spaces transformed each other to evoke a different emotional appeal of landscape in winter. It reflects how Guo’s artistic claim is to observe scenery from different seasons and climates and understand the landscape’s spirit and mood. For example, Guo believes the spirit of mountains in winter are static and solemn in making people feel lonesome (Guo, c.1075, Vol. I). In order to create a real winter landscape, Huang had travelled to a range of snowy mountains and valley areas to actually experience and observe the scenery and atmosphere himself, which has been recorded in his text *Xie Shan Shui Jue* (Secrets of Landscape Painting).¹⁵ After finishing his

¹⁵ In *Xie Shan Shui Jue*, Huang discusses a space-time relation in landscape painting, that is, three levels of distance used in four seasons of a year, and the climate features can endow landscape the different mysterious and sublime atmosphere.

painting, he wrote a little poem on the right top of the painting that explains his experiences and the time scale of making this painting. We can also clearly find three different levels of space and distance used in the work – the far distance of rolling peaks, the middle area of huge rocks, cliffs and trees, and the lower area of the valley, river and country houses, which are arranged vertically on the pictorial plane.

Nine Peaks in Snow (Fig. 23) is a rare scroll landscape painting that focuses on the beauty, solitude and sublimeness of winter as a topic of art expression. Most of the ancient Chinese landscape painters preferred to represent nature in the other seasons to express a scene of natural flourishing, for example, Guo's *Early Spring* (Fig. 3), and Jing's *Mount Lu* (Fig. 4). However, we see this painting (Fig. 23) with a highly artistic and emotional appeal today, which explains the artist's own unique aesthetic taste and attitude, and his perspectival spatial methodology in painting that follows the art of the Song Dynasty. As Guo proposes to understand landscape through an ideological truth from its different profiles, times and spaces, these Chinese painters, Wu and Huang, have their own ways to reveal the landscape's authenticity in their artworks.

Indeed, both traditional Western and Chinese art emphasize the expression of truth, so that the linear and the multi-focus perspectives were created for landscape painting. However, their perceptions of truth are different respectively. Renaissance art understands truth as a kind of rational and objective method to see the world, and this rationality is demonstrated by mathematical and scientific analysis of space and perspective. The one focus perspective or central perspective invented in the Renaissance pictorial system is also based on the assumption

that we see nature with a single motionless eye. In order to better express the subject matter, the painter needs to choose or focus on a visual instant – a dramatic point in time and space. ‘Painters cannot depict everything they can objectively see because each inevitable change of focus changes what is seen. They must always interpret and discriminate between what they will stress and what they will ignore.’ (Dunning 1991, p. 36).

In the ancient Song Dynasty, the truth of a painting was influenced by early philosophic thoughts rather than science. Guo’s understanding of truth in art is not a material concept, but a perceptual truth that lies in the painter’s deep understanding of nature’s features and atmosphere. This is based on the consideration that any single point of the subject that the eye can see once, displays only one aspect of its inner essence. Also, the ancient Chinese philosophy stresses a harmonic association of every being in the world; a single perspective or a visual moment cannot fully demonstrate what the ancients understand about an authentic and comprehensive perception of things in the mind.

Thus, the different ways of understanding things, materialistic or ideological, can create the different principles of perspectival spatial arrangement in landscape painting. We are always used to considering that perspective is introduced to create spatial depth for visual truth, but neglecting to think about the concept of truth itself. If perspective means a visual logic or structure for truth, and if it will be developed into a new and contemporary methodology to connect time and space in the flat visual art, there might be an alternative definition of truth to be found in different cultural understandings. This might evoke the importance of Guo’s

perspectival spatial theory and its value to contribute to the contemporary field of landscape painting that this study emphasizes.

Furthermore, to better address Guo's art theory in its time, it is important to see the development of pictorial space and perspective in relation to the change of Chinese social and economic patterns, from the early Wei-Jin periods to the empire of the Song Dynasty. Landscape painting's appearance in ancient China can be dated back to the Wei-Jin and Six Dynasties period (220-589), which was a chaotic period caused by a number of wars and the alternations of the dynasties. For nearly four hundred years, ancient China was experiencing the coexistence of different political powers. This unsettled pattern of social living brought people a desire to withdraw from the turbulent world, and Daoism's claim to return the original and harmonious balance of man and nature became prevalent at that time. Many Daoist monks studied art in order to pursue a spiritual state of wandering and fusing with the natural environment – an ideal state of Daoist paradise. For instance, as discussed in the first chapter, Daoist painter, Zong's art theory emphasizes an initial state of existence before the world had formed – the *Wuwei* (effortless action) and *Ziran* (naturalness), in which each being is seen as an integrated element of an original balance. Zong himself is a monk who was frequently living in the natural and wild landscape as a way of seclusion, and also to train his brain to comprehend a deeper philosophic spirit that he could not acquire in the secular life.

Guo's *Forests and Streams* reflects a theoretical connection succeeding from Zong's *The Ideas of Landscape Painting* (c. 430) as they both focus on a harmonic association as a common

philosophic pursuit in making landscape painting, and both of the theoretical claims concern landscape painting as the highest form of art expression. However, with the change of social and economic structures from Wei-Jin to Song Dynasty, the aesthetic attitude and methodology towards landscape painting were consequently changed.

Luo Shen Fu Picture (Figs. 1-2) is considered as the earliest Chinese landscape painting made by Wei-Jin painter Gu Kaizhi (344-405), through which we can see the spatial structure in landscape painting before its later development in the Song period. The subject matter in the work is telling an ancient legend – the Goddess *Luo Shen* rises to the heaven.¹⁶ In this work, we can see the objects – the trees, stones, cloud and water are all painted in a highly abstract and linear method of brush skills for visual representation, and the figures and natural objects are placed in an illusory spatial existence between the land and heaven. This space in the painting visualizes an ideal state of Daoist paradise that ancient people were desiring.

The spatial representation in *Luo Shen Fu Picture* (Figs. 1-2) reflects an ideal mode as the early version of Chinese landscape painting, demonstrating Zong's claim about art in the Wei-Jin periods. Here, Zong stresses a kind of early and original natural balance or an ideal state of life and seclusion, away from the chaos and unsettled social environment. Compared with him, Guo's aesthetic attitude towards landscape in the Song Dynasty was slightly different. Guo was an imperial court painter of his time. The social stability and commercial expansion in the Tang and Song Dynasties had promoted the growth and prosperity of culture and art. Guo's idea

¹⁶ Luo Shen is a devout Daoist. Through living in the mountain and cultivating her personal quality, she obtains the spirit of the cosmos, and finally becomes a goddess to rise to heaven.

about landscape painting embodies how landscape can evoke a natural spirit and authenticity for those who are confined to cities. He believes people living in cities, ‘may look upon paintings instead and so imagine themselves in the midst of mountains and forests’ (Guo in Fernald 1936, p.3).

Zong’s text *The Ideas of Landscape Painting* does not involve the pictorial composition, skills and methods available for art making; Guo’s theory and artwork however contributes a more systematic methodology of visual representation and comprehensive understanding of landscape as artistic expression and aesthetic spirit. Both Zong and Guo have seen landscape’s spiritual contribution to art, and for philosophy, but Guo’s theory reflects a change in the attitude towards landscape and its aesthetic value during a high level of social civilization in ancient China. Guo talked about his forerunners Zong, Wang Wu and Jing Hao, to say:

It was the turmoil of the times (Wei-Jin periods) that brought the artists to the original pattern of nature (both physical and mental); however landscape art in modern capitalism (the Song period) provides a wide prospect for people to yearn for lofty spirit of forests and streams, so that they can enjoy the pleasure of mountains and waters without staying in the physical nature. [...] Staying at home, while listening to the echo of mountains and the sound of water flowing, and seeing the scenery of rolling peaks in front of the eye, is the most significant value of landscape painting for modern life.

(Guo in Chen 2001, p. 125)

Michael Sullivan in talking about the Song period painting points out: ‘Most Northern Song paintings are meant to be examined closely, as if one could walk right into them... This is not a picture to stand back from, grand as it is, but to lose oneself in.’ (Sullivan 1979, pp. 64-67). He also stresses the artist’s aim is evoking a feeling that we are not looking at the picture at all but

‘actually standing on those rocks beneath that great cliff, until, as we gaze on it, the sounds of the world about us fade away, and we hear the wind in the trees, the thunder of the waterfall, the clatter of hooves on the stony path’ (Ibid. p. 69). Seeing from this point of view, Guo’s theory and his understanding of landscape’s aesthetic value, proposed in 10th-century China, is closer to our contemporary thought about the meaning of landscape. His methodology of landscape painting might provide an alternative interpretation to shorten the increasing distance between modern life and nature that is alien to most of us.

In Chapter one, I discussed how, in the Western art world, the transformation of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds had brought the change in attitudes and methods of landscape painting from the Medieval period to the 17th-century Holland. This general rule that change of social environment influences the artistic form is also applied to the ancient Chinese landscape painting. Indeed, the imperial prosperity in the Song Dynasty changed the main aesthetic value of art. Furthermore, the commercial development and cultural communication in the Tang and Song periods also promoted the change of pictorial form and methodology. The rise of Guo’s perspectival spatial strategy was also inseparable from the technological change and innovation in the Song Dynasty. The scroll form of art was developed in this period as a popular form of painting.

The long period of Chinese regime wars generally reached an end in the Sui period (581-618). After that, the Tang Dynasty (618-907) opened the door for economy and trade with the rest of

the world, especially the Middle East, to propagate the religion, culture and imperial power. This socio-economic expansion brings an important development of painting tools and art materials as well as the widespread silk and papermaking techniques. ‘The early form of Buddhist and Daoist fresco was no longer a popular method of art’ (Fu 2007, p. 116. Trans. Yuping Li), and the increasing number of rich city residents began to request new forms and methods of art for higher literary and aesthetic pursuits (Ibid. pp. 117-118). The Song Dynasty (907- 1279) after the Tang witnesses a boom of all forms of art, such as calligraphy, poetry, folded screen painting and scroll painting, etc. This boom to a great extent depends on the Song Dynasty emperors’ support for court art and official investment in building a number of art institutions (Chen 2001, p. 59). Guo was then appointed as the main leader of the central art institution for more than thirty years, and he wrote *Forests and Streams* and painted a number of landscape paintings such as *Early Spring* (Fig. 3), in this period.

Chinese scroll painting, which has a flexible and convenient portable form to roll up and carry for art and cultural communication, became one of the main art forms for collection and displaying in private and public spaces (Ibid.). The prosperity of literature and art in the Song Dynasty ensures the widespread survival and developed space for scroll painting. This form of art, it’s narrow and long pictorial plane, yet brings a high challenge of dealing with the space and composition for Chinese painter, and its way of seeing requires the viewer to open the scroll and look from the one side to the other side to experience a process of closely reading, either vertically or horizontally. This process of reading the painting is also related to the concept of time development like the way people read literary content. In this way, it requires perspective

to have a function to connect with the concept of movement and time passing, in which no plot or scene can be omissible by the eye.

Guo's three levels of distance with the multi-focus perspective was then proposed as a pictorial methodology to respond the form of scroll painting. It is particularly suited to represent an overall visual effect involving different time, space and scenery in the work. His perspectival method not only represents the subject matter in diverse profiles to achieve a rich visual effect, but also connects all the different space-time temporalities of landscape on a limited pictorial plane. At the same time, the viewer's viewpoint is moving forward according to the change of the focus on the pictorial plane, which retains a dynamic movement of the eye. Guo's strategy in *Forests and Streams* helps resolve the spatial issue in the form of scroll painting and establishes the traditional spatial structure of Chinese landscape painting.

Mark W. Roskill points out that in order to completely understand the artwork from the artist, the viewers and the time, it is necessary to reconstruct exactly how the artworks were originally displayed (Roskill 1989, pp. 105-106). Indeed, the painting supports, the different ways of visually displaying and seeing the artwork can also influence and determine the attitudes and treatments of space and perspective. For instance, in the 15th-16th century Italian Renaissance, the fresco was frequently used as the original way of visual art displaying and a part of the overall function of architecture. Linear perspective was introduced in order to imitate the real space on the flat surface and assist the structure of the architecture itself, emphasizing spatial depth and visual significance. Since the rise of painting on easel, the rectangular canvas has

become the main pictorial support and the way to display art. For example, Meindert Hobbema's *The Avenue at Middelharnis* (Fig. 11) in 17th-century Holland creates a realistic depth of space to display an artistic pursuit to admire the scenes of bourgeois' daily life. Both the fresco and painting on easel assume the viewer is standing in a fixed point of observation, so the one focus perspective here can help to maximize the spatial depth of illusion in the artworks.

In contrast with the traditional Western painting supports and the ways of visual display, scroll painting in the Chinese Song Dynasty is a more flexible and convenient support for cultural communication and propagation of the imperial power, corresponding to the needs of the rich residences. The narrow and long form of scroll painting requires the perspective that has a function to connect different space, time, scenery and the process of viewing. Running through three different levels of distance and spatial depth, Guo's unique spatial strategy displays an associated spatio-temporal state in landscape painting to express a perceptual authenticity of landscape in the mind. Since the rise of scroll painting, observing traditional Chinese landscape has always involved a process of eye movement to enjoy a visual journey on the artwork, rather than a fixed point of view. The physical forms of painting display and its ways of seeing provide a visual foundation and contribute to developing the perspectival spatial modes for both traditional Western and Chinese art.

Through addressing Guo's theoretical text *Forests and Streams*, and the relevant artworks of the times, this section specifies the perspectival spatial methodology in traditional Chinese

scroll landscape painting, and sees its difference from the Western linear perspective. There are some reasons that contribute to the development of perspectival principle in Chinese art. Firstly, Guo's claim about landscape's aesthetic value in art is to evoke a natural spirit for those who are confined to cities, to experience an immersed sense of real nature. He also understands landscape's authenticity as a real perception of nature, including the careful observation and comprehensive understanding in every profile of nature in order to gain a spiritual truth. The definition and understanding of truth decide the perspectival method needed to seek a complex but harmonious logical order in one pictorial plane, as Guo proposes the three levels of distance and the multi-focus perspective. He also stresses the painter's personal experience and self-cultivation to understand landscape as a state of spiritual or perceptual truth. Furthermore, the social, culture and economic influences on painting's material, visual display and way of seeing also contribute to the spatial modes and methods of perspective. Guo's perspectival spatial strategy to some extent connects the concept of time, space, scenery and the process of seeing the artwork as a visual union in the field of landscape painting.

● *Theory of Cloud*

The spatial method and perspective used in traditional Chinese painting have been discussed by some Western scholars through their own art-historical analysis. For example, Sullivan suggests that Chinese landscape painting cannot be viewed from a scientific perspective, but 'the angle of totality to grasp the whole' (Sullivan 1979, pp. 72-74); the viewer's eye is not limited by a fixed, but a movable viewpoint by a shifting perspective 'like the gardens of suburban houses we see from the window of a moving train, creating a continuous series of

vanishing points' (Ibid. p. 74). He quotes Chinese painter Shen Kua's words to stress that 'The painter should paint what he knows is there, not just what he sees from one place.' (Ibid.). In talking about the different methods of observation between Eastern and Western art, Sullivan writes: 'The East has expressed this view in metaphysics, poetry, and the visual arts, while the West formulates it in scientific or mathematical terms.' (Ibid. p. 6).

A.K. Coomaraswamy in his *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, states: 'Asiatic art is ideal in the mathematical sense: like nature, not in appearance, but in operation.' (Coomaraswamy 1974, p. 11). He believes the reality displayed in Asiatic art reflects how 'the intelligible and sensible meet in the common unity of being' (Ibid. p. 6), and the reality cannot be thought of as something separate from the intrinsic quality or vision (Ibid.). By sharing a similar opinion with Coomaraswamy, Suk-mum Law considers that Chinese landscape painting addresses 'a state of being, a process of revealing truth', in which the concern is not about what the painter sees, but how the painter experiences nature (Law 2011, p. 380). Chinese landscape painting can be seen as a visual text to illustrate the existence of man as a unit of the unified nature; and the aesthetic theory in Chinese art serves to release spiritual awareness that goes beyond time and space (Ibid. p. 381).

Steven M. Leuthold in *Cross-Cultural Issues in Art* also comments that since nature has become a cherished idea through poetry and landscape painting from the 11th-century China, people's sense of place changes towards a qualitatively different relationship to space: 'landscape led to a change in valuation of distance in nature, from dread to wonder.' (Leuthold 2011, p. 168-169).

Like Guo who sought to paint and express the internal spirit or vital rhythm, Leuthold points out that Song Dynasty painters exactly combined the observation of the immediate environment with the eternal spirit of the land, and he cites Li Zehou's words to describe Chinese landscape painting as an 'imaginative realism' (Li 1994 in Leuthold 2011, p. 168). In this way, 'the space of landscape is idealist and beautified so that all the elements are integrated and independent, expressing the philosophy of inter-connectivity at the heart of Daoism.' (Leuthold 2011, p. 175).

French philosopher Hubert Damisch's influential book *Theory of Cloud: Toward a History of Painting* (1972) re-explores spatial structure in visual representation in the second half of the 20th-century. It provides a different insight in relation to traditional Chinese landscape painting where the cloud is a kind of visual vehicle, its structure and plasticity are the essences for spatial creation. In the book, Damisch's discussion critically develops the theories of semiotics, iconography and formalism, and expands the theoretical knowledge up to a broad range of cross-cultural discourses. He attempts to claim and establish the coincidence and affiliation between two different art systems – the West and East, which demonstrates the theoretical significance in the field that needs to be addressed in this section.

Damisch's book discusses initially around Antonio Allegri Correggio's fresco in the cupolas of Parma and unfolds in-depth details about Correggio's innovation and treatment of space and perspective. Damisch believes, Correggio carefully selected an inner surface of the cupola, the concave form, and created a virtual open space. Through an ingenious operation of the principle of perspective, the artist attempts to deny the actual architectural structure – the closed roof

space of the building (Damisch 1972, pp.1-4). The key point in creating ‘a fake opening onto a sky’ in Correggio’s fresco is the arrangement and use of the subject: the cloud.

Damisch believes, the painting’s substratum, the surface upon which the picture is painted, the transition from dark to light, and colour gradation in the fresco are expressed by various forms of clouds (Ibid. p. 16). As he argues, cloud has an affordable substance to construct and build space and depth, which opens a new visual system and mechanism, in which ‘the propositions of the perspective cube and the orthogonal and closed tectonic space of the Quattrocento (fifteenth century) seem to fall apart’ (Ibid. p. 4). Damisch writes:

Bodies (in Correggio’s frescos) entwined in clouds defy the laws of gravity and likewise the principles of linear perspective, and they lend themselves to the most arbitrary of positions, to foreshortenings, deformations, divisions, magnifications, and fanciful nonsense... It furthermore makes it possible to free figures from the physical laws that govern bodies, and sanctions many aerial effects, raptures, and paradoxical ruptures and juxtapositions... Cloud plays its part as a free vector that lends itself to operations the nature of which is semiotic, both in a signaling sense and syntactically. Cloud is not just an instrument adopted by a style; it is the very material of a construction.

(Ibid. pp. 15-16)

For Damisch, cloud is a key or a code used to open the spatial substance in visual representation. Because of its physical characteristics – the gathering and dispersion of dynamic forms – cloud, is able to structure the diverse divisions of space and position in the pictorial plane, separating and composing the figures according to the needs of the artist. Damisch points out that cloud has appeared in many of Correggio’s works via different forms and ways of expression as one of the artist’s proficient languages. Due to the participation of cloud, the artwork begins to

demonstrate a brand new spatial state towards the infinity, in which the main aim is no longer for seeking a precise proportion and the satisfying relationships between the height, breadth and depth in pictorial space. However, 'in all directions one's gaze is drawn into infinity' (Ibid. p. 4). As Damisch writes: 'it too seems open: clouds stream down with clouds of angels and all the glory of heaven; our eyes and minds are lost in immeasurable space.' (Ibid.)

Damisch gives Correggio's frescos a very high grade as an art stylistic that witnesses the change of the times from Renaissance to Baroque, and he believes that it is the cloud's physical characteristic that directly decides a more 'pictorial' effect rather than a 'linear' effect in Correggio's frescos, and Correggio's celestial art and his 'vaporous' manner seem to be achieved in this way. Damisch argues that Correggio's works for the first time construct the picture from the subjective point of view, which respond to Kantian terms: 'space was a given, constitutive feature of awareness' (Ibid. p. 9). Here, the space made by cloud is neither defined by the mathematical concept of linear perspective, nor according to the atmospheric and luminous norms of aerial perspective, but relies on the ambiguous appearance of cloud, and its function to bridge two kinds of perspectives on the pictorial plane (Ibid. p. 16). 'On a conceptual level, a "cloud" is an unstable formation with no definite outline or colour and yet that possesses the powers of a material in which any kind of figure may appear and then vanish.' (Ibid. p. 31). Because the material property of cloud itself is forever seeking an irregular shape, it is, right from the start, deviating from the principle of linear perspective, as a source of inspiration for the painter (Ibid. p. 35).

For Damisch, cloud undertakes a strategic task in the pictorial order, and it acts in both roles of alliance and the detachment of visual space, to break the original concept of perspective and build new orders in the pictorial plane. 'In some instances, it swamps the entire figurative field and underpins an entirely original mode of organizing, articulating, and defining or designating the space, the substratum, the surface upon which the picture is painted.' (Ibid. p. 17). Because cloud serves to designate a space and marks the spatial status in painting, Damisch considers it has a certain function as an inductive sign, which is able to provide a guiding force to create logical movement on the pictorial plane. He writes: 'an image's value lies not so much in its configuration as in its mobility, its internal dynamism, and the scope of the imaginary variations to which it lends itself.' (Ibid. p. 19). Then, cloud brings the pictorial plane into a world of shapes in movement and deformed by movement, in which the inner constructions of the image (for example Correggio's frescos) are undergoing a change by an unlimited dynamic power (Ibid. pp. 18-19). Damisch's theory considers cloud as a kind of semiotic language to provide an imaginative and psychological movement for the painting, which is a theoretical expansion about the functions and meanings of cloud.

In the book, Damisch also selects and analyzes a number of different art historical judgments and comments towards Correggio's fresco, and points out some previous divisions of art-historical style and form by Riegl, Wölfflin, Mengs and Panofsky, which had not provided enough explanation for the up-to-date theory of visual representation, especially amongst a popular diverse methodologies in art history in the mid-20th century. According to Damisch, Correggio's fresco plays a significant role in Riegl's theory for not only a new form of origin,

but also a function to separate the art-historical course, pushing the development from tactile to optical modes of art representation. Damisch argues Correggio's fresco also responds to Wölfflin's conceptual division of linearly and painterly styles between Renaissance and Baroque art. Wölfflin considers the era of Baroque as a node where the linear was changing into the painterly, while Damisch believes the painterly style of art has a feature to see space itself as an object of reference. He dates the change of art style back to Correggio, a hundred years earlier than Baroque art, and it is the 'spatial substance' that plays a significant role in Damisch's division of the art-historical course.

Based on this unique perspective of observation in a number of historical paintings, Damisch proposes some critical opinions about the treatment of space and perspective from both semiotic and formalist studies. Through rethinking the signal quality of cloud and its unlimited feature and open forms of visual representation, Damisch's theory ultimately seems to blend theoretical concepts from both iconology and formalist analyses, in order to bring about a new perspective of visual narration. If we consider Panofsky's iconology and Wölfflin's formalist theory have built up their own systems of art-historical discourse, Damisch's theory of cloud is yet a criticism and introspection from both the existing methodologies, with an aim to explore a brand new syntactical space.

As discussed earlier with regard to the studies of iconology, Panofsky identifies three levels of art-historical analysis for Renaissance art: the pre-iconography (an interpretation of the content and form of the image itself); the iconography (a further step to see the concept and meaning

of the image by involving its related contextual knowledge); and the iconology (a deep analysis about the intrinsic factors to structure the image, including the social-cultural history and psychological significance). Through the three levels of analysis, Panofsky establishes a completely theoretical system and model to address Renaissance art for the future scholars. The formalist theory of Wölfflin, however, emphasizes the stylistic judgment and formalist development of the image. Instead of researching individual artists, Wölfflin is firmly focusing on the work of art itself, trying to create a *Kunstgeschichte ohne Namen*¹⁷ where style becomes the paramount task to capture the process and state of art-historical development. His five conceptual oppositions – the ‘linear to painterly’ ‘plane to recession’, ‘closed form to open form’, ‘multiplicity to unity’ and ‘absolute clarity to relative clarity’ (Wölfflin 1986) are good examples to demonstrate his formalist methodology to divide the styles of art. Wölfflin’s concern is clearly the aesthetic perception of formal language rather than the content or the subject matter involved, so that understanding the visual form and taste are the key to understanding his artistic claim. Compared with Panofsky and Riegl who try to create the theoretical frame as art-historical discourse, Wölfflin’s contribution places more emphasis on the pictorial language and sensual understanding.

It can be seen that Damisch, in his theory of clouds, relies more or less on a formalistic analysis for the specific artwork. For example, although he provides a unique perspective of observation on Correggio’s methods and treatments of cloud in the pictorial plane, the text is difficult to get rid of the influence of Wölfflin’s previously stylistic division of the linear and

¹⁷ *Kunstgeschichte ohne Namen*; Wölfflin’s early claim, provocatively suggested creating art history ‘without names’, but after being mocked by this statement, he dropped it from subsequent editions.

painterly in the theoretical description. Also, Damisch's theory cannot be separated from the study of iconology and the semiotic theory of art that were prevalent in his age. It is interesting that his theory, on the one hand, combines these two narrative ways of formalism and iconology as his historical succession; on the other hand, he critically makes use of the existing art-historical approaches to create a unique narration of visual representation as his own.

The critical understanding of existing theories in Damisch's book is also obviously displayed. If Panofsky's iconology and Wölfflin's formalistic theory are trying to provide or define concepts and categories in the art-historical discourse, the methodology in Damisch's book is not only an inheritance and development of Panofsky and Wölfflin's theories, but also a critique, to some extent, against historical conceptualism and formalism. Damisch's method in the book attempts to set up a claim to seek an intrinsically productive mechanism or a microscopic detail of clues of cloud, by which art history can provide us with some new visual orders and syntactical significance.

In the book, Damisch also displays a great interest about clouds used in ancient Chinese landscape painting, and he believes since John Ruskin proposed the 'service of the clouds' as an explorable theme in modern landscape painting, the West was beginning to discover that 'views of mists and clouds' are a most constant feature of Far Eastern art (Ibid. p. 201). In the last chapter, Damisch especially analyzes the cloud used in both Western and Chinese art, and focuses on cloud as a support or vehicle for landscape painting: 'clouds constitute a *recapitulation* of the landscape' and help the painting to 'succeed getting the inner significance

of universe.’ (Ibid.).

Fig. 24 John Ruskin *The Perspective of Clouds* (1855) From *Modern Painters*, vol. 5.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

Fig. 25 John Ruskin *The Perspective of Clouds* (1855) From *Modern Painters*, vol. 5.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

Damisch believes in the traditional Western pictorial space, cloud is a unique visual exception, which is very difficult to describe and capture, and it is not restricted by the principle of one focus perspective. ‘The reason why cloud does not encourage drawing is not so much its shape, but rather its instability and evanescence.’ (Ibid. p. 190). In order to capture cloud as a visual expression, Ruskin in *Modern Painter* sketches the schemata of celestial perspectives, in which cloud is required to display a diminishing effect according to its position on the checkerboard (Figs. 24-25). However, Damisch considers Ruskin’s method of painting cloud in the pictorial space as a continuing of the traditional practice of scientific perspective because Ruskin’s

formula does not intend to create a program or a style of art via cloud, but to sum up a statement of fact based on the previous perspectival theory. For Damisch, the clouds themselves, indeed remain outside the traditional framework of the Renaissance system, whilst, acting as a syntactical tool or a factor of illusion in order to break the order of conventional representation and the over-governed regime of the scientific perspective (Ibid. p. 193).

As to Chinese landscape painting, Damisch argues, cloud's gathering and dispersing constitute its 'elusive emptiness' (Ibid. p. 202), through its hiding and appearances, it also ties together the forms of mountains and water in the pictorial plane. Thus the specific functions of cloud and mists, and their 'cosmological connotations' (Ibid.), imply that far Eastern painting did not encounter the same difficulty about cloud's visual representation as Western art did (Ibid.). Damisch points out, in the West, cloud marks a 'limitation' or a 'closure' – a closed quality that is governed by a linear principle and mechanical means of representation. On the contrary, Chinese art seems to be the opposite of the Renaissance system, because cloud has been found to possess a quality of openness quality to structure the spatial mode (Ibid. pp. 202-203). With reference to Brecht, Damisch says that Chinese composition is not affected by the constrained elements that we are familiar with in the conventional perspective, and its visual order is unlimited. As Damisch writes about a Chinese landscape painting composition:

The rivers and the clouds assume a decisive function in such a work, for "in their gathering or their dispersion they constitute the link," while the sky embraces the landscape with its winds and clouds and the earth animates it with its rivers and rocks, according to the rhythm that accounts for all the metamorphoses of the landscape, and all the reversals and inversions of signs of which it is both the product and the place.

(Ibid. pp. 219-220)

Damisch also discusses the different levels of spatial depth in Chinese landscape painting, and he indicates these levels are neither simply divisions of the distances according to the surface and physical property, nor an attempt to divide the painting into several sections. Instead, the separation is to create a union of order and changes. Here he provides an idea of dialectical materialism to see the spiritual and perceptual mode of three levels of distance in Chinese landscape painting. He writes:

If some kind of delimitation is introduced, its role is not so much to isolate, separate, define, identify, but rather to establish a correlation between two terms that it presents as separate only in order to open up a field in which they can interact and in which the dialectical process prompted by their opposition can take place.

(Ibid. p. 212)

Damisch points out that conventional landscape emphasizes the separation of only two levels; clouds should be added between the sky and the earth (in the Western tradition), or ‘between the mountain above and the scene below’ (This practice is criticized by Chinese painter Shi Tao in *Mustard Seed*). Because these sky and earth levels ‘convey nothing of the interchanges and interaction between the above and the below’ (Ibid. p. 219), and have a limited quality and mode of spatial existence, so they are difficult to express the harmonic union and a whole series of effects that the Chinese painter pursues (Ibid.). He quotes Shi Tao who said: ‘The substance of the landscape [in China] is realized by reaching the principle of the universe’, and this is why landscape painting ranks highly in the hierarchy of genres in Chinese art (Ibid. p. 214).

In the book, Damisch also discusses some theories of ancient Chinese art such as Mi Fu’s

Huashi (11th-century) and *Lidai Ming Huan Ji* (7th-8th century) by Zhang Yanyuan and addresses how the relations of brushstroke and ink skills in Chinese painting reflect and display some similar functions to the traditional perspective, like how the line, plane, or shadow work in Western painting. He also notices that there is a dialectical relationship between ink and brush in the Chinese aesthetics of art that might be even more profound than the relation of painting and the universe. 'Ink and brush are like *flesh and bone*. If the ink makes the forms of the landscape expand, it is insofar as it confers its flesh upon the skeleton that the brush must provide. It fills in shapes, gives them a contour, just as flesh gives a body its "figure".' (Ibid. p. 209).

The last chapter of the book displays the most inspirational and creative ideas of Damisch's theoretical discussions. His process of thought is crossing from Ruskin, Turner, and Cézanne to Chinese art, and particularly explains the perspectival spatial modes in Chinese landscape paintings as a contrast to Western art. Through the perspective of cloud as a pictorial means, Damisch finds the difference of styles and forms in a cross-cultural comparison: Western art displays a frame of 'closure' while Chinese art demonstrates a quality of openness (Ibid. pp. 202-203). Although he admits the different systems and methods of cloud used in between two cultures should be viewed and interpreted according to their original cultural contexts, it is a pity that Damisch's references to Chinese art mostly come from the French version of translation, which provides relatively limited explanations about some significance aspects such as: the philosophic origin and perceptual understanding of Chinese art. Here we might need to go back to see the Chinese Song painter Guo's perspectival spatial methodology as an

alternative interpretation, especially with regard to how landscape's aesthetic value and its authenticity was defined in ancient China. However, by saying that, Damisch attempts to claim and establish some coincidences and affiliations between two artistic and cultural systems, and his claim to pose 'a possible theory of cloud that is general (not just local) geographically and historically speaking' (Ibid. p.203), provides a theoretical or practical perspective to research cross-cultural art and its related methodology.

● **Thoughts and Practices**

A cross-cultural exploration of perspectival spatial method in landscape painting is one of the main research components in my studio practice, in which I focus on absorbing and fusing the ancient Chinese aesthetics of art, especially Guo's spatial strategy, as an integrated methodology to create a different form and language of landscape painting. Like Damisch who uses cloud as a narrative clue to evoke spatial discussion, I take method of perspective as a research point to seek and explore the visual possibilities of cultural fusion, and demonstrate my theoretical and practical understandings in this cross-cultural study.

In some of my early studio practices, (See Fig. 26) I used the Chinese scroll art form as the painting support, together with the ink and water-based materials as the tools, to explore the southern coastline of England, including the Dover-Folkestone Coast, the *Seven Sister Chalk Cliff* in East Sussex and *Lulworth Cove* along the Jurassic Coast. My main aim is to explore how these geographic features – the heritage coastline can be expressed via a traditional

Chinese perspective where the support is frequently a narrow and vertical form of the pictorial plane. Also, through representing a various range of scenes in each scroll painting, I attempt to demonstrate how I understand Guo's aesthetic claim about landscape's perceptual authenticity, and his spatial strategy by dividing the different levels of distance and depth in the work.



Fig. 26 Yiping Li *Four Scroll Painting Practices* (2014) Ink and watercolour on hanging scroll
33×113cm each.

During my visit to the heritage coastline of England in summer 2014, I undertook some short walks via the footpath at the cliff edge, breathing the sea breeze and photographing the historical rock and formation. To visit the actual landscape and experience nature's atmosphere are what Guo advocates to better gain a spiritual and perceptual understanding of landscape. Guo encourages the painter to observe and travel thousands of miles of the real landscapes and choose the 'typical scenery' as the artistic expression. Here, I believe the personal travel

experiences in nature can help in bringing about a unique sensual experience between the self and landscape, so to discover the typical scenery that impressed me the most. Urry's theory of the tourist gaze, as discussed in Chapter one, explains how the tourist acquires a visual beauty and emotional pleasure from the natural landscape; this physical experience is then transformed as a mental understanding for art and literary creations, in return, to increase landscape's meaning and value (Urry 1995, pp. 195-98). After the journey, I came back to my studio and thought about the visual possibility for cultural combination, then my memory and experience during the visit took over to make the painting different. For example, I was thinking how to create a state of ink flowing on paper that can provide a different tactual feeling about the fluffy grassy ground and the rocky surface on the two sides of the cliff. The experiences and perception that landscape left in my mind during the journey might respond to Guo's claim of a perceptual authenticity in landscape painting.

In Fig. 26, I choose four typical scenes that left the unique impression on my personal experience of the England's coastlines. Instead of displaying one visual instant, each pictorial plane includes different views and profiles of the natural and geographic features to reflect Guo's aesthetic claim of comprehensively understanding the natural shapes and patterns. Here, the works do not aim to imitate the physical reality as nature displays it to us, but to demonstrate a 'real' perception or a spatial state in the mind that reflects my impression of a range of the historical coastlines.

In these paintings, I express the scenes of White Cliff via the vertical forms of composition,

arranging and combining the different levels of distance by the multi-focus perspective, or a kind of floating perspective, while I use the cloud and mist to connect these cliffs and create the spatial depths and layers in the works. Also, through a method of changing the focus in painting, I attempt to structure an organic order between the layers, from the close to the distant areas. With the shift of the focus, the viewer's eye is followed doing an upward or downward movement on the pictorial plane to experience a visual journey. In particular, in the third scroll painting the *Lulworth Cove along Jurassic Coast*, the perspective and vanishing point are keep changing, so as to a move of the viewer's eye from the top to the bottom of the painting, as people see the scenes from a moving helicopter, bringing a continuous series of vanishing points. Here it is better to see the photographs (Figs. 27, 28) as the visual contrasts that represent a conventional perspective the *White Cliffs* and *Lulworth Cove* viewed by the visitor.



Fig. 27 Yuping Li Photo of *Seven Sisters White Cliff* (2014).



Fig. 28 Yuping Li Photo of *Lulworth Cove* (2014).

The organization of composition and the setting out of layers and perspectives in these scroll paintings are relatively free, via a way of hand-writing rather than making the coordinate lines in order to aid a scientific method of perspective like the Renaissance system of art. Indeed, I challenge the concept of one single focus and the traditional method of observation because

this way sees things through the physical appearance rather than the spirit, and restricts a free expression of ink and brushwork on paper. Guo's spatial strategy here is a better way to connect the different scenes, spaces and the process of viewing, providing a rich visual experience of landscape that I aim to display in the works.



Fig. 29 Yuping Li *White Cliffs of Dover* (2014) Chinese ink and watercolour 38×45cm.

Fig. 30 Yuping Li *The Purple Melody* (2014) Chinese ink and watercolour 38×45cm.



Fig. 31 Yuping Li *Handfast Point between Studland and Swanage in Dorset* (2014) Chinese ink and watercolour 45×38cm.

Fig. 32 Yuping Li *Durdle Door and the West Lulworth in Dorset* (2014) Chinese ink and watercolour 45×38cm.

Indeed, my composition and spatial treatment in these scroll paintings are not directly formed in the mind, but come from a first step of the small painting sketches. In these painting sketches I explore how Western landscapes can be visualized and expressed through traditional Chinese art materials. For instance, Figs. 29-32 display four of my early exercises where I attempt to quickly capture the subject matters – the cliffs, rocks and their surroundings via a combination of ink, water and brushwork. I use the visual association of points, lines and short planes with different greyscales, via the brush skills of Chinese ink, to figure out the contours and express the different senses and the textures of the rocky appearance. The accumulative points can create a moving line, increasing the visual psychological effect of movement, in association with the cloud and colour as the mediums in painting (Kandinsky 1947, pp. 57-58). I consider the feeling of movement of point, line and plane can help promoting the change of viewpoint in the pictorial plane, in a way to evoke the movement of the different layers in my vertical scroll painting. Here, my use of line is different from Alberti's visual rays or the coordinate lines in the Renaissance linear perspective; it is, however, a kind of visual signal, abstracted from the shapes and forms of nature without the scientific measure involved.

In these sketches, I am also emphasizing a mixture of controllable and uncontrollable factors; the control comes from the limitation of physical and actual scenery; while the uncontrollable factors are the flowing languages of ink and water on paper. There is also a contrast of dry and wet visual effects I want to express by using the brush skills via the different proportion of ink and water on paper to distinguish the tactile feeling between the cliff and grass. By borrowing the methods, skills and materials from Chinese art, I hope these coastline landscapes can display

a different aesthetic quality that implies the cultural symbol of traditional China.



Fig. 33 Yuping Li *Formation of the Cliff I* (2014) Chinese ink and watercolour on paper 70×120cm.



Fig. 34 Yuping Li *Formation of the Cliff II* (2014) Chinese ink and watercolour on paper 140×70cm.

Similar studio practices in this period can be seen in Figs. 33 and 34 that explore the landscapes along the Jurassic Coast through the horizontal and vertical forms of composition respectively. They display a common artistic pursuit in spatial arrangement and treatment of perspective to demonstrate my theoretical discussion in the text. Inspired by England's heritage coastline and approached using Guo's strategy in Chinese scroll painting, these studio practices specify the contents and methods of my early exploration of a cross-cultural combination in landscape painting.

In the second stage of my spatial exploration, I mainly concentrated on the language of acrylic in landscape painting, as it demonstrates a good mixture between water and oil based paints to bring about a material and skilled combination of Western and Eastern culture. In my acrylic works I reference Damisch's theory of clouds and consider cloud as an effective means of landscape exploration, especially its unlimited visual function to separate and compose the object for spatial creation. For instance, in *Poem of Cliff and Cloud* (Fig. 35), I use cloud around the cliff to divide the pictorial plane and hide a part of real space in the work, and also connect the space between the foreground and background, bringing the visual movement in contrast to the still mountain and grassy ground. The diverse grey scales of cloud in the middle area are created by an interaction of Chinese ink and Western acrylic on the surface, and aimed to evoke the aesthetic atmosphere and mood. This work is an attempt to combine the pictorial materials, supports and the ways of display between the traditional Western and Eastern paintings. Here the pictorial plane is a rectangular canvas, as a support or the way of display; while the content to be explored is a material mixture and the mysterious and poetic effects that respond to Eastern

aesthetics.



Fig. 35 Yiping Li *Poem of Cliff and Cloud I* (2014) Chinese ink, acrylic and oil on canvas 100×80cm.



Fig. 36 Yiping Li *Poem of Cliff and Cloud II* (2014) Chinese ink, acrylic and oil on canvas 100×80cm.

In Fig. 36, I use cloud as the main means to create the pictorial composition and lead a circular visual movement of the eye in the work. I set out a small figure of a tree on the right top of the work – a relatively specific image that is normally captured first of all by seeing the picture. The dynamic trend of the tree is connected by the motive direction of clouds from the top right to the top left; while the shape of the cliff in the middle also helps evoke the direction of movement on the pictorial plane. When the visual movement arrives at the top left rim, it goes down to the bottom left, and follows the directions of the lower clouds and the flying birds towards the bottom right, until the clouds disappear. Then, the potential movement in the work is carried by the rocks and cliffs on the right rim, and finally, it returns to the place where the movement originally started. In this way, the association of clouds and scenes evoke a circular movement, again and again, and cloud contributes to composing and developing the spatial structure and composition on the pictorial plane.

In the mid-period of this study, I was authorized to design and execute a campus painting to hang on the wall of the Study Hub, by Lancaster University and Graduate College. The Study Hub is a study space in the Storey building in Lancaster town centre that is away from the main campus of Lancaster University, and the Graduate College chair, Claire Povah was looking for a large size landscape painting that can display and evoke a campus-like environment and atmosphere for the students who use this space. The original display space is a huge wall space of around 10 metres long but no more than 3 meters wide including a corner. (See Fig. 37) The size of the space indeed brings a difficulty for visual display and requires the painting to be narrow and long to accommodate itself to the wall space. In considering that expressing the

diversity of the architecture at Lancaster University in one pictorial plane is also a challenge, the perspectival spatial methodology in Chinese scroll painting is introduced here as an alternative strategy to compose the complex subjects and scenes that needed to be expressed.



Fig. 37 Yuping Li Photo of *Lancaster University* (2015).

The finished painting work (Figs. 37-38) is constituted by five board panels connected as a united whole, creating a continuous view of Lancaster University campus, from the southern Alexandra Park to the northern LICA building and County College. It also includes some interesting architectures such as the Ruskin Library, Campus Chapel and Chinese Confucious Centre as the landmarks of the University. To connect the different buildings and scenes in the work, I choose an elevated viewpoint that also provides an unfamiliar perspective, or an outlook towards the whole campus. For those of us who are usually walking inside the campus, it is a perspective through which we can find how the modern architecture is fused within nature and woodland as a unique example of rural/urban English culture.



Fig. 38 Yuping Li *Lancaster University* (2015) Oil on board 85 ×165cm each panel.

Like the traditional Chinese scroll painting that needs to be examined closely rather than watched at a distance, I invite the viewer to see the work from the left to right to experience the changes and development of spaces and scenes; with the transformation of the vanishing point and perspective, the contents in view are consequently changed and integrated into a process of the landscape journey. It is obvious, once the viewpoint moves up to the air, the language of cloud cannot be used as a way to create and connect spatial substance. However, I don't consider cloud as the only medium or means to have such a visual function. Here, I borrow the irregular forms of trees as a means to connect the main group of buildings and create the distances in the work. By re-arranging the position of individual or groups of trees, they are able to substitute the unlimited quality of cloud to structure the pictorial space.

The main aim of the creation of this work (Figs. 37, 38) is as a functional artwork to reinforce the relationship between the University campus and the Study Hub by creating both visual and spiritual connections. It depicts campus in the early morning when a new study or work day begins, and I choose the pale green as the main tone to bring a visual rest and relaxation for the student who studies here. Through a cross-cultural combination of composition and method of perspective, it is designed in order to suit the original space of display, and to bring an enjoyable visual experience for the students who use the Study Hub.

In the later stage of my studio practice, I began to think about how to access Western oil materials and the perspectival spatial methodology of Chinese painting to explore the diverse space-time possibilities as a contemporary language of landscape painting. *Empty Moments* (Fig. 39) is a six-panel screen painting, representing a landscape journey in the Greek island of Santorini during one day. This series screen painting has been exhibited in the LICA PhD group show *In-Betweenness* in November 2015. Most of my studio paintings around this period explore the spatial possibility in a cross-cultural fusion, and particularly concern the time duration that can be reflected in forms of landscape painting. For example, in Fig. 39, I emphasize the time passing during a day from early morning to night; while in Fig. 15, I address a process of seasonal change on a range of geographic features of landscape.



Fig. 39 Yuping Li *Empty Moments* (2015) Oil on canvas 100×50cm each by six panels.

Guo's perspectival spatial strategy in Chinese scroll painting is one of the important references in Fig. 39. For each individual screen, I generally set up three levels of distance: the far distance is separated from the other levels by an 'empty line' which can be considered as the light's reflection or a visual pause to imply the different spatial existence in the work. The middle and close distances are interconnected through a multi-focus perspective, in a way, to evoke a

feeling that the viewer's eye is moving in the landscape, from top to bottom. Due to the change of focus, the viewpoint and perspective are consequently changed, so that the viewer can get all the different profiles of the landscapes during the process of seeing.

Partly from a visual movement of the eye in the single screen, this work also includes a left to right movement that comes from the way of seeing traditional Chinese screen painting, in which the viewer needs to walk from one side to the other to achieve a comprehensive understanding of landscape displayed by the six screen panels. Once the panels are combined as a whole, each of them represents the spatial diversity in one specific time order; and these temporal moments, from left to right, constitute a process of time developed in a day. For example, the second panel represents an early morning when the sun has not yet risen above the horizon; while, the fifth panel shows an evening sunset under a pink afterglow.

I consider the way of display in a series of screen paintings also evokes the conceptual contrast of the instant and process displayed in visual art. Traditional Western art often represents the specific time and space with a particular emphasis on a dramatic instant in painting whereas ancient Chinese scroll art, stresses the totality of landscape and a comprehensive understanding during the process of seeing. The expressions of the instant and process in painting indeed reflect two different art and aesthetic methods of West and East. Here, in Fig. 39, I attempt to combine the forms of oil on canvas and screen painting, as well as the concepts of the instant and totality, in a way that the instant (or moment) and the process are existing simultaneously to demonstrate a new possibility of cross-cultural fusion, and landscape represented in time and

space.

I choose the different colours and tones for the different panels according to the change of temperature at the different time of a day. For instance, in the fourth panel, I use a very warm yellow tone to dominate the painting, implying that the time has changed to nearly noon. The colour temperature, its levels of cold and warm, in my opinion, is also an important factor to assist in representing the time development in painting. For example, Claude Monet's series of paintings about Rouen Cathedral have impressed us as a mode of landscape that is related to the concept of time. Although Monet's emphases were the moments of light and colour on the subject, we now usually see these works have been displayed together in the museum as a contemporary view of art appreciation.

Again, through a cross-cultural exploration of diverse methodologies in landscape painting, this series of screen work, for me, is an attempt to create a painting-based short 'video' of a landscape journey. Through watching it, the viewers can feel that they are walking in and involved in the process of landscape's changes with the change of time and their location in the work. It is, however, not based on the moving images on a big and blank screen, like the way a film is being played in the cinema, but a kind of visual art journey formed by the diverse spatial and cultural combinations on the landscape painting. Like the other landscape painting series discussed earlier, this work, in a way, answers the question how traditional Chinese art theory and methodology can be fused into contemporary landscape painting practice to create a new form and language of art.

Chapter 3 Emptiness: a Study of Pictorial Blank

The term ‘emptiness’ initially comes from the ancient Chinese Daoist philosophy, which addresses a state of the origin of the universe – a ‘supreme emptiness’ before the world began to form. This term is always related to ‘fullness’ as a pair of dialectical notions, like the *Yin* and *Yang* in Chinese philosophy, through which an emptiness enables all things that are ‘full’ to attain their complete fullness (Cheng 1994, p. 46). Since the influence of Daoism on Chinese art, emptiness has been applied into the pictorial field as a spatial methodology, especially useful in Chinese landscape painting. A number of ancient and contemporary Chinese painters have used the idea of emptiness to structure the space of painting and evoke aesthetic meanings beyond the artwork.

Just as Damisch sees cloud as a means of spatial creation, outside of the conventional framework of Renaissance perspective, emptiness reflects a dialectically ideological state; it can evoke aesthetic quality and symbolic meaning when applied to the landscape painting. If cloud is conceived as a visual sign; emptiness is, however, an ideological one. How ancient Chinese painters dealt with cloud’s visual representation in painting is dependent on their understanding of emptiness. Here, cloud, water, mist, sky and atmosphere all belong to the various visual vehicles that demonstrate an ideological state of emptiness. We often call the traditional Chinese painting a cloudy mountain and water picture, while it is the emptiness’s participation in painting that makes it a unique art. Indeed, the principles of emptiness and multi-focus perspective can be considered as two main pictorial methodologies together that contribute the spatial structure in Chinese landscape painting.

Emptiness as an artistic term has not yet been well-defined, raised theoretical discussion, or been systematically studied in Western art history. Indeed, as previously discussed, the traditional Western method of art tends to be based on scientific analysis and mathematical understanding in which the self and nature are in a relationship of observation and observed, or exploration and explored. Until the 19th-century, the changed relations between science and art have required us to re-think the new possibility about spatial treatment in painting. The works of 19th-century landscape painters such as Paul Cézanne and J. M. W. Turner, and the contemporary painters Peter Doig and Callum Innes, who have consciously or unconsciously used emptiness as a pictorial language, will be specifically discussed in this chapter.

This chapter discusses emptiness from the concept in Chinese Daoist philosophy and its corresponding conceptual extension in some fields such as literature, music and graphic design. Later, through analyzing a number of landscape painting practices in the traditional and contemporary fields, the text attempts to specify how an ideological notion of emptiness is an importantly cross-cultural methodology used in both Chinese and Western landscape paintings. It also discusses the comparative pair of emptiness and fullness and their dialectical relationship as a pictorial method to create space and composition in landscape painting. In the artworks, emptiness structures the diverse models of spatial representation; it acts not merely as a method of painting composition, but also evokes the atmosphere, vigor, and a wide range of aesthetic meanings and thoughts.

● Emptiness and Fullness

Looking without seeing, we call it invisible; listening without hearing, we call it inaudible; groping without reaching, we call it imperceptible. Here are three inexplicable things that constitute a unity of emptiness ... Its top is not bright, its bottom is not dark. It meanders indefinitely, indistinctly, until it returns to nothing ... It is characterized as the form of that which has no form and the image of that which is not an image.

(Lao-Tzu in Cheng 1994, p. 45)

With the above definition of emptiness, proposed by Daoist founders Lao-tzu, the Daoist School believes that every being of the created world comes from a state of supreme emptiness and will finally return to this original state. 'The Dao has emptiness as its origin; from emptiness is born the cosmos, from which the vital breaths emanate.' (Huai Nan Tzu¹⁸ in Cheng 1994, p. 44). In philosophic thought, emptiness is not an object, but an abstract consciousness or an ideological state which is containing and associating with the substance of every subject existing in the cosmos. Emptiness does not have a visible or tangible shape, but can be visualized by a number of material features such as the boundless sky, the sea as far as the eye can see, or cloud, land, water or the dark night. These all demonstrate a certain quality of inclusion and alliance of the subject, in this way, emptiness accommodates an unlimited possibility of forms and beings into a unity of variety.

Like the physical feature of cloud that is always looking for a form of change, emptiness is not an objective quality in specific time and space. According to François Cheng, 'It is a supreme state found within all things, at the very heart of their substance and of their process of change.'

¹⁸ Huai Nan Tzu, Chinese ancient Daoist scholar, living around 2nd-century BCE. Existed texts of him available seen as *Searching out of Dao*, or *Responses of Dao*, etc.

(Cheng 1994, p. 46). Qing Dynasty painter Wang Fu Zhi points out: ‘every emptiness includes the concept of *Qi* (vital breath or inner vigor); emptiness can be seen when *Qi* has been accumulated; cannot be seen when it has been dispersed.’ (Wang 1648).

Don’t listen with your ears but with your mind; don’t listen with your mind but with your breath. Ears are limited to listening; the mind is limited to representing things. Only the breath that is emptiness can take possession of external objects. It is to emptiness that the Dao attaches itself ... The Dao cannot be heard; that which is heard is not it. It cannot be seen; that which is seen is not it. The Dao cannot be formulated; that which is formulated is not it. That which gives birth to forms is without form. The Dao should not be named.

(Chuang-Tzu in Cheng 1994, p. 54)

Daoist emptiness as an inner quality of existence and an original state of the world, also reflects a dialectical relationship of contrast and transformation. Fullness, in contrast to emptiness, acts as an active force to create order and existence; while emptiness as the carrying space, provides vital breath that animates any being of the created world. According to Daoism, the movement and interaction between emptiness and fullness will finally achieve a harmonious unity or original balance. As Lao-Tzu said: ‘The great fullness is as though empty; thus it is inexhaustible.’ (Lao-Tzu in Cheng 1994, p. 46). ‘It is the silence that evokes the movement; it is the emptiness that arouses the unlimited existence.’¹⁹

Emptiness, quietude, detachment, insipidity, silence, and nonaction are the level of the balance of the universe, the perfection of the Way and of virtue. That is why the sovereign and the saint always remain at rest. This rest leads to emptiness, the emptiness that is fullness, the fullness that is totality. This emptiness confers on the soul a flexibility whose result is that every action performed is effective.

(Chuang-Tzu in Cheng 1994, pp. 53-54)

¹⁹ Translated from an ancient poem written by Northern Song Dynasty poet Su Shi (1037-1101).

Emptiness and fullness also refer to some other contrastive pairs in Chinese philosophy, such as the *Xu* (invisible) and *Shi* (visible), *Ruo* (vague) and *Qiang* (clarified), and *Fu* (negative) and *Zheng* (positive) that all demonstrate a dialectical relationship and the shift of ways of seeing. Associated with these philosophic concepts, emptiness and fullness, are able to find their counterparts in the fields and disciplines of literature, art, music and design, etc. Chinese contemporary scholar and writer Zhu Guang Qian states that the philosophic relation of emptiness and fullness in the literary term is similar to the relation of word and meaning, as the literal expression is limited but the significant meaning beyond the word is not, especially (the empty words) in a poem (Zhu 1995, p.36). Emptiness, in the musical interpretation, according to Cheng, can be seen not only by certain syncopated rhythms, but above all by silence, where emptiness ‘creates a space that enables the sounds to transcend themselves and accede to a kind of resonance beyond the resonances’(Cheng 1994, p. 36).

Qing dynasty painter Zhang Shi in his text *The Pool of Painting* writes: ‘Emptiness, sometimes displayed as a blank space on a painting, doesn’t mean “nothing” or “nonbeing”, but plays a significant role in the entirety of the artwork’ (Zhang c. 1665. Trans. Yuping Li). Late Qing painter Tang Yi Fen also points out: ‘we all know the painted place represents the picture, but most of us tend to neglect the “blank space” which is also an important part, related to the whole structure and composition’(Tang 2001, p.453. Trans. Yuping Li). Their ideas seem closely related to the spatial shift in contemporary graphic design, in which emptiness and fullness are considered as negative and positive spaces, intricately linked for spatial design in the two-

dimensional plane. Designer Alex W. White in *The Elements of Graphic Design* describes emptiness as a white space that lies behind the type and imagery, also called: 'trapped space', 'counterform', and 'working white', serving as an integral part of a design with great potential. He writes: 'Using emptiness is part of a valid and logical solution to design problems. Unlike images and word, emptiness is more subtle. It is within the designer's area of responsibility to look for and take advantage of emptiness on each design assignment.' (White 2002, p. 25).

Indeed, the relation of emptiness and fullness represents an ideological state and a shift of ways of seeing, in which the visible lies in the invisible; the clarified subject matter has been distinguished by a context of vagueness; and the positive factor stands out from the negative space. As Cheng argues: 'emptiness governs the mechanism of a whole group of disciplines of meaning and that of another group of disciplines, creating a relationship of open reciprocity between the subject and the objective world.' (Cheng 1994, pp. 35-37).

In landscape painting, understanding and use of emptiness provide much more than a composition of design – the relation of positive and negative space. Apart from its function for spatial creation, emptiness can also bring atmosphere and vital breath in the painting, evoking profound philosophic and aesthetic thoughts and showing cultural diversity. Actually, the concept of emptiness in China has been developed as a critical philosophy of art since the Daoist idea has been fused into landscape painting. Emptiness in Chinese painting implies an unrestricted scope, meaning or rhythm; it provides an imaginative space from the finiteness to the infinity, speaking in its own right. Through possessing emptiness and being identified with

the original concept of emptiness, ancient Chinese painters found themselves at the source of images and spirit, creating the spatial mode and composition in landscape painting.

As previously discussed, *Drizzle on River Yangtze* (Fig. 6) shows a typical example of landscape painting around the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279) when the aesthetic attitude in painting tended to develop into a more emotional and poetical expression. In the work, although very few subjects are painted through the limited brushstrokes, this painting (Fig. 6) displays more about a mysterious and aesthetic atmosphere, evoking thoughts that go beyond the image. Here, the use of emptiness in the pictorial plane plays an important role in making composition and bringing atmosphere and emotional appeal. In the painting, we can see that four-fifths of the pictorial space is a comparative state of visual blank, in which the sky, cloud, mist and the lake are connecting together via a subtle change of the grades of white colours from the background to foreground – a way to achieve the emptiness. Mountains in the distance are seemingly hidden in the clouds; a little boat is moored at the shore. After their daily work, two fishermen are holding the fishing net and hurrying to go home. The trees in the foreground are gradually disappearing into smoke and moisture, extending into the distance. The whole painting displays a poetic imagery in the dusk of the evening. Within an organic whole, the emptiness is represented by a spiral movement, crossing the different distances and levels in the painting. Here, emptiness and emptiness, emptiness and fullness, are interacting and integrated through a unique rhythm of pictorial composition.

With emptiness as intermediary, the painter creates the impression that the mountain could virtually enter the emptiness and melt down into waves, and that inversely, the water, by way of the emptiness, could rise up into a mountain. As

a result, mountain and water are no longer perceived as partial elements opposed and frozen but as embodiments of the dynamic law of the real.

(Cheng 1994, p. 37)

In ancient China, the purpose of making landscape painting is in order to pursue a harmonious relation between the self and nature. Landscape is not merely a subject to represent natural beauty, but most significantly, it is a vehicle to demonstrate the painter's understanding and perception that the self is a unified part of the spirit of the cosmos. In order to introduce a spiritual infinity into a limited pictorial plane, it is necessary to effectively use the philosophic quality of emptiness; here, emptiness can be understood as an image without shape; it can be a picture inside of the picture, or a space beyond the picture. Visually, it exists, and is associated with visible figures, through a kind of flowing rhythm in the work, which is a unique way of spatial representation in Chinese landscape painting. Furthermore, the participation of emptiness in pictorial space depends on the dialectical relationship between emptiness and fullness: fullness can be seen as the painted figures that are visible and identifiable; while the emptiness is sometimes visualized by the blank or vague spaces which are invisible and imagined. This relationship is not an opposition of form, but a unity of variety where emptiness and fullness can transform the form and content of each other to create a union of the ideal and reality in landscape painting.

To explore the relation and interaction of emptiness and fullness, Chinese painter Wu Guan Zhong's ink works, *A Corner of Jiang Nan* (Fig. 40) and *Poplar Grove* (Fig. 41) provide an interesting perspective in contemporary landscape painting. Born in Yi Xing, Jiang Su province

in China in 1919, Wu studied painting in Paris at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, starting in 1947,²⁰ in which landscape painting was influenced by a number of Western Modernist art movements. Wu's painting displays a style of simplicity, but powerful and unique, opening up both abstract and realist elements of art that he studied from the West and China. As Figs. 40 and 41 illustrate, his works are usually painted through some cross and rhythmic structures of line in combination with abstract visual elements, in which the painter represents his skilled combination and assimilation of both Chinese ink and the abstract language of Western modernist painting.



Fig. 40 Wu Guan Zhong *A Corner of Jiang Nan* (1999) Ink on paper 50×50cm ©Wu Guan Zhong & Huang Zhou Museum.

Fig. 40 represents a landscape in Jiang Nan (a small town in southern China) where the scene of village houses, built by the white wall and black roof, is a unique feature of the local landscape – also, seen as one of the natural culture heritages of China. These village houses are

²⁰ Wu was a student of Professors J. Dupas and Jean-Marie Souverbie, the artists of considerable renown in France at that time.

Wu's favorite art subjects to explore his formalist style of landscape painting. From a first glance, this painting (Fig. 40) brings the viewer a sense that the houses seem to be developing and extending to the outside of the work's frame. There is a dynamic force, which to some extent, is pushing the subjects from the center to the edges and corners of the picture, bringing an extremely full visual effect in the spatial arrangement. However, the actual ink and brushstrokes used on paper are very limited; the artist does not fill in all parts of the visible surface, instead, he uses the simple and abstract brushstrokes to create a considerable compact composition of space on paper. Here, it is an intelligent and ingenious use of the visual blank – the emptiness in the picture that enables the fullness to attain its complete visual expression.

It is obvious that emptiness is used and participates as an integrated part of Wu's painting; it structures the composition and creates the pictorial space as an active factor. The painter does not see emptiness as an independent existence but stresses a relationship or interaction between emptiness and its counterpart fullness, via a visual language of black and white, or the brushstrokes and blank space. From Daoist philosophy, fullness (the visible subject or being) can be seen as an active force; while emptiness is the carrying space of this force, providing vital breath that animates the things that are full. On this pictorial plane (Fig. 40), the visual blank provides the black brushstrokes a conscious and coherent spatial order, and connects all these different shapes of brushstrokes as a union. Emptiness and fullness here also create a stronger visual contrast and formalist language in the picture.

This picture also connects the philosophic pair of emptiness and fullness to another point of

view – the change of relation between the images and background, where a blank space can be either the subject or the surrounding depending on different ways of seeing. In Fig. 40, the large area of blank in the middle is certainly not only a background of the trees in the foreground, but also a subject itself, and it represents a large range of the white walls of Jiang Nan's houses that are the features of the local landscape. The changing relationship between the image and background also reflects a process of transformation through a philosophic way of seeing.

Fig. 41 Wu Guan Zhong *Poplar Grove* (1996) Ink on paper 140×180cm Duo Yun Xuan Art Museum.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

Poplar Grove (Fig. 41) displays a graphic and formalist beauty constituted by the elements of point, line and plane based on the painter's observation and abstraction from a natural scene. We can see a pictorial plane that is full of the trunks of the white poplars, leaving no extra interspace for sky and ground. However, the visual effect of fullness is not achieved by filling in all available space on the pictorial plane, rather, through a kind of interweaving rhythm, in which emptiness and fullness, the blank and ink lines are interacting as both cause and result,

or background and image, in a visual union. The use of line is in order to break the spatial origin, creating a new visual configuration; while the blank left in the picture is to balance the distance and order between the lines, providing a vital breath. Both emptiness and fullness are represented as the linear language, and of equal importance. It seems they are like two blades of the same pair of scissors. These vertical and horizontal lines in the picture bring a sense of movement towards the opposite directions; during this movement, the states of emptiness and fullness are able to transform each other. This is showing a dialectical relation in which emptiness changes its form to fullness, while fullness obtains a breath or life through the presence of emptiness. Together, an interaction between emptiness and fullness finally creates an organic and harmonious association on the pictorial plane.

Through introducing the philosophic notion of emptiness via a visual language in painting, Wu's art often displays a unique rhythm and formalist beauty. He believes the abstract language and rhythm are the cores of his formalist aesthetics (Jian 2008, p. 28). In his published literature *The Formal Beauty of Painting*, Wu talks about his study in Paris, and points out that his daily course included fresco-making inspired by classical, romantic and modern music; and the tutor was also training students to think about visual composition from the abstract rhythm of music to make sure the artwork is able to display a fluid rhythm (Wu 1979, p. 217). This foundation art training also laid a base for Wu's understanding about the significance of formalist aesthetics, and his method to create the union of emptiness and fullness in pictorial space. In Wu's solo exhibition 'Revolutionary Ink' in the Shanghai Art Museum, Karen Rosenberg²¹ commented

²¹ The editor of *The New York Times*.

on Wu's art: 'He comes across as a seamless integrator of ancient values and modern visual trends.'(Rosenberg 2012). 'Wu is a modern master who pushes the boundaries of our understanding of how a traditional medium like ink can be made new for a new century,'²² Wu has himself talked about cultural aspects of the work, to say:

Eastern art is poetic, philosophic and stylistic; while Western art emphasizes contour, constitution, gorgeous colour and passion. I was in an aesthetic edification of traditional China, or, perhaps the Western art after the 19th century has been influenced somewhat from Eastern art...I like the way of Western art and appreciate more and more the consistency between Eastern and Western art.

(Wu 1979, p. 217)

There are indeed differences between traditional Chinese ink painting and Western oil, not only in terms of the tools and techniques, but on their respectively integrated cultural backgrounds and knowledge systems, especially on the spatial treatment and method of pictorial composition. However, a cross-cultural study of art needs to not merely notice the differences but also the similarities and common visual principles, so to create a mutual understanding, connecting the different cultures and knowledge system.

In the Western art world, since the changed relations between science and art in the 19th-century, the meaning and value of painting need to be redefined. Furthermore, the popularity of semiotics and visual psychology in the mid-20th century, such as Rudolf Arnheim's Gestalt psychology, Panofsky's iconology or E.H. Gombrich's discussions in *Art and Illusion* enable people to realize new spatial possibilities are to be explored in flat art, thus, the space in painting

²² Melissa Chiu, Asia Society, Museum Director 2012.

needs to be re-treated and re-interpreted.

Fig. 42 Paul Cézanne *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (1885-87) graphite and watercolour on laid paper 32.7 x 50.5 cm The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

French 19th-century post-impressionist painter Paul Cézanne, however, provides an interesting interpretation of pictorial space through a number of landscape paintings depicting the Sainte Victoire near Aix-en-Provence. These paintings represent a process of Cézanne's exploration of pictorial space, perspective, and composition; whilst many of them are left plenty of blank spaces as an integrated part of the works. For example, *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (Fig. 42) is one of Cézanne's Sainte Victoire paintings through which we can see a typical approach that Cézanne uses to divide the space, make the composition, and run the perspective. He structured this painting by drawing lines in fixed positions, and then he developed the lines into some small square planes to create the space and volume of the subject. The artist made an effort to use the brushstrokes as little as possible but in a way to maximize the scenery of the mountain in Sainte Victoire. In order to do this, Cézanne used his brushstrokes to depict only the shadow or shade areas of the landscape, which can independently operate and support the pictorial composition,

while keeping a remarkable balance in both the content and form. It is obvious this painting displays to us a planned space via a selected and highly summarized way of brush skill. Only a few brushstrokes represent the whole visible scene; whilst the blank area is not a space of meaningless, but provides an open logical space – a space full of sunlight or occupied by moisture or cloud? It is the viewer who can fill in their imagination here.

This painting to a great extent reflects a change of attitude about spatial treatment in Western painting in the 19th-century. For instance, with the invention of the camera, faithfully representing the objective fact is not a necessary aim of art for landscape painting, and Cézanne is an essential person who had been involved this dramatic change. Here, I shall argue Cézanne's challenge of summarizing the landscape on painting displays a kind of wisdom in spatial arrangement and composition, or 'a wisdom of emptiness', in which how to set up the blank together with the subject is the point that the wisdom happens. Cézanne carefully selected, abandoned and abstracted the available figures so that the work could finally maintain a unique balance of emptiness and fullness.

For example, in the work it is the blank space that enables the shaded area to show a curvilinear rhythm as the dominant formal language, at the same time, it provides a vital breath to bring energy and vigor into the work. Without an association of emptiness, the figures – mountain, tree and the land would probably stand in a relationship of rigid opposition and thus be static. Here, emptiness in Cézanne's painting demonstrates a new way of thinking to push forward the spatial status in landscape painting. Emptiness gives breath to the work in a way to correspond

with the early Chinese aesthetic and philosophic thoughts. As the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu said: ‘The spirit goes down into the valley and comes back up from it – that is breath. The spirit and the valley hold each other in an embrace – that is life.’ (Lao-Tzu in Cheng 1994, p. 47).

Damisch, in the last chapter of *A Theory of Cloud* discusses the idea of emptiness and points out that traditional Western art, from Aristotle down to Leonardo da Vinci and to Descartes, has stubbornly rejected the idea of emptiness. He explains, it is, however, an ideological difference, such as the cloud as a visual feature of emptiness in the Western system serves to conceal or hide the subject, but in the Eastern system it serves to create and produce the space of the subject (Damisch 1972, p.226). In the text, Damisch takes Goya’s *The Dog in the Arena* as an example, and argues the illusionist space effect that Goya uses to replace the medieval gold background in the work itself constitutes a subject matter (rather than a background), which has been emphasized by evacuating and rearranging the other figures to the edges of the composition. As he writes: ‘The impression of “emptiness” obtained in this way is reduced to the effect of a “lack” that simply emphasizes the fullness of the “background” against which the figures stand out.’(Ibid.). Here, Damisch’s argument about the space and the figure in Goya’s *Dog* reflects a dialectical interaction between emptiness and fullness – a philosophical point of view where emptiness enables all things that are full to attain their complete fullness (Cheng 1994, p. 46).

In the text, Damisch also especially discusses Cézanne’s last paintings as a decisive break away

from the traditional Western landscape painting in terms of a dialectical understanding of space on painting. He believes that the blank space itself on Cézanne's painting begins to reveal a 'material nature', through this change, the spatial treatment will finally break the traditional pictorial mode of creating an illusion in depth. Damisch discusses the emptiness used in Cézanne's art together with traditional Chinese painting as both of them do not deny the substratum (the origin of canvas) and the painted surface as a whole. He considers Chinese painting has a flexible handling of space on paper: 'Some parts of the surface seem unused. Yet they play an important role in the composition. Their dimensions and space seem to have been planned with as much care as the outlines of objects. In these gaps, the paper or linen has a value of its own.' (Damisch 1972, p.224). Although Cézanne's art and Chinese painting belong to different cultural and historical products, Damisch argues, they are dealing with a similar pictorial issue that is endowing the substratum a unique natural or material property equally important with the painted surface of the work.

In painting, what is important is knowing how to hold and, equally, how to let go. Knowing how to hold consists in delimiting the outline and volume of things by means of strokes of the brush...one must know how to let go. This means that the movements of the painter's brush must be interrupted (without interruption of the breath that is animating them) in order to deal more effectively. Thus, a mountain might include areas that are unpainted, and a tree made to do without a portion of its branches. In this way, these forms remain in a state of becoming, between being and nonbeing.

(Li in Cheng 1994, p. 76)

The above quotation comes from the Chinese Late-Ming Dynasty art critic Li Jin-hua (1565-1635). According to him we can also consider the pair of emptiness and fullness includes a relation of selection and abandonment towards the visual elements, during the process of

painting. The selected and painted figures in the work are effective only based on the abandonment of the inessential visual elements. In my opinion, it is like the way we appreciate a stained glass in a Gothic cathedral. Seeing initially from the external structure, there is only a hint of colour from the window, the attractive point is within the building – the magnificent architectural features; but when we move into the building itself, the dominant visual experience is immediately transformed into the splendid and colourful stained glass. This is because the darkness of the environment inside the building then becomes an unlimited empty space to evoke the significance of the fullness (the stained glass). Emptiness is not merely a visual blank, but a shift of ways of seeing.

● The Significant Meaning

How can a fish fly above a bird? Chinese contemporary painter Pan Tianshou's painting *Fish and Bird* (Fig. 43) provides an interesting interpretation that challenges the conventional way we see things in the realistic world. Fish swims in the water; bird flies in the sky. In most situations, the physical space that nature gives a bird is always higher than that of a fish. However, to make use of the method of emptiness on painting, the physical time and space can be broken and re-built in a new logical order.

In Fig. 43, the bottom half of the pictorial space has been painted with a big rock and a bird sleeping on it; the top half, however, keeps plenty of blank space to accommodate a fish. How can we understand such a contradictory spatial state of fish and bird at first glance? If we explain

the visual blank in the work as a being of water or a lake in the distance, the sleeping bird and the rock can be seen as a foreground; when the fish is swimming far away from the physical position of the bird. Thus, this contradictory space – a fish above a bird, can make sense because of the participation of emptiness. Here, emptiness includes an unlimited possibility of spatial and material existence depending on how the artist narrates, or how the viewer understands the potential logic of the artwork.

Alternatively, if we explain the emptiness in the work as the sky, so the position of a fish is above a bird, and thus to evoke a symbolic or metaphorical meaning to the artwork. What is the aesthetic meaning that the artist might want to intimate or the viewer expects to understand by seeing the artwork? All visual representation has an ideological function. Understanding and creating an artwork is always based on both the physical and ideological cognition. Through thinking about the living spaces and the settlements of natural beings, the artist was probably expecting to convey an interesting metaphor by way of changing the logical space between a fish and a bird. Seeing from another point of view, the viewers, by viewing the artwork, can also find their own explanation, such as, they might consider that this work evokes a significant meaning – any being that is living at the ‘bottom of the world’ (or society) can, in a way, breathe the fresh air ‘above’. This metaphorical meaning beyond the artwork cannot be obtained or imagined without the participation of emptiness in the pictorial plane.



Fig. 43 Pan Tianshou *Fish and Brid* (1958) Ink on scroll 149 x 40.5cm ©Pan Tianshou & Chinese

National Art Gallery.

As discussed in the first chapter, landscape represents the ways of seeing determined by both social and personal factors. For example, how visitors and tourists seek, choose and respond to the meaning and value of landscape based on their personal and social experiences. The appreciation of artwork also involves two processes of seeing: the painter endows a personal emotion on the artwork via visual images; and then, it is a process of how the receptors can understand and respond by watching and reading the artwork based on their own contexts. Pan's *Fish and Bird* (Fig. 43), indeed provides an unlimited spatial possibility for both art making and art appreciation through the arrangement and treatment of emptiness. Emptiness here is a visual strategy to connect the surface of image and things to a spiritual or imaginative space in the mind, combining the ideal and reality, and harmonizing the perceptual contradiction and logic in the artwork.

Besides the functions to divide pictorial space, make composition and bring vital breath and vigor into the painting, emptiness is able to bring a wide range of aesthetic thoughts, creating visual mystery and providing the viewer an unlimited space of imagination. This is because the emptiness used in the artwork cannot be seen as nothingness or meaninglessness, but an expansion of the significant meaning of the artwork. It can establish an interesting balance between the content and meaning of the artwork, in which the painted figure provides a visual reference while the blank space evokes an unlimited imagination.

Southern Song Dynasty painter Ma Yuan's (1172-1214) landscape painting often represents to the viewer an atmosphere of mystical romanticism. Together with his contemporary painter Xia

Gui (1190-1225), they proposed a kind of unusual pictorial composition through painting only a corner, or half of the pictorial plane, while keeping the rest of the space generally blank. Due to their unusual methods of landscape composition, the art critics then gave them the nicknames: 'Half-Ma' and 'Corner-Xia' (Chen 2001, p.215). As previously discussed, the aesthetic attitude in the Southern Song Dynasty tends to create a more emotional and poetical expression in landscape painting. For the artists at this time, the use of plenty of blank spaces in painting enables them to bring an ideological extension or emotional resonance in response to the eternal spirit of the landscape.

Fig. 44 Ma Yuan *Soft Wind on the Lake Dong Ting* (Song Dynasty) Ink on silk 268 x 416mm The Palace Museum, China, Beijing.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

Soft Wind on the Lake Dong Ting (Fig. 44) is one of Ma's seascape paintings that demonstrates the artist's typical pictorial method of making a 'half-occupied' composition. Neither the artist creates a visual combination of mountain and water, nor sets up the different levels of distance

for spatial association that are often represented in many traditional Chinese paintings. Instead, he paints only on the bottom half of the work using some rich curved lines. These lines, in different wavy shapes - wide or narrow, rough or delicate, dark or light - on the picture, create a diminishing visual effect – the water is disappearing and melting into the air. It seems that the artist began to paint the work from the bottom edge, and later move the brush up to the middle area, gradually easing and relaxing the power of the wrist that is controlling the brush and ink. The top area of the picture is left by an emptiness, which is not merely suggesting the space and depth of the work, but also bringing an imaginative extension of both the content and meaning of the artwork. Here an infinity is existing in a limited time and space; ‘less’ is in a way ‘more’.

Qing Dynasty critic Wu Qizhen in his text *Review of Calligraphy and Painting* writes that Ma’s painting is ‘simplified in technique but has infinite implication’ (Wu 1666). Although simple in visual composition, this work successfully brings an ideological extension in which it can evoke the beauty of nature and its emotional resonance. As philosopher Wang Li writes in *Dong Zhuang Art Criticism*: ‘The vitality of pictorial composition does not depend on the abundance of brushstrokes, rather, it comes to the unlimited possibility of the “invisible”.’ (Wang c. 1700-1750). The visual invisible brings an ideological development in Ma’s work, so to evoke the feeling of resonance. Through an interesting visual form, Ma’s work also demonstrates how Chinese Daoist philosophy understands the existence of the universe – every being of the created world comes from a supreme state of emptiness and will finally return to this original state.

In painting, as in the universe, the breaths would not circulate and *Yin-Yang* would not operate without emptiness. Without emptiness, the brush-stroke, which implies volume and light, rhythm and colour, would be unable to manifest all its potentialities. In the execution of a painting, emptiness comes into play at every level, from the basic strokes to the composition of the whole, providing the pictorial system with its effectiveness and unity.

(Cheng 1994, p. 64)

Sullivan in *Symbols and Eternity* considers Chinese landscape painting as ‘a language of extraordinary richness and breadth, which is able to embody the strongest emotional and poetic feelings and the most profound philosophical and metaphysical ideas’ (Sullivan 1979, p. 6). He points out, like the poem can bring the reader into realms of thought that the literal language implied, the ‘landscape painter carries us beyond the image, on the wings of what Wordsworth in *The Prelude* called the “symbols of Eternity”’ (Ibid. p. 7). He mentions that both Chinese poetry and painting are inspired by a ‘vagueness’, which is an essence to demonstrate infinity. And Chinese painters often do the same thing like poets who are always concerning with the essence of a mood or a scene to achieve a universal quality. ‘Moreover, the absence of “tense” in Chinese enables the poet to present the scene not from the point of view of any specific time but almost “sub specie aeternitatis”.’ (Ibid. p. 14).

Emptiness is rendered not only by certain syncopated rhythms but above all by silence...Breaking up continuous development, it creates a space that enables the sounds to transcend themselves and accede to a kind of resonance beyond the resonances.

(Huai Nan Tzu c. 25-220. Trans. Yuping Li)

I have discussed some examples above in which emptiness is displayed as a kind of visual blank in landscape painting. However, I need to emphasize that blank space is not the only visual expression to achieve a state of emptiness. According to the original definition from Daoism, emptiness is not an object, but a consciousness in philosophic thought, which can be visualized by a number of material existences such as the cloud, water, sky and mist, etc. Although the conventional understanding of emptiness is often thought of as a space best used by filling in. In this study, however, emptiness is understood and referenced according to its definition in ancient Chinese philosophy. Daoism understands emptiness as an original state of the cosmos including a certain quality of inclusiveness. Also, emptiness reflects more about a dialectical relationship of contrast and transformation – the emptiness and fullness, and the conceptual extensions of the other pairs such as the *Xu* (invisible) and *Shi* (visible), *Ruo* (vague) and *Qiang* (clarified), and *Fu* (negative) and *Zheng* (positive).

It is interesting to see how the idea of emptiness has been expressed via a traditional English landscape, in which the blank canvas is fully filled in by the oil paints. British 18-19th century landscape painter J. M. W. Turner's works emphasize the light, shadow and atmosphere's expression and provide a deep romanticist impression to the viewer. Some of his seascapes demonstrate the similar form of composition to Ma's *Soft Wind on the Lake Dong Ting* (Fig. 44). Indeed, emptiness or a state of vagueness is a visual phenomenon actually widely reflected in many of Turner's landscape paintings in a way to arouse aesthetic atmosphere. Yet, emptiness in Turner's art is not represented as a pure blank in contrast with the painted figures, rather, it is expressed through a relative and dialectical relation of visible and invisible, or clarity

and illegibility represented in the paintings.

Fig. 45 J. M. W. Turner *Rain, Steam and Speed* (1844) Oil on canvas 91 x 121.8 cm National Gallery, London.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

For example, in *Rain, Steam and Speed* (Fig. 45), the most visible scene of landscape has been hidden by the clouds and fog, representing an overall vague visual effect. Apart from the front of the steam train and a tiny ship, it is difficult to find more places that are absolutely clear. By mixing cold and warm colours, the artist's intention in the work is more possible to reduce, instead of increase, the clarified contents and details on the canvas so to create a clear-vague contrast. Not like the Pre-Raphaelite painters such as William Holman Hunt or John Everett Millais whose works often display a style of absolute clarity in every detail of the subject, Turner's art is always based on a relative state of visual clarity between the subject and the atmosphere of landscape. As the most clarified contents in the painting have been reduced and blurred, Turner's art stands by itself for 'breathable emptiness'. Emptiness in his art also

includes a methodological strategy to select the most significant visual subject and abandon the other irrelevant visual factors. In the painting (Fig. 45) emptiness, created by blurring the specific contents, is not mainly for the aim of objective representation, but to concentrate the viewers' eye on the places that the artist wants to emphasize – the railway, steam and speed in the 18-19th century industrial civilization.

As discussed before, emptiness is not only displayed as a kind of visual blank on the pictorial plane; it is an ideological state, which can evoke an unlimited possibility of space and visual imagination beyond the artwork. This dialectical essence can help us to understand how emptiness exists in Turner's art. It is perhaps the visual relation between clarity and vagueness, or emptiness and fullness used in Turner's art that always brings to us the aesthetic atmosphere and philosophical thinking. In contrast with the sense of calm and stillness in Ma's *Soft Wind on the Lake Dong Ting* (Fig. 44), Turner's painting represents more about a dynamic effect of movement created by the method of perspective and the treatment of emptiness. Indeed, emptiness is able to establish an interesting balance between the content and form through both ink and oil materials. Turner's painting has also well demonstrated an argument made by Chinese painter, Pu Yen-tu (1618-1689) in the Qing dynasty, as follows:

The landscape that fascinates a painter must therefore include both the visible and the invisible. All the elements of nature that appear finite are in reality linked with the infinite. In order to integrate the infinite into the finite, to combine the visible and the invisible, painters must know how to take full advantage of the play of fullness-emptiness of which the brush is capable and of the play of concentratedness-dilutedness of which the ink is capable. They can begin with emptiness and make it verge on fullness, or the reverse ... There where the houses huddle, the road loses itself in the distance, the bridge is mirrored in the water, one must make use of "whites" in such a way that the halo of the mists and the

reflections of the clouds compose an atmosphere charged with grandeur and mystery...– the whole art of the visible-invisible is not more than what is needed to re-create it!

(Pu in Cheng 1994, pp. 77-78)

As an internationally influential painter of his generation, nominated for the Turner Prize, Peter Doig's work displays an unwavering faith on the theme in landscape painting. Doig is more like a recluse who narrates his personal emotion and memory on painting and his art is actually gaining a wider social acceptance. Inspired by landscape, photographs, magazines, and fragments of memories of daily life, Doig's works are often represented by large size paintings in oil and acrylic, bringing a strange sense and formal language of beauty as well as emotional complexity in its own right. The tone and melody in many of his landscapes seem full of doom, negative, dream-like, demonstrating an ideological state of uncertainty and 'being lost', which is possibly one of the permanent themes that penetrates Doig's life and art.

Doig's methods and treatments about space and pictorial composition in painting are to some extent comparable with traditional Chinese painting. On the one hand, he references the actual landscape as the main subject in visual representation; on the other hand, he builds a unique spatial structure that is not bound by the conventional way of linear perspective. Also, the visual mystery and uncertain emotion reflected in his paintings are probably coming from his cross-cultural experiences for living in Britain, Canada and Trinidad. Like contemporary Chinese painter Wu Guan Zhong who studied art in the West, Doig's art, to some extent reflects the collision and coordination of the diverse cultural experiences.

Fig. 46 Peter Doig *Briey Concrete Cabin I*, (1994-6) Oil on canvas, 200 x 275cm.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

Fig. 47 Peter Doig *Concrete Cabin II*, (1992) Oil on canvas, 200 x 275cm.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

Fig. 48 Peter Doig *Architect's Home in the Ravine* (1991) Oil on canvas 200 x 275cm.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

Fig. 49 Peter Doig *Black Curtai*, (2004) Oil on linen 200cm x 275cm.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

Between 1991 and 1996, Doig made a series of landscape paintings depicting people's dwellings, the trees and houses and the living spaces, such as *Concrete Cabin* series (Figs. 46, 47) and *Architect's Home in the Ravine* (Fig. 48). These kinds of images are depicted in an

interesting form that the trees or branches are encompassing the houses behind, and bringing a spatial confusion and uncertainty. The relation of emptiness and fullness here is represented via a very interesting method – a sense of emptiness as the foreground in contrast with a full background content. As Tate Britain curator Judith Nesbitt describes this series: ‘The utopian dream of the modern home dissolves into the disturbing unknown of the enclosing forest.’ (Nesbitt in Nesbitt & Shiff 2008, p. 13).

From the *Concrete Cabin* series (Figs, 46, 47) we can generally see two physically visual spaces: the foreground trees and the background Bauhaus-style modern apartments that are represented in one pictorial plane. The scenes in the work do not appear as receding in the distance, rather, the trees and buildings display an overlapping spatial state with a graphic feeling. The rough and free brushstrokes of the trees and branches are contrasting with the strictly divided geometric forms behind, while the dark and dim colours of the trees create a large range of black emptiness that distinguishes the bright and coloured buildings, so that the viewer’s eye will immediately concentrate on the buildings that the artist called *Concrete Cabin*. This is more like how we see the lighting on the stained glass inside of a dim Gothic church; when the surrounding dark spaces of emptiness make the stained glass stand out.

Doig’s setting of the subject, space, visual contrast and tension in the paintings seem to give a metaphoric impression: houses are built in the interstice of trees, or our living space is existing in ‘nature’s gaps. Also, the parallel spatial state of trees and dwellings in the work might imply an existing hybrid situation between nature and man. The obscure tone of the paintings brings

a negative feeling for this metaphor. It can be seen that the spatial treatment and visual contrasts of emptiness and fullness, clarity and vagueness can help evoke the implied aesthetic meanings and emotional response in Doig's paintings, and Doig has actually made use of these to lead the audience's way of seeing. In the *Times*, Doig also provides his own explanation of the paintings:

Instead of painting the façade of a building and then shrouding it in trees I would pick the architecture through the foliage, so that the picture would push itself up to your eye. I thought that was a much more real way of looking at things ... you are constantly looking through things, seeing the foreground and the background at the same time.

(Doig 1996, p.14)

In the painting *Architect's Home in the Ravine* (Fig. 48), we can see plenty of white lines as the branches are painted on the pictorial plane in a way to shelter the realistic scene behind. After the 'background' has been finished, the artist created a kind of irregular linear form as a surface layer to add a level of foreground to evoke a mysterious atmosphere. This visual effect brings a feeling that we are observing things through a transparent and cracked mirror, so to gain a scene of existence in an illusory reality. A similar way can be seen in *Black Curtain* (Fig. 49), in which the 'realistic world' appears to be covered with a layer of 'fog' made by the water-based white paint. It seems the artist was attempting to deny or change the originally spatial structure and depth through adding a perceptual level of emptiness. This emptiness here reflects as an ideological state of uncertainty, by denying the spatial certainty and reality in the painting. Thus, the world Doig provides is some kind of a mythical void.

I believe these two paintings demonstrate a very interesting relationship between the notions of emptiness and fullness. If we see Wu's paintings (Figs. 40 and 41) display a method to use the function of emptiness to get a visual effect of fullness, Doig's method of art is just the opposite; he fully painted the pictorial plane in every corner but the visual effect created is an ideological blank and the feeling of uncertainty. This method indeed demonstrates Doig's aesthetic pursuit in exploring visual and emotional complexity. Both Wu and Doig's art display a formal language and beauty of rhythm in a way to associate the realistic and perceptual spaces in landscape painting. For Wu, emptiness is a pictorial methodology for making the spatial and formalist expression. For Doig, confusion and uncertainty are implied and infiltrated in his art; emptiness is, however, an intricate ideological pursuit in his visual representation where he denies the realistic space and evades a direct representation of the real world, which might respond to the artist's reclusive attitude of living.

Doig's recent solo exhibition curated by Tate Britain²³ provides a comprehensive display of his painting practices in the recent two decades. There is a catalog published accompanying the exhibition including the essays by Richard Shiff and the Tate curator Judith Nesbitt, and also the artist's conversation with his fellow painters. Nesbitt's essay 'A Suitable Distance' starts by providing a good biographic introduction to Doig's personal life experience, including his MA study at Chelsea School of Art in London and later his time in Trinidad. The essay also addresses how Doig's personal experiences helped to form his artistic style in landscape painting, such as the influence of his career as a dresser at the National Opera on the painting

²³ <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/peter-doig>

Gasthof zur Muldentalsperre (2000-2002), or his experience and memory of skiing which was reflected in the form and composition of the works *Ski Jacket* (1994), and *Figure in Mountain Landscape* (1997-1998).

For Nesbitt, intellectual uncertainty, ambivalence and contradiction are the main directions of Doig's landscape painting, and to explain this, she introduces Freud's classic text 'Uncanny' to theoretically discuss a perceptual state and aesthetic atmosphere in Doig's art. In talking about Doig's series of *Concrete Cabin*, Nesbitt believes the works are the 'sustained performance of positive or negative dynamic', including the visual contrast and tension; and Doig was consciously closing or dissolving the hierarchy within the painting. Through these pictures, Doig has established himself as 'every bit a formalist as much as a representational painter' (Nesbitt in Nesbitt & Shiff 2008, pp. 12-13). In the essay, Nesbitt also discusses the artist's self in relation to his subject. In his paintings *Corn Cob* (1994), *Drifter* (1999) Doig seems to play both the roles of the author and subject to explore the relation between the inner self and outside world. Also, through putting the self as a subject and image in *Gasthof zur Muldentalsperre* (2000-2002), Doig attempts to explore a surreal state of painting that is understood through psychological complexity.

Nesbitt believes Doig's painting brings a mood of 'disturbance', which provides the viewer a disorientating experience of 'perpetual scene-shifting'; 'we find ourselves circling across different terrains and domains, where locations and situations seem to recur, at once familiar and strange.' (Ibid. p. 9). Nesbitt's descriptions about the emotional shift in the painting are

formed to a great extent from the artist's personal unsettled physical experience as Doig has travelled around the world to a remarkable degree, and developed a more individual route of art than his peers.

Fig. 50 Peter Doig *Hitch Hiker* (1989-90) Oil on postal bags, 152 x 226cm.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

Doig has made some landscape paintings since 1989 concerning the physical transformation of location as a theme to represent emotional complexity in painting – being lost or a feeling of being ‘on the road’. These artworks (Figs. 50-52) consciously or unconsciously include his understanding and use of emptiness as a method of composition or aesthetic pursuit. For example, the painting *Hitch Hiker* (Fig. 50) depicts a truck travelling on a highway in a turbulent sky. The bottom of the picture is left to a large area of emptiness, providing a sense of stillness in contrast to the waves-like dark clouds that evoke a dynamic movement above. This visual tension of movement and stillness is clearly divided by a horizon line in the middle half area. Plenty of raindrops are expressed in the work via a ‘vertical runs of fluid paint’ (Ibid. p. 27), through an ingenious combination of painting materials between water and oil paints.

The artist also set out a visual contrast between the clear and bright red truck and the dull and vague surroundings. It is interesting to see that the distance of the highway in front of the truck is shorter than that behind, implying a psychological unknown and an uncertain sense of crisis. Doig made this painting during 1989-90, a period the artist was experiencing a series of moving to Canada, and to London, and this metaphoric meaning, and the spatial transformation and tension, in the work are possibly implying the artist's personal physical and emotional experiences that are always in transit. Here, space is fluid; the contrast of emptiness and fullness implies a mood of disturbance or upset towards an uncertain adventure.

Fig. 51 Peter Doig *Young Bean Farmer* (1991) Oil on canvas, 186 x 199cm.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

Fig. 52 Peter Doig *Night Bean Farmer* (1993) Oil on canvas, 185 x 240cm.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

For Doig, journey is always a process to gain something new while being lost to some extent. Richard Shiff, in his essay in the Tate catalog, points out there is a disorientating, lose-yourself nature in many of Doig's paintings: "Getting lost", "losing yourself", "going beyond yourself" – there are colloquial expressions to which Doig resorts as he offers an experiential, as opposed

to a theoretical, account of his art.’ (Shiff in Nesbitt & Shiff 2008, p.33). From 1991 to 1993, Doig painted a pair of opposite paintings *Young Bean Farmer* (Fig. 51) and *Night Bean Farmer* (Fig.52) to explore the idea that home is a condition that recalls to exile. These paintings narrate a perceptual scene, a memory, or a mood, bringing a feeling of mystery, fantasy and utopian life rather than the specific or physical reality.

In Fig. 51, a small red figure is surrounded by a large area of empty land, and seems to be running from the center to the edge of the visual plane. Some branches painted around the edges, and a woven wire fence connects the contents from the foreground to the background. Like most of Doig’s art that explores the ideological and emotional complexity via formal language, this painting brings to the viewer a sense of solitude and alienation through some fluid forms and illusory colours. Here, the compositional mode – the small figure exists in a wide secluded and empty land, seems to imply a spiritual dialogue between man and nature. Or the artist might attempt to express an ideological state in which the physical body of the figure is separated from a spiritual world to experience a kind of ‘psychological adventure’. The emotional state of being lost, disorientation, confusion, and uncertainty in the painting can be also captured by the viewer. According to Doig, there is a process of time development from Fig. 51 to Fig. 52, and the artist describes the paintings as kind of being about someone leaving somewhere. ‘A small person, a shadow of a person really. It looks like he’s going and he’s not coming back.’ (Doig 1992, p. 26; Nesbitt & Shiff 2008, p. 14).

Richard Shiff in his essay ‘Incidents’ argues Doig’s work has a function of empathy. Despite

the peculiarities of his painting, viewers are able to feel ‘as if they have already experienced what they see in Doig’s art because the moments he depicts feel like other’s memories’ (Ibid. p. 21). Shiff describes Doig’s painting as a ‘perceptual incident’ in which memory and ‘visual mistakes’ happened frequently: ‘an incident is an accident that befalls both the intellect and the emotions’ (Ibid. p. 21). When looking at Doig’s painting, people are experiencing the incident happening to the artist. ‘The incident has too many meanings, too many things.’ (Ibid. p. 43). By the end of his essay, Shiff concludes that the significance of Doig’s painting does not depend on its scene or its background story, but its emotional encounter. Doig is able to let the viewer feel being lost in his paintings; it is the atmosphere of environment he provides that induces our emotional response. ‘Everyone recognizes his or her own feeling in Doig’s painting, for he uses his experience to think about things that are a part of other people’s experience.’ (Ibid.).

● **Thoughts and Practices**

How to use the philosophic notion of emptiness as a pictorial strategy or methodology to convey spatial diversity, visual movement and time passing is my main direction of exploration in this section. In my early studio practice, I explore the relation of emptiness and linear expression (as a form of fullness), for example, how the line, as the main pictorial language of Chinese ink painting, can accommodate itself in an unlimited space of emptiness to constitute the visual plane. In the later period of the screen painting series, I emphasize the visual blank as a method of composition to create and connect different spatio-temporal configuration and orders. Also, I consider the notion of emptiness as a kind of ideological expression to evoke symbolic

meaning and cultural implication.

I have discussed a number of paintings in which emptiness is closely related to the various linear expressions to create pictorial space and evoke aesthetic meaning and psychological complexity. For example, Chinese painter Wu's *Poplar Grove* (Fig. 41) shows to us an interwoven rhythm between the linear form and blank space, in which emptiness and fullness are interacting in a visual union. In the Song Dynasty painter Ma's *Soft Wind on the Lake Dong Ting* (Fig. 44), water, is the main subject matter that has been abstracted and painted via a kind of linear form to fuse into an unlimited state of emptiness, evoking aesthetic atmosphere. Furthermore, in his paintings *Architect's Home in the Ravine* (Fig. 48) and *Black Curtain* (Fig. 49), Doig creates a kind of irregular linear form as a surface layer to add an ideological level of uncertainty and mythical void to imply spatial and ideological complexity. Emptiness is always an effective visual vehicle for the abstractly linear expressions in landscape painting.



Fig. 53 Yuping Li *Practice I*, (2014) Chinese ink and watercolour on paper 70×75cm.



Fig. 54 Yuping Li *Practice II*, (2014) Chinese ink and watercolour on paper 70×75cm.

Figs. 53-58 are my early landscape painting practices on the topic of the heritage coastlines – the *White Cliff* in East Sussex and *Lulworth Cove* along the Jurassic Coast. In the same way as Chinese painter Wu works with his brush and ink line on the blank plane, I use point, line and plane, these basic visual languages, to divide and restructure the space and composition, creating a sense of movement, and an interaction between emptiness and fullness in the works. For example, in Figs. 53 and 54, I compose the pictorial plane by creating some meandering and serpentine forms of brush strokes. These lines are coming from my observation on the traces of the footpath on the edge of the cliff, which I consider them as the interesting linear forms to make a composition in landscape painting. I also introduced the different levels of distance in relation to these linear strokes in the works to create a spatial depth or a process of seeing, developing from the background to the foreground. Here, emptiness, the visual blank, is not only a context to contain the visible linear forms, but also a spatial carrier which provides an unlimited possibility for spatial union and visual order in the work. Because of the participation of emptiness, the lines can demonstrate its shapes, distance, rhythm and direction of movement.

Through exploring the conceptual association of emptiness and fullness, Figs. 55-58 are all in a way to create a kind of linear rhythm and visual movement in painting that I called a ‘linear dance’. In Figs. 55-56, I am inspired by the layers of natural formation displayed on the surface of the White Cliffs; these natural textures and different strata formed by the rock and soil’s combination bring a feeling of natural change, time development and historical vicissitude. In these two works, I create a mixture of linear brushstrokes to visualize the overlapping and

compressed layers of the cliff, and use some vertical and horizontal lines to divide the pictorial space in a way that emptiness and lines are interwoven and mutual changing each other. Here, each linear layer in the works is to break the existing spatial state and add new visual orders, while the blank is left to keep a balance between lines and lines, providing a vital breath. I hope these works can demonstrate how Chinese Daoist philosophy sees the dialectical relationship of emptiness and fullness, in which ‘an emptiness enables all things that are full to attain their complete fullness’ (Cheng 1994, p. 46).



Fig. 55 Yuping Li *Cliff Surface Practice I*, (2015) Chinese ink and watercolour on paper 48×50cm.

Fig. 56 Yuping Li *Cliff Surface Practice II*, (2015) Chinese ink and watercolour on paper 48×50cm.



Fig. 57 Yuping Li *Lulworth Cove along Jurassic Coast I*, (2015) Ink and watercolour 48×45cm.

Fig. 58 Yuping Li *Lulworth Cove along Jurassic Coast II*, (2015) Ink and watercolour 48×45cm.

This linear expression in my practice cannot be separated from its pictorial tool – the traditional Chinese pointed brush, which possesses a flexible ability to deal with any ink and water-based method of painting. Often made from animal hairs bundled together in tubular bamboo, the Chinese pointed brush can absorb the ink and water according to a certain proportion to express a variety of linear visual effects in association with the trained and skilled movement of fingers, wrist and arm. The diverse associations and contrasts of linear forms, soft or hard, round and square, smooth or rough, light or dark, indeed, provide a broad space for art as a spiritual expression that is also my practical pursuit in this study. Here, line is a main pictorial language to respond to a philosophic understanding of fullness in contrast with the infinite emptiness as a carrying space.

However, it is necessary to see that the linear language used in Chinese painting is quite different from the line in the Renaissance perspectival system. Alberti's theory of visual rays and vanishing point demonstrate a mathematical mechanism as a means of controlling reality. In many traditional Western paintings, line is a potential element hidden in the pictorial plane, helping create the space, depth, volume and distance. For example, Hobbema's *The Avenue at Middelharnis* (Fig. 11), and Turner's *Rain, Steam and Speed* (Fig. 45) where line is not visible in the works, but dominated by a scientific method of perspective to see the objective world.

In contrast, line in Chinese painting is a kind of subjective language produced by abstracting from natural contour and shape, which displays a freer expression of nature according to the painter's understanding. For instance, in *Luo Shen Fu Picture* (Figs. 1-2), line is a highly abstractive and expressive language to summarize the figures and subjects, even on the unpredictable form of cloud. The use of line is not relying on the objective fact, but presenting a flowing rhythm and the beauty of linear language itself. The painter Gu Kaizhi must pay more attention to dealing with the different pictorial features of lines – wide or narrow, bright and dark, smooth and free made by the pointed Chinese brush. For him, line is an independent expression of art to demonstrate an inner spiritual status between human and nature, as well as the painter's own artistic pursuit.

Tang Dynasty (618-907) theoretician Zhang Yan Yuan (815-907) in his *Lidai Minghua Ji*²⁴

²⁴ *Lidai Minghua Ji* is a general art book about famous historical paintings in the 9th-century in China. In the book, Zhang aims to create his own system of art history writing, combining the historical facts and artistic criticism. His book also describes a number of painters' lives thoroughly, including the biography and artworks.

(Important Paintings in History) points out Gu's art has a very high taste regarding the treatment of line. He writes: 'the lines, in Gu's painting (Figs. 1-2), are all inter-related, circulating around, flowing ethereally, like the moving of wind or water, the meaning yet is arrived (on the paper) before the actual brushstroke.' (Zhang c. 900, Trans. Yuping Li). He also discusses two significant aspects of the treatment of line in Gu's art: first, Gu's line shows the spiritual and emotional capture of the subject; second, the importance exists in the coherence of each line and the beauty of lines' association. Zhang believes Gu had a strong ability to 'write' the line on a painting with a very fast speed; each line was finished via only one brushstroke regardless how long the line is, so that his lines can contain the *Qi* (an inner spirit or breath) (Zhang c. 900).

As Sullivan writes: 'When landscape painting eventually appeared (in ancient China), it was animated by the feeling for linear rhythm transmitted down the arm of the painter, through his fingers, to the tip of his brush.' (Sullivan 1979, p.22). And he points out Chinese landscape painting acquires an abstract quality it never lost, in which line at the highest level of art is more important than likeness to the subject (Ibid.). Sullivan has a similar comment about the treatment of line in the early Chinese art:

In all we find a line that is alive because it follows the natural movement of the craftsman's arm and hand: you only have to try copying these designs to find that to do it successfully you must let your hand and arm swing quite freely, and never let your pencil come to a complete stop.

(Sullivan 1979, p.19)

William Hogarth in *The Analysis of Beauty* considers serpentine line belongs to the most varied shape of line – the ‘line of grace’.

Straight lines vary only in length, and therefore are least ornamental ... That straight and curved lines joined, being a compound line, vary more than curves alone, and so become somewhat more ornamental ... That the waving line, or line of beauty, varying still more, being composed of two curves contrasted, becomes still more ornamental and pleasing ... And that the serpentine line, by its waving and winding at the same time different ways, leads the eye in a pleasing manner along the continuity of its variety...

(Hogarth 1753, pp.41-42)

In the text, Hogarth attempts to compare the different features of line and their functions in the pictorial plane. In contrast to the Renaissance’s treatment of coordinate lines in the single focus perspective, Hogarth, in 18th-century Britain, began to return and re-discover an independent beauty of line itself, and in a way to sum up the law of it. It can be seen that there was a higher visual and emotional requirement of the pictorial line used then. Hogarth’s illustration (Fig. 59) is one of his studies about the elements of beauty through the diverse expressions of line, which provides us with a visual image of his analysis.

Fig. 59 William Hogarth Details of *Illustration in Analysis of Beauty* (1753) March Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum, London.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

In his book *Point and Line to Plane*, Russian 20th-century abstract expressionist painter, Wassily Kandinsky proposes that line is an invisible thing made by the destruction of the intense self-contained repose of the point; the factor that leads the points up to a line is the force, one force or the repeated, alternate actions of both forces (Kandinsky 1947, p. 57). Kandinsky believes the conformation of line is a result of the movement, in which tension and direction determine its status of developing (Ibid. p.58). In the book, Kandinsky summarizes the features and psychological effects from a number of the purely visual elements: the point, line, plane, colour, and other geometrical images in a way to show the movement, growth and change. He also discusses the colour and temperature of the line, for example, he believes curved and wavy lines provide a warmer colour and feeling than that the straight line can provide; and a diagonal possesses a more-or-less warm tonality according to its inclination toward the horizontal or the vertical (Ibid. pp.69-70). Compared with Hogarth's theory about finding the beauty of line, Kandinsky's idea in the early 20th-century paid more attention to the emotional and psychological implications of it.

Five Dynasties (907-979) Chinese painter and theoretician Jing Hao's monograph *Essay on Brush Methods* (c. 900) includes an analysis and summary of different forms of linear brushstrokes from the historical Chinese paintings. In the text, Jing outlines four kinds of brushstrokes of line – *Gu*, *Rou*, *Jin*, *Qi* to use to create the landscape painting. He also describes the features and functions of these linear brushstrokes by matching them with the human tissues – the bone, skin, muscle, sinew – and with breathing. He proposes that:

Gu is a form of line to express the main structure and frame of the subject – the

‘bone’ of the body. This kind of line is sometimes dominant, strong and powerful, upright to represent the main contour and outline of the subject.

Rou is a line that depicts the surface feature of the subject – the ‘skin’, ‘muscle’ or ‘hair’ of the human body. To reflect this, a line is needed to develop into a vivid and specific form to depict the different texture and characteristic of the subject. It also represents the features of appearance and details in the painting.

Jin is a line like ‘sinew’, attaching to the main structure and frame – ‘the bone’. It presents a visual state that the linear brushstroke has paused sometimes (on the paper) but the inner meaning is still connecting and developing on the paper.

Finally, *Qi* – the most important philosophical idea in ancient China painting and calligraphy, is a line of vital breath (or an inner spirit or breath) of the subject.

(Jing c.900, Trans. Yuping Li)

Here we can go back to see the painting *Mount Lu* (Fig. 4), the artist’s own landscape painting, as a good example for demonstrating his theoretical claim of lines as human tissues. Fig. 4 shows a magnificent visual effect and a mysterious visual atmosphere via the formal expression at the first glance, but is full of delicate and fascinating details of linear brushstrokes. In the painting, the main bodies of the mountains are constituted by some vertical linear shapes. The contours of the peaks and rocks are painted by a way of sharp turning of lines that cut in a neat edge. These lines seem strong, powerful and upright to represent the structure of the mountain ranges, which reflect how Jing’s description of *Gu* in the work.

The lines used to paint the pine trees yet possess vivid and diverse forms – a combination of straight lines and curves, soft within hard, thin but powerful. They are corresponding to Jing’s understanding about *Rou*. Like the relation of skin and bone of the human body, these lines seem to adorn and decorate the main body of mountains; meanwhile the lines of mountains

provide the position and foundation for the lines of trees. Both the lines of trees and mountains (*Rou* and *Gu*) are painted in a suitable proportion in the spatial arrangement in association with the empty space on the pictorial plane.

The flowing lines – the lines to paint the waterfalls and streams are moving from the upper left of the picture, falling down to the lower middle part, and dividing into different branches of streams, finally flowing on the way to the lake at the bottom right. These lines connect the mountains and trees and run through the whole painting, via a flowing movement, which might response what Jing's concept of *Jin*.

There is also a hidden visual movement via a serpentine line, beginning from the top left, moving followed the foggy edge of the mountains, vanishing and appearing intermittently, and finally integrated in the bottom right of the picture, which brings a visual and emotional coherence and breath – the *Qi*, for the composition as a whole.

Mount Lu, is a good example of interpreting how Jing's theory of line contributes to landscape painting. I consider that Jing's theoretical connection between the skill of the linear brushstroke and the different parts of the human body provides a more vivid and imaginative explanation, which enriches the linear expressions and the roles and functions of line in landscape painting. Here the linear language is carried and connected by the empty space in a way that lines and emptiness are interacting and interweaving with each other. Without the participation of emptiness to create and embody the spatial configuration, the features and functions of the

linear brushstrokes cannot be achieved. Indeed, the spiritual pursuit as an aim in Chinese landscape painting requires a spatial expression that involves both the subjective and objective factors of visual representation. Chinese painting cannot use the pictorial methods of light, shadow, and volume to visualize as realistic a scene as possible, like the traditional Western painting. Also, the visual authenticity understood in ancient China comes from a comprehensive and perceptual truth towards the natural scenery. The language of line, itself, has a function for abstracting and generalizing, and is formed by the painter's thought and refining from the objective things, so that the landscape made by the line is in a way more suitable for the aim and aesthetic pursuit in Chinese art, in which painting landscape is in order to demonstrate the spiritual significance between man and nature. To make the abstract language of line into a landscape of art, the use of emptiness is indispensable. Chinese landscape painting often emphasizes a kind of harmonious balance or an organic association, here, emptiness, with its visual function of inclusion and alliance, provides Chinese painting an essential methodology of art.

To reflect the ancient Chinese art theory about Jing's four kinds of brushstrokes of line – *Gu*, *Rou*, *Jin*, *Qi*, I made some painting sketches (Figs. 60-61) based on the landscapes of Lancaster University campus that demonstrate my early attempts to respond to a cultural combination by making the relation between emptiness and linear language. In Fig. 60, I was inspired by a unique landmark in Lancaster University – the Ruskin Library, which is a piece of modern architecture constituted by a pair of arc-shaped walls, like a jujube pit from the top view. I thought it would be interesting to find a linear method to express this modern building

by referencing the ancient Chinese art theory in the 10th-century.



Fig. 60 Yuping Li *Ruskin Library* (2014) Ink painting 24×38cm.



Fig. 61 Yuping Li *County College* (2014) Ink painting 38×45cm.

By thinking of a pictorial expression via an architectural form, I consider Ruskin Library as a unique landscape providing a combination of varied linear forms and movements, and full of rhythm. How to organize these straight and curved lines of different lengths and thickness in combining with the visual blank is my main concern in this painting exercise. Firstly, I tried to think before the actual painting: which kinds of structural lines of the building respond like the *Gu* (lines of bone)? Jing believes these kinds of lines are able to compose the main structure and frame of the pictorial plane, which are essential than the *Rou* (lines like muscle, skin or hair). With this in mind, I found the horizontal and vertical lines – the middle part of the building sited in between of the two arc walls can be seen as the ‘bone of the building’ or *Gu* (lines of bone), while the two arc walls are seen as the *Rou* (lines of muscle), and the shrubbery, signs, parapet, and pebbles around the building all belong to the visual expressions of *Rou* (lines of skin). There was then a linear landscape painting gradually formed in my mind.

The first brushstroke of the painting was beginning from the *Gu* (lines of bone) – the darkest area on the right quarter of the picture. I painted the middle part of the building firstly, as I understand that ‘bone’ is formed inside of the ‘muscle’ and ‘skin’. I also referenced the ancient’s idea that ‘lines of bone’ are strong, powerful and upright, thus, these kinds of line are dark, rough and straight. And then, I used some light curves to paint the arc walls – the *Rou*, following the lines I believe belong to the ‘lines of muscle and skin’, and dropped some grey and black points around the lines. Because they are the lines that are understood by the ancients as the more vivid and varied forms – the *Rou*.

After finishing the lines for the shrub, parapet and pebbles in the picture, I felt that it is necessary to develop some new lines, which can connect all the other lines as a whole. According to Jing, *Jin* is a kind of line that runs through the picture to evoke a coherence in the work – ‘the linear brushstroke has paused sometimes, but the inner meaning is still connecting and developing on the paper.’ (Jing c. 900). Latterly, I made some linear forms that come from the aerials (the left top of the work), the background building (the bold vertical lines on the left), the lamppost and the ground. These newly created lines are interspersing and connecting with the early lines to make this picture a unique linear expression. I hope the diverse forms of line – overlapping, alternating, extending and hidden, can create the rhythm and movement in the picture, associated with the empty space as an orderly whole, to bring a respiration of the *Qi* (an inner spirit or breath). Another painting *County College* (Fig. 61), my early practice of the study, represents a similar method of absorbing linear aesthetics from the tradition of Chinese art.

Contemporary abstract painter Callum Innes's painting *Green Lake* (Fig. 62) provides an interesting example about how Western artist displays emptiness and blank space as the visual language to structure landscape painting. *Green Lake* is one of Innes's works in series, involving the removal and application of paint on several unequal areas of the flat canvas. Innes considers this geometric form of art as an abstract expression of landscape painting. In the work (Fig. 62), we can see the canvas has been divided by a few abstract and geometric areas with different dark to light levels of green colour on it. Two of the geometric areas on the pictorial plane are completely empty. According to the artist, the unpainted emptiness is not always an original blank left on canvas but created by removing the paints and dissolving the image using a turpentine-soaked brush. 'He repeats this activity over and over again until he arrives at the decision that the painting is finished.'²⁵ By exposing the painting's materials and spatial components, Innes leaves the work looking like a partly unpainted surface, as a result of painting, and in this way, he brings a previous status of painting in contrast to its current layers.

Fig. 62 Callum Innes *Green Lake* (2012) Oil on linen 205 x 200cm Courtesy Frith Street Gallery, London.

(Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions)

²⁵ Exhibition Introduction in *Exposed Painting*, Manchester Art Gallery, September 2015.

Unlike ancient Chinese landscape painting, which uses emptiness to express atmosphere and spatial mystery to evoke aesthetic and spiritual responses, Innes uses the language of emptiness as a means to imply the developmental process of painting: his actual movement on canvas or the order and process of thought. Here, each moment of the progress is displayed by visual areas, shown together via a logical order on the pictorial plane to reflect a concept of time duration. I believe emptiness used in Innes's landscape is not merely to create visual balance and method of abstract art representation, but also to arouse the associated state of time and space on one visual plane of landscape painting. His art makes me think about the form of Chinese screen painting, in which each screen panel displays a specific time-space state; once the different screen panels have been composed together as a whole, the work narrates a process of time duration from left to right. Some of my screen painting series are inspired by the form and method of Chinese screen painting, as previously mentioned. I also reference Innes's idea that emptiness displays a previous status of the canvas in contrasting with painted and visible layers; while the association of emptiness and fullness demonstrate a process of painting making on the flat surface.

Figs. 12-15, Fig. 39 and Fig. 63 show the works made in the later period of my studio practice when I began to access the oil paint to work with the complex spatio-temporal possibility in landscape's representation, and explore a state of visual joinery via forms of painting. In these works, emptiness is an important pictorial methodology to structure spatial mode and visual representation in relation to the time passing. Together with my early studio practices that concern with the linear language on the empty space, these paintings are an integrated part of

my cross-cultural art research. As previously discussed, they involve the thought and use of the spatial perspectival principle – the three levels of distance in ancient Chinese scroll painting. Here, in this section, I shall mainly discuss how I use emptiness as a method to connect the space-time order and create the symbolic and psychological implications in this work, and in an effort to enrich the landscape painting as a contemporary art language.

In *Empty Moments* (Fig. 39), emptiness is used as a linear language to separate the space in the individual work, but connect the six screen paintings into one spatial association. The use of emptiness is to alter the one focus perspective as well as the sole pictorial space, frequently displayed in traditional Western landscape painting; and in a way, to create a visual effect of spatial association to narrate an ever changing state of the land. This is similar to how Peter Doig introduces the white lines to deny the realistic space of the painted scene in order to evoke an ideological uncertainty (see Fig. 48). In my work (Fig. 39), I used some empty lines to break the original spatial setup, and to remove the spatial specificity and certainty, emphasizing a kind of eternal space-time state of existence. Here, emptiness displays both its functions of disturbing and connecting the pictorial space simultaneously.

Furthermore, in Fig. 39, some small areas of emptiness – the arrow or diamond shapes have been left in an original state of the canvas to create a sense of breathing in the fully painted painting. These small pieces of emptiness I made through sticking some strips of marking tape on the surface of the blank canvas, and then removing them after the process of painting. This is in order to respond to the relation of emptiness and fullness in a metaphorical way – the small

interstices or gaps of nature always exist in a fully displayed and colourful world. According to Kandinsky's psychological discussion about the visual effect of line that can evoke the tension and direction of growth and movement (Kandinsky 1947, p. 58), I cut the marking tapes into some short arrows or diamond shapes, and stuck them on the canvas so that when they were removed they made empty shapes, creating the feeling of movement and stillness, arousing the visual contrast and tension. Here, small empty pieces are an active force passing through the widespread sense of stillness of the land, providing a breath or a reflection of light from the created world.

Chinese Daoist philosophy understands emptiness and fullness as a pair of dialectical and comparative notions, in which emptiness provides the ways of existence for things that belong to a 'full'. Also, through the visual language, emptiness and fullness are able to change their forms and methods of existence. For example, in Wu's painting *A Corner of Jiang Nan* (Fig. 40), they imply a change of ways of seeing between subject and background. Or in Doig's works *Concrete Cabin* series (Figs. 46-47), they are represented by a parallel and hybrid spatial state of trees and dwellings. Here, in my work (Fig. 39), emptiness (the visual blank) and fullness (the fully painted surface of the scenes) can be either the subject or background, depending on the different ways of seeing the screen work. If we consider the emptiness as a background, when the painted surface is developing via a process, based on, and in contrast with, a previously material state of the blank canvas; the emptiness and fullness are existing simultaneously. If we see the painted surface as a background to provide the ways of existence for emptiness, the emptiness is a topic or subject matter itself to divide and structure the space

in landscape painting. I believe the dialectical relationship between emptiness and fullness in ancient Chinese philosophy provides various possibilities to thinking about spatial methodology in visual representation, as an alternative point of research in the contemporary field of visual art.

Furthermore, the participation of emptiness in painting brings a sudden visual halt – an ideological blank to add spatial uncertainty and psychological complexity on the flat surface.

Damisch considers the blank space on Cézanne's painting reveals a material nature equally important to the painted surface as a whole. Also, Callum Innes believes the blank space on canvas represents a previous status of painting in contrast to its painted layers, in this way, the blank and painted surfaces, together, display a parallel state of time and space. Thus, the material nature of emptiness can also bring another level of understanding about the process and time development that happening on the surface of the canvas. If we consider the making of a painting as a process, the blank on the canvas reveals the painting's past – the original attributes, and focuses on what is missing and what is remaining to evoke the nature of landscape.

If I take my early studio practices (Figs. 29-36) as a kind of exploration of pictorial space, composition, form and painting material, referencing between Western and Chinese art, here my groups of screen paintings involve an all-around cultural fusion between the methodologies of ancient China and the contemporary West. These methodologies include: the multi-focus perspective, the formalist and material combination of oil and screen painting, the

understanding of time and space in flat art, the linear language, and the use of emptiness. These cross-cultural explorations can be all traced from my screen painting series. For example, in *The Cultural Geographic Landscape* (Fig. 15), each screen panel has a multi-focus perspective to lead the viewer's eye in an up to down movement; while a combination of the six panels creates a left to right process of experiencing the change of landscapes, and various geographic features during their seasonal transformation. Furthermore, in this work, my use of linear expression as an empty space is not an auxiliary of formal language, but a method to divide the space and organize a whole composition crossing six different pictorial planes. Emptiness is not merely structuring the spatial mode in the single screen panel but bringing the movement and change of scenes and forms in between these panels. The empty lines sometimes emerge and sometimes are hidden so that the related spaces are passing in and out of the visual planes, changing through the transformation of the viewpoint.

Also, the blank lines on the canvas can display the painting's past, as the time goes during the process of painting, the contents – the mountain, forest, desert and river in the work are gradually beginning to take shape, bringing a visual contrast of the original state and process of change. Here, emptiness in a way to separate, connect and create space (both on a single screen and in a group) and integrate the diverse features of landscape into one totality in the visual union, which I call a cultural geographic expression via the language of painting. By this effort, I expect to introduce a kind of new visual form or language through these screen series works, including the cultural combination, spatio-temporal thought and landscape's critical representation.



Fig. 63 Yuping Li *The Rootless Origin* (2015) Oil on canvas 100×50cm by four panels.

The Rootless Origin (Fig. 63) shows a slightly different mode in my screen series works, in which I use the blank space as a part of landscape's symbolic representation to evoke the metaphorical meaning and a method of making the complex cultural implication. This four-part work is related to the theme in another of my group paintings (Figs. 12-14) that concerns the potential climate change of our time and the crisis and tension between man, dwelling and the environment. In the work (Fig. 63), I attempt to challenge an unconventional composition, and concentrate the empty space right in the middle by an inverted pyramid to create a sense of 'an original and missing land'. This is to respond to the ancient Chinese philosophic definition that emptiness is an original status of the cosmos – a supreme emptiness before the world began to change.

In contrast with the shape of the inverted pyramid that intimates an unsettled feeling in the work, I paint a small town existing inside an upright triangular shape with vivid colours (see Fig. 64), in a way to evoke a little bit of hope in a general feeling of crisis. From the background to

foreground, the work (Fig. 63) represents a gradual change of environments and scenes: the sea, desert, drought area, and the phenomenon of land subsidence and ships stranded. I believe these visible contents and symbolic scenes provide good references for the viewer's imagination towards the meaning of the empty space in this work. Here, emptiness is practiced as both the context and subject matter. For the scenes of the sea and desert in the background, emptiness is an imaginative subject – a 'floating landmass', an 'iceberg', or a 'Noah's ark' that is unable to dock anywhere; but for the small triangular town, emptiness provides a ground or a platform as a context to provide the means of existence of the town. Emptiness, in its unlimited possibilities of form and being, is used as a visual carrier to unite and transform the contradictory spaces represented in the painting.



Fig. 64 Details of *The Rootless Origin*.

In ancient Daoist philosophy, emptiness can be understood as a subject without visible and tangible shape – the boundless sky, cloud, moisture, sea, or the day or night. It reflects and implies an unrestricted ideological state, or a shift of ways of seeing. And I believe it can draw

people to thinking about something beyond the landscape painting. For example, the painted surface – the drought, the stranded ships and the tiny dwelling space suggest an imaginative range in the work; while the large area of blank evokes an unlimited imagination depending on how the viewer wants to understand the meaning and value of the landscape.

For myself, through this work (Fig. 63), I thought about the current issues such as climate change, and the hybrid state of the natural and cultural environment in contemporary life. I attempted to give this painting a good title and finally called it *The Rootless Origin*. The ‘origin’ implies the emptiness is an original state of the cosmos in philosophic thought. The term ‘rootless’, is firstly used to describe the tree without a root, reflecting the problems and issues of environmental change. It is also related to the people who do not have settled home or social and family ties to evoke a feeling of loss of belonging. I think the symbolic meaning of the word ‘rootless’, in relation to the emptiness used in the work, may also allude to culture – the gaps between the modern and traditional cultures, and also, a hybrid situation that culture is drifting and rootless in contemporary social life – a scene the work is depicting.

Emptiness establishes an interesting balance between image and context to create visual mystery, symbolic meaning, and afford a wide range of social and cultural thoughts. By the end of this chapter, I think it is necessary to consider not merely the pictorial function, but an all-around function that emptiness can contribute to landscape painting. As discussed in the first chapter, landscape painting is not merely an image of the land, but it represents a critical mode of thought through a deep relation of self and environment. Emptiness provides a method of

thought in landscape as a symbolic representation, as well as philosophic and aesthetic expressions. Let us recall the interesting aesthetic ideas reflected in contemporary Chinese painter, Pan's *Fish and Bird* (Fig. 43). Emptiness is a code to unlock the substance of landscapes and evoke thoughts about its meaning and value as a contemporary visual art language.

Conclusion

Through the theoretical discussions and studio practices, I have demonstrated how I attempt to fuse the ancient notions and methodologies of Chinese art into the contemporary landscape painting practice, in an effort to provide a different insight in the field, and expand existing artistic forms of landscape painting.

In the thesis, I begin by looking at the current definitions and approaches of landscape and landscape painting and linking the landscape's visual representation with people's ideological participation – the ways of seeing towards the relations of self and environment. Indeed, a shift in ways of seeing landscape is a key thing that we can understand and unfold in the aesthetic and philosophic attitudes in ancient Chinese art, and integrate the ancient methodologies into our contemporary art practice. For example, the multi-focus perspective used in traditional Chinese painting reflects a kind of comprehensive and perceptual understanding of spatial representation in landscape painting. Also, the visual truth of landscape, according to Chinese painter Guo, comes from an ideological authenticity, including the 'typical scenery' and

different profiles to evoke landscape's spiritual significance. Based on this aesthetic idea, Guo proposes 'three levels of distance' with a multi-focus perspective for Chinese scroll painting to demonstrate his theoretical claim. Furthermore, the use of emptiness in landscape painting also comes from a shift of ways of seeing, in which emptiness and fullness as a pair of philosophic notions demonstrate a dialectical relationship of interaction and inter-transformation, thus, the painting can gain a visual balance in spatial diversity and aesthetic significance.

To answer the associated research question about landscape as a critical cross-cultural art practice, I compare and discuss the notions and methods of Western and Chinese art, for instance, their different scientific or perceptual understandings about visual truth, and their different relations of self and environment, subject and object, spectator and spectacle that are indeed reflected in the spatial and perspectival methods in the artworks. Also, through using emptiness as a visual code to discuss the spatial structure in painting, I attempt to link both traditional and contemporary examples, as well as the cross-cultural forms of landscape painting.

My main method involves understanding and using the specific art theories and methods of ancient China, which is not only a cross-cultural study in theory but also a methodological exploration as a result of the contribution. The studio practice explores the cross-cultural forms and methods of painting display, for example, the association of scroll and screen painting and oil canvas. It also answers how I attempt to establish a different spatial and perspectival mode as a contemporary language of landscape painting by referencing Guo's 'three levels of

distance'. By studying the ancient method of perspective, I have created a kind of perceptual space in painting to evoke a process of experiencing the natural and climatic changes (See Figs. 12-14), or the landscape as a visual journey of the duration of time (See Fig. 15 and Fig. 39). Studio practices such as Figs. 12-14, Figs. 53-58, Fig. 60 and Fig. 63 also answer the question how I absorb the philosophic idea of emptiness as a pictorial methodology to create the spatial diversity and evoke the symbolic meaning in landscape painting. Indeed, my screen painting series, made in the final stage of my studio practice, demonstrate a general visual result of this cross-cultural research, including all my specifically methodological studies of space, perspective, linear language and emptiness in Chinese art.

Finally, this thesis aims to provide a different insight and encourage ways of discussion for any future exploration about cultural fusion in the field of landscape painting. By the end of the text, I shall argue that landscape painting is an efficient carrier for culture and human thought. It represents a collective visual and emotional recognition; it is formed through the culture, and expresses various cultural aspects; it is also a significant component in both Western and Chinese art. As Cosgrove said 'landscape represents a way of seeing' (Cosgrove 1984, p. 1), if we see landscape as a natural scenery of beauty, landscape is on the road; if we take landscape as a process or an active method by which the in-depth thoughts on culture, art, and social life are formed, the landscape is on the road to research and practice.

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